

Background and activities of members of the European Parliament

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Introduction.

Three years ago, the citizens of the European Community elected, for the first time, their representatives in the European Parliament. The direct elections stimulated a wave of publications concerning the future of this largely consultative assembly (1). However, existing research on the European Parliament is, generally, of a descriptive nature and remains largely speculative due to lack of empirical analysis (2). This study attempts to fill a gap in the literature by taking an empirical approach, and looks at the background and activities of the MEPs since direct elections.

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(1) See, for example, BANGEMANN M. and BIEBER R., *Die Direktwahl-Sackgasse oder Chance für Europa*, Baden-Baden, 1979; BURROWS B. and EDWARDS G., «An Analysis of the Elections - and After», *New Europe*, No. 3, Summer 1979, pp. 35-46; COOK F. and FRANCIS M., *The First European Elections*, London, 1979; JACKSON R. and FITZMAURICE J., *The European Parliament, a guide to direct elections*, London, 1979; MARQUAND D., *Parliament for Europe*, London, 1979; COOMBES D., *The Future of the European Parliament*, London, 1979; MORGAN R., «New tasks for the European Parliament», *The World Today*, No. 10, October 1979, pp. 400-408; HERMAN and LODGE, *The European Parliament and the European Community*, 1978, pp. 73-93; PALMER R., *The European Parliament*, London, 1981; SIDJANSKI D., *Europe élections: de la démocratie européenne*, Paris, Stanke, 1979; LODGE J. and HERMAN V., *Direct Elections to the European Parliament: A Community Perspective*, London, 1982.

(2) Dewachter and De Winter make some of the first steps towards an empirical analysis of the composition of the European Parliament by examining Belgian delegates to the EP from 1952 to 1979. DEWACHTER and DE WINTER, «Het verlies van het machtspotentieel van een zwak parlement», *Res Publica*, vol. XXI (1979), No. 1, pp. 115-125.

It will be argued in this paper that the functioning of the EP depends, to a large extent, on the political will of the Members of Parliament acting collectively. This collective action, in turn, depends on the input of the individual members.

The idea that the development of the EP is largely in the hands of the MEPs also underlines the approach taken by Dewachter and De Winter who, in a research concerning the Belgian delegates to the EP from 1952 to 1979, argued that parliaments with small competences only attract weak candidates which, in turn, weakens these parliaments even more (3). The strength and weakness of MEPs is measured by their previous power positions.

What remains to be tested, however is whether weak members, in terms of power positions and career backgrounds, indeed weaken the EP. If much depends on the effectiveness of the MEPs, as argued above, it is perfectly clear that weak members, in terms of Dewachter and De Winter's analyses, can turn into strong members.

Research Design.

This study raises the empirical question whether or not extensive political experience (parliamentary and ministerial) correlates with a high level of activity in the European Parliament and, likewise, whether a low level of political experience correlates with a low level of activity. A further question is whether or not there is any correlation between age and activity which indicates that young, politically inexperienced, members are using the forum of the European Parliament to establish and further a political career. The level of the activity of members, as such, does not tell us in which direction the Parliament is developing, unless we can determine to what end this activity is directed. If, for example, activity is focused on issues over which the European Parliament has little or no powers of influence in terms of the legislative process (for example, political co-operation/foreign policy), then we must conclude that this concentration of effort is not the most efficient use of existing powers.

Expressed in other terms, the key to a more influential role for the European Parliament in the institutional framework of the Communities is a concentration of the activities of members on those issues where the Parliament has in the past gained powers in line with institutional changes (budgetary control) and where it can use existing powers

(3) See DEWACHTER and DE WINTER, *op. cit.*

to gain more (the appointment of Commissioners). We must bear in mind, however, that a stronger European Parliament is not necessarily the desire of all members, and that the activity of some anti-marketeer members will be concerned, primarily, with the demise of the European Parliament or, at least, a halt in its progress. Therefore, we must take into account the ideological standpoint of members vis-à-vis the pro/anti-EC question.

Methodology.

The data for this study was collected from a number of sources : members' backgrounds from biographical notes [*Who's Who ; The Times Guide to the European Parliament*, David and Alan Wood (eds.), London 1979 ; notes published by the Directorate-General for Information and Public Relations of the European Parliament ; the *Official Handbook of the European Parliament*, Dod's Parliamentary Companion, Halisham, 1980 ; the *European Communities « Who is Who »*, ed. Delta 1980], and a questionnaire sent to all 434 MEPs (4).

The data on the activity of members was compiled from the debates of the European Parliament, *Official Journal of the European Communities*, July 1979 to July 1982.

