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Pathways to the European Parliament: an exploratory analysis of MEPs' career patterns of Belgian, Irish, German, Swedish and British MEPs*

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Abstract: The European Parliament (EP)'s formal authority has considerably expanded since 1979. Yet, the EP evolves and achieves its formal policy-making capacity along with the types of Members of the EP (MEPs) attracted to serve into it. Indeed, the EP is not only populated by European 'careerists', but also 'rookies' without legislative experience or MEPs fuelled by 'domestic' political goals. Therefore, our research question is: what are the MEPs' career patterns in the EP? Career patterns are conceptualized as institutions in their own right, socializing and framing how MEPs consider their past, current and future positions in European multilevel settings. Since Scarrow's seminal distinction between 'EP careerists', 'domestic-oriented MEPs', and 'short-term politicians', there has been surprisingly no systematic analysis. Studies are often country-oriented or restricted to specific legislative terms. This paper presents an exploratory empirical analysis of 850 MEPs career patterns over seven legislative terms (1979-2014) from five countries (Belgium, Ireland, Germany, Sweden and the UK). Building upon the methodological challenges and first tentative results we encountered, this paper will serve as a springboard for a more systematic analysis of MEPs' political paths and its impact upon parliamentary behaviour in the broader "EvolvEP" – MEPs career and behaviour project"

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***** Very first draft of the PDR 'EvolvEP'*****

1. Introduction: why study MEPs' career patterns

The incremental empowerment of the European Parliament (EP) over time – now on an equal footing with the Council of the European Union regarding the ordinary legislative procedure (OLP) – is one of the most notable evolutions in the democratic functioning of the EU. Today's legislative behaviour of Members of the EP (MEPs) can have very concrete effects on the European Union (EU)'s policy-making. Yet, as outlined by Matthew (1984:573), “legislative institutions change along with the types of people attracted to serve in them”. Daniel and Metzger (2018:91) go in the same direction when they outlined that the EP can only achieve its policy-making capacity when populated with MEPs seeing the EP as more than a second-order electoral arena. It is, therefore, crucial to know more about the kind of politicians attracted to serve in the EP, as it allows to assess whether its formal empowerment went along the development and stabilization of a European parliamentary class.

On this matter, Scarrow (1997)'s seminal work on MEPs has been confirmed and extended recent studies (Beauvallet-Haddad *et al.*, 2016; Biro-Nagy, 2019; Daniel, 2015; Salvati, 2012; Verzichelli & Edinger, 2005; Whitaker, 2014) outlined that the attractiveness of the EP is evolving and that it now appeals to an increasing number of *European careerists* devoted to the institution and seeking to empower it. Yet, other profiles of MEPs also exist: some MEPs are pure rookies without any legislative experience, others use the EP as a *stepping stone* towards national politics as they are mostly driven by ‘domestic’ political goals where for other MEPs, the EP is nothing more than a *political dead-end* (Scarrow, 1997).

However, since Scarrow (1997)'s seminal distinction, the composition and formal powers of the EP went through major evolutions. For instance, the enlargement of the EU from 15 up to 28 (and back to 27) Member States resulted in the inclusion of MEPs originating from different political systems, cultures and with various degree of political experience (see. on this matter, Bale & Taggart, 2006; Biro-Nagy, 2016, 2019; Verzichelli & Edinger, 2005). A second notable evolution is the progressive expansion in the share of Eurosceptic MEPs: from 19.1 percent in 2004 to 30.5 percent during the 2014-2019 legislative term (Brack, 2018). Third, the number of national political parties represented in the European Parliament has also continuously increased: from 97 national parties in the 4th term, we now have up to 232 in the 8th term (European Parliament, 2018, 2019a). Finally, as outlined by Beauvallet-Haddad *et al.* (2016:116), ‘while parity is still a long way away, feminization is a major trend’ of the EP evolution: from 15.2 percent in 1979 to 36.4 percent in 2019 (European Parliament 2019b). Alongside the progressive institutional empowerment of the EP, these evolutions raise the

question whether Scarrow's original categorization – and more recent works that built on her categorization – still holds today.

The objective of this article is to contribute to this debate by mapping and explaining the diversity and evolution of career paths of Belgian, German, British, Irish and Swedish MEPs (1979-2014, i.e., from the 1st to the 7th legislative terms). First, the study provides a longitudinal analysis of MEPs' career covering both pre- and post- legislative and executive offices. Missing in the literature (van Geffen 2016), this approach allows to map more accurately the diversity and evolution of MEPs career patterns without merely considering MEPs' past experience to categorize the distinct pathways to – and from – the EP. Second, the article also aims at verifying the relevance of our updated classification by assessing the variation observed across countries and time while assessing the effect of some domestic and EU level variables. In particular, in this version of the article, we focus on the impact of a few MEPs' attributes (gender and age), political regimes (federalization) and European parliamentary groups (EPG).

The rest of the article is organized as follows. In section 2, we start by giving a short overview of the diversity of MEPs' career paths previously identified in the literature over the last 25 years. On this background, the article also points to (explorative) explanatory variables that can shed light on the variation of MEPs' career paths across individual profiles, countries, political parties, and over time. The third section presents the research design and discusses the operationalization of variables, the country selection as well as the data collection and method of analysis. Subsequently, we provide a preliminary analysis of MEPs career paths over time and across countries. The article ends with a discussion of the findings and propose leads for forthcoming research.

2. Career paths of MEPs: what we know and what we should know

The section introduces the existing categorization of MEP's career paths and identifies the main evolutions since Scarrow's seminal work in the late 1990s. While this first batch of studies made major contributions to the literature, they also faced several challenges and limitations that we will present succinctly. Building upon categories found in the former scholarship, this article introduces a finer categorization of MEP's career paths integrating some of the major limits previously identified.

2.1 Existing categorization of MEPs' career paths

Scarrow's study (1997) on French, German, Italian and British MEPs (period 1979-1994 – 1st 2nd and 3rd legislative terms) identified three main career paths. The first path is composed of

short-termers “*political deadend*” MEPs who served in the EP only for a short period of time and who did not extend their political career after their EP mandate(s). Two sub-types of short-termers are identified by Scarrow: MEPs retiring from domestic political life and joining the EP as a consolation prize and MEPs using the EP as a ‘gateway’ towards a career outside of politics. The second career path gathers so-called “*Stepping Stone*” MEPs aiming at ‘winning or regaining’ a national mandate after their time in the EP. Finally, “*European Careerists*” are defined as those with a “long and primary commitment” to the EP. Having a look at the categorization of career paths of MEPs published after Scarrow’s work (Salvati, 2016; van Geffen, 2016; Verzichelli & Edinger, 2005), one can observe that studies mainly built on her categorization.

For instance, in the “*Short-termers*” category, van Geffen (2016) also makes a distinction between “*EP retirees*” (i.e., MEPs at the end of their political career) and what he labels as “*one-off*” MEPs. These MEPs usually do not have any political career before or after serving in the EP and usually only stay in the EP for no longer than two terms. This can be public figures with no previous political experience, “*Party Loyalists*” rewarded by their party but that do not pursue a career in the EP or, finally “MEPs who turn out to be poor-quality politicians and who are deemed unfit for a political career at either the European or domestic political level” (van Geffen, 2016: 1021). Verzichelli & Edinger (2005) had already introduced a similar distinction between two types of politicians entering the EP after their career in the national parliament: “*EP pensioners*” (i.e., golden parachute MEPs) and “*Euro-insider*” (i.e., MEPs that were already involved in EU affairs before joining the EP). The main distinction between these two types of MEPs lies whether their previous career was ‘domestically’ or ‘Europeanly’ oriented.

