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# Look who's talking: Parliamentary debate in the European Union

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## Abstract

Legislative speeches are an important part of parliamentary activity in the European Parliament (EP). Using a new dataset on EP speeches, this paper offers an explanation for participation in legislative debates. We argue that floor speeches partially serve as a communication tool between members of parliament, their national parties, and their European political groups. EP group dissidents often go on record by taking the floor when there is a conflict between their national party and their European political group. In this instance, members give speeches for two reasons: to explain their national party's position to other members of their EP political group, and to create a positive record for themselves in the eyes of the national party to serve their own reelection purposes.

## Keywords

candidate selection, European Parliament, political parties, legislative speeches, roll call votes

## Introduction

Legislative speeches are an important part of parliamentary activity in all democratic political systems. Politicians give speeches for several reasons: they argue for or against legislative proposals, they scrutinize the executive, and they send signals to their constituents, fellow party members, or other members of parliament. The European Parliament (EP) is no different. During plenary debates, members of the European Parliament (MEPs) discuss committee reports, legislative proposals and

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amendments, pose questions to the European Commission and the Council, and even make statements on matters over which the EP has few or no formal powers, such as foreign policy. Conventional wisdom suggests that the EP — despite its status as an institutional veto player in the European Union — continues to be a ‘multilingual talking shop’ with ‘lack-lustre’ debates during plenary sessions (e.g. Scully, 2000; Judge and Earnshaw, 2003). Yet, the reasons why European legislators use debates to put statements on the public record are not well understood. We argue that legislative speeches in the EP serve as an important institutional tool for members who vote against their European political group, which controls the perks of office within the EP, to support their national party, which controls their reelection bids. Speeches give members an opportunity to explain themselves to their European group, thus avoiding possible punishment within the parliament. At the same time, they provide members with an opportunity to create a record of positive activity for their national party to further their chances for reelection. When EP political group leaders control speaking time allocation, they allow dissidents to take the floor because they wish to see their rank and file reelected, as these were the members who elected them to leadership positions. When national parties have more control over candidate selection at election time, we find that members have an even greater incentive to give a speech.

The article begins by examining the interaction between institutions and legislative speech in parliaments. It then discusses how the European Parliament differs from national parliaments, and how these differences are likely to lead to variations in the patterns of debate participation among MEPs. We first illustrate our argument through a discussion of three important votes in the European Parliament and then test our argument using two new datasets of EP roll call votes and speech records. First, using a sample of roll call votes and their associated speeches from the 6th European Parliament (2004–5), we show that MEPs voting against their European political group for national reasons are about twice as likely to put their reasons on the public record than those who do not rebel against their EP group. Second, we use aggregate data on voting defection and debate participation covering the entire 5th legislative period (1999–04) to show that the effect holds when we consider all speeches and the speaking time allocation mechanism of the EP, and not just statements related to roll call votes. We find that political groups in the EP allocate speaking time differently than parties in national parliaments because of the EP’s electoral politics and the fact that MEPs are agents of two different principals — their national party and their European political group. National rebels, i.e. MEPs who disagree with the majority of their European political group for national reasons, are much more likely to get speaking time in the EP than those who adhere to the party line.

## Political parties and legislative speech

Political scientists have only recently begun to seriously examine parliamentary speech. They do so to analyze positions of members of parliament or political

parties (Laver and Benoit, 2002; Monroe and Maeda, 2004; Proksch and Slapin, forthcoming), lexical differences between and rhetorical tools used by politicians (Monroe et al., 2008; Klebanov et al., 2008), or the dynamics of coalition government using the length of debates (Martin and Vanberg, 2008). But few studies examine why legislators deliver speeches, how political parties determine who is allowed to speak on the floor of parliament, and the institutional constraints that shape these decisions. Such investigations, however, are essential if political scientists wish to use speeches as a source of information to estimate the conflict within or between parties.

In national parliaments, one of the primary reasons why legislators make speeches is to stake out policy positions and communicate these positions to voters (Mayhew, 1974). Members of the US Congress will often stand up before an empty House to deliver an address, knowing that their fellow members of Congress will never hear what they have to say. Instead, they hope the media will pick up on their speech and report their policy positions back to their constituents. Indeed, Democratic party leaders in the US House of Representatives have used coordinated short speeches as means to attract media attention and sell their position (Sinclair, 1995: 270). Like voting, speech is a tool politicians can use to demonstrate to their constituents that they are standing up for them in Washington. In the British Parliament, speeches by party leaders, both during weekly question time as well as during general debate over bills, fulfill similar functions. Legislative speeches give the government a chance to advertise and defend its policy positions not only before the parliament, but before the media and voters as well. Opposition parties take the opportunity to criticize the government and to highlight programmatic differences.

Despite the importance of speech, plenary time is a scarce resource in most parliaments (Cox, 2006: 142). Because there is a finite amount of time set aside for debate, not all members of parliament (MPs) get the chance to speak. Which MPs receive floor time will be both a function of supply (the amount of speaking time and who allocates it), as well as demand (which MPs actually want to speak). Institutional and electoral considerations will determine who eventually gets to have their opinions heard on the floor. In European national parliaments, party leaders must pay particular attention to electoral considerations. Strong party labels may serve as cues to voters. To the extent that a party label is important for communicating party views to the electorate and, thus, securing support for that party in national elections, parties need to protect their label (Arnold, 1990; Cox and McCubbins, 1993). Allowing party dissidents to take the floor in parliament would be one way the importance of a party label may be diluted. Thus, parties may seek to protect the party label by preventing dissidents from taking the floor of parliament to deliver a speech that runs contrary to the official party line.<sup>1</sup>

In political systems where the personal vote matters significantly more than the party label for re-election, there is less need for parties to reign in maverick legislators. If members can use speech-making as a tool for reelection, the party

leadership has an incentive to allow all MPs to take the floor to publicly express their opinion, so long as their speech does not irreparably damage the party label. Party leaders likely wish to see the current membership reelected, as these MPs elected them to their current leadership positions (Cox and McCubbins, 1993: 132). Therefore the leadership provides members with tools to increase the likelihood of winning the next election. The institutions of US Congress reflect this. In the Senate, there is no limit on speaking time and Senators may speak on any topic, creating the possibility to filibuster. Even in the House, where germaneness rules and limits on speaking time apply, all members of the House may request to speak. Unlike in many European parliamentary systems, speaking time is not allocated by party leaders. It seems likely that the degree to which a party label matters for electoral politics will play a role in determining whether parties use the allocation of speaking time as a means to punish dissidents.

