

## **THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND ENLARGEMENT**

This chapter considers from a number of related perspectives the interaction between the recent enlargement of the European Union and the workings and role of the European Parliament. It concludes that the objective impact of enlargement upon the Parliament has been slight, but that the Union's enlargement has crystallised differing views about the Union's future, differences which bear and will continue to bear particularly on the development of the European Parliament over the coming years.

### **THE NEW PARLIAMENTARIANS**

A number of factors have combined to ensure that the impact of the European Union's enlargements in 2004 and 2007 would be less pronounced in the European Parliament than in the European Commission or the Council of Ministers. The first and most obvious is purely quantitative in nature. At plenary meetings of the Commission and the Council of Ministers, the number of decision-making participants has nearly doubled since 2004, from 15 to 27, with the parallel increase in the number of Commissioners widely regarded as so anomalous as to justify the reduction in the Commission's size proposed by the European Constitutional Treaty. In comparison, the numerical impact of new members coming to the European Parliament from the Treaty of European Union's twelve most recent signatories is almost marginal. In a European Parliament of currently 785 members, 215 (representing just over twenty-seven per cent of the total) are from the twelve countries that joined the Union in 2004 and 2007. (See Table 1 for a breakdown by country and political group membership.) The enlargements of 2004 and 2007 embraced a number of small and very small member states, the limited population of which is reflected in their representation in the European Parliament. The capacity of the parliamentarians in question to change significantly (even if they wished to) the workings and attitudes of the European Parliament was always likely to be constrained by their limited numbers, whatever their personal and political qualifications for their new positions.

These qualifications are in many cases impressive. A study undertaken by Bale and Taggart (Bale and Taggart, 2006) sheds some light on the profiles of the MEPs from the ten new member states which joined in May 2004. The vast majority of this new intake of MEPs exhibit an exceptionally high degree of education, expressed in a striking number of holders of postgraduate qualifications (83 per cent) and even doctorates (47 per cent) (see table 2). This compares to 45 per cent of first-time MEPs from the fifteen "old" member states holding postgraduate qualifications and 18 per cent holding a doctorate. The remarkable educational background of MEPs from the new member states is no doubt linked to the high proportion of them whose previous professional occupation was in education. The educational sector forms by far the largest occupational background of this group of MEPs (38 per cent), followed by public administration (12 per cent) and the sectors of industry, media and health & social services (11 per cent respectively). (See Table 3 for the occupational backgrounds of first-time MEPs from the old member states).

Regarding their previous political experience, Bale and Taggart's findings show that a significant number of MEPs of the ten new member states also have previous experience in the world of

politics. As many as three quarters of MEPs from this group have had experience as holders of an elected office, whether in their national parliament (60 per cent) or in government (33 per cent). A number of MEPs from these countries have had extensive experience of the EU before entering the European Parliament, gained for example when serving on the EU committee of their national parliament or even in the role of observers in the run-up to accession. Others have gained experience working in a multi-national environment by working for other international organisations such as the NATO or OSCE assemblies (see table 4).

But the potential impact of parliamentarians from twelve new countries on the European Parliament can neither be assessed in exclusively numerical terms nor can it be linked solely to the personal background of the elected individuals. The internal structures of the European Parliament and its specific position within the institutional interplay of the European Union's political system create for the Parliament an idiosyncratic organisational and intellectual context which might well have been able rapidly to accommodate a much larger number of new parliamentarians than it has over the past five years with no fundamental change to its underlying aspirations and ethos. It has often been remarked that the turnover of members in the European Parliament from one set of European Elections to another is greater than in many national parliaments. Very rapidly, most of these new members undergo an integrative process within the Parliament which goes well beyond the self-confidence arising from growing familiarity with the voting procedures or the geographic peculiarities of the Parliament. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that the European Parliament has always had a noticeably more profound effect on the great majority of its new members than they have had on it. It would have been distinctly surprising if the new parliamentarians from the twelve new member states had proved an exception to this rule.