The “*European Careerists*” category also received an important attention from scholars. For instance, Verzichelli and Edinger (2005) identified “*Euro-expert*” (i.e., politicians with a significant domestic career but now committed to supranational issues) and “*Euro-politicians*” (i.e., MEPs without any major political experience and directly recruited for a career at the European level). Van Geffen (2016) also makes a similar distinction based on the former national mandates served by MEPs. Also, the work of Salvati (2016) identifies three paths in the development of a European parliamentary career that he labels as “*Amateur (politician)*” (i.e., MEPs with no previous domestic experience and/or presence of an alternative background), “*national politician*” (i.e., MEPs with substantial previous national or subnational experience) and “*European politician*” (i.e., MEPs that are re-elected in the EP).

Finally, Verzichtelli and Edinger (2005) also rightly outlined that some stepping-stone *minded* politicians with domestic objectives may progressively consider to make a career at the European level, albeit this category is difficult to operationalize in practice because it requires to measure and record MEPs' individual ambition. Overall, figure 1 summarizes the main evolutions since Scarrow's original categorization.

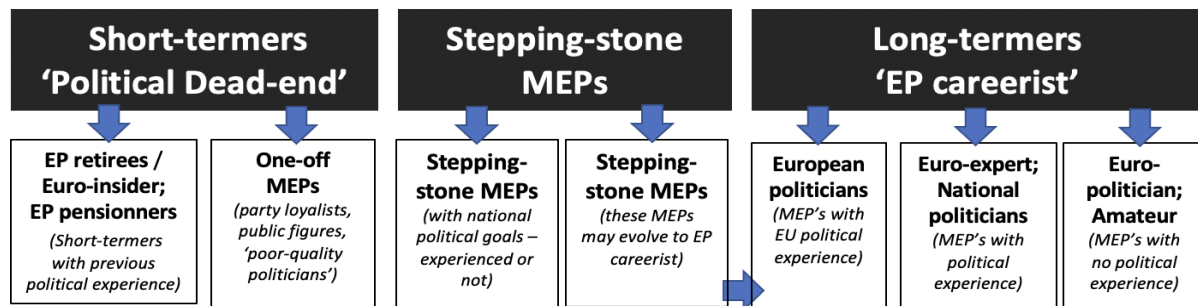


Figure 1: Summary of existing categorization of MEPs career paths (the authors)

Yet, while this first batch of studies made important contributions to unpack the various career paths of MEPs, they are also facing several shortcomings. First, there has been surprisingly no systematic analysis of MEPs career paths since Scarrow's (1997) seminal distinction. Studies are often country-oriented (e.g., Beauvallet and Michon 2010, 2016 on French MEPs; Dato & Alarcón-González 2012 on Spanish MEPs; or Bale and Taggart, 2006; Bíró-Nagy 2016, 2019 on central and eastern countries) and/or restricted to specific legislative terms (e.g., van Geffen 2016; Salvati, 2016). Second, some studies do not systematically analyze pre- and post- EP positions and cover merely MEPs' previous political experience and socio-demographic indicators when entering the EP (Beauvallet-Haddad et al., 2016). Missing in the literature (van Geffen 2016), analyzing pre- and post- EP offices allow to describe more accurately the diversity and dynamics of career patterns. Finally, despite the growing importance of subnational regional tiers in some of the biggest (federal or regionalized) Member states, the inclusion of subnational offices has been almost systematically overlooked in previous studies (but see remarks from Whitaker 2014, Høyland et al. 2017).

2.2 MEPs' career paths: short-termers, progressive, long-termers and multi-level career MEPs

Building on previous works, not only the "Evolv'EP" project aims at (further) developing our understanding of the (multi-level) career path of MEPs by studying pre- and post- political offices held at both the subnational and national levels, but it also aims at offering a systematic

longitudinal analysis from 1979. This article is the first attempt of the “Evolv’EP” project to reach that goal, analyzing MEPs from five countries to assess a next classification.

Overall, our categorization of MEPs’ career patterns distinguishes between four broad categories: (1) short-termers, (2) stepping-stone MEPs, (3) long-termers ‘EU careerist’ and finally, (4) ambiguous multilevel career pattern. First, *short-termer MEPs* are defined as politicians with a very short political experience in the EP. This can take the form of ‘EP retirees’ (i.e., short-termers with previous political experience), ‘one-off MEPs’ (i.e., short-termers without previous political experience and not pursuing a political career after their EP mandate(s)) or ‘multi-level short-termers’ (i.e., short-termers at both the EU and domestic levels). The second category, *stepping-stone MEPs* (i.e., MEPs using the EP to (re)gain a domestic political office) makes a differentiation between MEPs with national and MEPs with regional political goals. These MEPs are expected to have no or only a limited political experience before their EU mandate. Their EP mandate(s) are used as a moment of political professionalization before (re)entering the national or regional political arenas. Third, the *long-termers ‘EU careerist’* category consists of MEPs largely devoted to the EP. As for previous studies, we also make a distinction between ‘Euro-politicians’ (i.e., MEPs without previous political experience that do most of their career at the European level) and ‘Two-track Euro MEPs’ (i.e., MEPs having a significant political experience but that are now devoted to the EP). Finally, the ambiguous *multi-level career MEPs category* is composed of individuals with experience at several levels of government in a non-ordered manner. In this study, MEPs with multi-level careers are defined as MEPs with (a) experience served at three levels of government (i.e., regional, national and European), and/or with (b) distinct complex sequences (e.g., national-European-national-regional); and/or (c) with time served in office that does not permit to establish a clear orientation towards one level or the other.

The following figure (figure 2) summarises the four main categories of main MEPs career paths as identified in this study.

