

OPINION CONGRUENCE BETWEEN VOTERS AND PARTIES ON THE EU DIMENSION

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes variation in party-voter congruence on European integration in the EU member states. Drawing on existing research on policy representation, we put forward nine hypotheses which we test with data from the EES2004 survey. We first show that parties are closer to their voters on the left/right dimension than on the EU dimension. Parties are also more supportive of European integration than their voters. Party system characteristics (number of parties, government composition, and ideological range) did not have an effect on opinion congruence. The responsiveness analysis at the party level shows that government parties were more supportive of integration than opposition parties; party size was related to responsiveness, with opinion congruence higher in smaller parties; and responsiveness was lower among centrist parties. According to the results, voters are better represented on the EU dimension by their parties in the new member countries than in the older EU member states. This difference between the old and new member countries may result from the EU occupying a more central place on the political agendas of these countries.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Representation is both a complex and contested phenomenon. It is complex in the sense that it can be approached from a variety of angles, with most of the empirical research focusing on the linkages between the representatives (such as members of parliament and political parties) and those that elect them. It is contested in the sense that there is no commonly accepted normative rule or objective criteria for assessing whether representation works or not.

Nonetheless, students of representative democracy do agree on certain basic conditions that a political system should meet. First, the composition of the representative body, primarily the legislature, should reflect the composition of the electorate, thus ensuring that all main societal groups are represented in public policy-making. Secondly, there should be at least *some* congruence of preferences between the citizens and their representatives. While there is no consensus on what constitutes a sufficiently high level of such opinion agreement, it is easy to agree with Wessels (1999: 137), who states that “the smallest common denominator in normative terms, though, is that in a democracy there should be some match between the interests of the people and what representatives promote.”

European democracies are effectively party democracies. Political parties are the main actors in screening and selecting candidates for public offices, they fight for power in competitive elections, and form governments after the elections. The main parties in Europe were formed on the basis of social cleavages well-recognized in party literature, with the left-right dimension forming the dominant axis of contestation (Huber & Inglehart 1995). This applies particularly to those ‘west’ European countries where democratic rule has functioned without interruption for several decades. Also the party systems in the newly democratized Central and East European countries are by and large based on the familiar socio-economic cleavage, but the ideological underpinnings of these party systems are less stable and still undergoing a period of institutionalization.

Considering the dominance of the left-right cleavage in European politics, it is not surprising that most studies find political parties to be quite representative of their voters on this dimension. However, any new dimension or issue that enters the political agenda, particularly if that issue is only weakly related to the left-right dimension, is bound to cause problems for parties. The main such new dimension in European politics is undoubtedly the development of the European Union (EU). Indeed, several scholars have argued that the European party-political space, at least in those countries that joined the Union before 2004, is nowadays based on two main dimensions -- the old left-right cleavage and the new EU cleavage, often defined as an anti/pro European integration dimension (e.g., Hix 1999; Hooghe & Marks 1999; Marks & Wilson 1999; Marks & Steenbergen eds. 2002, 2004; Mattila 2004). One of the key arguments of this research is that low connectedness between these two dimensions creates problems for the established political parties, that hence have an incentive to downplay European issues and to structure competition along the more familiar and thus safer socio-economic cleavage.

This paper analyses the congruence of preferences between political parties and their voters on European integration in 22 EU member countries. More specifically, we are not only interested in reporting levels of issue agreement, but our main aim is to find explanations for the variation between the individual countries and parties. The paper is structured as follows. The next section presents the findings of existing research on policy representation and on the impact of EU on the party systems of its member states. Drawing on these two strands of research, the research hypotheses and data are introduced in sections three and four. The empirical analysis is found in sections five and six, with the former section explaining variation between countries and the latter variation between parties. The concluding discussion summarizes our findings.

2 POLICY REPRESENTATION AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

Representative democracy is based on the concepts of delegation and accountability. The main act of delegation is that of the voter casting her vote in an election, with the elected representatives then held accountable for their actions in the next election. When choosing their party and/or candidate in the election, voters presumably have at least some knowledge of the preferences of the parties that compete in the election. Indeed, according to the so-called party government or 'responsible party model', that has driven much of the policy representation research in the European context (Powell 2004: 284), cohesive parties should offer competing choices to the voters, who then vote for the party that they perceive as being closest to their preferences. Once in office, parties will carry out the promises made in the campaign, and hence eventual government policy will be in line with the preferences of the majority of the electorate. Whether these conditions are met is obviously an empirical matter.