Two defining characteristics of the European Parliament contribute particularly to its traditional ability to integrate within its political culture and norms a wide spectrum of new members from different political backgrounds. These are the political and administrative structuring of the Parliament around multi-national political groups and the essential nature of the Parliament as a legislative (not executive) body, which can make its strongest contribution to the European Union's legislative agenda only through its relationships with the other main elements in the Union's legislative structure, namely the European Commission and the Council of Ministers. Both these facts create for European Parliamentarians powerful political and functional identities which are specific to their role as European Parliamentarians, and which in the vast majority of cases shape the developing political consciousness of MEPs when they go about their parliamentary business in Brussels or Strasbourg. This political and functional consciousness is of course not universal within the European Parliament, but the notable exceptions to this rule are in any case instructive, deriving usually from a radical rejection of the current constitutional structures of the European Union. Such a pre-existent and thorough-going rejection of existing structures seems almost to be a precondition for the resistance of individuals or political groupings to any internalisation of the European Parliament's dominant ethos.

The transnational political group structure of the European Parliament creates for any new MEPs or groups of new MEPs two contrasting sets of pressures, one of differentiation and the other of collaboration. The first of these derives primarily from ideological and electoral considerations, the second from the European Parliament's recurrent need, under the current institutional structure of the European Union, to obtain for its legislative proposals in particular as large a consensual majority as possible among the Parliament's 785 members. Both of these pressures

are central to the working life of any MEP who wishes or is at least prepared to work within the conventional self-understanding of the European Parliament. Both of these pressures work inevitably to dilute and disaggregate any united impact that might otherwise have been discerned arising from the arrival in the European Parliament over the past three years of the MEPs representing the twelve new member states of the European Union. Where the European Parliament's political groups are in dispute among themselves, the default reaction of Maltese, Slovak, Polish and Estonian members will be to vote in disparate, non-national ways reflecting their group affiliations. Where there is a consensus, negotiated or spontaneous, between a number of parliamentary groups, then the great majority of parliamentarians from these groups will normally associate themselves with this consensus and there is no obvious reason why parliamentarians from the new member countries should systematically fall outside this general rule.

A recent study by Hix and Noury (Hix and Noury, 2006) has shown that party cohesion, in the European Parliament, reinforced by the pressures described above, has indeed remained strikingly stable after the enlargement of 2004. This statistical analysis, based on roll-call votes in the European Parliament, demonstrates that MEPs from the new member states do indeed correspond in their recorded votes to the voting patterns deriving from their group affiliations rather than their national origins and that the primary motor of voting choices by European parliamentarians is political and not national. Occasionally, a shared national approach to a particular European issue generates a consensus between political opponents of the same nationality and this is reflected in a specifically national voting pattern which ignores the normal discipline of the political groups to which the members in question are affiliated. But such events are very much exceptions that mark the rule, and by no means confined to Parliamentarians from the newest member states. Equally, there are national delegations within the Parliament's political groups which are more prone than others to transgress in the interest of national positions the voting discipline of their groups. But such differences are differences normally only of degree between the components of the Parliament's groups. It might be that further statistical analysis could provide findings which, in isolation, could be regarded as illuminating or surprising about the behaviour of individual national parliamentary cohorts in the European Parliament. It would not necessarily follow that such statistics would be significant for the functioning of the European Parliament as a whole.

The application of this general analysis to the case of the 215 newest members of the European Parliament is clear. These members constitute just over 27% of the members of the European Parliament. For them to make any significant statistical impact on the characteristic and well-established voting patterns of the European Parliament, it would be necessary for all of them (or at least a large proportion of them) radically to depart from the norms and patterns of their predecessors and for them to structure these departures in similar ways among themselves. There would need to be a consistent and regular pattern of voting along specifically national lines, not merely by individual national delegations, but by all or the great majority of the national delegations concerned. It seems clear that no such radically atypical behaviour has been manifested by the new members in question. At most, there have been some suggestions that among the Polish and Czech members of the European Parliament, there is a greater willingness to embrace specifically national positions on questions relating to the European Constitutional Treaty. This has and can only have a very limited significance for the overall work of the European Parliament. The general stance of the European Parliament on these questions remains clear and at wide variance from the "national" stances of the Czech and Polish MEPs. Moreover, for all the political polemic which surrounds in the European Parliament the sort of institutional

questions treated by the European Constitutional Treaty, these are issues where the role of the Parliament is indirect and declaratory. No serious case can be made for the proposition that underlying political culture of the Parliament has been changed by enlargement.