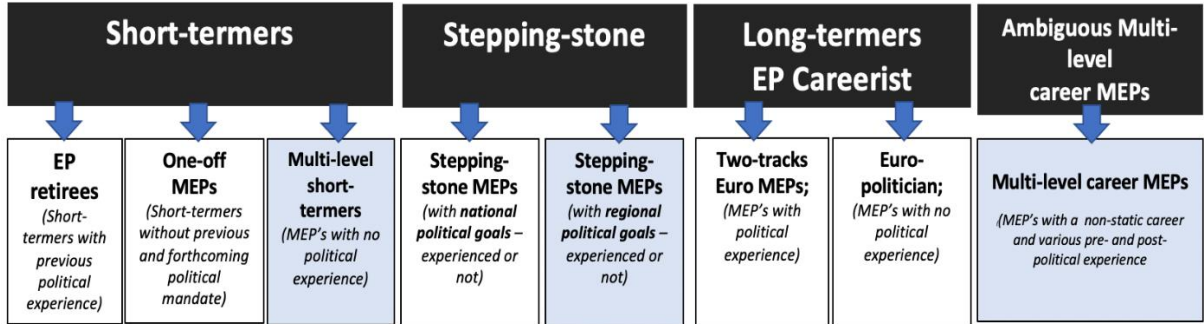


Figure 2: Categorization of MEPs career path in this study

Compared to previous categorizations, we make three important contributions to the study of MEPs career paths. First, we consider not only national (legislative and executive) but also regional positions. Indeed, not including regional experience in the analysis would constitute a serious bias, as experienced regional MPs – including those from the strongest European regions – would be treated as simple rookies (see also this limit identified by van Geffen 2016). Beyond ‘methodological nationalism’ (Schakel & Jeffery 2012), the literature analyzing career paths in multi-level systems (Docherty, 2011; Stolz, 2010, 2011; Borchert, 2011; Dodeigne, 2014, 2018) have yet demonstrated the relevance – or even predominance – of regional political arenas in multiple European countries. These politicians are therefore not political rookies, and this is especially true for MEPs originating from Member States with strong legislative regions. Building on this, we further distinct stepping-stone’ MEPs between politicians with *national political goals* from the ones having *regional political goals*. As section 4 introduces the descriptive statistics, it becomes clear that regional political arenas constitute a strong component – if not the strongest – for many MEPs with multilevel experience in Member states with federal political systems.

Second, we propose to add a third career path in the broader category of short-termers that we label *multi-level short-termers*. Previous studies already made a distinction between two types of short-termers: ‘EP retiree’ (i.e., MEPs with domestic political experience ending their career in the EP) and ‘one-off MEPs’ (MEPs without previous domestic experience and no political career after the EP). While these two MEPs career paths allow to map a great share of short-termers, it does not allow to account for MEPs who are short-termers at both the EU and the domestic levels, a sub-category we labelled as *multi-level short termers* (i.e., MEPs with a limited previous political experience and staying only for a short term in the EP before ending their political career).

Third, we also outline the necessity to add a fourth career pattern, the one of *ambiguous multi-level career MEPs*. Considering the diversity of profiles in this *suis generis* category, we believe that a more fine-grained qualitative analysis of their profile – in combination with an analysis of their parliamentary behaviour – will allow us to better classify those MEPs in the course of the “Evolv’EP” project. However, at this stage of the project, it is clear that very complex MEPs’ career patterns appear when considering pre- and post- experience in a genuinely multilevel perspective (from regional to national and European levels).

Overall, the main objective of these three modifications is to identify to what extent the multiplication of governance levels impact upon MEPs’ pathways towards – and from – the EP. Indeed, it is necessary to make a distinction between MEPs that have relatively ‘stable’ careers

across two levels of government from MEPs depicting much more ambiguous career trajectories. Actually, some EU Member States – like Belgium for instance - witnessed in the last years a twofold process of political restructuring (Beyers and Bursens, 2006, 2013). On the one hand, resulting from the process of European integration, policy-making competences were progressively pooled-up to the European level, making a career at the European level – and in the EP – more attractive for politicians. On the other hand, some Member States also face, in parallel, a process of decentralization with competences moving from the national to the regional level. This decentralization process also triggered the development of political elites with stable career at the regional level (Dodeigne, 2018). This twofold political restructuring phenomena offers additional career opportunities for politicians. While some MEPs may have rather stable careers – for example, one or two terms at the European level followed by a (long) career at the regional level – others may have much more ‘dynamic’ and ambiguous multi-level career paths (i.e., having experience at regional, national and European levels). These paths can be linear, in the sense that politicians climb the governance ladder one step at the time from the regional level, to the national and finally European level or it can also be much more ambiguous, with mandates at various governance levels taking place in a non-ordered manner (e.g., National-European-Regional / National-Regional-European-Regional). The main rationale is that in a multi-level political arena, such as the European Union, one needs to differentiate between MEPs with more ‘stable’ careers and MEPs with more ‘ambiguous’ careers.

3. Assessing longitudinal and cross-sectional variation in MEPs’ career paths

The composition and formal powers of the EP went through major evolutions since the direct election of its members in 1979. The question(s) thereof are (1) whether an evolution in (the share and types of) MEPs profiles can be observed over time and (2) how to account for variation of MEPs career paths across countries. Those evolutions have furthermore induced changes in the attractiveness and accessibility of the EP in the newly established multilevel structure of opportunities (Schlesinger 1966; Borchert 2011), in terms of differences along EPG as well as variance for young and/or female ambitious candidates.

Indeed, while scholars observed a progressive stabilization in the background and types of MEPs serving in the EP nowadays (Beauvallet-Haddad *et al.*, 2016; Whithaker, 2014; Daniel, 2015), the same studies also outlined (persistent) cross-country, cross-party and sociodemographic variations. In the following sections, we identify six hypotheses explaining variation over time, across countries and political parties as well as MEPs’ sociodemographic

profiles. In this respect, the rationale of this paper is not so much to assess the causality of these hypotheses (the effects of these variables have already been pretty well established in the literature), but rather to assess the relevance of our new classification. In the long-term, the goal of the “Evolv’EP” project is, however, to provide the first empirical systematic cross-national evaluation of those hypotheses for the 28 Member States from 1979 until 2019.

3.1 A longitudinal perspective: what evolution of career paths across time

Along the progressive empowerment of the EP, some studies focusing on the latest legislatures conclude that the type of a *European Careerist* is the one which has developed the most among a high number of deputies (Verzichelli and Edinger 2005; Meserve *et al.* 2009; Daniel, 2015). Beauvallet-Haddad *et al.* (2016) indeed highlighted that careers at the EP are longer than before and that the percentage of MEPs re-elected steadily increased across time (i.e., after the 2014 elections, almost one third of MEPs were beginning their second mandate and 13 percent their third one). Overall, the authors also observed a relative stabilization of the EP’s composition and MEPs background. Others found out that MEPs see their time in parliament as a career itself or a stepping-stone to move up to a national position, but not as a retirement home (Whitaker 2014). In addition, the studies of Bale and Taggart (2006), Beauvallet-Haddad *et al.* (2016), Bíró-Nagy (2016, 2019) and Verzichelli and Edinger (2005) all outlined that newer MEPs from Central Europe are not ‘rookies’ but display a high human and political capitals (i.e., previous mandates in their national parliament or in the government). The main argument developed among these studies is that a stronger and more professional EP has affected the European multilevel structure of opportunities by offering new supranational attractive positions. As a result, it has the potential to attract more experienced politicians as well as politicians fuelled by European ambition willing to commit their political career in that institution.

In addition, the empowerment of the EP also offers an arena of ‘political professionalization’ (Beauvallet and Michon, 2010; Beauvallet-Haddad *et al.*, 2016) for the MEPs accessing to the political profession (first mandate) or for MEPs with a limited domestic political experience. Finally, in the case of regionalized and federal countries, we also expect the rise of a new category of MEPs career pattern: ambiguous multi-level career MEPs acting at the regional, national, and European levels.

