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**Determinants of Dyadic Correspondence
in European Parliament Elections**

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Abstract

Electoral representation of voter preferences regarding European integration has notoriously been reported to be ineffective: issue congruence between voters and parties in this domain is known to be deficient. This paper analyses conditions under which electoral representation seems to work well even in this difficult issue area. It is found that congruence is generated by disagreement about and conflict over the issue; that the duration of membership tends to reduce congruence; that the format of party competition has to play a role; and that finally large and governmental parties are more responsive than others in those questions (and possibly in other questions as well). Large parties are found to be particularly responsive in old member countries; and issue conflict moderates the mechanism of party-voter correspondence such that in conflict-ridden environments parties are shaping public opinion while they are largely responsive to shifting voter preferences in low-conflict situations.

1. Introduction

One continuous pattern in the institutional development of the European Union is the continuous strengthening of the role of the European Parliament within it (e.g. Maurer 2007).¹ Policy decisions taken by majorities of the Members of Parliament can no longer be overruled by the Council – at least in the expanding domains that are subject to the co-decision procedure of EU legislation. In addition, the Parliament has been able to significantly increase its impact on the selection of the Commission, both regarding its president as well as individual Commissioners, as was demonstrated by the struggles over the investiture of the Barroso Commission following the 2004 election of the members of the European Parliament (e.g. Schmitt 2005).

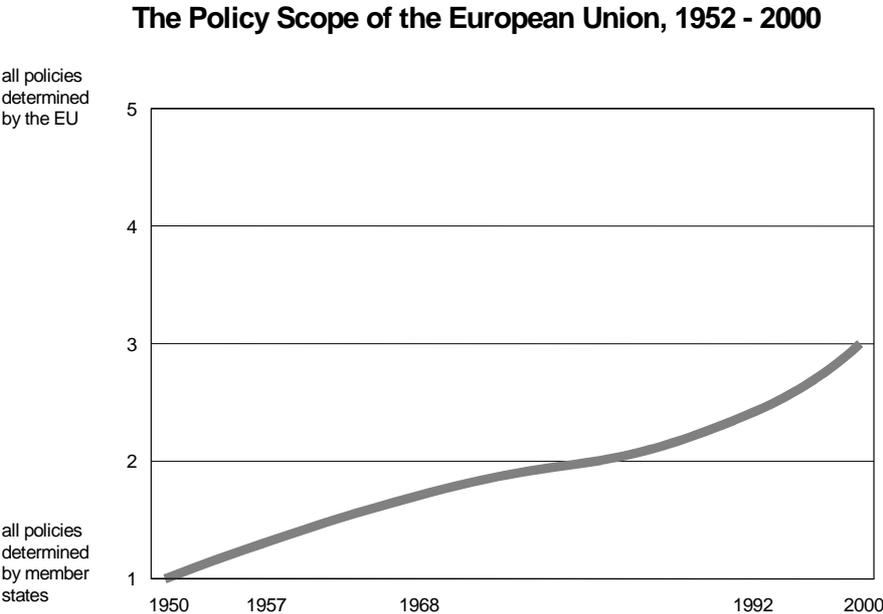
Not only has the parliament been able to increase its political weight and stature in the EU policy making process. In addition, the policy reach of the EU layer of the European multi-level system of governance has been constantly growing over the past half century. When the EU began in 1952 – it was called ‘European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC)’ at the time – there was hardly any policy authority allocated at the Union level. Fifty years later, at the end of the 20th century, the Union is an important co-legislator, at a par with national legislatures.

¹ This research has much profited from the excellent research assistance of Nicola Stegmaier. The data sets that together constitute the empirical base of it – the Mannheim Eurobarometer Trend File and the Euromanifestos Data Base – are available from the Central Archive at the University of Cologne.

A series of expert judgements about the relative weight of “Europe” in the legislative process of 28 policy areas reveals that today, half of all significant legislation in these areas originates in Brussels rather than in Berlin or Bratislava or any other national capital. In all of these cases, national legislatures only ratify, or rather adopt, ready-made EU-wide directives so that their national administrative apparatus can implement them (see Graph 1).