Policy representation is a crucial aspect of the act of delegation in the responsible party model. Not only should parties offer competing policy bundles to the voters, but voters should also be aware of these differences and then choose their party accordingly. As European party systems are based on the left-right dimension, it is likely that citizens possess most accurate knowledge about the parties' positions on that dimension, and that the farther one moves from traditional socio-economic questions, the less informed the voters are of party positions. According to Kitschelt (2000: 851), political parties stick to the established patterns of competition and reduce the dimensionality of the political discourse for at least two reasons: "First, in representative democracy, [...] representatives are charged with representing their constituencies over an infinite and uncertain range of issues. Thus, to enable voters to anticipate candidate positions on issues in which voters do not know the parties' positions or in which parties do not (yet) have positions, parties must signal to voters more fundamental principles for generating policy stances that would apply to new and ex ante unforeseeable political issue conflicts. Second, voters are information misers and typically lack time and

resources to review the candidates' and parties' specific issue positions. Instead, they are looking for simple underlying principles according to which parties generate issue stances.”

The dominance of the left-right dimension, the familiarity of that dimension among the voters, and parties own strategic interests all thus contribute to attention in European politics focusing on socio-economic matters. Hence it is not surprising that research on policy representation has found European political parties to be fairly representative of their voters on the left-right dimension. Both comparative analyses and country studies testify that, by and large, European citizens are well represented on that key dimension of party competition (e.g., Dalton 1985; Klingemann 1995; Widfeldt 1995; Kitschelt et al. 1999; Pierce 1999; Thomassen & Schmitt 1997, 1999a; Holmberg 2000).²

It is easy to concur with Kitschelt (2000: 845) who argues that “it is a key task for political scientists to identify the conditions under which politicians are responsive to citizens’ preferences.” However, there appears to be no consensus on which factors work for and against effective policy representation in left-right matters. The only broader study that focuses exclusively on comparing policy representation in different countries is Miller et al. (1999), which employs largely comparable elite and citizen data from France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United States. Interestingly, the authors of that book reach quite divergent conclusions. Wessels (1999) did find a link between party system features and policy representation, with the median voter better represented in countries with majoritarian electoral systems, and the party voters better represented in countries with proportional representation (PR) election systems. Wessels (1999: 153) also concluded that “the stronger the polarization -- the more differentiated the supply -- the better the match between party voters and MPs of that party, as compared with median voter policy representation”.

² For an excellent review of the policy representation literature, see Powell (2004).

However, Holmberg (1999: 94) reached a different conclusion: “Given the differences in measurement techniques and measurement scales and the very limited number of issues included in some studies, the conservative conclusion is that the degree of collective policy congruence between elected leaders and voters did not differ in any substantial way between the five political systems ... the political system does not matter when it comes to degrees of policy congruence between leaders and voters in Western democracies.” Pierce (1999: 31) also found no connection between the fragmentation of the party system and effectiveness of policy representation: “Without in the least challenging the appropriateness of a multi-party system for a society with multiple and deep social cleavages, one must doubt that multi-party systems (at least of the kind examined here) multiply the combinations of issue positions offered to the voters in ways that produce any sizeable mass response.”

With data from Eurobarometers and from a survey of MEP candidates carried out in 1979, Dalton (1985) compared policy congruence in the then nine European Community countries. At the system level, Dalton found that PR electoral systems and higher party diversity (operationalized as number of parties in parliament and fractionalization of the legislature) produced better issue agreement: “As the number and variety of parties increases, it becomes easier for voters to locate a party that simultaneously represents their views on all issue dimensions.” (Dalton 1985: 287) At party level, Dalton showed that parties on the right and particularly on the left (as opposed to being centrist) had better opinion congruence, and that having a centralized party organization also facilitated issue agreement. Comparing issue congruence on the left-right dimension between the median voter and the government in twelve industrialized countries, Huber and Powell (1994) showed that congruence increased when the effective number of parties and the proportionality of election outcomes also increased.

However, the reality is altogether different when we examine attitudes towards European integration, which arguable has become the second main cleavage in European politics.

Recently an increasing number of studies have focused on the role of parties in the EU system. Perhaps the most significant finding of this research is the divisive nature of the European question. Regardless of the data used -- voting behaviour in legislatures, surveys of citizens and MPs, expert surveys, or more descriptive approaches -- European integration is clearly a destabilizing factor for national parties.

While European questions have in several EU countries led to severe conflicts among and within parties, European integration has nonetheless not altered the basic structure of national party systems by resulting in the formation of new parties (Mair 2000; Raunio 2005). This is not surprising. Indeed, there are very strong reasons to expect that we would not witness the entry of new parties as a result of European integration -- or any other issue for that matter. The main explanatory factor for the observed stability is that the established national parties have an interest in sustaining the status quo and the prevailing structures of party competition. It would be dangerous and potentially costly for parties to change existing structures of electoral contestation. After all, despite the gradual partisan dealignment, parties still have their 'natural' pools of voters and they have reputations for particular programmes and policy objectives. Giving the EU dimension a stronger role in the competition for votes would potentially lead to instability that might weaken the role of the main national parties (Marks & Steenbergen 2002: 881-882). As Hooghe et al. (2002: 970) argue: "Parties that are successful in the existing structure of contestation have little incentive to rock the boat, while unsuccessful parties, that is, parties with weak electoral support or those that are locked out of government, have an interest in restructuring competition. The same strategic logic that leads mainstream parties to assimilate the issues raised by European integration into the Left/Right dimension of party competition leads peripheral parties to exploit European integration in an effort to shake up the party system." Viewed from the perspective of the responsible party model, mainstream parties are thus offering competing choices to voters in left-right matters, but not in European questions.