Based on these observations, we can formulate a first set of hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a: Along the progressive empowerment of the EP, we expect an increase followed by a stabilization in the share of European Careerist

Hypothesis 1b: Along the progressive empowerment of the EP, we expect an increase in the share of stepping-stone MEPs

Hypothesis 1c: Along the progressive empowerment of the EP, we expect an increase in the share of ‘multi-level career’ MEPs

Hypothesis 1d: Along the progressive empowerment of the EP, we expect a decrease in the share of ‘retiree MEPs’

3.2 A cross sectional perspective: political regime, EPG size and socio-demographic characteristics of MEPs

Career paths of MEPs cannot merely be explained by their individual personal ambition, and one needs to further integrate the structure of opportunities constraining – or favouring – MEPs’ navigation in the European multilevel structures. These constraints are related to the domestic level (i.e., federalization), the European level (i.e., size of EPGs) or to socio-demographic characteristics of MEPs (i.e., gender, age).

The variation of career paths across countries can first be explained by the type of political systems of the MEPs’ country of origin. Indeed, the studies of Daniel (2015, 2016) and of Daniel and Metzger (2018) expected differences between career paths of MEPs from decentralized and federal countries in comparison with MEPs from more centralized and/or unitary countries. The rationale of Daniel is the following: in federal systems, political parties are more used to work in multi-level settings and assign MEPs ‘in the functional areas that align most closely with their professional interest’ (Daniel, 2015: 25). Therefore, MEPs from these types of countries should depict more stable and extensive careers in the European Parliament.

That being said, we do not expect that all MEPs with a federal background will depict the exact same career patterns. Indeed, in federal and regionalized countries, the degree of mobility – and thereof stability in career patterns – can shape very differently: with regional and national integrated political arenas with permeable institutional boundaries (e.g., Belgium or Spain), or, on the opposite, with a clear-cut separation between political arenas and the quasi-absence of level-hopping movements between regional and upper levels (e.g., the UK and Canada) (Dodeigne, 2014, 2018). Amongst those two classifications, Germany seems to present in an in-between category with permeable institutional boundaries between the Länder and the national – yet with limited transfers (Stolz and Borchert 2011). As a result, this means that career paths of MEPs from Belgium – and to a lesser extent Germany – are expected to depict much more ‘mobility’ across the regional, national and European levels than their British

counter-parts. In the latter, political personal is meant to commit to his/her office for a relatively long period of time once elected in a specific political arena (Dodeigne 2018), be it regional, national or European. Therefore, the following hypotheses can be drawn from previous findings:

Hypothesis 2a: MEPs from federal backgrounds will have a more stable career as ‘European careerist’ than MEPs from highly unitary systems

Hypothesis 2b: MEPs from “integrated” political arenas with permeable institutional boundaries will have shorter European career and more ambiguous “multi-level career” profiles than MEPs from “alternative” political arenas with clear-cut separation between arenas

Second, the EPGs of MEPs are also identified as a variable impacting on the career paths of MEPs. Bíró-Nagy (2016) and Beauvallet-Haddad et al. (2016) both found that MEPs from the largest and most active EPGs in terms of legislative activities and key positions in the European Parliament tend to have longer career than other MEPs. In this wake, Pemstein et al. (2015) previously found that incumbent MEPs are more likely to be ranked higher on candidate lists if they belong to one of the three largest policy-making groups of the EP, if their national party emphasizes European issues or if their domestic party has more limited opportunities at the national level. Based on the previous observations, we formulate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: MEPs that belong to the most active EP groups in terms of legislative activities are more likely to evolve as ‘European careerist’

Furthermore, we also discuss the impact of socio-demographic characteristics - such as age, geographical distance and gender – on the career paths of MEPs. First, it has been found out that younger MEPs – and especially those in the early stage of their career – who face a (realistic) choice between a national or a European career tend to have a national focus (Meserve et al 2009; Bíró-Nagy 2016). Therefore, it is likely to expect that politicians entering the EP at a young age would use the EP as a stepping-stone towards national or regional politics. Second, Whitaker (2014) also hypothesized that the geographical distance of MEPs vis-à-vis their home country could play a role as well. The longer the distance between Strasbourg and Brussels and their home country, the shorter are the careers in the EP.

Finally, despite the progressive and steady increase in the share of female MEPs, we also expect differences between male and female MEPs. Studies on the national electoral systems (including some of the European Member States) concluded that women are vulnerable to some kind of elections. It has been found out that women’s chances to get elected to parliament are lower if they are candidates under a majoritarian vote system. In contrary, proportional voting systems are in favor for women. The higher the district magnitude, the

higher the chances for women to get elected (see for example Rule 1987; Norris 2004; Kunovich/Paxton 2005; Matland 2005; Bieber 2016). In our sample we look at countries which have different electoral systems for their national elections which make it more difficult for women to enter Parliament. This is especially true for the UK, which uses a single member plurality system ('first-past-the-post') and in part for the German national elections ('Personalisierte Verhältniswahl') because it combines majoritarian rules (election of district candidates via 'first-past-the-post') and proportional representation by voting for state party lists. On the opposite, Sweden, Belgium and Ireland use a proportional system for national elections. Yet, in Ireland, the proportion of female deputies in the national parliament is relatively low (22.2%) while in the other four member states this rate is much higher (European Parliament 2019b). As all MEPs get elected via a proportional representation system since 2004 and because women seem to face more difficulties on national elections, we suggest that women who entered the European Parliament tend to be more European Careerists than their male colleagues.

* **Hypothesis 4a:** MEPs that enter the parliament at a young age are more likely to be stepping-stone MEPs and/or 'European careerist'

* **Hypothesis 4b:** MEPs coming from countries that are further away will tend to have shorter career in the EP (and are likely to be stepping-stone politicians)

* **Hypothesis 5:** Female MEPs are more likely to enter the EP to pursue a pattern of "Euro-careerist" than their male colleagues

4. Research design: Data, method and operationalization of variables

The analysis is based on an original dataset of 850 Belgian, British, Irish, German and Swedish MEPs having served – once or multiple times – in the EP over the seven legislative terms (1979-2014, i.e., from the 1st to the 7th legislative terms). In this perspective, our case selection for this first draft of the "Evolv'EP" project is heuristically driven by differences across Member states as well as data availability. Firstly, from the heuristic view point, we sought to cover Member states with regionalized or federal political systems as well as more unitary structures to assess the relevance of regional mandates in MEPs' career patterns. According to seminal classification in regional and federal studies (Swenden 2006), our sample thus covers two federations (Belgium and Germany) and one regionalized country (United Kingdom) as well as two unitary political systems (Ireland and Sweden).

Our federal Member States present their own elected regional parliaments and their own regional cabinet for Belgian Regions/Communities, German Länder as well as in Scotland,

Wales and Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom. According to the regional authority index (Hooghe, Marks and Schakel 2016), those regional tiers present some of the highest scores of regional authority across the world (with scores superior to 20 on a scale from 0 to 27) – albeit to a lesser extent in Wales. On the opposite, Ireland is amongst the countries that has devolved the least scope of powers to regional tiers (with a score of 3). With a score of 12, Swedish Landstinge present a more complex case as they benefit from an already substantial degree of regional authority. From a comparative viewpoint, Wales is merely three points higher on the scale while Landstinge have the same degree of autonomy of Corsican institutions in France. However, in line with Niessen (forthcoming)’s argument on regional autonomy, we seek to integrate regional tiers that enjoy legislative decision-making capacity in their own right. The latter is of particular importance to create a political arena that offers a sufficient degree of attractiveness to conduct (professionalized) political careers.