Another indicator of the same process is the evolution of the number of EU initiated legislative acts that pass national parliaments per legislative period. Although national implementation processes of EU law vary a bit from one member country to the next regarding their speed and effectiveness, the trend is the same everywhere and it is therefore sufficient for our purposes here to look into the parliamentary statistics of one. The German figures in this case indicate that the number of EU-initiated legislative acts has grown by 24131 % between 1957 and 2002, and has reached the number of 3137 in the last legislative period for which data are now available (1998 to 2002; Feldkamp & Ströbel 2005: 862-3).²

Graph 1



Note: The trend line indicates the average policy authority of the EU over 28 policy areas drawn from the economic, foreign, legal and constitutional, and social policy. Individual authority rankings are based on expert judgements by Lindberg and Scheingold 1970; Schmitter 1994; and Hooghe and Marks 2001; the raw figures are taken from Hooghe and Marks 2001: 187-189.

² Note in passing that, on the aggregate level of analysis, this tremendous increase in the policy making authority of the European Union is found to have a minor negative effect on EU support in Germany, but a strong negative effect on the legitimacy of the national political process there (Schmitt & Scheuer forthcoming).

All of this cannot but make the election of the members of the European Parliament more consequential, both regarding their policy and their personnel decisions. And to the degree that this is indeed the case, the effectiveness of the “representational bond” (Miller & Stokes 1963) between voters and their representatives in the European Parliament assumes central importance for the quality of the democratic process in the European Union.

This then is the topic of the present paper: how ‘tight’ is this representational bond and, more in particular, under what conditions is it functioning particularly well or badly? We will proceed in the following manner. In the next section we will briefly review the state of the art. Then, a number of hypotheses are developed that draw upon the findings of previous scholarship and yet are hoped to help to advance our knowledge about EU political representation. The fourth section is about data and methods, and the fifth about the findings of the empirical analyses. The final section of this paper will discuss those results and put them in a broader perspective.

2. Previous research

Political representation recently has been a major topic in the study of EU politics, both theoretically and empirically. Of course, the phenomenon of political representation is not restricted to the electoral channel of interest intermediation. Public protest, the lobbying activities of organized interest groups, even the influence of national and sub-national governments on EU decision-making bodies – all of this can and has been discussed with an eye on the effectiveness of political representation. However, much of the empirical work concentrates on the electoral channel of political representation because it is potentially both the most general and the most democratic (Schmitt 2005). These studies typically try to assess what has been called the effectiveness of EU electoral representation, effectiveness being defined as the relative issue congruence that characterizes the dyadic correspondence between electors and elected. Exploring this issue congruence in a meaningful way requires (a) a profound understanding of the nature of European issues and (b) an appropriate specification of the elements upon which dyadic correspondence rests.

With regard to the former requirement, it is important to realize that the issues that are dealt with (and the respective policies that are decided upon) at EU level are not just about “Europe” and the future of the European Union – but also about peace and security, social

welfare, economic growth, environmental protection, and so on. It is therefore too narrow a view if one restricts the notion of effective EU electoral representation to “constitutional issues” related to more or less integration and the further development of the EU polity (see Schmitt (forthcoming) for a more comprehensive discussion).

There is another complication with regard to European issues that has to do with the distinction between position and valence issues (Stokes 1966, 1992). When empirical representation studies typically base themselves on the comparison of issue positions of different political actors, they can hardly cover the full story. A comparison of the issue emphases of electors and elected is a necessary complement of the spatial approach (Schmitt 1998, 2001; Green 2007). A full account of the effectiveness of EU electoral representation must therefore include normal and constitutional issues as well as position and valence issues.

Moving on to an appropriate specification of the elements of the dyadic correspondence, the most prominent alternatives in the literature are the individual representational bond between constituency voters and their elected representative, and the collective representational bond between a national party electorate and the party as a collective actor (identified by its candidates, members of parliament, election manifesto or similar). Miller and Stokes (1966) in their landmark study of the highly personalized and de-central US political process analyzed the link between district voters and their individual representatives. Consecutive studies of European electoral systems found it more appropriate to build their analyses on the collective model of political representation (e.g. Holmberg 1974; Thomassen 1976; Barnes 1977; Dalton 1985; but see Converse & Pierce 1986). In marked contrast to the US, the institutional make-up of most European political systems has been characterized by proportional representation and coalition governments, and both of these institutional features favor party discipline in parliament and underscore the role and importance of political parties rather than that of individual representatives.