This paper consists of two parts : Section I deals with career backgrounds, and Section II relates to activities.

Section I : *Career backgrounds.*

We come across difficulties when trying to classify career backgrounds. Often, it is not clear from biographies which is the main occupation, and whether or not the member is still involved to a greater or lesser extent in a career outside the realm of parliamentary duties. However, from the occupation stated in members' biographies, we have compiled a breakdown of members' occupations in table I.

The biggest representation is from the academic profession. It would appear that several in this category are continuing to work in this field at the same time as being members of the European Parliament. This also appears to be the case with those occupations which can be continued on a part-time basis, for example, consultants, lawyers and solicitors, journalists, writers, farmers and so on. It is difficult to judge, therefore, to what extent these members consider themselves

(4) Response rates for the material used in this paper were Britain 85 %, Luxembourg 50 %, Belgium 92 %, Netherlands 74 %, and Ireland 65 %.

TABLE I
Profession of MEPs 1981-1982

Profession	Belgium		Denmark		France		Germany		Greece		Ireland		Italy		Luxembourg		Netherlands		United Kingdom		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Legal	4	9.3	1	3.7	10	10.0	17	15.9	12	34.3	2	7.6	10	12.3	2	8.3	6	15.4	9	9.5	73	12.9
Literary	1	2.3	8	29.6	5	5.0	10	9.3	2	5.7	—	—	18	22.2	—	—	2	5.1	8	8.5	54	9.6
Academic	14	32.5	6	22.2	14	14.0	24	22.4	5	14.3	3	11.5	20	24.7	2	16.6	7	17.9	10	10.6	105	18.6
Farmer	—	—	1	3.7	5	5.0	3	2.8	3	8.6	4	15.4	1	1.2	—	—	2	5.1	9	9.5	28	5.0
Business	—	—	1	3.7	11	11.0	4	3.7	2	5.7	4	15.4	2	2.5	—	—	1	2.6	29	30.9	54	9.6
Worker / Trade union	—	—	—	—	—	—	9	8.4	—	—	1	3.8	9	11.1	1	8.3	1	2.6	2	2.1	23	4.1
Politician	11	25.6	4	14.8	47	47.0	21	19.6	9	25.7	9	34.6	10	12.3	6	50.0	11	28.2	14	14.9	142	25.1
Engineer	2	4.6	—	—	3	3.0	2	1.9	2	5.7	—	—	7	8.6	1	8.3	1	2.6	9	9.5	27	4.8
Civil servant	7	16.2	1	3.7	5	5.0	9	8.4	—	—	1	3.8	3	3.7	—	—	7	17.9	4	4.3	37	6.6
Miscellaneous	4	9.3	5	18.5	—	—	8	7.5	—	—	2	7.6	1	1.2	—	—	1	2.6	—	—	21	3.7
Total	43	99.8	27	99.9	100	100.0	107	99.9	35	100.0	26	99.7	81	99.8	12	99.8	39	100.0	94	99.8	564	100.0

TABLE II

MEPs with parliamentary or ministerial / governmental experience

MEPs	European parliament						National parliament						Upper House						Government						Previous categories combined**			
	1979	%	Left	Entered*	Mid-'82	%	1979	%	Left	Entered	Mid-'82	%	1979	%	Left	Entered	Mid-'82	%	1979	%	Left	Entered	Mid-'82	%	1979	%	Mid-'82	%
24 Belgium	7	29.16	6	1	5	20.83	17	70.83	9	3	11	45.83	9	37.50	4	1	6	25.00	8	33.33	5	—	3	12.50	21	87.50	13	54.16
16 Denmark	3	18.75	—	—	3	18.75	9	56.25	2	1	8	50.00	—	—	—	—	—	—	4	25.00	1	—	3	18.75	8	50.00	7	43.75
81 France	12	14.81	7	6	11	13.58	36	44.44	17	11	30	37.03	10	12.34	2	1	9	11.11	19	23.45	9	5	15	18.51	41	50.61	38	46.91
81 Germany	18	22.22	—	—	18	22.22	34	41.97	2	—	32	39.50	4	4.93	—	—	4	4.93	6	7.40	—	—	6	7.40	37	45.67	34	41.97
15 Ireland	2	13.33	1	—	1	6.66	13	86.66	4	4	13	86.66	2	13.33	1	1	2	13.33	9	60.00	2	3	10	66.66	14	93.33	14	93.33
81 Italy	16	19.75	3	1	14	17.28	43	53.08	5	3	41	50.61	15	18.51	—	2	17	20.98	13	16.04	2	—	11	13.58	48	59.25	48	59.25
6 Luxembourg	1	16.66	1	—	—	0.00	5	83.33	4	4	5	83.33	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	33.33	2	—	—	0.00	5	83.33	5	83.33
25 Netherlands	9	36.00	1	2	10	40.00	11	44.00	2	1	10	40.00	3	12.00	—	1	4	16.00	2	8.00	1	1	2	8.00	13	52.00	13	52.00
81 United Kingdom	10	12.34	—	—	10	12.34	12	14.81	—	—	12	14.81	3	3.70	—	—	3	3.70	5	6.17	—	—	5	6.17	15	18.51	15	18.51
410 Total	78	19.02	16	10	72	17.56	180	43.90	45	27	162	39.51	46	11.21	7	6	45	10.97	68	16.58	22	9	55	13.41	202	49.26	187	45.60
24 Greece (October 1981)	October 1981	%	Left	Entered	Mid-'82	%	October 1981	%	Left	Entered	Mid-'82	%	October 1981	%	Left	Entered	Mid-'82	%	October 1981	%	Left	Entered	Mid-'82	%	October 1981	%	Mid-'82	%
	7	29.16	—	—	7	29.16	15	62.50	1	—	14	58.33	1	4.16	—	—	1	4.16	6	25.00	1	—	5	20.83	16	66.66	15	62.50
434 Total	—	—	—	—	79	18.20	—	—	—	—	176	40.55	—	—	—	—	46	10.59	—	—	—	—	60	13.82	—	—	202	46.54