In total, almost one fifth of MEPs from a federal political system present a regional experience (129 out of 711). As detailed below, interactions between regional and upper levels are actually limited in the UK, so this means that most of these 129 MEPs originate from a single country in our sample: Germany, the Member State sending the largest delegation in the EP. In other words, not including regional experience for German MEPs implies that almost one third of them – 94 sur 333 – are labelled with (heavily) biased categories in former studies. For instance, some former Ministerpresidents of the German Länder are considered “rookies” when they moved up to the EP, despite having experienced years of cabinet politics.

Secondly, in terms of data availability, this new dataset builds upon existing biographical information on their experience in the EP, as well as gender, age and EPG (Hix and Høyland 2011). On the other hand, the dataset is completed with pre- and post-EP offices served at both national and regional – legislative and executive – levels. For the latter, sources combined former studies (Dodeigne, 2018; Dodeigne forthcoming) as well as official results published by institutions or via biographies available online¹. Overall, our sample covers a variety of Member States (small and large; with geographical diversity from Western and Northern Europe; with different political systems and political cultures).

We now turn and discuss the operationalization of the dependent and independent variables. First, the operationalization of career paths was achieved the following way. In the **short-termers category**, ‘*EP retirees*’ are defined as MEPs with domestic political experience

¹ For German MEPs, regional experience is hardly available via official sources (be they Home affairs or the Länder parliaments) but are surprisingly compiled on a Wikipedia’s pages dedicated to regional members of Länder parliaments. For German MEPs, also note that time served in the national government is not recorded yet while it has been recorded

(be it regional or national) and serving in the EP for no more than one legislative term. *'One-off MEPs'* covers MEPs with no previous political experience that remain less than two full terms in the EP. In addition, these MEPs have not held any political mandates after their EP mandates. *'Short-termers multilevel'* MEPs are politicians that have a short political career at both the domestic and EU levels and are operationalized as MEPs with less than two full terms in the EP, and/or regional and/or national levels. Regarding the **stepping stone** politicians, we have operationalized as follows: *'stepping stone with national ambitions'* are MEPs that seated less than two terms in the EP and at least two terms at the national level. The same rationale applies for *'stepping stone with regional ambitions'*: MEPs that with less than two terms in the EP and at least two terms at the regional level. The third category, **long-termers EP careerist**, is operationalized the following way: *'Two-track Euro politicians'* are MEPs that served at least two terms in the EP after their domestic career (regional or national) while *'Euro-politicians'* consist of MEPs with at least two terms in the EP but without any previous political experience (be it regional or national). Finally, the category of **'Ambiguous multi-level MEPs'** gathers politicians with complex career patterns, in the sense that these EP parliamentarians held mandates in the EP and/or at the national and/or at the regional levels without a clear career pattern emerging. While our dataset covers the first seven legislative terms only, we made sure that our categories remain valid when analysing the eight legislative term for those MEPs.

For the independent variables, regarding political regimes, we first make a distinction between federal and regionalized countries (i.e., Belgium, UK and Germany) on the one hand and unitary (i.e., Ireland & Sweden) on the other. Going one step further, following Dodeigne (2014), we also differentiate between countries with federal background having permeable institutions (i.e., Belgium and to some extent Germany) and countries having clear-cut political arenas (i.e., UK). Second, based on the findings of Pemstein et al. (2015), we also make a distinction between EPGs, considering that EPP, ALDE and S&D are large (and actually more centered EPGs) policy-making groups while the others are not. Third, geographical distance is measured using a simple proxy (i.e., distance in km between Strasbourg/Brussels and the capital city of MEPs home country). Finally, regarding sociodemographic, we look at the average age of MEPs from one country when starting their first EP mandate as well as differentiate countries with majoritarian and proportional electoral systems for national elections as discussed above.

5. Findings

5.1 Career patterns over time

How has the composition of the EP evolved across time? In the previous section, we expected (1a) an increase followed by a stabilization in the share of “European Careerists”; (1b) an increase in the share of stepping-stone MEPs as the EP is a place of political professionalization; (1c) an increase in the share of complex “Multi-level career” MEPs and finally, (1d) a decrease in the share of “Retiree” MEPs. As summarized in table 1 and illustrated in figure 3, while both hypotheses 1a and 1d depict the expected increase in the share of long-termers (i.e., Euro-politicians and Two-track Euro politicians) and a decrease in the share of “EP retiree”, our findings show more nuanced results for the evolution of other MEPs profiles.

First, our data shows an increase in the share of European-oriented MEPs (i.e., “Euro-politicians” and “Two-track Euro politicians”) along the incremental empowerment of the EP, with an important increase going from 42,3% (5,7% of Euro-expert and 36,6% of Euro-politicians) in LT1² up to a total of 74,9% (respectively 14,1% and 60,8%) in LT7. In parallel to this trend, we also observe a decrease in the overall share of “EP Retirees”, confirming previous findings expecting an increase followed by stabilization in the share of “European careerists” in the EP. This stabilization tendency is also partially reenforced by the temporal evolution of “short-termers” MEPs identified: overall, the share of “One-off” MEPs is relatively stable over time (from 17,2% in LT1 to 15,9% in LT7) and there are only a few “Multilevel short-termers” populating the EP through time (from 3,5% in LT1 to 1,3% in LT7).

That being said, the findings are much more puzzling when looking at “Stepping-stone” as well as “Multilevel” career MEPs. For these categories, we also expected an increase in the share of these MEPs. However, the share of MEPs using the EP as a springboard for their future regional and national careers continuously decreased over time (i.e., from 3% in LT1 down to 1,5% in LT6 and 0% in LT7). In addition, our findings also outlined a decrease in the number of ambiguous “multi-level career”. Yet, this finding may be nuanced at this stage as our sample includes an important share of regionalized and federal countries known in the literature to have more ‘stable’ careers. While these two phenomena were not expected per se, it is another indication that MEPs actually consider the EP as a career in itself.

² While Two-track euro politicians and Euro-politicians will only be such in LT3 – to be categorized as such, MEPs need to have completed at least 2 full EP terms – we retrospectively know their career patterns in LT1 and LT2.

	LT1	LT2	LT3	LT4	LT5	LT6	LT7
	(79-84)	(84-89)	(89-94)	(94-99)	(99-04)	(04-09)	(09-14)
EP_Retirees	10 (4,4%)	5 (2,2%)	4 (1,8%)	6 (2,6%)	7 (3,1%)	11 (4,8%)	6 (2,6%)
Two-track Euro politicians	13 (5,7%)	15 (6,6%)	19 (8,4%)	23 (10,1%)	32 (14,1%)	35 (15,4%)	32 (14,1%)
Euro_Politicians	75 (36,6%)	106 (52,0%)	120 (57,3%)	138 (63,4%)	139 (64,8%)	133 (62,1%)	135 (60,8%)
Multilevel	75 (29,5%)	43 (18,9%)	34 (10,6%)	52 (20,3%)	47 (17,2%)	34 (11,5%)	30 (11,9%)
One_Off_MEPs	39 (17,2%)	32 (14,1%)	30 (13,2%)	34 (15,0%)	33 (14,5%)	31 (13,7%)	36 (15,9%)
ShortTermers_Multilevel	8 (3,5%)	3 (1,3%)	1 (0,4%)	9 (4,0%)	8 (3,5%)	4 (1,8%)	3 (1,3%)
Springboard_nat	6 (2,6%)	2 (0,9%)	4 (1,8%)	6 (2,6%)	2 (0,9%)	1 (0,4%)	0 (0,0%)
Springboard_reg	1 (0,4%)	2 (0,9%)	3 (1,3%)	2 (0,9%)	4 (1,8%)	2 (0,9%)	0 (0,0%)