### *Speaking to two principals: Debates in the European Parliament*

If political institutions and the role of the party label matter for the allocation of speaking time, what should we expect in the European Parliament? First, electoral system variables that affect the importance of the party label, such as the use of open vs. closed lists, district magnitude, and candidate selection mechanisms, vary across member states within the EU. Second, the political system of the EU combines elements of parliamentary democracy, where party cohesion tends to matter more, with elements of a separation-of-powers systems, where party cohesion often is lower.<sup>2</sup> Finally, the lack of contestation for political leadership in European election campaigns and the low voter participation in those elections have led scholars to lament the continued existence of a ‘democratic deficit’ in the European Union (Follesdal and Hix, 2006). The electoral disconnection between European political groups and citizens raise questions about the extent to which the parliamentary behavior of MEPs matters for reelection.

In addition to operating within a hybrid political system, MEPs must serve two different principals: the *national party* and the *European political group* (Hix, 2002, 2004; Hix et al., 2007). Elected members enter the European Parliament as members of national parties, but once inside, these national party ‘delegations’ join European political groups. This causes a dilemma as both of these principals control resources that MEPs value. On the one hand, national parties control candidate selection and run election campaigns in European elections, which are fought primarily on national issues (Hix and Marsh, 2007; Marsh, 1998; Reif, 1984; Reif and Schmitt, 1980). In addition, national parties control access to offices in the national arena, which is of importance if MEPs intend to return to domestic politics (Scarrow, 1997). On the other hand, European political groups — not national parties — control office allocation in the European Parliament. Political groups control the election of the EP President, the allocation of committee chairs and reports, and — the focus of this study — plenary speaking time. These groups have installed specific mechanisms to monitor the actions of their members.

Group whips monitor whether MEPs follow voting instructions from the group leadership, and group coordinators maintain regular surveillance of members' activities in committees (Kreppel, 2002; Hix et al., 2007: 134–135).

National parties and European political groups are therefore able to reward and punish MEPs, who face the challenge of appeasing both principals. If an MEP's national party position on an issue differs from the position of the MEP's group, the MEP faces a choice: vote with the national party and risk punishment by the political group, or vote with the group and risk punishment by the national party. In the vast majority of votes, MEPs agree with both their national delegation and European political group majorities, but the most common type of defection occurs when MEPs vote with the majority of their national party against the majority view of their European political group. Analyzing the voting records of the 5th European Parliament (1999–04), Hix et al. (2007: 137) find that MEPs vote with both the national party majority and the European political group majority in 88.9 percent of recorded votes. In 6.6 percent of these votes, MEPs decide to vote with the national party majority but against the European political group majority. Less common are defections from the national party to vote with the group majority (1.8%), and against both the national and European political group majorities (2.7%).

Hix and his coauthors have demonstrated that MEPs' need to appease both their national party and EP group affects their voting behavior in the EP (Hix, 2004; Hix et al., 2007). But we do not know whether this tension affects parliamentary speech-making in the same way. Indeed, voting and speaking are subject to quite different institutional constraints. Votes directly affect policy outcomes while speeches do not, but speeches allow for a much more detailed explanation of policy positions than votes do. Recent work on position taking in EP speeches has demonstrated that MEPs' estimated positions based on speeches are significantly different from their estimated positions based on votes (Proksch and Slapin, forthcoming). The results indicate that there is a much stronger national component in plenary speeches than in votes. These findings suggest that the content of MEPs' speeches differ from voting patterns. Nonetheless, an MEP's decision to cast a vote against his or her party group may affect whether an MEP gives a speech on the floor.

Of the types of possible voting defections, we are most interested in examining the speech patterns of those MEPs who vote against the European political group for national reasons. We argue that these national defectors have the greatest incentive to take the floor to give a speech. They can use their speaking time to explain their vote to the leaders and members of their European political group in hopes of mitigating possible punishment. In addition, they can use the opportunity to garner favor with their national party for reelection purposes by publicly reiterating their national stance. Yet, the EP political group may want to keep these rebels off the floor so it does not appear divided. Institutionally, political groups in the EP have the power to do so. They control the most immediate benefits to MEPs, including speaking time (Corbett et al., 2007: 145). While several MEPs

have reserved speaking time, the largest proportion of speaking time is allocated to the political groups of the EP. According to the rules of the European Parliament, a first fraction of speaking time is allocated equally among all political groups and then additional time is allocated in proportion to the total number of their members. Then, each group allocates its speaking time among the national delegations and individual MEPs, who, themselves, can request speaking time. Given these rules, political group leaders can prevent dissident MEPs from taking the floor should they wish to.

Of course, whether the leaders desire to exercise their power remains an open question. If the EP were a typical European national parliament, there would be clear incentives for leaders to protect party labels for electoral reasons by keeping dissidents off the floor. However, because national parties, and not EP group leaders, control the reelection chances of MEPs, EP group leaders may have fewer incentives to reign in dissidents. In fact, they may desire that their MEPs use relatively low cost measures, such as speech-making, if it helps their reelection chances. As mentioned above, Cox and McCubbins (1993) argue that, in the US Congress, party leaders have incentives to see their rank and file reelected as these were the members who elected them to leadership in the first place. A similar logic may apply in the European Parliament.

We argue that the decision of dissident MEPs to take the floor is about more than just a public expression of a different policy stance. Plenary debates serve as a forum for communication between MEPs and the leaders of both their EP groups and national parties. Specifically, MEPs who vote with their national party but against their political group are more likely to put their opposition from the EP political group majority on the record. Public statements may minimize possible punishments within the EP by offering the EP group leadership a national explanation for the dissident behavior. At the same time, these statements create a public record expressing support for the national party which may prove helpful around election time as national parties control reelection. This will be especially true in member states where national parties use centralized means of candidate selection for EP elections. In these countries, MEPs' reelection chances rest firmly in the hands of central offices of the national parties. Previous research suggests candidate selection rules affect MEP behavior (Bowler and Farrell, 1993; Faas, 2003; Hix, 2004; Raunio, 2000). Hix (2004) argues that MEPs from member states with more candidate-centered electoral laws are more willing to vote with the political group majority and against their national party majority when these two majorities differ. This is because when MEPs have more control over their own electoral fate, the EP political group can inflict greater punishments on the dissident MEP than the national party. The opposite is true for MEPs elected in party-centered electoral systems. For electoral reasons, they need to go along with their national party majority rather than the EP political group majority, otherwise they risk being moved down the party list at election time, or worse still, they may lose their place on the list entirely.<sup>3</sup>