* Entered between mid-July 1979 and mid-1982.

** The figures derived do not represent the totals of the respective four categories, since a certain member might have belonged to all four categories, or combinations thereof. Instead, they include those with national parliamentary experience (and, automatically, those formerly appointed to the EP), plus those with either Upper House or Government experience only.

as full-time parliamentarians from their biographies alone. However, for the purpose of this paper, we have used information on members' past careers to find out how many MEPs had parliamentary or ministerial/governmental experience. This has been done in table II.

The first of the categories mentioned in table II are those members who had been appointed MEPs. There were 78 former MEPs in 1979, representing 19.02 % of the 410 elected members. The Netherlands and Belgium had the highest country percentage of former MEPs among their elected members comprising, respectively, 36.00 % and 29.16 %. Britain with 12.34 %, Ireland with 13.33 % and France with 14.81 % were at the other end of the percentage scale.

By selecting national parliamentary (lower houses) experience as a background criterion, we find that, in 1979, 180 of the 410 MEPs had such an experience, amounting to 43.90 % (5). Of their respectively allotted members, Ireland (86.66 %), Luxembourg (83.33 %), and Belgium (70.83 %) recorded a large proportion of their elected MEPs as having former national parliamentary experience. In contrast, the UK (14.81 %), Germany (41.97 %) and the Netherlands (44 %) were countries which had low or lower percentage representations from such a background. However, the German proportion could be raised if the 14 members with State (Land) parliamentary experience only are added. This would alter the German figures to 48 or 59.25 % of its 81 elected MEPs.

Of the 410 MEPs in 1979, 68 had ministerial/governmental experience, representing 16.58 % of the total. Whereas Ireland has a relatively high proportion of MEPs with such an experience (60.00 %), Britain (6.17 %), Germany (7.4 %), and the Netherlands (8 %) score relatively low.

Looking at the total of those with parliamentary or ministerial/governmental experience, but discounting double listing in the four respective categories, there were 202 such members in 1979 (49.26 %). If the 14 German members with State (Land) parliamentary or ministerial/governmental experience are added, then the respective figures are 216 and 53.68 %. With regard to single country representation, we find Ireland (93.33 %), Belgium (87.50 %) and Luxembourg (83.33 %) sent a high proportion of so-called experienced members. In contrast, the UK managed only 18.51 % of its members with parliamentary or ministerial/governmental backgrounds.

(5) If the 14 German MEPs are added who had state (Land) parliamentary experience only, then the respective figures are 197 and 48.05 %.

This shows, then, that half of the elected members (202/49.26 %) could draw on a former parliamentary or ministerial/governmental experience, whilst the other half had, on the whole, to learn (or adapt to) the roles and functions of parliamentarians. However, there are members in this category who may have had considerable experience in other fields, for example, in local government, in their political party, in the civil service, community institutions, or other international/European organizations.

The data appear to confirm the view that some member states consider the EP a more important political institution than others, both in terms of the type of member standing for the election, and the importance they attach to the EP.

From the evidence thus far, the idea that a weak Parliament attracts weak members is refuted with regard to the Belgian, Irish and Luxembourg MEPs.

Replacement of MEPs.