Table 1: Longitudinal evolution of MEPs' career patterns

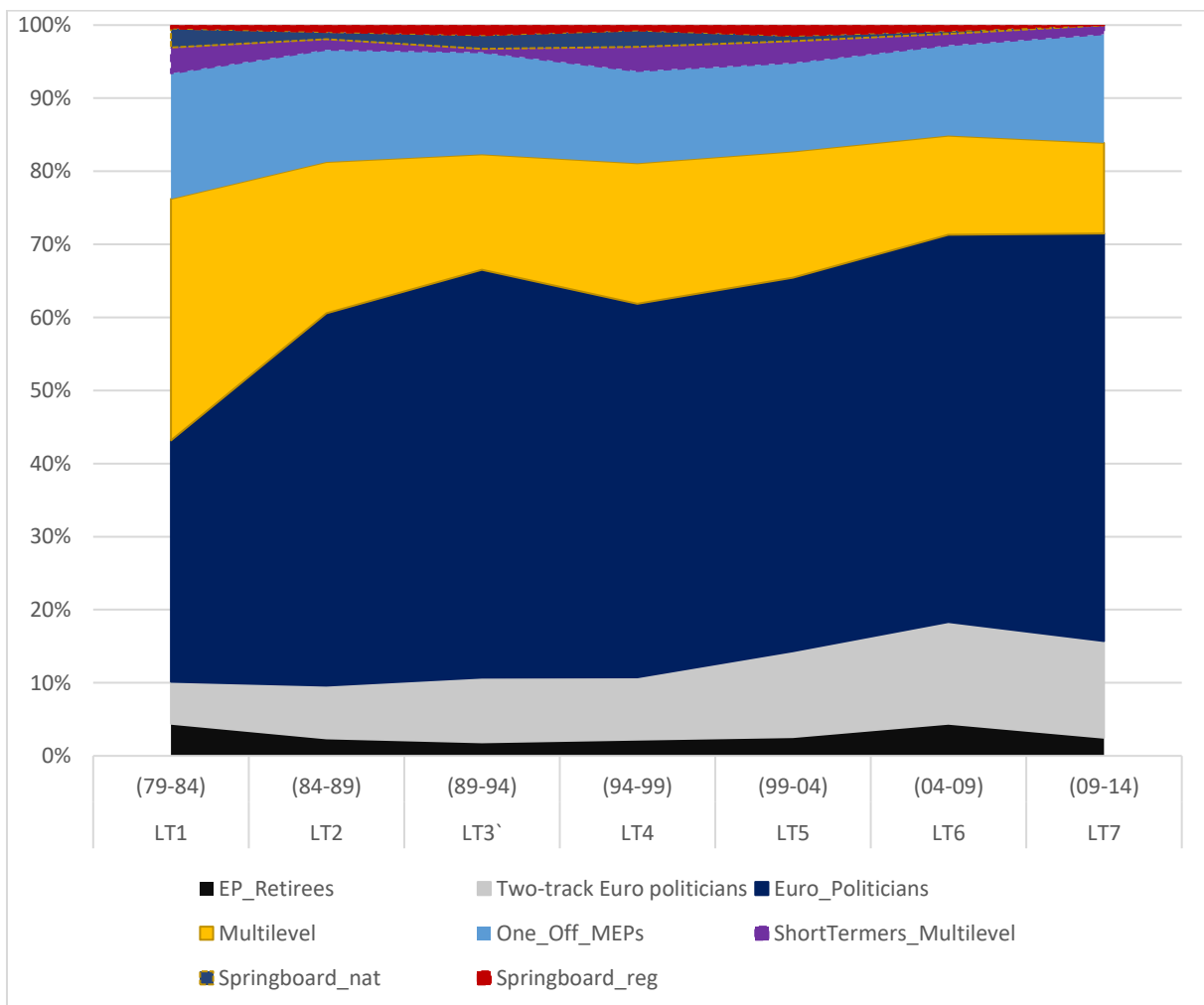


Figure 3: Longitudinal evolution of MEPs' career patterns

5.2 Cross-sectional variation of MEPs career paths

Now turning to cross-country variation, there are important differences in the career paths of MEPs along their country of origin.

First, our analyses confirm previous findings (see. Whitaker, 2014) that the EP is not an elderly retiree home: all countries have less than 9% of MEPs belonging to this category. This observation is especially true for British MEPs, with less than 2% of “Retirees”. In addition, in the “Short-termers” category, two additional observations can be made at this stage. On the one hand, there are even less “Short-term multilevel MEPs” (4%) than “Retirees”, albeit with an important variation across countries. On the other hand, the “One-off” MEPs category is almost equally present across all five countries. It’s the second strongest group in our data with an average of 27% of all the 850 MEPs.

Second, our data also show a quite important share of long-termers (43% of the total) yet with major differences across profiles (Two-track Euro politicians vs. EU politicians) as well as between the studied countries. As Scarrow rightly outlined in her analysis in the late 90’s, ‘this trend is likely to be self-reinforcing, because the greater the role that Parliament claims, the more likely it is to attract those with European interests’ (Scarrow 1997, 261). Still, the most striking result is that more than half of the British MEPs can be defined as EU politicians (56%), while this is less the case in Ireland (13%) and Sweden (7%). Germany (28%) and Belgium (26%) also send a great share of EU politicians, although much less than the UK. The amount of ‘Two-track Euro politicians’ is, on its side, relatively limited with 10% or less in the studied countries.

	Short-termers			Stepping-stone		Long termers		Ambiguous	Total
	Retirees	One-Off	ST_Multilevel	Spring nat	Spring reg	Two-track Euro politicians	EU Politicians	Multilevel	
BE	11 (9%)	30 (26%)	9 (8%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	7 (6%)	31 (26%)	27 (23%)	117
DE	29 (9%)	91 (27%)	7 (2%)	6 (2%)	9 (3%)	34 (10%)	94 (28%)	63 (19%)	333
IR	6 (9%)	16 (24%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (7%)	9 (13%)	31 (46%)	67
SW	5 (7%)	19 (26%)	11 (15%)	3 (4%)	0 (0%)	6 (8%)	5 (7%)	23 (32%)	72
UK	5 (2%)	74 (28%)	5 (2%)	6 (2%)	0 (0%)	8 (3%)	147 (56%)	16 (6%)	261
Total	56 (7%)	230 (27%)	32 (4%)	17 (2%)	9 (1%)	60 (7%)	286 (34%)	160 (19%)	850

Table 2: Cross-country variation of MEPs’ career patterns

Third, contrary to our expectations, the number of MEPs using their mandate in the European Parliament as a springboard to the national or regional levels is really low. Regarding stepping-stone MEPs with regional political goals, these are only found in Germany, and not in Belgium or the UK. Still, the most surprising finding is the importance of what we label as ‘Ambiguous multi-level MEPs’. Indeed, almost a third of the Swedish MEPs (32%) and nearly half of the Irish MEPs (46%) fell in this category. This career pattern also exists in Germany (19%) and in Belgium (23%) but is less frequent, while it is almost absent in the UK (6%).