The literature has consistently argued against a strong electoral connection between European political groups and the electorate. If this is true, then dissident

speech on the floor should do little to sully the European political group's label. At the same time, it may bolster an MEP's position in the national party, especially if the national party uses centralized candidate selection mechanisms. This means that, unlike in national parliaments across Europe, there is little incentive for EP group leaders to keep dissidents off the floor. We would thus expect that those MEPs who defect from their EP group to vote with their national party delegation (national rebels) are more likely to speak than those who do not defect. We, therefore, derive the following hypotheses:

H1 (National Rebel Hypothesis): *National rebels are more likely to go on the public record than those MEPs who do not defect. They speak both to justify their opposition to the EP group, hoping to minimize possible punishment by group leadership, and to publicly state a national position for reelection purposes.*

H2 (Candidate Selection Interaction Hypothesis): *National rebels from parties using centralized candidate selection rules are even more likely to give speeches than those national rebels who have more control over their own electoral prospects. If they do not draw sufficient attention to their support for their national party, they risk a lower list placement or deselection.*

The alternative hypothesis suggests that, as in national parliaments across Europe, political groups in the EP ultimately control the allocation of speaking time. They are therefore in a position to limit the speaking time of dissidents or to create rules to prevent dissident views from appearing excessively on the public record. Both Whitaker (2001) and Kreppel and Tsebelis (1999) cite the limiting of speaking time as one potential measure EP political groups can take to punish dissidents. Hix and Lord (1997: 133) argue that speaking time is a 'precious commodity' in the European Parliament. This may lead political groups to allocate speaking time only to those MEPs who are 'most likely to argue the group line' (ibid.). This suggests that the effect should, in fact, be the opposite.

H3 (European Group Punishment Hypothesis): *National rebels are less likely to give a speech because EP groups may actively prevent those national dissidents from putting their dissent on the record.*

The remainder of the paper empirically examines these hypotheses. First, we present a case study of an important piece of legislation to illustrate our argument. We then test the argument using data on speeches and voting patterns from the 5th and 6th European Parliaments.

## **An illustration: The Takeover Directive**

We demonstrate the logic behind the 'national rebel speech' argument with an example of a high-profile piece of EU legislation. The Takeover Directive aimed

to establish common European rules regarding corporate takeover bids, in particular with respect to shareholders' rights and defensive measures (Hix et al., 2007: 200). We chose this directive because it is not only one of the more frequently studied pieces of EU legislation, but because there is variation regarding the level of national party voting across the available roll call votes for this directive. In fact, the directive turned out to be highly controversial. MEPs cast three key roll call votes on this directive during the course of the legislative proceedings (see Hix et al. 2007: chapter 11). General debate time was set aside to discuss the directive during the plenary sessions of each vote. Hix et al. (2007: 207) classify the three votes according to their average political group cohesion score. Voting cohesion scores are equal to 1 if all members of a political group vote together, and 0 if members are divided. For the 5th European Parliament, the average political group cohesion score was 0.889 (Hix et al., 2007: 94). In comparison, the political group cohesion score for the first and second roll call votes on the Takeover Directive were below this average (see Table 1). The first vote passed an amendment that addressed the definition of 'control' of a company, and a substantial number of MEPs defected from their political group to vote with their national party. In the second vote, the EP failed to adopt the version of the directive approved by the conciliation committee, a joint committee of the Council and the Parliament formed to iron out differences between the two chambers. Of the three votes, this was the vote where national divisions were most apparent. Finally, the political group cohesion score for the third vote was approximately equal to the 5th EP average cohesion score. Following defeat in the EP, the Commission introduced a new, watered-down version of the directive, and the EP approved this new version. Few MEPs defected from their EP group to vote with their national party majority.

**Table 1.** Voting and speaking in the European Parliament: The *Takeover Directive* example

Takeover Directive	Roll Call Vote 1 12/13/2000	Roll Call Vote 2 7/4/2001	Roll Call Vote 3 12/16/2003
European Party	Below	Below	Average
Group Cohesion	Average	Average	
(5th EP Average: 0.889)	(0.728)	(0.598)	(0.838)
Total Speeches	11	11	19
Proportion of National	0.45	0.27	0.00
Rebel Speeches	(5/11)	(3/11)	(0/19)
Proportion of Committee	0.63	0.73	0.26
Member Speeches	(7/11)	(8/11)	(5/19)
Proportion of Committee	0.57	0.38	0.00
National Rebel Speeches	(4/7)	(3/8)	(0/5)

Source: Cohesion scores are from Hix et al. (2007). Speech data are own calculations.

On the basis of these three recorded votes and their political group cohesion scores, we can formulate expectations regarding the level of speaking activity of dissenters. Our findings with respect to speaking time should be strongest for the first two votes and weakest for the third. If political group cohesion is high, there will be few national rebels to ask for speaking time. On votes where significant national divisions remain, we expect national rebels to take the floor to explain their votes.

Table 1 presents the European political group cohesion scores for all three votes as well as the number of speeches related to each vote, both for all MEPs and those MEPs who were in the responsible committee for this piece of legislation. With respect to the first vote, eleven MEPs gave speeches. Five of these eleven speeches were given by MEPs who voted against the majority of their European political group and with their national party delegation, meaning that almost half of the speeches were delivered by national rebels.<sup>4</sup> Almost all speeches referred to a national position. For example, the MEP Charlotte Cederschiöld (EPP-ED, Sweden) expressed her opinion that the amendment would create problems for states with small markets such as Sweden. Therefore, she suggested Swedes demand more flexibility. Arlene McCarthy and Lord Inglewood both explicitly stated that they spoke for their national party delegations, the British Labour and Conservative members respectively. Membership on the relevant committee may also be important in determining who speaks because committee members have specialized knowledge and interest in the topic. Of the eleven MEPs giving substantive speeches on this amendment, seven were either members of or substitutes on the Committee on Legal Affairs and the Internal Market, the committee responsible for this directive. However, even among committee members and substitutes, those dissenting from their political group were more likely to give speeches than those voting with the group. Of the seven speeches given by committee members, four were by national rebels.