Not counting those elected MEPs who were replaced immediately after the election, i.e. replaced before 17th July 1979 (6), there have been 70 replacements of the initial 410 MEPs between 17th July 1979 and mid-1982. (One of the elected Greek MEPs was replaced between October 1981 and mid-1982.) The following table highlights the respective members and percentages for each of the ten countries.

One of the main factors affecting replacements of MEPs have been national general elections in Belgium, Ireland and France since July 1979,

TABLE III
Replacement of MEPs between 17th July 1979 and mid-1982

	Total number	Replaced number	%
Belgium	24	11	45.83
Denmark	16	2	12.50
France	81	30	37.03
Germany	81	7	8.64
Greece	24	1	4.16
Ireland	15	4	26.66
Italy	81	6	7.40
Luxembourg	6	7	116.66
Netherlands	25	3	12.00
United Kingdom	61	—	0.00
Total	434	71	16.36

(6) There were four cases in which a member was elected in June 1979 but resigned before 17 July 1979.

in which sitting MEPs were given posts in Governments. The death of some MEPs also made replacements necessary.

The 70 replacements affected the proportion of MEPs with parliamentary or ministerial/governmental experience only slightly, namely, from 49.26 % to 45.60 % of the total of 410. When the 15 German MEPs, of which one was a replacement, are added, then the respective percentages change from 52.92 % to 49.26 %. However, whilst for most countries only slight changes occurred in this respect, there were more significant alterations in the case of Belgium, with a net loss of 33.34 % and Denmark, declining by 6.25 %.

With regard to the addition of 24 elected Greek MEPs in October 1981, it is worth noting that 66.66 % of these had former parliamentary or ministerial/governmental experience. As a consequence of the additional 24 Greek MEPs, there were 202 MEPs by mid-1982 with parliamentary or ministerial/governmental experience before entering the EP, representing 46.54 % of the total figure of 434. This is only very slightly under the 1979 percentage figure of 49.26 %, relating to the then 410 MEPs. Adding, once again, the 15 German MEPs with State (Land) parliamentary or ministerial/governmental experience, we arrive at a total of 217 or 50.00 %. In the following table, we will examine how many of those MEPs in leadership positions in the EP Bureau, the Political Groups, and the Standing Committees had parliamentary or ministerial/governmental experience.

As table IV shows, there is a heavy concentration of members in leadership positions with parliamentary or ministerial/governmental experience.

TABLE IV
Leadership Positions of MEPs mid 1979 - mid 1982

	Total number	Number with parliamentary or ministerial experience	%
Bureau	27	21	77.77
Political groups	14	11	78.57
Chairmen of committees	25	18	72.00

We cannot assume, however, that the past career of a member correlates with a high degree of input into the parliamentary system. The level and content of activity can only be assessed by an analysis of the activity of the individual members in the day-to-day functioning of the Parliament, itself.

Section II : *Activities.*

Before we start examining activities and compare career backgrounds with levels of activity, it should be noted that the research carried out so far only allows us to consider a restricted number of MEPs, rather than all 434. In addition, the statistical presentations will centre on the British MEPs and in the assessment of the data reference will be made to identical data collection from the Benelux and Irish MEPs.

In plenary sessions.

Tables V and VI show the average level of activity of members in the plenary sessions. Columns 2 and 3 show the length of speaking time, and the number of interventions according to experience and age of members, respectively (7). Column 2 shows the number of columns taken up by members of that experience or age group in the verbatim reports of the debates (July 1979 - July 1980), divided by the number in that group, to give the average. Column 3 refers to the actual number of times the member spoke (8). Because of the nature of the Rules of Procedure, Political Group leaders are allowed considerably more speaking time than other members and, for this reason, we have calculated the figures excluding the one Political Group Leader, James Scott-Hopkins (9). However, where this situation arises, we have included the figures showing what the average would be were he included (in brackets underneath). The average length of speaking time for all members is 11.8 columns. There seems to be little difference among « experienced groups » : we find experienced members speaking a little above average (this corresponds with the findings on the Benelux MEPs). The difference is a little more pronounced if we look at the actual number of interventions. It appears that those with less experience make fewer interruptions, and do not speak out of order, as often as their more experienced colleagues but, when they do speak, their interventions are longer (this corresponds with the findings on the Irish MEPs, but the more experienced Benelux MEPs had longer interventions than the less experienced).

Table VI shows that it is the age group 60 and over that is the most active in this field, mainly because it is in this group that the most experienced members are concentrated. (This also corresponds with the

(7) For restrictions on speaking time, see EP Rules of Procedure 28 and 30-32.

(8) This includes all interventions, except those of the rapporteur during voting time, when he is merely stating whether or not he is in agreement with an amendment.