To sum up, in Belgium, Germany and in the UK, the most frequent career paths are the ones of ‘EU-politicians’ and of ‘one-off MEPs’. On the other hand, the most frequent career paths in Ireland and Sweden are the ones we labelled ‘Multi-level career MEPs’, again associated with ‘one-off MEPs’. These patterns – and the cross-country variation - are summarized in table 2.

5.3 Explaining cross-sectional variation

How can we explain this cross-country variation? Coming back to our preliminary hypotheses, some first elements can be mentioned.

For instance, our findings show that MEPs from federal backgrounds have a more stable career as ‘European careerist’ than MEPs from highly unitary systems (**hypothesis 2a**). Indeed, more than half of the British MEPs can be defined as ‘long-termers’ (59%), followed by Germany (38%) and Belgium (32%). On the contrary, there are relatively fewer ‘long-termers’ in Ireland (20%) and Sweden (15%). Taking this one step further, we also hypothesized that MEPs from integrated federal backgrounds with permeable institutional boundaries will have shorter European career and more ambiguous ‘multi-level career’ profiles than MEPs from federal backgrounds with clear-cut separation between political arenas (**hypothesis 2b**). This hypothesis also seems to be validated. Indeed, just a small amount of the British MEPs (6%) is characterized by a multilevel political career. This finding is in fact not surprising since political career in the UK is usually made on one and the same level and that changes in between are rare. Compared with Belgium and Germany which have more permeable institutional boundaries, we see that the number of MEPs with a ‘multilevel career’ is higher: 23% of Belgian and 19% of German MEPs. However, and quite interestingly, Swedish and Irish MEPs have the highest amount of ‘multilevel MEPs’. Nearly a half of the Irish MEPs (46%) and about one third of their Swedish colleagues (32%) are characterized by a complex political career.

Now turning to hypothesis regarding the size of EPGs (**hypothesis 3**), we expected MEPs that belong to the most active EP groups in terms of legislative activities (S&D, EPP, ALDE) to have, on average, longer career in the EP. Our hypothesis is only partially accurate. While MEPs from both the EPP (E in the graph) and S&D (S) have on average longer career in the EP (+/- 120 months in the EP) than their colleagues, they are actually not closely followed by MEPs from ALDE-Renew European as we expected (L – 80 months on average), but by MEPs from right wing (C – UK conservative party – 120 months in the EP) and independentist parties (R – SNP and Volksunie – 120 months in the EP).

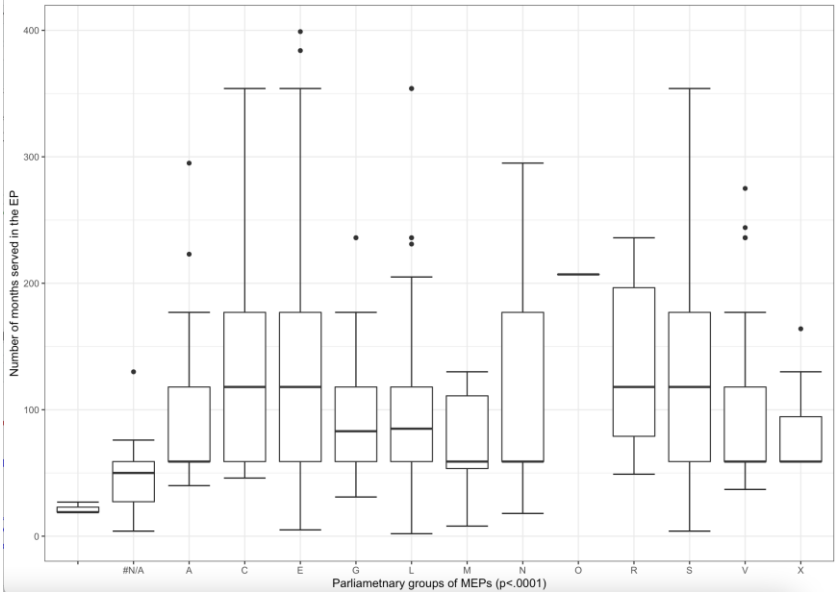


Figure 4: MEPs' career patterns according to EPG

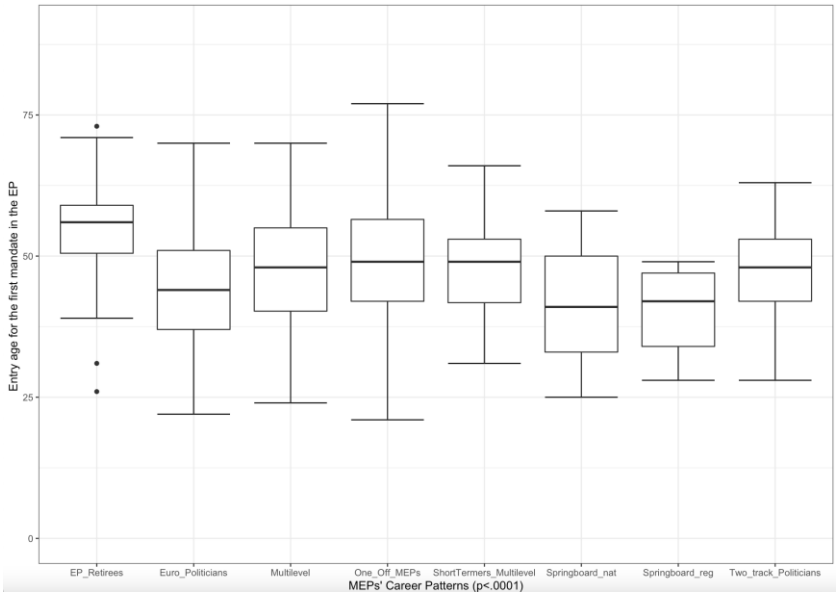


Figure 5: MEPs' entry age according to career patterns

Finally, we shortly discuss the impact of socio-demographic variables (age, geographical distance and gender) on the career paths of MEPs. Regarding age, we observe that MEPs who enter the European Parliament the first time at a relatively young age (at their late twenties) become either ‘Euro-politicians’ or use the EP as a springboard towards a national or regional political career (**hypothesis 4a**). Regarding the geographical distance, a quick look at Sweden and Ireland (i.e., the two countries that are the further away from the EP in our sample) show that they indeed have less ‘European careerist’ and much more complex multi-level career paths than the Belgian, British and German counterparts (**hypothesis 4b**). That being said, at this stage of the study, the hypothesis on federalization also brings a similar conclusion. Consequently, to properly assess the weight of this geographical explanation, we will have to test it on a larger sample of countries and most likely combine it with the political systems variable.