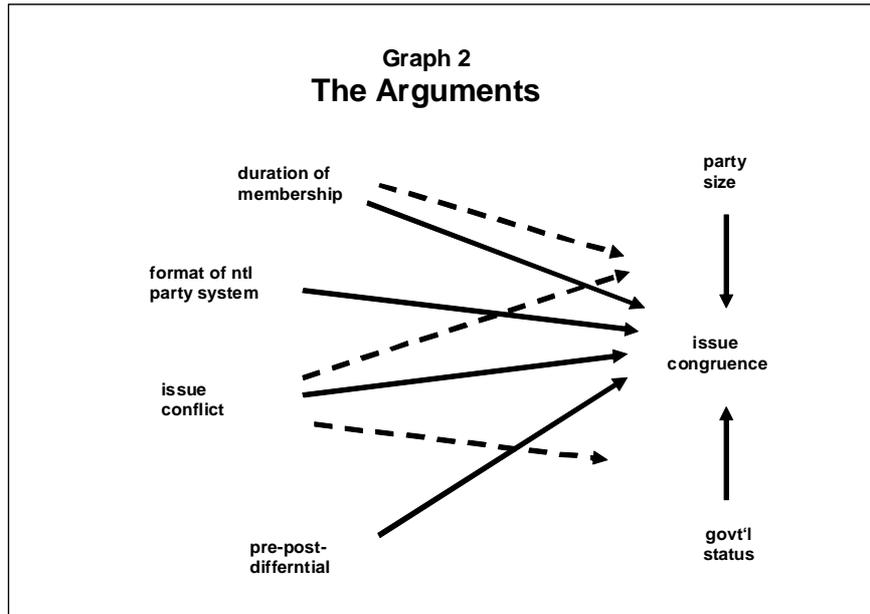
In terms of the above categories, empirical research into electoral representation at the EU level of government has focused on position rather than valence issues. All of these studies have specified the basic elements of the dyadic correspondence in collective terms by comparing national party electorates’ issue orientations with those of the national party. If one tries to strike a balance, one probably can say that the empirical study of EU electoral representation has produced the following insights. Congruence between party elites and their

voters varies with the type of issue under investigation. It is weakest with regard to specific policies of the European Union, like the abolishing of border controls or the introduction of a common currency (Thomassen & Schmitt 1997; Schmitt & Thomassen 1999). It is highest with regard to the saliency of issues and to ideological orientations (Schmitt 2001). Located somewhere in between is the voter-party agreement on the basic goal of European unification (Schmitt & Thomassen 2000). Whether this congruence is brought about by elite responsiveness or by the learning and socialization of voters seems to depend on circumstances: both processes seem to exist (Schmitt & Thomassen 2000; Carruba 2003).

3. Research Questions and Hypotheses

The present contribution does not intend to provide a full account of the effectiveness of electoral representation in the European Union. Rather, the focus is on the weakest link between voters and political parties – the distance between voters and parties regarding the (constitutional) issue of more or less integration. As informative as the insights of earlier studies in this domain are, they still leave a number of important questions unanswered. Most prominently, previous research had to remain silent regarding the “circumstances” referred to above. Is popular disagreement about the issue of European integration leading to higher congruence? Is long-lasting EU membership of a country a better environment for effective electoral representation than a new membership? What about the format of national party competition – are more parties producing higher issue congruence than fewer parties? In short, we are interested in the conditions under which the dyadic correspondence that is established through general elections of the members of the European Parliament proves to be particularly effective or ineffective.

More in particular, we will test a number of hypotheses that are derived from previous scholarship. Graph 2 gives an overview of the arguments that follow.



Party specific hypotheses: size and governmental status

Otto Kirchheimer (1965) and many after him observed that big parties, in environments of de-alignment (Dalton et al. 1985, Franklin et al. 1992), tend to become vote-seeking catch-all parties, that is: to adjust their electoral appeals to changing policy preferences in their potential electorate. The same seems to apply to governmental parties: once in office, they tend to value office more than policy (Wright 1971; Müller & Strom 1999). Therefore, party size and governmental status seem to promote the responsiveness of political parties towards changing voter preferences separately and jointly.