(9) James Scott-Hopkins was replaced as leader of the Political Group by Henry Plumb in 1982.

TABLE V

**Activity of British Members of the European Parliament
by experience in Plenary Sessions, July 1979 - July 1980 - averages**

	1 No. of members	2 Cols. of debate	3 Interven- tions	4 Written questions	5 Questions at ques- tion time
Former Members of Commons or Lords	15	12.6 (17.5)	22.8 (28.0)	14.5	2.6
Former Ministers or Parliamentary Secretaries	5	15.5 (23.5)	22.0 (37.5)	11.8	0.2
Former MEPs	10	13.7 (17.6)	19.5 (27.5)	15.3	3.5
Former experience in EC institutions	8	13.6	18.5	6.5	1.0
Former experience in United Nations	4	13.4	19.0	5.7	0.7
Experience in local Government only	27	10.0	16.0	8.4	1.9
No political experience	30	10.5	14.0	7.5	1.7
Average for all 81 members		11.8	17.7	9.0	1.7

Note. — Column No. 1 does not add up to the total membership of 81, as some members are counted in more than one group.

TABLE VI

**Activity of British Members of the European Parliament by age in Plenary Sessions,
July 1979 - July 1980 - averages**

	1 No. of members	2 Cols. of debate	3 Interven- tions	4 Written questions	5 Questions et ques- tion time
Up to 34	7	7.4	7.0	12.0	1.4
35 to 39	18	10.7	15.2	14.2	1.0
40 to 44	16	13.6	21.7	11.4	2.6
45 to 49	11	8.3	12.6	2.6	1.4
50 to 54	12	12.0	20.3	9.2	3.0
55 to 59	12	11.4 (15.1)	16.8 (23.7)	3.8	0.8
60 and over	5	17.7	22.8	4.0	1.2
Average for all 81 members	81	11.8	17.7	9.0	1.7

Irish case.) However, the next most active group is that between the ages of 40 and 44 which, in terms of a political career, is relatively young. (Younger Benelux MEPs had the same number of interventions and length of speaking time as the older ones).

Columns 4 and 5 of tables V and VI show the frequency of parliamentary questions asked by members (see Rules of Procedure 45-47). Column 4 shows the average number of written questions asked by each member, in experience and age groups, respectively. It is those British MEPs with parliamentary experience who are most active in this field, which is understandable as they are familiar with asking questions in Westminster (this corresponds with the Benelux findings, but

not with the Irish ones). As far as the other experience groups are concerned, those British MEPs with experience in other Community institutions and the United Nations ask fewer written questions than those with local Government experience only, or none at all. If we look at the age groups (table V) we see that the younger members are definitely more active in this field (this corresponds with the Benelux and Irish findings).

We see the same pattern emerging if we look at the frequency of questions asked at Question Time. This procedure was only introduced in 1973, when Britain joined the Communities, and was very much based on Question Time at Westminster. Therefore, one would expect members with experience at Westminster to make considerable use of this procedure, and this is verified to a certain extent by the data (table V, column 5). Those with ministerial experience, however, use this procedure least of all the experience groups. (The same holds for the Benelux and Irish MEPs.) The frequency of questions at Question Time asked by members with experience in local Government only, or none at all, is about average. (The same category scores relatively low in the Benelux case.) As far as age is concerned, the groups are roughly equal, with the 40 to 44, and 50 to 54 age groups slightly more active. (Both the Benelux and Irish MEPs below 40 were more active than the other age groups). However, the former members of the Commons or Lords, and the former members of the European Parliament experience groups, and the 50 to 54 age group figures, are somewhat distorted due to one member who posed 70 written questions (61 above the average) and asked 21 questions at Question Time (19 above the average).

Motions for resolution.

In practice, the majority of motions for resolution in the European Parliament are tabled by more than one member on behalf of one or more of the Political Groups. This procedure differs sharply from that of Westminster, where the vast majority of Parliament's business is proposed by the governing party, and where those in opposition have very little opportunity to influence the order of business. One would expect, therefore, that experience in the Houses of Parliament would be a less important criterion for activity in this field than it proved to be in the plenary sessions. If we look at table VII, we see that this is in fact the case (10). On average, we find that those with experience in local

(10) In these figures, members who have tabled motions for resolution along with other members have been counted as well as those who have tabled motions alone.

Government only, or none at all, are the most active in this field. We also find that the younger members are the most active, particularly the 35 to 44 age group. As far as the tabling of motions for resolutions is concerned, it is not the most experienced who are the most active; the younger, less experienced, members are using this procedure far more than their senior colleagues. (This corresponds both with the Benelux and Irish findings).