Regarding gender, we expected women, once they entered the EP, to be more likely “European Careerist” than their male colleagues. The preliminary findings suggest that this tendency is true. About 40% of all female MEPs belong to the group of “Two-track Euro politicians” while most of their male counterparts could be categorized as “One-off MEPs” (57%). Examining the tendencies between gender within one country, we find some differences. The data shows that the tendency to belong to one of the two European careerist groups is lower in the three countries with a national proportional system than in Germany and the UK. In Belgium and Sweden women tend to have mostly multilevel careers (58% in Belgium, 34% in Sweden), in Ireland the percentages of women for “Euro-Politicians” as well as for “Multilevel career MEPs” cover about one third of their delegation. As a multilevel career is defined to have a career path at several levels of government, including the national level, the data support our suggestion that women who face (partly)-majoritarian systems in their national elections tend to commit more to a career in the European Parliament because accessibility of offices is higher. This can be underlined regarding to Germany and the UK where the percentage of female MEPs in the group of “Two-track Euro politician” is – compared to the other three countries – very high. 49% of the German female MEPs and 57% of the British female MEPs can be classified in the category of “Two-track Euro politician”.

More broadly, it seems that gender does not impact upon the time served in the EP (irrespective of the type of career orientation) career the duration of male and female MEPs does not differ at statistically significant level ($p < .610$), although the median experience of female MEPs is slightly higher (Figure 6). Finally, to further assess the effects of electoral

systems, the share of women needs to be compared with their percentage at their domestic level, like the national parliament. In further research, those findings need to be analysed on a deeper level.

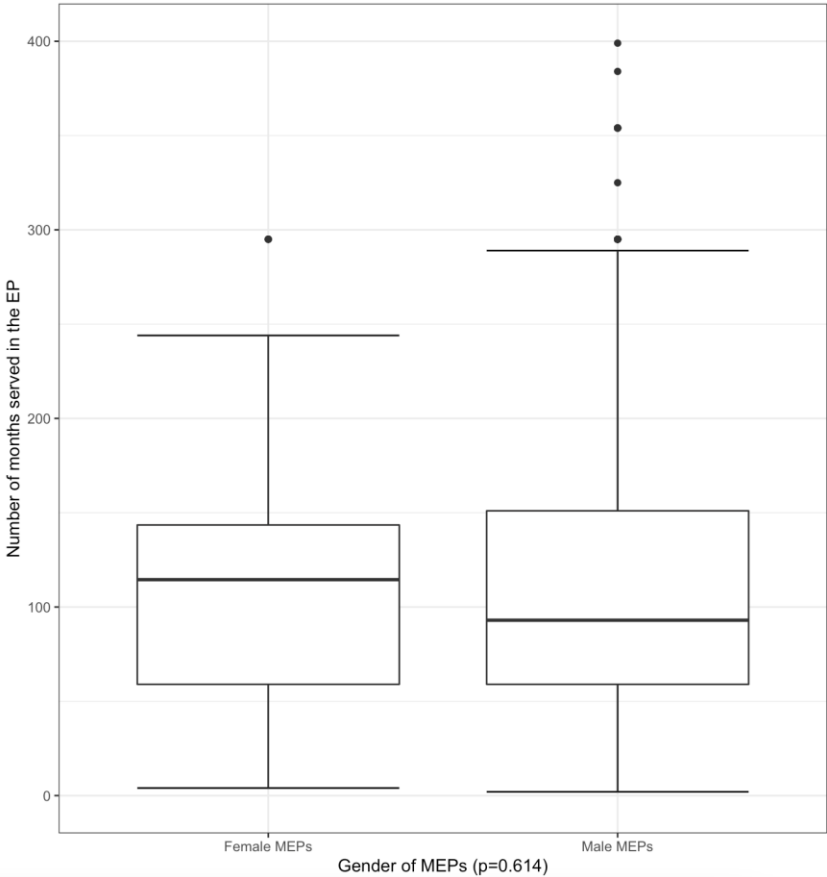


Figure 6: Time served in the EP according to gender

Discussion and conclusion

The attractiveness of the EP has greatly evolved over time as its formal powers have been extended. It has been increasingly appealing to a larger number of European careerists devoted to the institution while seeking to empower it. More recently, the 2019 European elections remind us that this trend is not linear though: those elections present the greatest turnover of MEPs ever observed since 1984 coupled with a high degree of fragmentation while Eurosceptic parties obtained amongst their largest electoral success. In this wake, the literature has long established that the type of personals serving in legislative institutions matters. In other words, the profiles of MEPs affect the extent to which the EP can achieve its policy-making powers.

Building upon categories found in the previous scholarship, the main objectives of this paper were (1) to introduce a finer categorization of MEP’s career paths and (2) to test its

relevance by analysing cross-sectional variation in a longitudinal perspective. To this end, the paper relied on an original dataset including all Belgian, British, Irish, German and Swedish 850 MEPs that served in the EP between 1979-2014, including pre- and post- political mandates (executive and legislative) at both national and regional levels. Increasing our knowledge of who are the MEPs sitting in the EP is of central importance, as it allows to assess if the formal empowerment of the EP went along the emergence of a specific European political elite.

Overall, this paper contributes to the literature on MEPs career paths on two aspects. First, the inclusion of subnational political offices introduced a more fine-grained categorisation of MEPs career paths, notably by adding new career paths – analytical relevant – such as “multi-level short-termers” MEPs, “stepping-stone MEPs” with regional political goals as well as (ambiguous) multi-level MEPs. In this wake, our categorization takes into account regional political experience and not merely the national against bias of “methodological nationalism” present in the literature. This inclusion of this political offices is of predominant empirical and analytical importance as it would wrongly categorize some MEPs as merely “rookies”. On the opposite, in the largest Member States such as Germany, up to one quarter of the MEPs have served in regional politics – even at the highest function such as Ministerpresident of Bavaria. Second, our findings confirm the hypothesis of a stabilization of the MEPs’ career patterns associated with an increase of long-term “EP careerists” as well as a decrease in “EP retirees”. In addition, it also outlined the existence of a great share of MEPs who have ‘ambiguous’ multi-level careers.

That being said, our study also depicts some limitations that will be tackled in forthcoming steps of the broader “Evolv’EP” project. These limitations are both empirically as well as theoretically founded (i.e., identification of additional explanatory factors). Regarding the empirical challenges, we aim at completing our current dataset by including pre- and post-political mandates of all MEPs from the 28 EU Member States in order to produce a comprehensive data-set of all MEPs career patterns through times (1979-2019). Yet, data availability and accessibility has proved particularly challenging – especially for offices served in regional politics – which might impose use a step-wise strategy (e.g., starting with a theoretically relevant sample of MEPs and/or Member States before moving out to the comprehensive population of MEPs). In addition, we will also complete and refine the data-set by including information related to the education level and/or professional background of MEPs and by differentiating more systematically the type of political experience (i.e., executive or legislative), as some studies outlined important cross-country variation on this matter (see. Biro-Nagy, 2019). For specific Member States, we might also consider registering local executive

offices for the largest cities, especially for some countries where those offices matter even more than other parliamentary offices (as in some Western as well as East and Central European Member States).

At a theoretical level, we aim at developing the research project in two directions. On the one hand, based on previous studies of Aldrich (2018) or Daniel (2016), we will also investigate the potential impact of domestic-level variables, and in particular the impact of political parties on the career paths of MEPs (e.g., establishment vs. anti-establishment parties; government vs. opposition parties). On the other hand, beyond the identification of various career paths, the research project seeks to establish the relationship between MEPs' career patterns and their legislative behaviour (see, on this matter the studies of Meserve et al., 2009; van Geffen, 2016; Høyland et al., 2017).

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