H1a *Ceteris paribus*, issue congruence should be the higher the larger a party is.

H1b *Ceteris paribus*, issue congruence should be higher among governmental parties.

H1c *Ceteris paribus*, issue congruence should be higher among large governmental parties.

There are reasons to expect these regularities to be context-sensitive. Under conditions of long lasting Union membership, voters know the policies of their national political parties well, particularly those of large parties who are at the centre of public attention. Following this arguments, we expect the congruence between large parties and their voters to be higher in older member countries. Much the same reasoning applies to the intensity of issue conflict:

the more conflict there is over Europe and the EU, the better will voters know where at least the large parties stand, and they will take this into account in their voting decisions.

H2a. *Ceteris paribus*, issue congruence should be higher among large parties in older member countries.

H2b. *Ceteris paribus*, issue congruence should be higher among large parties in environments that are characterised by issue conflict over the EU.

Election specific hypothesis: pre-post differential

We know that political representation is not a one-way process. In a top-down process parties are shaping public opinion. Bottom-up they responsively react to public opinion changes. A well-known problem to students of political representation is to determine the relative weight of the two complementary processes. Solving the problem could be associated with the variable time: if parties are responsive followers to changes in public opinion over an issue, voter-party congruence should be highest ahead of the election – at around the time when party platforms are discussed at national party congresses and the media are mirroring both the results of the congress and the reactions of competing parties towards it. If, however, parties are actively shaping public opinion, party-voter congruence should be highest sometime after the election because the moulding of voter preferences is likely to take some time (Esaiasson & Holmberg 1996). Earlier research has suggested that while both processes are at work, the responsiveness (bottom-up) mechanism seems to be the stronger one (Schmitt & Thomassen 2000). The third hypothesis therefore reads as follows:

H3 *Ceteris paribus*, issue congruence between voters and parties should be higher ahead of the election than after it.

Moreover, we expect here an important interaction with the degree of issue conflict in a system. Under conditions of low issue conflict, parties are expected to behave responsively. When issue conflict is high, however, it is the parties who are the most likely promoters of divergent views among the citizenry – a condition under which we expect them to be likely to draw their electorate towards their own convictions.

H3a *Ceteris paribus*, issue congruence should be higher after the election than before when issue conflict is high.

System specific hypotheses: issue conflict, format of party competition, and duration of membership

Strong issue effects on vote choices cannot but strengthen the representational bond between parties and their voters. The scholarly dispute on issue voting is old and controversial. Not only are there different philosophies about how issues might affect the vote (e.g. Downs 1956; Stokes 1966; Rabinowitz & Macdonald 1989). Early on, scholars also disagree about the relative importance of issue orientations for electoral behaviour (Campbell et al. 1960; Key 1966). One thing seems to be obvious: the more disagreement there is about an issue, the more likely is it that voters base their party choice on this particular issue – rather than on other motivations that are known to affect vote choices like party identification, leader traits, tactical considerations, and so on. In fact, the typically low issue congruence on EU policies has repeatedly been attributed to the low salience of those issues (e.g. Schmitt and Thomassen 1999, concluding chapter). Contrariwise: if voters base their EP vote choice on EU issues, issue congruence in these questions should be particularly high.

H4 *Ceteris paribus*, issue congruence should be the higher the more controversial the issue is.

There is another argument about issue congruence that almost belongs to political science folklore. It refers to the electoral system and the ensuing format of party competition. According to that majority vote systems with their tendency to fabricate two-party systems (and similar formats) maximise accountability while proportional systems with their tendency to manufacture multi-party systems maximise representation (e.g. Przeworski et al. 1999; Norris 2004). If we follow these arguments, we should expect electoral representation to work the better the more parties are competing for votes because many parties have a better chance of accurately representing the variety of different opinions in the electorate than few parties.

H5 *Ceteris paribus*, issue congruence should be higher the larger the effective number of political parties of a system is.

Our final system specific hypothesis refers to the duration of EU membership of a country. Analyses of public support for European integration have repeatedly found that “familiarity breeds content” (e.g. Newton and Bosch 1995): the longer a country belongs to the Union, the more citizens tend to agree with it and the less incentives exist for political parties to campaign on the issue. To the degree that issue congruence is a function of party competition over an issue, we expect the following:

H6 *Ceteris paribus*, issue congruence should be lower the longer a country belongs to the European Union.