Now let us move on to the correlation between the level of activity and members' ideological position on the pro/anti-market question. In the absence of anti-EC MEPs for Benelux and Ireland, we will only deal with British MEPs here. The 12 members who we have found to express anti-market views, make up 14.8 % of the British membership (11). Of the two British members in the Bureau, one is a pro-marketeer, the other an anti-marketeer. Of the ten British members in Group leadership positions, seven are pro-marketeers, two are anti-marketeers and the attitude of one was not clearly apparent. As one may expect, the dividing line falls between the two main political parties, the British Conservatives, and the Labour Party. Of the twelve British members in Committee leadership positions, ten are pro-marketeers, one is an anti-marketeer, and the attitude of one was not clearly apparent. If we turn to table VIII, we find that the level of activity of the pro-marketeers is, in general, roughly the same as the average for all 81 members, except for the fact that proportionally more rapporteur appointments go to pro-marketeers. If, however, we look at the anti-marketeers, we find that they are considerably more active than the average in all areas, except that of rapporteur appointments. Only four of the rapporteur appointments (8.3 %) went to anti-marketeers, who make up 14.8 % of the British membership. One should bear in mind the fact that, although the Committees are formally responsible for the appointment of rapporteurs, it is, in fact, the political groups who decide which of their members will take on this task, whereas all other areas of activity we have looked at are directly open to all members (bearing in mind that the political groups have a certain amount of control over the choice of spokesmen in debates). The discrepancy in our data between the high level of activity of anti-marketeers in all areas except rapporteur appointments, suggests that there may be a certain amount of discrimination among political groups against anti-marketeers (as far as our analysis shows, this only applies to the Socialist Group).

(11) It should be remembered that this relates to the 1979/1980 period. A few of the anti-marketeers have changed position since then.

TABLE VII

**Activity of British Members of the European Parliament by experience,
and Motions for Resolution - averages**

	No. of members	Motions for resolution
Former Members of Commons or Lords	15	2.8
Former Ministers or Parliamentary Secretaries	5	3.8
Former MEPs	10	2.5
Former experience in EC institutions	8	3.5
Former experience in United Nations	4	4.0
Experience in Local Government only	27	4.5
No political experience	30	4.2
Average for all 81 members		4.0

Note. — Again, the first column does not add up to the total membership of 81, as some members are counted in more than one group.

TABLE VIII

**Level of activity of British members of the European Parliament
by pro / anti-market attitude, July 1979 - July 1980 - averages**

	No. of members	Cols. of debate	Interven-tions	Written ques-tions	Questions at ques-tion time	Motions for resolu-tion	Rappor-teur appoint-ments
Pro-marketeer	56	12.1	17.0	9.0	1.6	3.9	0.7
Anti-marketeer	12	15.2	25.7	11.2	2.3	5.5	0.3
No attitude expressed explicitly	13	7.9	13.4	6.9	1.5	3.2	0.4
Average for all 81 members	81	11.8	17.7	9.0	1.7	4.0	0.59

What is particularly interesting is that, among those members who have not expressed, explicitly, an attitude either for or against the Communities, there is a consistently lower level of activity than average, especially in debates and written questions.

The results of this analysis suggest that the more definite members' aims and objectives are, the more active they are; and that a negative attitude towards the Communities correlates with a higher level of activity than a positive attitude.

Scope of activity.

So far, we have concentrated on the level of input of members into the parliamentary system. Let us now turn to the question of the scope of activity which will give us some indications of the direction in which the activity of the MEPs is leading. We shall look at just two areas of

activity : interventions in debates and written questions. We have chosen these two areas because they represent two very different types of contribution (the first involves speaking to the assembled house, and the second is a communication by correspondence and, therefore, less likely to come to the attention of the public), and also because, here, the level of activity is relatively high. Our analysis will centre on Britain and Ireland, but some observations will be made about the Benelux MEPs.

We counted the number of interventions in debate on the following topic areas only (i.e. excluding Points of Order or interventions which were out of order). We also categorised written questions under these headings in table IX (12).