While studies have shown parties to be fairly representative of their voters on the left/right dimension, the picture is much bleaker in European matters. First, parties are ideologically less cohesive on integration than in traditional left/right issues (e.g., Hix 1999; Ray 1999; Thomassen & Schmitt 1999b). Moreover, within parties the elected representatives are considerably more supportive of integration than their voters, with the European dimension revealing a wide gap between citizens and MPs. The first comparative study on issue agreement on integration matters did, however, find considerable congruence of opinion. Comparing voters' perceptions of where parties stand and voters' own preferences from a survey carried out right after the 1989 EP elections, van der Eijk and Franklin (1991: 124) showed that most parties were representative of their voters in integration matters, with "only a few parties" taking positions that were clearly out of line with the position of their voters.

Comparing the preferences of citizens and candidates in the 1994 EP elections in concrete policy issues about EU (abolishment of borders, unemployment, single currency), Thomassen and Schmitt (1997: 181) concluded that the elite and the electorate were "living in different European worlds". And, when comparing the views of MPs and MEPs and the citizens on those same issues, the same authors stated a couple of years later that "across the board, voters' attitudes appeared to be less pro-European than those of the political elites, whether they were members of the European Parliament or of the national parliaments." (Thomassen & Schmitt 1999a: 206). Using the same data Marsh and Wessels (1997) showed that MEPs from countries with highly proportional electoral systems were more likely to represent citizens better than MEPs from countries with less proportional systems.

In another article, based on elite and citizen survey data from 1979 and 1994, Schmitt and Thomassen (2000) showed that while the policy preferences of the voters and the parties do diverge, the issue agreement between voters and party elites about the general development of integration ("are you for or against efforts being made to unify Europe?") was as high as on the left-right dimension. Thus they argued that while policy representation may be failing in

specific EU policy issues, it does seem to work fairly well as far as the overall development of integration is concerned. Finally, using data from the 1999 European Election Study (EES), in which the voters were asked to place both themselves and the parties on the anti/pro-integration dimension, van der Eijk and Franklin (2004) showed that the diversity of opinion among the electorate was not reflected at the level of the parties. There was thus, according to those authors, “potential for contestation” on EU issues, with the EU issue being a “sleeping giant” in European politics. The study also showed the parties to be far more supportive of integration than the voters.

Most of these previous studies on policy representation in EU matters have basically just reported the preferences or positions of voters and parties. Only a few of them have gone beyond descriptive analysis. Our study constitutes an attempt at explaining variation in levels of issue agreement both between countries and between individual political parties. Moreover, the existing body of research on policy representation has produced somewhat contradictory findings, with no consensus on what explains variation between individual countries or parties. Drawing partly on that previous research, we shall in the next section introduce our research hypotheses.

3 RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The primary goal of this paper is to explain variation in party-voter congruence on European integration in the EU member states. Our analysis proceeds in two stages. First, we compare (in section five) representativeness at the system level by comparing the responsiveness of party systems in the different EU countries. Then we shall change our focus to the party level, with section six explaining variation between individual parties. Moreover, in order to put our results on congruence in EU matters into perspective, we shall also report congruence levels on the left-right dimension.

In line with this approach, our research hypotheses are also broken down into three categories. First we put forward three general hypotheses. As previous research indicates that the elites are more supportive of integration than the citizens, *we expect to find that also in 2004 the parties were, according to the citizens, more pro-integrationist than their voters* (Hypothesis 1). We also expect, again in line with the findings of previous research, *opinion congruence to be higher on the left-right dimension than on the anti/pro-integration dimension* (H2).

Our third general hypothesis is not derived from previous research on policy representation, and focuses more specifically on European integration. We expect that the *timing of membership matters, with lower congruence in EU matters in the new member states that joined the Union in the spring of 2004* (H3), just under two months before the survey from which our data is taken was carried out. The reason for this expectation is that in these newly democratized member countries European questions are new to the parties and to the voters, and therefore parties have had less time to adopt positions over integration and there has been less time for parties and their supporters to ‘find each other’ in EU matters. Another factor that speaks on behalf of this hypothesis is that stable party systems should produce higher opinion congruence (Holmberg 1999), with the newly democratized post-communist countries still characterized by much higher volatility between elections than the ‘old’ EU member states.