## THE POLITICS OF THE NEW EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The new members of the European Parliament have been elected by a variety of systems of proportional representation, from twelve new countries of the European Union with widely differing recent histories of economic and political development. The spectrum of political views and economic analyses they represent is correspondingly variegated. Their distribution among the political groups has not altered the fundamental balance of voting majorities, whether conflictual or consensual, within the European Parliament (see table 1). On any plausible statistical review, the European Parliament remains a body with a centre-right majority for most contested votes, and one with a potential centrist majority in cases when there are institutional incentives for the Parliament to achieve an absolute majority of its members to give itself more purchase in its dealings with the Council and Commission. (For the latter phenomenon, see the interesting analysis by Neuhold and Settembri, bringing out the high level of consensus attained in the Parliament's committee votes, both before and after enlargement; Neuhold and Settembri, 2007.) If there is a discernible political impact which enlargement has had on the European Parliament, it certainly falls far short of any kind of restructuring of its underlying political composition.

Much comment has been generated by the recent establishment of a new right wing group in the European Parliament made numerically possible by the participation of Bulgarian and Romanian MEPs. For some commentators, this development is evidence of a worrying prevalence in Eastern Europe of the disagreeable and dangerous nationalism the European Union was founded to combat. For others, it is more generally indicative of a political volatility, even instability of political attitudes in some countries formerly within the Soviet bloc and now full members of the European Union. Such arguments and perceptions are worth considering in some detail, not necessarily to establish their objective truth or otherwise, but to locate more precisely their relevance for the functioning of the European Parliament.

It should not of course be forgotten that the newly-established right wing group is not the first such alliance in the European Parliament's history. Unsurprisingly, in a parliament largely elected by proportional representation, there has always been a numerically limited stratum of extreme right wing MEPs, who sometimes have had the numbers and administrative cohesion to form an independent group of their own and sometimes not. If on this occasion, it happens to be an accretion of right-wing Bulgarian or Rumanian MEPs who allow the formation of a new political group in the European Parliament, then it would be premature indeed to conclude that the enlargement of the European Union will generally impart to extreme right wing views within the European Parliament a reinforcement and momentum which they did not previously possess. Given the present electoral system and Rules of Procedure for the European Parliament, neither the emergence nor the disappearance of an extreme right wing group will ever be a surprising phenomenon. That elections in Bulgaria, Poland or Great Britain should tip the balance in one direction or another is of some limited significance for the propagation of extreme right wing views within the European Union. But the real institutional and political context within which the European Parliament operates would only genuinely be changed by the emergence of an extreme right wing group in the Parliament considerably greater than that which has now come to exist.

There is as yet no significant reason to believe that such a development is in immediate prospect, or that the likelihood of its coming to pass has been greatly affected by enlargement.

None of this is to deny that on a number of issues, the political centre of gravity of the European Parliament has somewhat shifted at the margins in recent years. There is unanimous agreement among observers that the present European Parliament is more sympathetic than some of its predecessors to the rhetoric and policies of the free market; more inclined to be suspicious of Russian attitudes and of its leading politicians; and that there is a noisy strain of social conservatism, even reaction which is to be found among the new MEPs from the former Warsaw Pact countries in particular. But the significance of these observations must not be overstated, either in the short or long term. There are many MEPs from former Warsaw Pact countries who are bitterly critical of what they see as reactionary social attitudes exemplified by their compatriots in the European Parliament; and there is every reason to believe that the passage of time will soften rather than exacerbate any particularly flagrant contrasts of rhetoric and political approaches between the great majority of the European Parliamentarians (from wherever they come) and the small minority who, as new members of the Parliament, understandably attract to themselves a disproportionate amount of short term attention.