4. Data and how they are analysed

The dependent variable of this study is issue congruence. Issue congruence is here defined as the distance between the average position of the voters of a party in matters of European integration and the position of that party. Testing the various hypotheses requires a data structure that allows for variation in the dependent variable before, at and after a particular election to the European Parliament (in order to assess intra-election dynamics), as well as for variation between elections (in order to assess inter-election dynamics).

Voter orientations are taken from the findings of the Eurobarometer surveys of the European Commission. From the cross-classification of party preference (national vote intention) and EU membership evaluation³, we can estimate voter evaluations of EU membership as the proportion of “good thing” answers in all valid responses, the resulting variable ranges between 0 and 100. This can be done at various points of the EU electoral cycle: two years ahead of the election, one year ahead, in the election year, one year after and two years after. Altogether five elections are covered, from 1979 over 1984, 1989, 1994 to 1999.⁴ Unfortunately, the Eurobarometer surveys discontinued the national vote intention question in 2002 so that the 2004 election can not be included here.

Party positions are estimated from their EP election manifestos. Expert coders in the various EU member countries have applied the Euromanifesto Coding Scheme [EMCS] to altogether

³ One of the classical long Eurobarometer trends asks the respondents, whether “EU membership of [country] is a good thing, a bad thing, or neither.”

⁴ The number of observations per party electorate varies between several hundreds and very tiny numbers. In order to base the estimates on stable evidence, the permissible minimal number of observations per party electorate in a given year was set to 20.

588 party platforms from the very first election in 1979 to the most recent in 2004.⁵ The EMCS builds upon the well-known MRG/CPM coding scheme by preserving the structure of it while adding a number of EU specific codes. The pro-/anti EU position of a party in a particular election is estimated as the difference between the proportion of positive arguments about the EU and European integration (in all European arguments) and the proportion of negative arguments about the EU and European integration (in all European arguments).⁶ The resulting variable ranges from +100 to -100.⁷

Both variables are standardised (z-transformed so that their metric is their standard deviation around a mean of 0), and subtracted from one another. The result of this is again transformed to yield only positive (absolute) values – because as a distance is a distance in either direction.

This is then our final dependent variable, with low values indicating small distances (high congruence) and high values indicating large distances (low congruence). The unit of analysis is the voter-party distance in a particular year (pre-post differential) of a particular election (1979 to 1999). Altogether 1095 observations are available for analysis, as documented in Table 1.

Independent variables come from different sources. The size of a party is determined by its share of the valid vote in a particular election; data are from the Eurmanifestos Database as available from the MZES website.⁸ Governmental status refers to the participation of a party in a national government coalition at the time of an EP election; data are from national statistical offices as available from the internet. Pre-post differential is the timing of a voter-party distance around an election: ‘-2’ stands for two years ahead, ‘-1’ for one year, and so on. Duration of membership at the time of an election has been calculated as the difference between the accession year of a country and the election year. Issue conflict is estimated by the standard deviation of the Eurobarometer “membership” variable in a country in any election year; high standard deviation values are understood to indicate wide-ranging popular disagreement. The format of national party competition is estimated as the effective number

⁵ It is gratefully acknowledged that the first two phases of the Euromanifestos-Project were funded by the German Research Foundation under the reference number SCHM 835/4.

⁶ This measure correlates at .8 with coder placements of the manifesto on a pro-anti-integration scale, which underscores the validity of the scale.

⁷ In each Euromanifesto, the *pro-EU share* is calculated as the sum of arguments coded in the following *Euromanifesto Coding Scheme (EMCS)* categories: 108s, 2-203, 3021, 306s, 308s, 310s, 312s, 314s, 316s, 4041, 4084, 4086, 2-601, 1-602. The *anti-EU share* is the sum of the following: 110s, 2-204, 3011, 307s, 309s, 311s, 313s, 315s, 317s, 318s, 4011, 4085, 4087, 2-602, 1-601 (see Wüst & Schmitt 2007 for more detail).