Moving next to explaining variation between individual countries (system level), we test the impact of three factors. Party system characteristics have been argued by several authors to impact the effectiveness of policy representation. While previous studies have produced mixed findings, they seem to lean towards arguing that higher party system fragmentation improves congruence of opinion between the mass and the elites (e.g., Wessels 1999). Hence we also hypothesize that *the more fragmented the party system, the higher the congruence of opinions between voters and parties* (H4).

Our second system-level variable is ideological range, operationalized as the distance on both the left/right and the EU dimensions between the most left-wing and the most right-wing or the most anti-EU and the most pro-EU party in the country. According to this hypothesis, *greater ideological range will produce better representativeness* (H5), as parties offer more policy options to voters. The third system-level variable deals with government status. According to H6 the level of congruence depends on the breadth of governments, with *representativeness lower in countries that have more parties in the government*. The rationale for this hypothesis is that when entering multiparty coalitions, parties need to make compromises with their coalition partners that may distance them from the preferences of their voters.

Turning to explaining variation between individual parties, we put forward three hypotheses. We again expect government status to make a difference, with the level of congruence depending on whether a party is in the government or not. We argue that *government membership makes parties less representative of their voters* (H7), with the logic here being the same as in hypothesis six, that participation in government, particularly the bargaining involved in multiparty coalitions, distances parties from their voters. Additionally, government parties represent their country at the EU level in the Council and the European Council, and this may present them with further restrictions. Our second party-level variable is party size. We expect *representativeness to be higher in small parties than in large parties* (H8). The rationale here is simple: small parties are likely to be ideologically more homogeneous than larger parties that have needed to moderate their views in order to broaden their electoral appeal.

The final party-level variable tests the impact of party ideology. This variable is derived from Dalton (1985), according to whom ideological centrism had a negative effect on policy representation. Hence we also expect that ideological centrism produces lower congruence, with *parties that are further from the political centre on the left/right dimension being more*

representative of their voters (H9). The rationale behind this hypothesis is that parties that are situated on the left and the right have clearer policy profiles than centrist parties, with this ideological clarity facilitating higher responsiveness. These three hypotheses will be tested in section six of our paper.

4 DATA

Our data is taken from the European Election Study 2004 (EES2004) project, which consisted (for the most part) of identical surveys carried out in the EU countries just after the European Parliament elections held in June. Unfortunately not all countries were included in the survey, and hence our data set includes only 22 political systems.³ Of these political systems 21 are EU member states, and additionally we have data from Northern Ireland in which a separate survey was conducted because Northern Ireland has its own unique party system different from the rest of the United Kingdom. Although Northern Ireland is not an EU member state, for the sake of simplicity, we will refer to our 22 political systems as “member states” or as “member countries” in the text.

We use questionnaire data for locating both the parties and their voters on the anti/pro-integration dimension and on the left/right dimension. Hence our approach differs from the majority of previous studies on policy representation that have compared voter data with elite-level data (mainly surveys of MPs or MEPs). Of the studies dealing with policy representation in EU matters, only van der Eijk and Franklin (1991) relied exclusively on voter data as we do here.

The unit of observation in our study is a political party. We compare voters’ own policy positions with their assessment of the position of the party they voted for. Basically, we

³ The EES2004 study included all the EU member states with the exception of Malta. Unfortunately, in three countries the questionnaire did not include the EU and left/right scale questions necessary for our analysis. Therefore, the data set does not include Belgium, Lithuania and Sweden.

assume that when the distance between voters and their party is small, parties do a good job of representing their voters and vice versa. For each party we calculated two measures. First, using only the respondents who indicated that they voted for a particular party in the 2004 EP elections, we calculated their average positions on the EU and left/right dimensions. Second, we calculated from these same respondents where they perceived their 'own' party to stand on these same dimensions. Comparing these two average values it is possible to analyze how close or far voters feel that their parties are to themselves.

The main interest in this study is the distance between voters and their parties on the EU dimension which was operationalized in the EES2004 questionnaire as a 1-10 scale measuring respondents' attitudes towards European unification. The exact wording of the question was "Some say European unification should be pushed further. Others say it already has gone too far. What is your opinion? Please indicate your views using a 10-point-scale. On this scale, 1 means unification 'has already gone too far' and 10 means it 'should be pushed further'. What number on this scale best describes your position?". This question was followed by several questions where the respondents were asked to indicate, using the same scale, where the main parties of their respective countries were located. In the following, we refer to this dimension as the 'anti/pro EU dimension' or simply as the 'EU dimension'.