Dissenters also gave speeches on the second vote. Around one third of the speakers were national rebels. Of the committee members that gave a speech, the proportion of national rebels was slightly higher. The national rebel speech effect is thus comparable to the first vote. As a member of the conciliation committee forging the proposal that was up for vote in 2001, the British Labour MEP Arlene McCarthy together with her national party supported the compromise. However, a majority of members of the Socialist Group (PES), the group to which the British Labour delegation belonged, rejected the compromise in the roll call vote held on 4 July 2001, with 84 PES members voting against the measure and 80 voting for it. During the debate, McCarthy defended her position, explained the reasons why she supported the compromise, and finally stated on behalf of her national party delegation that she would vote for the joint text, and thus against her group:

“Mr President, the job Parliament has here today is quite simple: to adopt or reject the compromise achieved in conciliation. [...] In conciliation the Council and the

Commission stuck to their key objective in this directive, of protecting the minority shareholders, protecting the interests of investors and defending shareholders against unscrupulous directors and inefficient company boards. [...] My delegation will vote for this directive.” (Arlene McCarthy [Labour Party, UK], PES group, during the EP session on 3 July 2001)

Finally, on the third vote there were many fewer political group dissenters. Only 44 MEPs voted against their political group and with the national party, compared to 188 on the second and 99 on the first vote. The political group cohesion score was therefore higher than for the first two votes. Consequently, none of the speakers making substantive comments on the directive voted against their political group.

The analysis of the speeches and votes surrounding the Takeover Directive highlights how our argument works at the level of individual votes and suggests when our findings should be most apparent. Even controlling for committee membership, dissenters are more likely to take the floor than those who vote with their political group, as the relationship between the cohesion scores and the national rebel speech participation in Table 1 would imply. Moreover, the content of the speeches suggest that MEPs are using speeches to express national opinions and to explain their dissident voting behavior to other MEPs.

## Data analysis: Speeches in the EP

To systematically evaluate the national rebel speech hypothesis and the rival EP political group punishment hypothesis, we rely on three newly collected data sources. First we asked the European political group secretariats to indicate their groups’ internal rules and priorities when allocating speaking time to their members. The second data source is a sample of roll call votes and their associated speech records from the first 18 months of the 6th European Parliament (2004–5). These data allow us to directly test whether an MEP’s probability of going on the record is higher when he or she is a national rebel. The potential drawback of such an analysis is the fact that we can only study the record related to roll call votes and must exclude all other forms of debates, as many votes are not recorded. Moreover, because explanations of votes can be made in writing, MEPs do not face the same time constraints during the time set aside for explanation of votes as during regular plenary debates. Yet, MEPs might have an incentive to put a statement on the record even if votes are not recorded, in particular when the legislative proposal under debate is significant. Research on roll call vote requests in the EP suggests that the level of conflict is underestimated by examining roll call votes because they are disproportionately requested on unimportant resolutions and not on important matters decided by codecision (Carrubba et al., 2006). Therefore, to complement our analysis, we have collected aggregate data for the entire 5th European Parliament (1999–04) on the total number of speeches given by each MEP as well as the proportion of (recorded) votes on which each MEP was a national

rebel. This dataset allows us to study debate participation for an entire legislative term and covers tens of thousands of speeches on numerous topics. In the following, we demonstrate that our national rebel argument holds consistently across these analyses.

### *Partisan priorities in allocating speaking time*

While European political groups are responsible for allocating speaking time to their members, there is wide variation both in who speaks and how groups assign speaking time. To uncover how EP groups allocate scarce speaking time, we queried the European political group secretariats.<sup>5</sup> First, we asked each European political group to describe the process by which speaking time is allocated internally. Second, we asked the European group secretariats to indicate which factors are most important when deciding on the allocation of available speaking time.

Table 2 shows the groups' different speaking time allocation mechanisms. In all instances, MEPs send their requests for speaking time to the political group secretariat. Following these requests, a proposal on the allocation is made by the group secretariat (for instance by the Secretary-General). The final decision is then taken either by the group leadership (EPP-ED, UEN, PES), the national party representatives (GUE-NGL), or the MEPs themselves (ALDE). In addition, we asked political group secretariats about their group's priorities in allocating speaking time. We asked each group to indicate for several items whether this item was always (4), frequently (3), rarely (2), or never important (1) when taking the decision. Table 3 presents the results. The answers in the table are sorted with the most important item listed at the top, measured by the mean response across groups. The most important considerations in the allocation process are formal criteria, such as membership in a responsible committee, group leadership position, issue expertise, and the contributions in committee meetings. National issue relevance as well as the tenure of a national delegation

**Table 2.** Process of allocating speaking time in the European Parliament

EP Political Group	Proposal Made by . . .	Decision Taken by . . .
ALDE	Secretary-General	Full Group
EPP-ED	Permanent working groups	Vice Chairman for parliamentary work
GUE-NGL	Deputy Secretary-General responsible for plenary sessions	Political Secretariat (composed of one member per national party)
UEN	Group Secretariat	Two Co-Presidents of Group
PES	Coordinator of relevant committee or party Vice-President when multiple committees are involved	Coordinator of relevant committee together with Secretariat

Source: Query to EP political group secretariats (responses received during 2007 and 2008).

within each group are less important, as is the seniority of the MEP requesting speaking time. Characteristics such as speaker quality, MEP contribution in party meetings, attendance record, or whether the MEP speaks in one of the working languages in the EU, hardly have any significance for the allocation of speaking time.

Most interestingly, an MEP's loyalty to his or her political group does not seem to play a role in allocating speaking time according to the political group secretariats. In other words, MEPs do not appear to get 'rewarded' with extra speaking time for voting with the majority, nor are dissidents punished. Only the Socialist group suggests that group loyalty is frequently important in allocating time, but the group qualifies this stating that 'depending on the subject, minority views of special countries [are] taken into consideration.' Even in the political group most concerned with loyalty, dissidents can come to the floor to express national opinions on sensitive matters. Of course, these answers can only give a partial picture of the speaking time allocation. Because time is a scarce resource, we must also take into account the demand side of speech. In fact, the answers from the groups do not allow any conclusions as to what kind of MEPs request speaking time in the first place.