Nor should it be forgotten that Parliamentarians from the Union's newest countries will rightly demand of their colleagues that they take seriously the new insights and experiences coming from the political systems of the new member countries. If, as a result of enlargement, the European Parliament's centre of political gravity moves a little towards free market political preferences or towards a less accommodating view of the present Russian government, then such developments can hardly be regarded as unreasonable or anomalous in an enlarged European Union. Parliamentary representatives from new member states are not likely to be those individuals most likely to take advantage of occasions offered them to say nothing. It is difficult to avoid the impression that some at least of the unfavourable comment directed towards the attitudes or utterances of individual MEPs from the new member states of the Union reflect the general concerns of the commentator about the overall question of enlargement, rather than the real significance for the European Parliament of such attitudes or utterances.

## THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY

Ever since the first direct elections to the Parliament in 1979, the European Parliament has been that institution of the European Union most in developmental flux. Many hoped in 1979 that the very fact of direct elections to the Parliament would rapidly call into being a powerfully legitimising new element of the Union's political structure, exercising increasingly salient powers in the Union's continuing institutional and political evolution. Some but not all of these expectations have been fulfilled. Over the past twenty-eight years, the formal powers of the European Parliament have dramatically increased, to the point where it can properly claim to be a co-legislator over great swathes of new legislation from the Union. On the other hand, the Parliament cannot reasonably claim that for anything other than a small majority of the European Union's citizens it enjoys a democratic legitimacy or political salience easily comparable to that of national parliaments. The following paragraphs will consider the question of whether enlargement is likely to change, and if so in what direction, this uneasy present equilibrium of the European Parliament as a European institutional giant and a political pygmy.

For those who accept in its purest form the traditional integrationist analysis of the European Union, the directly elected European Parliament is one important focus of the democratic legitimacy of the Union, the other being the democratically elected members of the Council of Ministers. Between them, and particularly when they work together in the co-decision procedure, the Parliament and Council constitute on this analysis an unanswerable rebuttal of sceptical questioning or doubts about the democratic credentials of the Union. Whether the Council fulfils quite the democratically legitimising role attributed to it in this context is a moot question. National elections, which dictate national representation in the Council of Ministers, are only rarely shaped or decided by European topics and if they are, then it is even more unusual for detailed questions of pending European legislation to figure in domestic campaigning. On the face of it, the European Parliament, issuing from specifically European Elections, has a better claim to be regarded as the carrier of the Union's democratic legitimacy. Even this claim, however, needs qualification and perhaps more vigorous qualification in the light of the enlargement of the European Union since 2004. The dramatically low participation of voters from the Union's newest members in the European Elections of 2004 does not suggest any widespread recognition in these countries of the European Parliament's legitimising role within the Union.

Confronted with the low and generally decreasing participation of voters in successive European Elections, Members of the European Parliament often and rightly point to low turnout in other large political units such as the United States. It is not generally held that the legitimacy and legitimising function of the Congress is destroyed by this low turnout. This is only a partial answer to the Parliament's critics, since American democracy rests on a number of related foundations, of which elections to Congress form only one, together with Presidential Elections, gubernatorial elections, state elections and local elections. None of these elections have obvious equivalents within the European Union, where national and local elections form no part of the European Union's institutional fabric. Moreover, democratic legitimacy in the United States is sustained by an almost universal sense of shared American political identity, the central role of which in American political culture is well illustrated by the social pressure exercised upon new American citizens to reverence the symbols of shared American political identity. The sense of American political identity is in its turn reinforced by a lively and polemical civil society, an American "public space" in which the polity's common problems and concerns are debated. The majoritarian decisions of the American Congress would not be accepted as democratically legitimate without this pre-existing (or at least co-existing) sense of American political identity, from which the rights and obligations of minorities and majorities within the American political system flow. The European Union at its present stage of development has little resemblance to the real democratic circumstances of the United States of America. This fact is particularly pertinent for the real democratic possibilities and constraints under which the European Parliament has operated, both between 1979 and 2004 and from 2004 to the present. Whether the enlargement of the Union in 2004 significantly changed these possibilities and constraints is not a question capable of a single answer.