In addition, and in order to put our results into perspective, we compare policy representation on the EU dimension with representativeness on the conventional left/right dimension. Measures from this dimension are based on the following question: "In political matters people talk of 'the left' and 'the right'. What is your position? Please indicate your views using any number on a 10-point-scale. On this scale, where 1 means 'left' and 10 means 'right', which number best describes your position?". As with the EU question, this question was followed by a set of questions in which respondents were asked to indicate the positions of the main parties in their country on the left/right scale according to their perception.

Our data set includes 118 parties from 22 political systems (79 from the old and 39 from the new member states). In the case of some smaller parties there were only a handful of respondents who voted for them. In this study only parties with ten or more voters among the respondents are included to avoid calculating policy position averages from only a very small group of voters. This restriction means that some small parties are dropped from the analysis. Furthermore, a much more severe restriction for the inclusion of some parties is caused by the system of using joint lists in several member states. In some countries the respondents voted for lists which included two or more parties, and hence we do not have data on which particular party they supported. These parties had to be dropped from the analysis. For example, in Hungary the joint list of two parties, Fidesz and MPP, gained 47% of the votes in the 2004 EP elections. However, from the questionnaire data we know only that some respondents voted for the Fidesz-MPP list but not which of the two parties they supported. Hence, these two parties cannot be included in the data set and as a result we were able to include only two parties from Hungary in our study. Fortunately, for most of the countries we were able to include all or, at least, most of the major parties (see Appendix for more information). Put together, the parties included in our analysis won on average over 80% of the votes in the 2004 European Elections. In many countries, such as Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany and Greece, they won over 90% of the votes.

We acknowledge that voter perceptions of party locations may not be accurate reflections of reality, with the majority of European citizens probably having quite limited information or knowledge of party policies, at least concerning European integration. However, it is worth recalling that according to the so-called party government or 'responsible party model', voters should vote for the party that they *perceive* as being closest to their preferences. Voters may not be able to place parties accurately on political dimensions, but they base their vote choices on their own perceptions of party and/or candidate positions. Other approaches to inferring parties' positions, such as expert surveys and content analysis of party programmes (Mair

2001), or using elite data, do not allow us to directly compare the positions of voters and their perceptions of where the parties stand.

5 SYSTEM LEVEL ANALYSIS

There are several ways of measuring the representativeness of individual politicians or political parties (see Achen 1978). We begin our analysis with two very simple measures. First, we analyze the distance between the average position of party voters and the position of their party on the EU and left/right dimensions. This distance measure does not tell us anything about the direction of possible differences between parties and their voters, for example, whether parties have adopted more favourable positions towards European integration than their voters. The second measure, called 'bias', is simply the difference between the party position and the voter position. Positive values of this measure indicate that parties have more pro-integration stances than their voters on the EU dimension or that they have more rightist views on the left/right dimension while negative values indicate the opposite.

Distance and bias averages for the 22 political systems in our analysis are presented in Table 1. The second and third columns of the table show how close or far an average party is located from its voters on the EU and left/right dimensions. On the EU dimension parties in Northern Ireland are closest to their voters. The average distance between a party and its voters in Northern Ireland is only 0.11 on the 10-point EU scale, which means that parties are indeed very close to their voters. Also on the left/right dimension Northern Irish parties seem to be close to their voters. This is quite surprising because neither the traditional left/right dimension nor the EU dimension is hardly the defining political cleavage in Northern Irish politics.

[TABLE 1 APPROXIMATELY HERE]

Other countries where parties are located very close to their voters on the EU dimension are Cyprus, the Czech Republic and France. On the EU dimension the biggest gap between parties and voters can be found in Britain, where the average distance is more than ten times bigger than in Northern Ireland. One would be tempted to say that this is related to the British majoritarian political system but this is clearly not the case as distances are large also in some countries with highly proportional electoral systems, like Estonia and Finland.

When looking at the average distance measures at the bottom part of Table 1, one can notice that parties are closer to their voters on the left/right dimension than they are on the EU dimension, which supports our second hypothesis. Similar conclusions can be reached when one compares the distances in the old and in the new EU member states. Basically, parties in the new member states are as close to their voters as they are in the old member states on both dimensions. The small differences in the actual figures are not statistically significant. Thus, our hypothesis (H3) expecting better representation in the old than in the new member states on the EU dimension does not get any support.

Turning to the bias measures, shown in the last two columns of Table 1, it can be seen that parties are indeed more favourable to European integration than their voters, as our first hypothesis expected. On the EU dimension positive figures mean that parties have adopted more pro-EU positions than their voters. Only in the Czech Republic, Portugal and Poland are voters on average more favourable to European integration than the parties they voted for. However, the figures for these three countries are very small indicating that the anti-Europe bias among parties is practically insignificant. Biggest differences between parties and their voters are found in Britain, Luxembourg, Hungary and Finland.