### *Matching votes and speeches in the 6th European Parliament*

To test our hypotheses, we must link MEPs' decisions about whether to defect from their EP group to support their national party to whether or not they gave a speech

**Table 3.** EP political group priorities in allocating speaking time

Item	ALDE	EPP-ED	UEN	GUE-NGL	PES	Average
Committee membership	4	3	4	4	4	3.8
Expertise	4	4	3	3	4	3.6
EP group leader	3	4	3	4	3	3.4
MEP request	4	3	3	4	3	3.4
MEP contribution in committees	4	4	3	2	4	3.4
National issue relevance	2	3	3	3	3	2.8
National party tenure within group	2	3	1	1	2	1.8
Loyalty to political group	2	2	1	1	3	1.8
MEP contribution in party meetings	2	2	1	1	3	1.8
Seniority of MEP	2	2	1	1	2	1.6
Good attendance record in plenary	2	2	1	1	2	1.6
Speaker quality	1	3	1	1	1	1.4
Major Language (EN, DE, FR)	1	2	1	1	1	1.2
Equal Allocation among MEPs	1	1	1	2	1	1.2

Note: 4 = always important, 3 = frequently important, 2 = rarely important, 1 = never important.

Source: Query to EP political group secretariats (responses received during 2007 and 2008).

regarding the vote. From a researcher's perspective, the ideal data scenario would be that parliamentary debates are clearly linked to subsequent votes and all voting decisions are recorded. Yet, it is well known that only a small number of votes in the EP are recorded. At the same time, the EP archive only links explanations of votes directly to roll call votes. Therefore, we can only directly examine this subset of vote and speech records. Up until recently, even linking roll call votes and speeches was practically impossible because some speeches refer to more than one bill and a roll call vote often is held only on a specific amendment to a bill. But beginning with the 6th parliament, the EP created a separate website category containing all speeches and statements that directly relate to legislation voted upon earlier the same day. Moreover, speeches are organized according to the bill to which they refer. We were able to link debates to roll call voting decisions for the first 18 months of the 6th parliament using roll call vote data collected by Hix and Noury (2009). We focus our analysis on the MEPs from the EU-15 member states in order to clearly investigate the link between candidate selection, voting decision, and speech participation. MEPs from the new member states that joined the EU in 2004 were much less likely to speak during the first two years in the EP than MEPs from the 'old' member states — MEPs from EU-15 states were approximately six times more likely to give a speech than MEPs from new member states. We therefore have reason to suspect that MEPs from new member states were in a 'learning period' (*ibid.*, 173), and therefore exclude them from our sample.

Using these data, we were able to link 144 roll call votes to 710 MEP statements, for an average of 4.9 speeches per vote.<sup>6</sup> For each vote, we determined whether an MEP was a national rebel and whether he or she gave a speech. Our unit of analysis is, therefore, vote-speech, making our dependent variable binary — did the MEP give a speech or not on a particular roll call vote? We present results from two-sample tests of proportions, with one sample being the national rebels and the other one the MEPs who were not national rebels. We focus on two independent variables — whether an MEP rebelled from his or her EP group to vote with the national party and the nature of the mechanism used to select candidates to the EP in the MEP's member state. As our hypothesis stated, we suspect that rebels are more likely to speak than those MEPs who do not rebel against their EP group. We also believe that this effect should interact with the candidate selection mechanism used in the MEP's member state. Where the candidate selection process is centralized and controlled by the MEP's national party, we expect that rebels are even more likely to speak. When national parties are stronger in terms of their power to control the reelection chances of MEPs, MEPs should try harder to highlight when they stand up for the national party over the EP group. The candidate selection variable was coded by Hix (2004) and is based on a survey of national parties conducted by Raunio (2000). The variable equals 1 for MEPs from member states where all parties have centralized candidate selection mechanisms and zero where one or more of the major parties do not have a centralized candidate selection mechanism.<sup>7</sup>

The data show that just slightly over one percent of MEPs who are loyal to their political group are expected to speak, while the proportion of national rebels who

give a speech is 2.5 times higher (approximately 2.8%). When national parties have centralized control over candidate selection this effect should be amplified. When candidate selection is centralized, MEPs have an even greater incentive to send signals back to the national party that they support the national delegation's position. To examine this effect, Table 4 presents the proportions of MEPs who make statements both by their voting decisions as well as whether parties in their member state use centralized candidate selection mechanisms. National rebels are more likely to give speeches regardless of the candidate selection mechanism employed in their member state. However, MEPs are more likely overall to give a speech if they come from a member state where all major parties use centralized candidate selection mechanisms. In addition, the effect of the national rebel variable is even more pronounced in these countries. In member states where at least some parties have decentralized selection mechanisms, rebelling against the EP group roughly doubles the likelihood that an MEP gives a speech. In centralized member states, however, rebelling almost triples the likelihood of giving a speech.<sup>8</sup> This provides additional evidence that MEPs use speeches not only as an opportunity to explain their votes to the EP group, but also to highlight their loyalty to their national party.

### *Aggregate speech analysis for the 5th European Parliament*

The individual roll call vote-speech analysis solves an ecological inference problem that plagues aggregate-level tests of individual-level theories. However, only an aggregate analysis of the 5th EP allows us to study legislative speech participation for an entire parliamentary term and to consider the speaking time allocation mechanism during debates. Moreover, although our theory is most applicable to speeches regarding recorded roll call votes where national parties and EP groups can directly monitor MEP voting behavior, the aggregate analysis allows us to consider debates on issues not subject to roll call votes. It may be the case that

**Table 4.** Proportion of MEPs giving a speech as a function of voting and candidate selection mechanisms (Vote-speech sample from 6th EP, 2004–05)

National Rebel Voting Decision	Candidate Selection	
	Decentralized	Centralized
No	0.74% (192 of 25,982)	1.60% (459 of 28,609)
Yes	1.41% (17 of 1,208)	4.52% (42 of 930)

Note: Cells display proportion of MEPs falling within each category who give a speech. For coding of the variables, please refer to the text.

MEPs likely to rebel against their EP group take the floor on important issues not subject to roll call votes. We have collected a complete dataset on speaking time for the 5th European Parliament (1999–04) to complement our analysis. The dependent variable is the total number of speeches given by each MEP. We calculate this variable using the available data from the speech archive of the European Parliament. The speeches include all part-sessions in Strasbourg and Brussels during this period.