TABLE IX
Number of interventions in debate and written questions, according to topic areas

	Debate interventions				Written questions			
	United Kingdom July 1979-1980		Ireland July 1979-1981		United Kingdom July 1979-1980		Ireland July 1979-1981	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Institutional	166	14.0	20	6.7	56	7.7	52	14.7
Agriculture and fisheries	151	12.7	79	26.5	134	18.4	20	5.7
Industrial and employment	87	7.3	17	5.7	47	6.5	37	10.5
Regional issues	89	7.5	32	10.7	91	12.5	42	11.9
Environment and consumer protection	76	6.4	7	2.3	60	8.2	38	10.7
Energy and research	64	5.4	7	2.3	28	3.8	40	11.3
Transport and communication	60	5.0	5	1.7	47	6.5	15	4.2
Social affairs	74	6.2	18	6.1	86	11.8	46	13.1
Trade relations and economic affairs	102	8.6	12	4.1	122	16.8	32	9.1
Foreign policy	184	15.5	13	4.4	40	5.5	6	1.7
Community budget	120	10.1	34	11.4	8	1.1	7	2.0
Human rights questions			23	7.7			14	4.0
Northern Ireland problem			8	2.7			2	0.5
Miscellaneous	14	1.1	23	7.7	8	1.1	2	0.5
Total	1187	100	298	100	727	100	353	100

(12) « Institutional Issues » includes the institutional structure of the Communities and the internal organisation of the Parliament. « Agriculture and Fisheries » includes the controversial question of butter sales to the USSR (predominantly a question of foreign policy) because it is usually connected with the problem of surplus butter arising from the Common Agricultural Policy. « Regional Issues » are those in all topic areas if the member is concerned with a particular region only (not member state), as well as matters arising from the Regional Policy as such. « Social Affairs » includes all aspects concerned with human welfare within the member states. « Trade relations and Economic Affairs » includes all issues concerned with trade between member states and with third countries, including capital movements, tariffs, competition law. « Foreign Policy » includes the Communities » relations with third countries (of a political rather than a commercial nature), defence, questions on human rights in third countries, etc.

As table IX shows, the activity of the British members does not appear to be focusing attention on those issues where the European Parliament has in the past gained powers in line with institutional changes. We have, on the other hand, found evidence to suggest that British members are using the forum of the European Parliament to voice national views in the field of foreign policy. Where there is a high level of activity on institutional affairs, the anti-marketeers are proportionally more active than the pro-marketeers (13). (Foreign policy and institutional issues comprised half of all the debates Benelux members conducted in plenary sessions of the EP). Two issues, which are arguably the most important facing Europe today, industry/employment, and energy, appear to have received a relatively low level of attention.

Evidence suggests that Irish MEPs focus attention on issues of major concern to Ireland in the EC (14). Differences in the scope of activity between British and Irish MEPs may be a reflection of the different significance that the two countries give to the importance of the EC and its institutions.

That the Benelux prefer to deal, primarily, with foreign policy and institutional issues reflects, on the one hand, a feeling of frustration over the lack of influence held by the EP and, on the other, an ambition that the EP should not only deal with matters that fall explicitly under the EC treaties and provisions, but rather act as the political, economic, social and moral forum of the European Community, both with regard to other EC institutions and the rest of the world.

Conclusions.

There are several points to be made before we begin to draw conclusions from the research carried out in this study. First, we have dealt here with some of the background variables only, and some of the activities of British, Benelux and Irish MEPs only, which form part of an ongoing and more comprehensive survey of background and activities of the 434 MEPs, plus replacements.

Our conclusions cannot, therefore, apply to all the MEPs. However, the findings do give an indication of development in replacements of

(13) Over 25 % of the interventions on institutional affairs were made by the twelve anti-marketeers.

(14) The concentration on agricultural, fisheries and regional issues by Irish MEPs can be seen as a reflection of the fact that Ireland has a high level of civilian employment in agriculture (24.3 %) and one of the lowest gross domestic products per capita in the EC.

MEPs over a three-year period, and also form the basis of further study on activities encompassing the entire membership over a three-year period. Second, we have considered here only those activities for which information is readily available and accessible, in biographies and official European parliamentary documents. There are, of course, other areas of members' activity which have not been taken into account, for example at the constituency level. However, even at the parliamentary level, there is work carried out in Committees and Political Groups which is not available for scrutiny due to the fact that meetings are held in private and minutes are, therefore, not available. Were these documents accessible, we would be able to gain a more complete understanding of the workings of Parliament. Third, we have not attempted to weigh activities in order of importance. Criteria for such weighting would be difficult to establish, and would necessarily involve arbitrary decisions. One should, however, bear in mind that, according to members' positions and commitments within the Parliament, each will achieve a different level of activity in each of the areas we have considered here. By way of example, one would not expect those in leadership positions in the Parliament to play quite such an active role in debates, questions, etc., as their colleagues without these types of commitments. However, what we are concerned with are overall trends over a wide range of activities which enable us to draw some preliminary conclusions.

First, we find that most MEPs came from the academic, legal and literary professions. Other categories, such as farmers or skilled workers, are under-represented in the EP.