The pro-European integration bias among parties can be seen both in the new and in the old member states. However, the average bias seems to be bigger in the old member states (0.51)

than in the new (0.35), but the difference is far from being statistically significant. The bias on the left/right dimension is only a half of what it is on the EU dimension indicating, again, that parties represent their voters better on the left/right dimension than on the EU dimension.

In Table 2 the relationship between party system characteristics and representativeness on both the EU and left/right dimensions is analyzed using Pearson's correlation coefficients.⁴ The distance and bias figures are from Table 1. According to our hypotheses (H4-H6) the number of parties, the number of government parties and the ideological range offered by the parties would impact on representativeness. The number of parties is measured with the Laakso-Taagepera (1979) index of effective parties (calculated from the seat distribution in national parliaments at the time of the elections) and the number of government parties is simply the number of parties in national governments in June 2004 during the EP elections. The ideological range, i.e., the distance between the extreme parties, is measured both on the EU and the left/right dimension using the EES204 data set.

[TABLE 2 APPROXIMATELY HERE]

The results in Table 2 are rather disappointing. Most of the correlation coefficients are small, with only one of them being statistically significant and even its sign is contrary to what we hypothesized. We expected that large governments make parties less representative of their voters but the negative coefficient indicates that in political systems with large multiparty governments parties are closer to their voters than in countries where governments include less parties. All in all, none of our three system level hypotheses gained support in the correlation analysis.

⁴ We used correlation analysis because the number of observations is relatively small (22). Additionally, we tested the same hypotheses with regression analysis both including each explanatory variable individually in the regression models and including them all simultaneously, but the results were not different from those of Table 2 in any meaningful sense.

6 PARTY LEVEL ANALYSIS

Next we turn to analyzing voter-party opinion congruence on party level using Achen's (1978) regression based approach which he calls the responsiveness measure of representation. This approach has been used earlier, e.g. by Dalton (1985), Herrera et al. (1992), Wessels (1999) and Kitschelt et al. (1999). The basic idea behind the responsiveness approach is that the better we are able to predict party positions on policy or issue dimensions using the average voter positions on these same dimensions the better the responsiveness. This can be expressed as a regression equation as follows (see Dalton 1985: 281):

$$\text{Party position} = a + b(\text{voter position})$$

The degree of overall party responsiveness is determined by both the intercept a and the regression coefficient b of the model.

According to this perspective of political representation, ideal responsiveness occurs when the intercept of the regression line is zero and the slope coefficient is one. This means that, for example, if the party voter average on the EU dimension is seven, the position of their party is also seven. If the average party voter is located at two, so will the party and so on. Different combinations of a and b correspond with different types of deviations from ideal responsiveness. If both b and a equal one, parties have a positive bias in the policy positions meaning that they are on the average located one point 'to the right' on the dimension. For example, if parties adopt more pro-European integration positions than their voters, as our first hypothesis expected, we will see positive intercepts in our regression models.

It is not only the intercept that affects the degree of responsiveness. The regression coefficient b has also an interesting interpretation. When b is less than one, parties adopt more convergent positions than their voters, that is, the opinion differences between parties are smaller than between their supporters. On the other hand, if b is greater than one the party system is more polarized and parties accentuate the differences between voter groups. This

means that at both ends of the policy dimension parties adopt more extreme positions than their voters.⁵

Table 3 presents the results of the responsiveness analyses (Models A) for all parties in the data set and then separately for parties in the old and in the new member states. Next, we included some additional variables to the analyses (Models B) to see how they affect party responsiveness. These new variables are related to our last three hypotheses which concerned the effect of government participation (H7), size of the party (H8) and ideological centrism (H9) on representativeness. Government participation is measured with a dummy variable, coded one if the party was in government at the time of the 2004 EP elections and zero if it was in opposition. The size of the party is measured as the vote share it gained in the same elections. Finally, ideological centrism (or extremism) on the left/right dimension is measured with two dummy variables which indicate whether the party was a left-wing or right-wing party while the reference category is a centrist party.⁶

[TABLE 3 APPROXIMATELY HERE]

Examining the results of the responsiveness analysis (Model A) containing all parties in Table 3, we notice that European parties deviate from the ideal model of responsiveness in a statistically significant way. The intercept of the model is 1.45 indicating that parties are, according to voter perceptions, more favourable to European integration than their supporters. Also the slope coefficient (0.83) is less than one, showing that the variation among parties on the EU dimension is smaller than among their voters. Basically, this confirms the results obtained by van der Eijk and Franklin (2004) using data from the 1999 EP elections, who concluded that European parties do not differentiate themselves clearly enough in EU matters to offer competing alternatives to voters.

⁵ For a more thorough discussion and illustration of various combinations of the intercept and the slope coefficient and their implications for political representation, see Kitschelt et al. (1999: 80-87).