Since the Treaty of Rome, differences of view have co-existed on the institutional model of integration towards which the European Community and (later) European Union were tending. These differences are sometimes described as those between the "intergovernmentalist" model and the "federalist" model. A more precise description of the debate might be as one between those who foresee the European Union as acquiring a substantial and increasing range of state-like attributes and those who believe its existing state-like attributes are already sufficient or even excessive. The implications of this debate for the standing and future role of the European

Parliament are evident. A powerful and politically highly visible European Parliament, with an autonomous and widely-recognised democratic legitimacy, would itself be a striking state-like attribute for the European Union. For reasons described above, however, such a European Parliament will never exist in isolation from other state-like elements of the Union, which either do not currently exist, or exist only fragmentarily. Until the Amsterdam Treaty of 1997 it was possible to believe, or to fear that the work of state-like construction in the European Union was proceeding consistently. The Amsterdam Treaty itself marked an important further step in the state-like characteristics of the Union, with the substantial pruning back of the “intergovernmentalism” which until then had characterised the Justice and Home Affairs pillar of the Maastricht Treaty.

But if there is reason to say that the enlargement of the European Union in 2004 has made it somewhat more difficult to envisage the continuing construction of such a network of state-like attributes for the Union, it cannot be claimed that the fifteen member states of the Union between 1997 and 2004 were pursuing this path with any great enthusiasm. The enlargement of the Union in 2004 took place at a time when the “state-building” aspect of European integration was anyway quiescent. With the important exception of the single European currency, the late 1990s were not a period when the member states were eager to construct new state-like functions for the European Union. Indeed, the European single currency itself has a structure of governance as “unstate-like” as possible at the European level. If it is to be argued that enlargement made “state-building” within the European Union more difficult, it must be precisely specified what were the new elements in this equation arising from enlargement. Two possible elements present themselves, namely the difficulty of agreement on constitutional innovation among twenty-five member states rather than fifteen and the potentially looser sense of a binding political identity engendered in some longer-standing member states of the Union by enlargement.

The first of these elements does not need extended discussion, being little more than a mathematical self-evidence. While many of the day to day decisions of the Union are taken by majority voting, the new treaties which are central to the continuing constitutional innovation on which the European Parliament in particular depends need to be agreed by unanimity. To steer twenty-seven national governments to such unanimity must always be more difficult than to do the same for fifteen. Less tangible, but just as important for the short and medium term institutional development of the Union, are the changes arising for the Union’s political meteorology from the accession to the Union of twelve new countries between 2004 and 2007.

Ever since the end of the Cold War and the emergence of the real possibility that the European Union would expand to include in particular the countries of the defunct Warsaw Pact, debate has raged within the Union on what relationship there might be between the institutional deepening and the geographic widening of the Union. An often-expressed expectation has been that the workings of the European institutions in an enlarged European Union would be so inefficient and tardy that the case for institutional reform would be thereby reinforced. It cannot be claimed that events in the European Parliament have yet followed this course. On the contrary, it would be difficult to argue that the European Parliament has been so hamstrung in its regular activities since 2004 as to reinforce the case for the extension of the co-decision procedure which was so important a feature of the European Constitutional Treaty. In any event, the principal argument for that extension was always one of democracy rather than efficiency. It is in the context of the democratic self-understanding of the European Union that enlargement has made at least in the short term a difference to the European Parliament’s possible evolutionary path.

Rightly or wrongly, the enlargement of the European Union in 2004 has been associated in the minds of many ordinary electors in the European Union with a sense that the political identity of the Union was being diluted, in the interest of a purely economic Union geared around the values of economic liberalism and globalisation. This sense was crucial to the rejection in both France and the Netherlands of the European Constitutional Treaty. The much-quoted figure of the “Polish plumber” was at a superficial level pure caricature. At a deeper level, it reflected concerns in France and elsewhere that the enlarged European Union is so politically and economically disparate that further progress along the route sketched out by the Single European Act, the Maastricht Treaty and the Amsterdam Treaty, is no longer possible or desirable. These concerns have been sustained and reinforced in particular by some of the social attitudes which the present Polish government has embraced and for which it has on occasion even sought to proselytise. More than any other institution of the Union, the European Parliament depends in the medium to longer term on the continuation of the state-like integration which found its highest point until now in the Amsterdam Treaty. If enlargement poses in the coming years, for whatever reason, a barrier to the resumption of this process, the European Parliament will be a particular loser. The vexed question of relations between the European Parliament and national parliaments is a powerful illustration of the new challenges which the European Parliament is coming to face in its quest for a democratically legitimising role.

## THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS

A specific and significant theatre over which the debate about the future institutional structure of the European Union has ranged in recent years is that of the role of national parliaments in the Union’s institutional architecture. This argument has been exacerbated by the Union’s enlargement, since to involve national parliaments from twenty seven countries in the legislative and other work of the Union presents even more of a political and administrative challenge than to involve the national parliaments of fifteen. The role of national parliaments in the European Union was a much-debated one in the European Constitutional Convention. The terms of that debate were highly illuminating and potentially disquieting for the European Parliament.

In the Convention, two contrasting views of democratic legitimacy in the European Union clashed, that of the “federalists” who argued that only the European Parliament had the expertise, focus and specifically European democratic legitimacy to perform with any credibility the central parliamentary role within the European Union; and on the other hand that of the so-called “intergovernmentalists” who doubted the aptness of the European Parliament for any such role and believed that democratic legitimacy speaks rather out of the barrel of national parliamentary weaponry. (It may incidentally be doubted whether in this context the often self-attached designation “intergovernmentalist” was wholly appropriate. The real contrast was surely that we have already observed between those content with the state-like evolution of the European Union and those hostile to any such evolution.)

The compromise achieved by the Convention and incorporated into the Constitutional Treaty (with only marginal changes in the Reform Treaty) was one which should rationally have satisfied neither party. The logic of the “statelike-building” European Union had traditionally ascribed to national parliaments only the role of scrutinising the European policies of the national

governments with which they were associated. By appearing to give a new, European role to national parliaments in the Union's legislative procedures, it implicitly cast doubt upon the democratically legitimising role of the European Parliament and sought to reintroduce into the Union's legislative procedures the approximately forty varied national parliaments of the Union. Intellectually and politically, this was a damaging breach in the philosophical and institutional rationale of the European Parliament, made all the more damaging by the nonchalant claims of some national politicians that "democratic legitimacy" could only be assured for the European Union by national parliaments. The "federalist" side of this argument, however, could draw comfort from the hollow, restricted and incoherent nature of the new power given to national parliaments. It was not long before Eurosceptic critics in the United Kingdom and elsewhere were claiming (with some plausibility) that the European Constitutional Treaty's institutional structure was in at least one respect demonstrably untransparent and dishonest, appearing to involve more fully national parliaments in European legislative procedures but in reality not doing so.

It is not, of course, by chance that the compromise elaborated by the Constitutional Convention was so indefensibly incoherent. It was an attempt to marry two wholly incompatible views of the current and future institutional rationale of the European Parliament and indeed of the European Union. Both views have persuasive elements to their argumentation. The European Parliament is not in most member states of the Union a substantial legitimising factor for the Union's decision-making. But it in no sense follows that the greater involvement of national parliaments in this decision-making, anyway bringing with itself enormous practical problems, will enhance the Union's democratic legitimacy in the minds of its citizens either. The European Parliament is today uncomfortably poised between impractical and incoherent notions of national democratic legitimisation for European decision-making on the one hand; and as yet implausible and fragmentary accounts of itself as a supporting column of the Union's democratic legitimacy. There must be considerable doubt as to the long-term sustainability of this position. Since direct elections to the European Parliament began in 1979, the formal powers of the European Parliament have increased exponentially and the Reform Treaty is likely to continue this process. But the formal powers of the European Parliament should not necessarily be equated with political legitimacy and its essential concomitant in a modern democracy, high public profile. The capacity of the MEPs who served on the Convention to set the agenda of the Convention in a way so favourable to their institution was in no sense a response to public pressure for an enhancement of the Parliament's role. It was rather a consequence of the (wholly legitimate) negotiating skill shown by the Parliament's representatives in the Convention.