Second, we find that less than half of the previously appointed MEPs were returned in July 1979, representing about 20 % of the directly elected Parliament. If this can be seen as affecting continuity in the work of the EP, the finding that half of the elected MEPs had former parliamentary or ministerial experience puts this deficit in a better light. Also encouraging is the fact that replacements in the first three years have only very slightly affected the proportion of MEPs with parliamentary or ministerial/governmental experience. Nonetheless, the « other half » without such political experience, had to newly acquire parliamentary rules and procedures. On the whole, however, the idea that a weak Parliament attracts weak members does not hold either for the 1979 intake, replacements between mid-1979 and mid-1982, or the Greek members, who were elected in October 1981. However, a more precise test of Dewachter and De Winter's argument will have to wait until the newly elected members are known in 1984.

Third, we find that members with parliamentary or ministerial/governmental experience nearly exclusively occupy the leadership posi-

tions in the Bureau, the Political Groups and the Standing Committees. Members with such experience are also more active in those areas where their experience is directly relevant, in debates, parliamentary questions; except for Ireland, which scored lower in parliamentary questions.

Fourth, we find that where EP procedure diverges from that of national Parliament, their experience appears to have less relevance. We have also found that the younger (and most often, least experienced) British members are, in general, more active than their older colleagues. This would suggest that younger members are using their mandate in the European Parliament to gain political experience. This contribution may not, necessarily, enhance the development of the Parliament as much as we may have expected if these members are using the European Parliament as a « springboard » to a career in national politics. This may very well be the case in view of the fact that a considerable amount of activity has centered on issues which are the domain of the nation state rather than the Communities, viz foreign policy.

A slightly different picture emerges from the Irish findings where the older, more experienced members are, on the whole, more active than the younger members. Young Irish MEPs had a high level of activity, but also had a dual mandate (15). This suggests that the younger and, most often, least experienced members, although aware of their European duties, are also using their dual mandate to further their political careers at home. Certainly, the activities of Irish MEPs in championing the interests of Ireland in the Community has stood them in good stead at national general elections (16). We also find that the European Parliament has been used as a training ground for future national ministers.

If benefits from EC membership seem to be an important factor for the election of many experienced Irish MEPs, (17) the Benelux MEPs, also manifesting considerable experience, tend to de-emphasise agricultural, regional or trade issues. But, by giving disproportionate attention to foreign policy and institutional issues, they might betray a certain ambition to make more of the EP than it actually is.

Considering the relatively low voting turn-out in the 1979 direct elections, the lack of effective transnational party structures, the absence of a common electoral system, and the difficulties the Community has

(15) 12 of the 15 Irish MEPs (80 %) hold a dual mandate. There are approximately 80 MEPs who have a dual mandate.

(16) See Howard PERRIMAN (ed.), *Ireland at the Polls*, American Enterprise Institute, 1978, p. 156.

(17) Not using the list system, as practised by most continental countries, or by elections as used in Britain, for replacements, Irish national parties select candidates, and in doing so, ensure that the replacements are experienced and motivated to pursue Irish interests.

in coping with economic or political problems, one can understand the worries of the present President of the EP with regard to the 1984 election. In his inaugural speech, Dankert pointed out that before the next direct election the Parliament had to demonstrate to the electors that it would play a positive role in determining the Community policies. From our evidence of the issues raised by British and Benelux MEPs, this demonstration has yet to be made, but is taking place with regard to the Irish MEPs. Come next election, citizens in Britain and the Benelux countries will raise the question as to what the EP, or for that matter, the EC, has done on unemployment, regional problems, the stimulation of economic growth, or the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. It appears, from the topics raised, that MEPs in these countries will have a lot of explaining to do in 1984.

We cannot say, at this stage, whether these trends are confined to the British and Benelux members, or whether they are a reflection of other countries. Further research on the remaining five member state representations is necessary. This will provide a more accurate overall picture of the direction in which this new Parliament is heading and the information will provide valuable data with which to compare the next European Parliament after the election in 1984.

Summary : Background and activities of members of the European Parliament.

This article argues that the development of the European Parliament (EP) is largely in the hands of the Members of this Parliament (MEPs). Empirical questions are posed whether a) age and prior political experience (parliamentary and ministerial) are determinants of MEPs' levels of activities (number and length of interventions in debates and written questions); and b) MEPs concentrate their activities on those issues where the Parliament has the potential to gain powers. The empirical examination deals with the first three years of the directly elected EP and centres on the British, Benelux and Irish MEPs. Whilst age and prior political experience were found to be important determinants for levels of activities, the activities themselves do not appear to be focusing attention on those issues where the EP has in the past gained powers in line with institutional changes.