⁶ We defined parties that had average values below 4 on the 10-point left/right scale as left-wing parties. Parties with values over 7 were classified as right-wing parties.

When the new and old member states are compared interesting results emerge. In the case of parties from the old member countries, the pro-Europe bias is even clearer, almost 2 points on the 10-point scale. Also the slope coefficient is smaller (0.75), indicating smaller variation among parties than among their voters. However, the case is definitely different in the new member states where the voter-party opinion congruence corresponds almost exactly with the ideal responsiveness situation, a result which certainly refutes our third hypothesis. Clearly parties in the new member states do a better job of representing their voters in EU matters than parties in the old member states. Perhaps, EU matters occupied a larger role on the political agenda in the new member states with the enlargement (and the preceding membership referenda) taking place only shortly before the 2004 EP elections. This stronger salience of EU matters may have forced parties to be more responsive towards their voters than in the old member states where parties have mostly been trying to avoid making EU matters a central component of their electoral campaigns or discourse (see, e.g., van der Eijk & Franklin 2004).

Models B in Table 3 show how our three additional variables are related to responsiveness. Government parties both in the new and in the old member countries occupy more positive positions towards European unification than opposition parties. This may be related to the fact that government parties often have to make compromises which may distance them from their voters. These compromises are made with their government partners and, perhaps more importantly, on the EU level with other European governments and EU institutions. Opposition parties do not face similar restrictions.

Also party size is related to responsiveness with larger parties being, on the average, further away from their voters on the EU dimension than their smaller counterparts. Perhaps the catch-all nature of most of the larger parties, with broad and diverse supporter bases, enables them to avoid strong dependence on any specific group of voters (Dalton 1985: 289).

However, this effect is seen only with parties from the old member states, although the equivalent coefficient for the new member states is almost statistically significant at the 0.05 significance level. Finally, we can notice that ideological extremity on the left/right dimension has an effect on responsiveness. In the regression analysis containing all the parties both the left-wing and right-wing dummies have negative coefficients showing a smaller pro-Europe bias among these parties than among centrist parties. However, the coefficient is statistically significant only in the case of leftist parties. In the new member states this ideological effect is not visible, although the coefficients are by and large similar in size to those of the old member states. All in all, these results give, at least tentative, support to our last hypothesis expecting smaller bias in responsiveness among parties that have clearer ideological profiles than among catch-all type centrist parties.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The main objective of this paper was to analyze variation in party-voter congruence on European integration in the EU member states. In fact, as previous research had largely focused on merely reporting the positions of parties and voters, this study has therefore constituted one of the first attempts at explaining variation in policy representation on the EU dimension between countries and individual parties.

Drawing mainly on the existing comparative research on policy representation, we put forward nine hypotheses which we tested with data from the EES2004 survey carried out immediately after the June 2004 EP elections. Our findings offered only partial support for the hypotheses. In line with previous research, we first showed that parties are closer to their voters on the left/right dimension than on the EU dimension. Then we confirmed that parties are more supportive of European integration than their voters. We also expected party system characteristics (number of parties, government composition, and ideological range) to have an effect on opinion congruence, but this was clearly refuted by our analysis. The responsiveness

analysis at the party level produced also mixed findings -- government parties were more supportive of integration than opposition parties; party size was related to responsiveness, with opinion congruence higher in smaller parties; and responsiveness was lower among centrist parties. Our study also confirms that European parties, at least in the old member states, fail to offer enough competing alternatives to voters over European integration. This bodes ill for the 'responsible party model', the basic premise of which is that parties offer competing choices to the voters, who then vote for the party that is closest to their preferences.

Perhaps the most interesting result that emerges concerns policy representation in the new member states. Contrary to our hypothesis, voters are actually better represented on the EU dimension by their parties in the new member countries than in the older EU member states. We ventured a guess that this difference between the old and new member countries might result from the EU occupying a more central place on the political agendas of these countries. After all, the June 2004 EP elections took place just over a month after the enlargement which had in nine out of ten new member states been preceded by membership referenda. Hence parties had been forced to express their positions on European integration, or at least on membership, with citizens thus exposed to information about parties' European policies. This stands in quite striking contrast to the old member states, where parties have in most countries done their best not to have debates over Europe's future.

The key to improving the quality of policy representation would thus seem to lie in making the EU dimension more salient in national politics. However, this appears to be a slim prospect. Strategic considerations of national parties aside, the EU -- lacking a common identity and the power to raise taxes or to carry out major redistributive policies -- will remain for the foreseeable future 'distant' from the voters. Hence opinion congruence on the EU dimension will continue to be lower than on the conventional left-right dimension.