## CONCLUSIONS

The specific impact of the European Union's enlargement upon the European Union has been limited, both because of the modest numbers of new parliamentarians involved and their dispersal within the pre-existing political groups of the Parliament. Other than on institutional questions, where the role of the European Parliament is any case restricted, MEPs from the newest member states of the Union have followed the example of their predecessors and voted in a manner more easily explicable by their political rather than their national affiliations. To a limited extent, the prevalence of certain political views within the Parliament has been reinforced by the influx of new members (as it has in the Council and Commission) and some marginal political views have become slightly less marginal. The European Parliament remains however confronted with its fundamental existential question, whether it can substantially contribute to the democratic life of

the European Union. This was a question which already was posing itself in sharper tones as the 1990s progressed. Enlargement has certainly not rendered this question less acute. If the European Union, or a substantial portion of its members, is prepared to resume that institutionally integrative path on which it seemed irrevocably set until the Amsterdam Treaty, the future role of the European Parliament will be a clearer and securer one. If not, it may well be that the growing calls for national parliaments to provide the democratic legitimacy of the Union, in spite of all the practical difficulties involved, will become irresistible. In those circumstances, the question could not be avoided as to the sense and future of the directly elected European Parliament itself. In the twentieth century, the British House of Lords reinvented itself as essentially a highly-qualified revising chamber for the legislation of the House of Commons. It must be doubtful whether the European Parliament would wish or be able in the long term to content itself with such a role. The years leading up to the European Elections of 2009 will be particularly important in this regard. The process of ratification of the Reform Treaty and the capacity or otherwise of the Parliament to take advantage of the new possibilities given to it by the Treaty, particularly in the election of the President of the Commission, will provide important clues about the future likely evolution of the (enlarged) European Parliament.

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Table 1: MEPs from the 12 new Member States

	EPP	PES	ALDE	UEN	Greens/ EFA	EUL/NG L	ID	ITS	Non- attached	
BG	5	5	5					3		18
CZ	14	2				6	1		1	24
EE	1	3	2							6
CY	3		1			2				6
LV	3		1	4	1					9
LT	2	2	7	2						13
HU	13	9	2							24
MT	2	3								5
PL	15	9	5	20			3		2	54
RO	9	12	8					6		35
SI	4	1	2							7
SK	8	3							3	14
Total EU-12	79	49	33	26	1	8	4	9	6	215
Total EU-27	278	216	104	44	42	41	24	23	13	785

Table 2: Degree of education of first-time MEPs

	MEPs EU-10 (nominal)	MEPs EU-10 (percentage)	First-time MEPs EU-15 (nominal)	First-time MEPs EU-15 (percentage)	All first-time MEPs (nominal)	All first-time MEPs (percentage)
Postgraduate education	134	83	110	45	244	60
Doctorate	76	47	45	18	121	30

Source: Bale and Taggart (2006)

Table 3: Occupational backgrounds: Sectors of previous employment of first-time MEPs

	MEPs EU-10 (percentage)	First-time MEPs EU-15 (percentage)	All first-time MEPs (percentage)
Education	38	29	32
Public Administration	12	11	12
Industry	11	15	13
Media	11	10	10
Health & Social Services	11	3	6
Legal	4	8	7
Banking, Finance, Insurance, Property	2	7	5
Agriculture, Fishing, Hunting, Forestry	1	2	2
Security Services (e.g. Police, Armed Forces)	1	1	1

Source: Bale and Taggart (2006)

Table 4: Previous political experience of first-time MEPs

	MEPs (EU-10) (nominal)	MEPs (EU-10) (percentage)	First-time MEPs (EU-15) (nominal)	First-time MEPs (EU-15) (percentage)	All first-time MEPs (nominal)	All first-time MEPs (percentage)
EU institutions	18	11	22	9	40	10
International organisations	43	26	29	12	72	18
Elected office	120	74	168	68	288	71
Local council	47	29	124	50	171	42
Regional government	9	6	43	18	52	13
National parliament	96	60	89	36	185	45
National government	54	33	41	17	95	23
High position in national party	86	53	120	49	206	50
High position in regional party	11	7	49	20	60	15

Source: Bale and Taggart (2006)