⁸ http://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/projekte/euro_elections/Europawahlergebnissen-21-06-2007.pdf

Table 1

**Numbers of Observations [Party-Voter Dyads]
by Election Year and Pre-post-differential**

	2 yrs before	1 yr before	in election year	1 yr after	2 yrs after	<i>all</i>
<i>EP election of 1979</i>	28	30	31	31	34	154
<i>EP election of 1984</i>	28	30	29	27	26	140
<i>EP election of 1987</i>	4	4	4	5	5	22
<i>EP election of 1989</i>	33	36	45	39	41	194
<i>EP election of 1994</i>	53	54	60	58	53	278
<i>EP election of 1995</i>			6	6	6	18
<i>EP election of 1996</i>	5	11	11	11		38
<i>EP election of 1999</i>	84		86	81		251
<i>all</i>	235	165	272	258	165	1095

Data sources: *The Euromanifestos Data Base* and *The Mannheim Eurobarometer Trend File*.

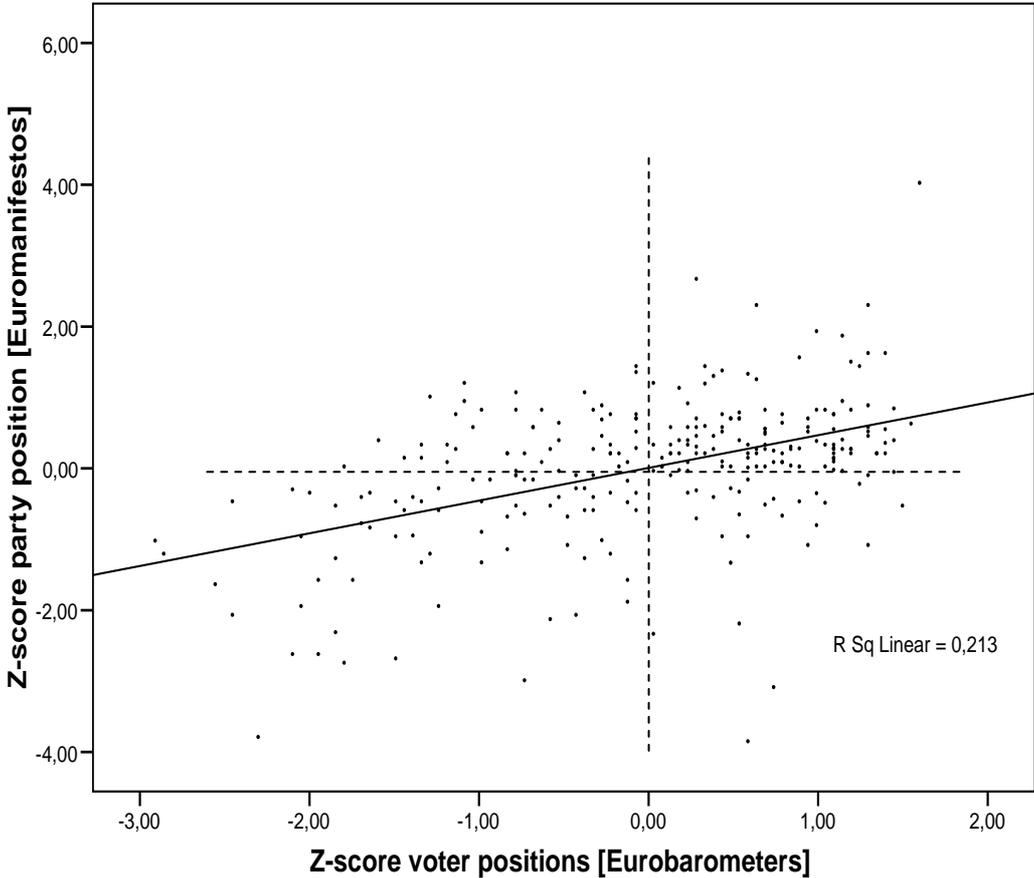
of electoral parties in the national election preceding the EP election (these data are taken from Gallagher and Mitchell 2005).