**Dependent variable: Speeches.** Members of the 5th European Parliament gave almost 53,000 speeches, but the number drops to 42,115 speeches if members of the EP Bureau, who chair the plenary sessions, are excluded. This means that the average MEP delivered approximately 63 speeches. Figure 1 breaks down all

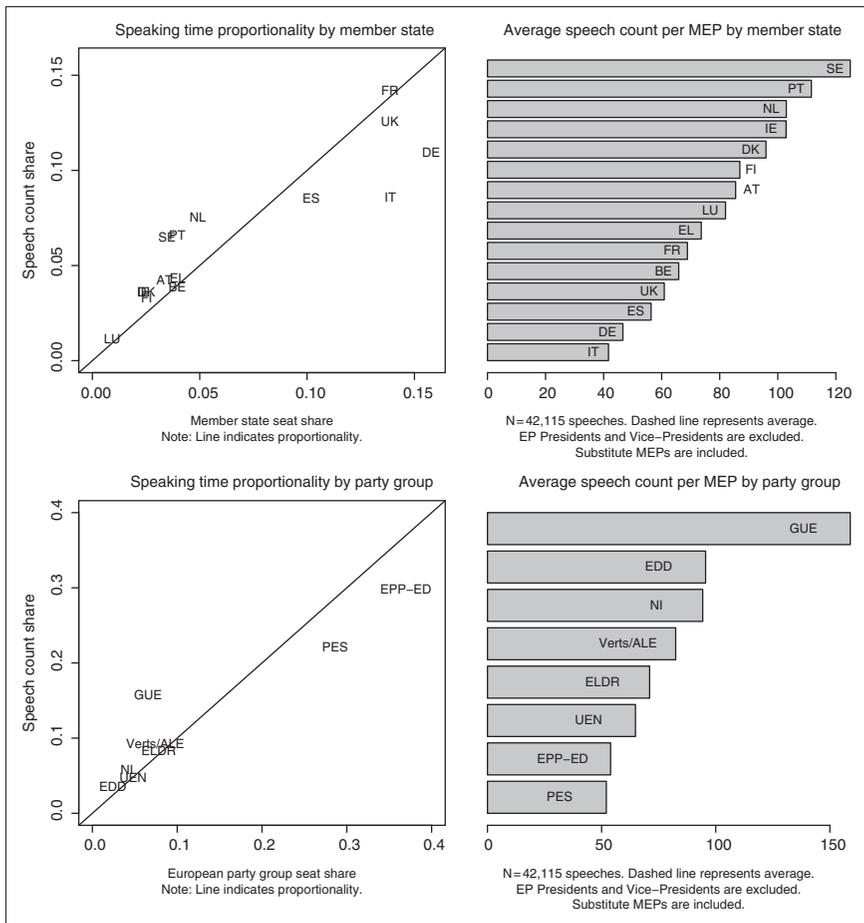


Figure 1. Speeches in the 5th EP (1999–2004) by Member State and Party Group.

speeches by member state and European politics groups. The left column plots the seat share of the national delegations and political groups and their respective share of speeches. If speech allocation were proportional, we would expect political groups to line up on the 45-degree line. Since the rules of procedure stipulate that a fraction of time is first distributed evenly among groups and then only in proportion to their seats, larger groups should have relatively less speaking time than smaller groups. The speaking time proportionality for political groups reveals that the two largest groups, the EPP-ED and the PES, receive a smaller share than would be expected under proportional allocation. Standing out among the smaller political groups is the Communist group GUE-NGL with very high speaking activity. All large member state delegations have a lower share than what would be expected under a proportional allocation scheme and small member state delegations have a larger share. Interestingly, the largest share of speaking time goes to the French delegation, even though it has fewer MEPs than the German delegation and the same number as the British and Italian delegations. Dutch, Portuguese and Swedish MEPs are also particularly active, with almost the same share of floor time as Spanish and Italian MEPs.

Another way to look at the data is to calculate the average number of speeches delivered by an MEP (bar charts on the right). This calculation puts the Swedish delegation at the top with more than 120 speeches delivered per MEP. In general, MEPs from Northern Europe (including Scandinavian countries and Ireland) are the most active on the floor, while German and Italian MEPs are the least active. Members of large national delegations have fewer opportunities to speak because someone else from their delegation is likely to express their opinion for them. The bar chart for the European political groups confirms the strong activity of the Communist group (GUE-NGL). In addition, Euroskeptics (EDD) and non-attached members are above average in speech activity.

**Independent variable: MEP voting defection.** Our main independent variable captures the degree to which an MEP is a national rebel, measured as the proportion of votes on which the MEP defected from his or her EP political group majority to vote with the national party majority.<sup>9</sup> We would expect that MEPs who defect more often from the EP group to support the national party should also speak more frequently (Hypothesis 1). The EP group punishment hypothesis would suggest precisely the opposite — it states that these dissidents should be prevented from taking the floor (Hypothesis 3). As a control, we also examine defection from the national party majority to the EP group. We would expect these defectors to speak no more than average. They should not want to draw their national party's attention to their vote and they have nothing to explain to their EP group. In addition, we include a dummy variable that takes on a value of one for MEPs from member states where parties use centralized candidate selection mechanisms and zero otherwise, as in the individual-level analysis (Hix, 2004). We interact this variable with our national rebel variable. We would expect that the national rebels who are most likely to benefit electorally from taking a national stand are even

more likely to speak. They stand to gain the most from highlighting their defection (Hypothesis 2).

One note of caution is warranted at this point. Some have suggested that using roll calls as a measure of party loyalty may pose a problem in the EP. Carrubba et al. (2006) find that roll calls in the EP are an unrepresentative sample of EP votes. They also argue that roll calls are likely to significantly underestimate the degree of dissent within the political groups. Specifically, they suggest that members of the EP most likely to dissent from their political group are least likely to vote on roll calls. If this is true, it would suggest that when regressing the number of speeches given by MEPs on our measure of roll call dissent, the coefficients of the defection variables should be negatively biased. If we find a null result, or a positive coefficient on our dissent variable, we can be very confident that parties do not punish dissenters by limiting their speaking time. In fact, the finding would support our research strategy of complementing the individual level analysis with an aggregate analysis.

**Control variables.** We control for numerous other variables likely to affect how often MEPs speak. First, we include the length of parliamentary tenure of each MEP in the analysis. More senior MEPs may be more influential and get to speak on the floor more frequently than junior MEPs. We control for an MEP's presence in the chamber by counting the number of roll call votes each MEP missed (voting absence). Members who miss votes may make fewer speeches either because the party punishes them for missing votes or simply because they have fewer opportunities to give a speech. The responses received by the EP group secretariats seem to suggest that the latter is more likely. None of the EP groups suggested attendance record was an important factor when allocating speaking time. This means attendance at votes may also help control for MEPs' demand for speaking time. We also include the number of rapporteurships held by each MEP, also using available data from the EP website. Rapporteurs are guaranteed speaking time, so MEPs who held more rapporteurships will speak more often. We include dummy variables to capture whether the MEP was a political group and EP leader as these leaders give speeches more frequently. We control for the number of committee assignments per MEP as well as the number of committee chairmanships. Finally, because larger political groups are allotted more time for their MEPs, we include the size of the MEP's political group in the analysis, as well as the share of each national party delegation within each political group.