APPENDIX

The number of parties included in the data set is presented in Table A1. The third column of the table indicates the combined vote share that the parties included in the data set received in the 2004 European Parliament elections in each country. The last column shows the most important parties or lists missing from the data set. We listed only parties or lists that received over 5% of the votes in the 2004 elections.

[TABLE A1 APPROXIMATELY HERE]

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Table 1. Opinion congruence between parties and their voters, 2004.

COUNTRY	Distance		Bias	
	EU dimension	Left/right dimension	EU dimension	Left/right dimension
Northern Ireland	0.11	0.19	0.05	0.17
Cyprus	0.32	0.41	0.24	-0.13
Czech Republic	0.47	0.70	-0.09	-0.17
France	0.47	0.35	0.47	0.29
Netherlands	0.54	0.34	0.27	0.03
Spain	0.59	0.24	0.25	0.17
Slovakia	0.75	0.70	0.21	0.61
Ireland	0.76	0.57	0.72	0.26
Italy	0.82	0.44	0.32	0.23
Austria	0.86	0.67	0.86	0.27
Denmark	0.87	0.50	0.04	0.17
Germany	0.88	0.43	0.21	0.11
Slovenia	0.88	0.55	0.88	0.55
Portugal	0.95	0.68	-0.22	-0.10
Latvia	0.95	0.44	0.95	0.13
Poland	1.01	0.64	-0.30	0.51
Estonia	1.03	0.70	0.35	0.11
Greece	1.17	0.62	0.01	0.34
Finland	1.22	0.48	1.22	0.24
Hungary	1.46	0.11	1.46	-0.01
Luxembourg	1.47	0.67	1.47	0.60
Britain	1.54	0.49	1.54	0.49
All countries	0.86	0.51	0.46	0.24
Old member states	0.87	0.47	0.51	0.23
New member states	0.86	0.58	0.35	0.26

Table 2. Pearson's correlation coefficients between opinion congruence and political system characteristics (*p<0.05, N=22).

	Distance		Bias	
	EU dimension	Left/right dimension	EU dimension	Left/right dimension
Number of parties	-0.20	0.17	-0.05	0.17
Number of government parties	-0.45*	-0.06	-0.09	-0.03
Ideological range (EU dimension)	0.33	0.31	-0.22	0.10
Ideological range (left/right dimension)	-0.18	0.03	-0.29	-0.27

Table 3. Regression analyses of party responsiveness on the EU dimension (standard errors in parentheses, *p<0.05, **p<0.01).

	All parties		Parties in old member states		Parties in new member states	
	Model A	Model B	Model A	Model B	Model A	Model B
Constant	1.45** (0.45)	1.30** (0.41)	1.87** (0.52)	1.59** (0.47)	-0.03 (1.17)	0.26 (1.18)
Voters' EU position ^a	0.83** (0.08)	0.80** (0.07)	0.75** (0.10)	0.75** (0.09)	1.06 (0.18)	0.92 (0.18)
Party in government	-	0.63** (0.16)	-	0.53* (0.21)	-	0.88** (0.30)
Party size	-	2.34** (0.69)	-	2.29** (0.77)	-	3.31 (1.66)
Right wing party	-	-0.35 (0.19)	-	-0.38 (0.23)	-	-0.37 (0.37)
Left wing party	-	-0.52** (0.17)	-	-0.47* (0.22)	-	-0.63 (0.35)
Adjusted R ²	0.49	0.63	0.44	0.59	0.47	0.57
N	118	118	79	79	39	39

^a The statistical null hypothesis is that the regression coefficients equal 1.

Table A1. The number of parties in the data set, their combined vote share in the 2004 EP elections, and the major parties missing from our data set.

COUNTRY	Number of parties	Combined vote coverage % (EP2004)	Major parties or lists missing (> 5 % vote share)
Austria	4	85.2	Liste Dr. Hans-Peter Martin
Britain	4	80.4	-
Cyprus	4	84.0	For Europe
Czech Republic	3	59.1	KDU, CSL, US, DEU
Denmark	8	98.7	-
Estonia	7	92.2	-
Finland	7	97.8	-
France	7	87.5	-
Germany	6	90.1	-
Greece	5	94.8	-
Hungary	2	42.0	FIDESZ, MPP, MDF
Ireland	6	84.5	-
Italy	10	58.6	DS, La Margherita, SDI
Latvia	6	78.2	-
Luxembourg	5	97.1	-
Netherlands	7	82.4	CU, SGP
Northern Ireland	4	90.8	-
Poland	7	82.5	SDL, UP
Portugal	3	61.0	CDS, PP, PDS
Slovakia	7	89.7	-
Slovenia	3	55.4	LDS, DESUS
Spain	3	89.4	Galeusca-Pueblos de Europa
Total	116	81.0	
Old member states	77	85.6	
New member states	39	72.9	