5. Findings

Any study of electoral representation presents at some point a measure of congruence, be it a correlation coefficient, a distance measure, or some other indicator of how close the fit is found to be between voters and parties, constituency members and their representatives, the citizenry as a whole and its assembly, and so on. Graph 3 displays the relative congruence between parties and their electorates regarding the EU and European integration as evidenced by our measurement efforts described in some detail in the previous section. The scatterplot confronting standardized voter and party positions is informative. There is one quadrant in the joint distribution that is clearly less populated than the others: the one exhibiting EU-positive voters and EU-critical parties. The other remarkable quadrant is the one in which

both voters and parties are EU-critical. This is the one with the largest distances to the origin: EU-criticism that is shared (and reinforced) by both the parties and their voters tends to be a strong attitude that expresses itself in stark statements. Overall, the correlation between the two standardized variables is at +.46. This is certainly less of an association that we would find were we confronting salient ideological positions of voters and parties (e.g on the left-right dimension).

Graph 3
The Congruence between Voter and Party Positions
on the EU Issue in Election Years



Data Sources: *The Euromanifestos Data Base* and *The Mannheim Eurobarometer Trend File*. The graph displays 272 valid cases (=party-voter dyads in election years). The correlation is at $r = .462$ and statistically significant at $p = .000$.

Earlier work, including some of our own, has presented this kind of graph as the ultimate contribution to the body of scholarly knowledge. In the present study, we are able to go one step further and offer it merely as a starting point for the causal analyses to come. In fact, we

are actually not so much interested here in the average fit between the parties and their voters (not least because we know that this fit varies depending on the indicator we select). Of greater interest are the conditions under which this fit is particularly high or low.

This is where we move to now. Table 2 presents correlates of congruence. We are inspecting bivariate coefficients first before we move on to the final multivariate analysis. The figures

Table 2
Correlates of Congruence
(Figures are Pearson's r, p-values and number of observations)

	r	p	N
<i>party specific predictors</i>			
party size [vote share in respective EP election]	-.005	.434	1019
ntl. governmental status [0=opposition, 1=government]	-.144	.000	1056
<i>election specific predictors</i>			
pre-post-differential [2 yrs before, 1 yr, 00, 1 yr after, 2 yrs after]	-.002	.473	1057
<i>system specific predictors</i>			
effective number of electoral parties	-.144	.000	1056
duration of membership [in years]	-.197	.000	1057
popular disagreement on EC/EU-membership	.057	.033	1056
<i>Interactions</i>			
party size * duration of membership	-.145	.000	1019
party size * issue conflict	-.001	.482	1018
party size * governmental status	-.007	.815	1052
pre-post-differential * issue conflict	.020	.253	1056

Data sources: *The Euromanifestos Data Base* and *The Mannheim Eurobarometer Trend File*.

are somewhat sobering. The coefficients are modest and often enough contradict our theoretical expectations. Big parties should be closer to their voters than small ones, but party size does not make a difference (H1a). Government parties (H1b), large government parties in particular (H1c), should be closer to their voters, which is only partially confirmed (H1b). Large parties should be closer to their voters under conditions of long-lasting membership, which seems again confirmed (H2). Parties should be closer to their voters ahead of the election rather than after it; we find that the pre-post-differential does not matter at all, neither globally (H3) nor under conditions of issue conflict (H3a). Public conflict works in the

‘wrong’ direction by increasing the distance between voters and parties rather than diminishing it (H4) – but this effect is very weak and ‘borderline significant’. The format of party competition has a minor effect in the expected direction: the larger the effective number of parties, the smaller the distance between voters and parties (H5). Long-lasting membership improves the congruence between voters and parties, which however is not what we expected to find (H6). But – these bivariate correlations are of course only part of the story: the *ceteris paribus* (other thing being equal) condition requires a multivariate analysis.

Table 3 presents the results of a multiple regression that are better able to identify *ceteris paribus* effects.⁹ Running briefly through our hypotheses again, we find H1a disconfirmed as party size seems to decrease rather than increase the congruence between voters and parties. By contrast, H1b seems to be corroborated: parties in government are closer to their voters than parties in opposition. Large government parties are more like large parties – somewhat farther away from their voters than others – which disconfirms H1c. Large parties are found to be closer to their voters in old member countries and even more so in environments characterised by conflict over Europe and the EU; these findings confirm H2a and H2b.

The positive coefficient of the pre-post-election differential suggests that parties tend to be responsive (which implies that they are closer to their voters ahead of the election than after it), a result that seems to confirm H3 and previous results based on other data (Schmitt & Thomassen 2000). However, the effect is very weak and indeed insignificant if we apply conventional levels of statistical significance. The interaction between the pre-post-differential and the intensity of issue conflict however is clearly insignificant, so that H3a is disconfirmed.