## Results

Because our dependent variable is a count of speeches, we estimate a negative binomial regression model. We estimate one model without EP group and member state dummies and one model including those dummies. The estimation results are presented in Table 5. The coefficients on our variable of interest 'national rebel defection score' are positive, meaning that MEPs with higher

**Table 5.** Negative binomial regression: Explaining the allocation of speaking time

Variable	(1)	(2)
National Rebel Defection Score (Votes with NP & Against EP Group)	2.8591 (0.7470) <sup>***</sup>	0.1343 (1.1105)
European Group Defection Score (Votes with EP Group & Against NP)	-3.0777 (1.3567) <sup>**</sup>	-3.0238 (1.3585) <sup>**</sup>
Centralized Candidate Selection	0.1030 (0.1013)	0.2595 (0.2883)
National Rebel Score x Candidate Selection	1.4744 (1.1773)	3.2620 (1.3783) <sup>**</sup>
Tenure	0.0001 (0.0000) <sup>***</sup>	0.0001 (0.0000) <sup>***</sup>
Voting Absences	-0.0005 (0.0001) <sup>***</sup>	-0.0005 (0.0001) <sup>***</sup>
Rapporteurships (number)	0.0618 (0.0108) <sup>***</sup>	0.0668 (0.0103) <sup>***</sup>
EP Group Leader	0.3676 (0.1260) <sup>***</sup>	0.5019 (0.1210) <sup>***</sup>
EP Leadership	0.0501 (0.1139)	0.0747 (0.1076)
Committee Assignments	0.1236 (0.0343) <sup>***</sup>	0.1255 (0.0327) <sup>***</sup>
Committee Chairs	-0.0370 (0.0707)	-0.0090 (0.0664)
EP Political Group Size	-0.0040 (0.0005) <sup>***</sup>	
National Party Relative Size	-1.7851 (0.5064) <sup>***</sup>	-0.9040 (0.7977)
(Intercept)	4.4045 (0.1803) <sup>***</sup>	4.1110 (0.4984) <sup>***</sup>
Theta	1.441 (0.086)	1.676 (0.103)
Observations	563	563
Log-Likelihood	-2747.6	-2704.9
EP Political Group Dummies	No	Yes
Country Dummies	No	Yes

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. \* =  $p \leq 0.1$ , \*\* =  $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\*\* =  $p \leq 0.01$ . The dependent variable are the number of speeches given by each MEP during the 5th European Parliament (1999–2004).

voting defection scores participate more in debates. The interaction between the national rebel score and candidate selection is also positive. This suggests that centralized selection mechanisms do indeed yield higher speech counts. The defection score variable is significant in the first model without group and country dummies and the interaction is not, while the interaction becomes significant when we introduce the dummies. This is not surprising, however, as the fixed effects are highly collinear with the country dummy variable for candidate selection. The substantive effect, though, remains the same: national rebels give more speeches than other MEPs. The fixed effects model indicates that this is especially true when candidate selection mechanisms are centralized. We have also run models without the candidate selection variables and interaction (both with and without fixed effects) and we have run the same models with robust standard errors. We consistently find a strong, statistically significant, and positive effect of our national rebel variable on speech counts.<sup>10</sup> As expected, the opposite defection score (defection from the national party majority) does not have a positive effect, in fact the coefficient is negative and significant.

The signs of the coefficients on the control variables are in the expected direction. The number of rapporteurships is significant and positively correlated with speaking time, but this was expected given that rapporteurs have speaking time *ex officio*. MEPs who are absent more often from roll call votes also speak less. Independent of tenure in the EP, political group leaders are also more likely to take the floor than lower-ranking MEPs. EP leadership positions, however, do not have any effect on the number of speeches. As far as committee assignments and chairmanships are concerned, the assignments variable has the expected positive sign and is significant in all models, as the survey of EP political groups suggested it should be. Committee leadership positions (chairman or vice-chairman) has a negative effect but it is not statistically significant. The coefficients for political group and national party delegation size are negative. The rules for allocating speaking time among EP groups is not exactly proportional, as a first share of debating time is allocated equally among groups and then in proportion to the seat share. Thus, smaller groups are slightly favored when speaking on the floor.

Interpreting the effects of the variables is facilitated using simulated expected values of speech counts. Such simulations also properly take into account the interaction effects between variables and allow us to examine whether there are truly significant and substantive differences between centralized and decentralized candidate selection countries and national rebels and non-rebels. Table 6 is similar to the two-by-two Table 4, except that the cells now report simulated expected speech counts per MEP instead of the proportion of MEPs giving a speech. They show what we can expect if we set the independent variables to values of substantive interest while holding all other variables constant. We choose the 10th and 90th percentiles of the national rebel voting defection variable as low and high values respectively. The results show a substantial interaction effect between defection and candidate selection mechanisms on speech counts. MEPs with low national rebel defection scores from decentralized candidate selection systems speak less, while

**Table 6.** Predicted speech counts in the 5th EP (1999–04): Substantive effects of national rebel defection and candidate selection

National Rebel Defection Score	Candidate Selection	
	Decentralized	Centralized
Low	32 (28,37)	36 (32,41)
High	44 (38,52)	59 (50,70)

Note: Cells display the simulated expected speech counts from a negative binomial model and their 95 percent confidence intervals are indicated in parentheses. The simulations are based on model 1 (see appendix) and were performed in R using the *Zelig* package (Imai et al., 2007). A low national rebel voting defection score is the 10th percentile of this variable (0.01) and a high national rebel voting defection score the 90th percentile (0.12). All other variables are held constant at their mean, except for the rapporteur and committee controls (median) and the dummy control variables (leadership).

those from centralized candidate selection systems speak slightly more. This difference is not significantly different, as the simulated confidence intervals overlap. However, MEPs with high national rebel defection scores from centralized systems give about 34 percent more speeches than those from decentralized systems (59 instead of 44), and the confidence intervals barely overlap. The substantive effects of defection on speech counts found in the aggregate data are similar to those found in the individual level data from the 6th EP, suggesting that the ecological inference problem is not too severe in these data.