According to H4, issue conflict is expected to increase congruence – an expectation that has already been confirmed regarding in the special case of large parties (H1c). The main effect of issue conflict, however, points in the other direction and suggests parties and voters are farther apart the more disagreement there is in the citizenry about Europe; this disconfirms H4.

Political science folklore about the advantage of multi-party systems regarding the effectiveness of political representation (H5) is also disconfirmed. While the coefficient

⁹ Because of the possibility of correlated standard errors due to the stacked format of the data matrix, we calculate robust standard errors that are controlled for clustered auto-correlation in elections (recall that the estimates of party positions are the same over all five steps of the pre-post differential).

Table 3
Determinants of Congruence
(linear regression results)

distance	B	robust std. err.	t	p > t	95% conf. interval	
Constant	1.178	.302	3.91	.006	.465	1.89
party specific predictors						
party size [vote share in EP election]	0.060	.022	2.71	.030	.008	.112
governmental status [0=opp, 1=gov]	-1.443	.332	-4.35	.003	-2.22	-.658
election specific predictors						
Pre-post-differential [2b, 1b, 0, 1a, 2a]	0.005	.013	0.38	.711	-.026	.036
system specific predictors						
issue conflict on EC/EU-membership	1.161	.335	3.46	.010	.369	1.95
effective number of electoral parties	-0.025	.019	-1.32	.229	-.069	.020
duration of membership [in years]	-0.007	.004	-1.59	.156	-.017	.003
Interactions						
party size * governmental status	0.032	.010	3.31	.013	.009	.055
party size * duration of membership	-.0009	.0003	-2.68	.032	-.0017	-.0001
party size * issue conflict	-0.073	.021	-3.57	.009	-.121	-.025
pre-post-differential * issue conflict	-0.001	.001	-1.29	.237	-.003	.001

Robust standard errors adjusted for 8 clusters in elections; number of obs. 1018; prob > F = 0,000; R2 = 0.12.

points in the right (negative) direction (the more parties, the smaller the distance), it is very weak and clearly insignificant. The same is true for our final hypothesis that predicts a decline in issue congruence as a function of growing “EU membership age”.

If we try to strike a balance at the end of this, we find three central variables that can account for at least some of the variance in issue congruence: governmental status, issue conflict, and party size. Government parties are closer to their voters than opposition parties. Parties are closer to their voters when there popular disagreement over the issue. And large parties are

‘conditionally’ closer to their voters, conditionally meaning: when they are in government; in old member countries; and when the EU is a controversial issue.

6. Conclusions and Perspectives

Given the complex institutional architecture of the multi-level system of EU governance, political representation based on the electoral connection is a difficult but increasingly relevant research area: The EU is increasing its governmental scope almost by the day, and the parliament enjoys rising powers while it does not have – and will not have in the foreseeable future – uncontested legislative authority. This paper discussed the question of what European issues are, arguing that European issues are those that are discussed and decided upon in the EU political apparatus – and thus far more than ‘constitutional’ position issues which are often mistaken to represent what there is of ‘European issues’. These constitutional position issues, however, are the ones that prior research has identified as the most difficult when it comes to the congruence of voters and parties, which is why they are accepted in this paper as well as indicators of issue congruence between voters and parties. Based on prior research, a number of hypotheses are presented and a dynamic model of issue congruence is specified that allows for both intra-election and inter-election variation. In addition to time, party-, election- and system-specific factors are identified that are expected to be able to explain variation in issue congruence over EU membership and European integration more broadly. The combination of Eurobarometer and Euromanifesto data is used as the empirical evidence against which the hypotheses are tested. At the end, it turns out that time is actually much less central a predictor than initially thought. What is more important for effective representation is the degree of politicisation of the European issue, and the behaviour of political parties that can be affected by their size and governmental status.

Where does that lead us to? Further inquiry should probably aim at increasing variation in party- and system-specific factors. The pre-post-election differential did not do much of an explanatory job – it can be disregarded in further work. This will allow to include the 8 post-communist member-countries of the Union, and their host of political parties, in the analysis. There is more work to do ...

(to be developed)

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