## Discussion and conclusion

Legislative speech is an important, yet under-studied feature of parliamentary politics. Using new individual-level and aggregate-level data on legislative debate in the European Parliament, we have examined how members of the European Parliament participate in debates. Our results suggest that who speaks on the floor of the European Parliament is determined by supply-side decisions by EP political groups and demand-side decisions by MEPs and their national delegations. MEPs who side with their national party against the European political group demand more speaking time to explain their dissident positions to their fellow group members and to put their support of their national party on the public record. We find evidence that MEPs from countries with centralized candidate selection mechanisms systems do in fact participate more in debates, possibly to create a record of support of the national party when there are conflicts with the European group. On the supply-side — and contrary to what some EP scholars have suggested (e.g. Hix and Lord, 1997) — political groups do not appear to use speaking time allocation as a means to punish these MEPs for defecting from the majority position of the

political group. Although the formal rules of speech allocation in the EP mirror the rules of other European parliamentary democracies, in practice the allocation of speaking time is quite different. This is because political groups do not stand to lose very much by allowing their dissidents to speak. Unlike in national parliaments, where dissident speech may dilute the meaning of a party label for voters, in the EP the political group label means little for electoral politics. Instead EP elections are fought by national parties. This allows members of the national party delegations to use speeches as a forum for expressing intra-group dissent.

These findings have implications for the study of legislative politics in the European Union. Using MEP speeches to estimate positions of national party delegations in the EP, we have found that there is a strong national dimension to parliamentary speech (Proksch and Slapin, forthcoming). On the contrary, studies using roll-call votes to estimate policy positions find that left-right positions form the first dimension of conflict in the EP (Hix et al., 2007). The findings of this paper provide a potential explanation for this discrepancy. The national dimension is particularly strong in policy positions derived from speeches because MEPs use speeches to explain national votes, for example those votes on which the MEP votes against the EP group but with his or her national party. Even if such votes only account for a small percent of all votes (at least using roll call data), speeches to explain these votes probably account for a higher percentage of all speeches. This is because MEPs do not need to speak when the national party and political group are in agreement, but they are still likely to vote. Taken together, these studies suggest an institutional explanation for why MEPs take the floor and position themselves in speeches. If there were a stronger European dimension to EP electoral politics, speeches may be more likely to reflect a left-right dimension similar to voting records. Should European political parties eventually run European campaigns, there would be more pressure to develop a homogeneous party label, and the considerations of political group leaders regarding the allocation of speaking time might change accordingly.

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### Notes

1. In the British House of Commons, for example, party whips attempt to keep those who do not follow the party line off the list of speakers (Jordan and Richardson, 1987: 71). In the German *Bundestag*, party whips also play a large role in determining the structure of parliamentary debate (Loewenberg, 1967). Party *Fraktionen* exert 'tacit pressure' on their

members. If a member of the German *Bundestag* wants to disagree with his or her party's position on the floor, the MP must justify this choice before a party committee (Schüttemeyer, 2001: 44). In coalition governments, legislative speeches might also serve as an opportunity for coalition members to express specific policy stances. Martin and Vanberg (2008) show that government parties engage in more extensive debate on divisive policy issues, measured by the length of speeches, in particular as elections approach.

2. The EU functions like a parliamentary system with interdependent legislative-executive relations because the EP must approve the Commission and has the sole right to censure it. But unlike in a parliamentary system, the Commission cannot dissolve the European Parliament and the censure vote requires a super-majority in the EP. As a consequence, and unlike government coalition formation in parliamentary systems, there is no 'inbuilt government majority in the European Parliament' (Hix et al., 2007: 21).
3. There is a growing body of literature that studies candidate selection mechanisms in parliamentary and presidential systems and how they affect the behavior of legislators (Gallagher and Marsh, 1988; Carey and Shugart, 1995; Rahat and Hazan, 2001; Crisp et al. 2004; Shomer, 2009; Tavits, 2009). Our focus is on the selection mechanisms for the EP elections.
4. The five speakers were Lord Inglewood (EPP-ED, UK), Armonia Bordes (GUE/NGL, France), Charlotte Cederschiöld (EPP-ED, Sweden), Arlene McCarty (PES, UK), and Malcolm Harbour (EPP-ED, UK).
5. Note that this is not a survey of MEPs themselves. Instead, we asked the group secretariat member responsible for the administrative details of the allocation of speaking time to complete a brief questionnaire. Thus, there was one response from an administrative staff member per political group. The responses were collected in 2007 and 2008. No response was obtained from the IND/DEM group, the Greens, and the non-attached members. In addition to the items reported in the table, political groups indicated that the rapporteur status of an MEP was important in allocating speaking time, but this is because rapporteurs have pre-allocated speaking time *ex officio*.
6. All debates are publicly available on the EP's website at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/>. The term 'speeches' here is used rather loosely to encompass both speeches given on the floor of Parliament as well as brief written statements that may be appended to the debate record. Since such statements are included in the public record, we include them in our analysis as well.
7. Countries coded as having centralized candidate selection mechanisms are Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, France, Greece, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, and Sweden. Of course, ideally, this variable would be measured at the level of national party rather than member state. However, the original Raunio survey was unable to obtain responses from approximately 45 percent of national parties represented in the EP, meaning that a party level variable would contain a substantial number of missing values. Although a crude measure, this simple dummy is easier to measure and preserves more data. Hix (2004) has demonstrated that it does predict MEP behavior.
8. The results reported here consider only 'Yes' and 'No' votes, but the results do not change when abstentions are included. This is true regardless of whether abstentions are counted as votes in favor of or against the legislation. We also ran a multilevel logit model with member state random effects. Our national rebel variable is highly statistically significant and positive, as expected. Our candidate selection variable is positive but not statistically significant.

9. We exclude MEPs who belong to a national delegation with fewer than three members, as it would be impossible to know the national party majority. We also drop MEPs who do not belong to an EP group (non-attached MEPs). This leaves us with a sample size of 563 MEPs. As with the analysis of the 6th EP, we calculate the defection variable by dropping abstentions. However, we have also run all models recoding abstentions as 'yes' votes as well as 'no' votes. In both instances, the results are very similar to those we report here and their substantive interpretation is the same.
10. We thank two anonymous reviewers for suggesting these robustness checks. To save space, these models are not reported here, but the results are included in the web appendix. The appendix also includes the simulated marginal effects of the control variables.

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