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Abstract

As the legislative body of the European Union, the European Parliament groups 732 elected representatives from over 170 national political parties from 25 member states. At the EP level, these members are affiliated with seven major party groups representing distinct policy positions. In this paper we provide precise estimates of these policy positions based on expert surveys in addition to characterizing the dimensionality of policy competition in the EP. Our results suggest not only that party groups have identifiable and differentiated positions on multiple issues of policy, but also that these positions group broadly into two orthogonal dimensions: one consisting of classic left-right social and economic issues, and the other related to the powers and scope of EU institutions.

Key Words: Party Competition, Policy Positions, European Parliament, Expert Surveys.

Word Count: 6,200 without tables but including notes and bibliography

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1. Policy and Party Competition in the European Parliament

Just as parties do in national parliaments, political groups in the European Parliament (EP) form the backbone of legislative organisation and decision making, acting as the gatekeepers to legislative amendments and the vast bulk of interruptive and procedural motions in the assembly. Political group size determines membership of committees and all other key Parliamentary decision-making bodies. Despite this important role of party groups in the functioning of the increasingly powerful European Parliament, our understanding and knowledge of the policy space in which these groups compete is rudimentary. This paper addresses this gap in our knowledge by reporting the results of an expert survey of these policy positions of the political groups in the EP.

Since its inception, the European Parliament has been organized in terms of political groupings, when members of the various political traditions in Europe (Liberals, Christian-Democrats and Socialists) began to collaborate with each other to form supranational political groupings. Since its inception in 1957, political groups in the EP have been officially recognized in the rules of procedure, and have received financial support for administrative costs from the Parliamentary budget. Seven political groups currently exist in the EP, representing over 170 different political parties from the 25 member states. These political groups vary significantly in their degree of institutionalization. Several, such as the European People's Party (EPP) and the Party of European Socialists (PES), have been in existence for over 50 years but others, such as the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE) are much younger. The largest party, the EPP, has representatives from all 25 member states, comprising a total of 268 representatives from 42 different national political parties. At the other end of the spectrum, the Union for a Europe of Nations (UEN) has just 27 members from only 6 states of the EU.

Party groups in the EP have become increasingly cohesive and powerful over time. Levels of voting cohesion have been rising across parliamentary sessions, especially for the three largest political groups, despite increases in the size of the EP and the number of member states (Raunio, 1997; Hix et al. 2005). The increasing importance of the political

groups in the EP is not unrelated to the concomitant increase in powers of the Parliament itself. Once a purely consultative institution, the EP is now a co-legislator with the European Council for the roughly 70 percent of legislation that is currently adopted within the co-decision framework. We view it as also increasingly important to understand better the political space and policy positions through which these party groups compete.

In this paper we provide the first published estimates of the policy positions of the EP political groups using expert surveys, measured just before the European elections of June 2004. Previous attempts to infer these positions have used a variety of indirect methods such as codings of European election manifestos (Gabel and Hix 2004), interviews with European elites (Arregui et al 2004), surveys of MEPs (Thomassen et al 2004) and analyses of roll call votes (Hix et al 2005). Our approach, by contrast, locates the party groups directly using pre-defined dimensions of policy by asking experts to place them on these dimensions. Using the estimates, we also characterize the policy space of EP party competition. Finally, we explore interesting patterns between EP party group positioning and the policy positions of each group's national party members.

In what follows, we discuss different approaches to measuring European policy positions, highlighting the benefits of expert survey methodology in the EP context. Next we describe our expert survey and then present and discuss the results. Following that, we use factor analysis to measure the dimensionality and components of the EP policy space, comparing our results to previous findings. Finally, we offer preliminary observations on the interaction of the EP groups and their national affiliates in terms of policy convergence, suggesting promising avenues for emerging research.

2. Measurement Approaches to European Policy Positions

Previous research has approached the problem of measuring the policy positions of the European party groups in several distinct ways. These approaches can be distinguished along two main dimensions, one associated with a substantive empirical focus and the other methodological.

As a matter of empirical focus, measurements of European party group positions have focused either on measuring the group positions of party groups in the EP directly, or on attempting to measure these indirectly through national-level measurements of the policy positions of member parties. Direct measures include analysis of roll-call votes (Hix et al. 2005; Noury 2002), Stokman and Thomson's (2004) expert interviews of political preferences on 66 Commission proposals, and a survey of MEPs (Thomassen et al 2004), or analysis of European manifestos (Gabel and Hix 2004).

Indirect measures rely on estimating the policy positions of party groups in the EP through direct measures of the positions of actors associated with EP party groups. After measuring the policy positions of these associated actors, the EP group position is assumed to be the average of their associated groups. For instance, the European Election surveys used by Thomassen and Schmidt (1997) measure the policy positions of mass publics and European Election candidates associated with EP party groups. Alternatively, expert surveys of national party positions, or CMP estimates based on national party manifestos, might be used to estimate EP party group positions. For reasons we highlight later in this paper, however, it should not be assumed that EP policy positions are always determined by the central tendency of their national party members or mass public positions. Indeed, we see this degree of convergence as one of the more interesting research questions to subject to empirical testing.

In terms of methodological divide, of course, there are numerous ways to measure the policy positions of political actors, including opinion surveys, expert surveys, expert interviews, analysis of party manifestos, and multi-dimensional scaling from roll-call votes. Each method has advantages and disadvantages. Roll-call votes, for example, provide objective political actions from which parties can be inductively located on policy scales, using statistical techniques of multi-dimensional scaling. Roll call votes may suffer selection bias, however, since they may be called selectively depending on political outcome and only for certain issues. In addition, the substantive interpretation of the policy scales which they produce must be interpreted, and these are not always clear (see Hix et al 2005).

The approach we use here is that of expert surveys: systematic placements by political experts of party groups on numerous pre-defined policy dimensions. Expert surveys have by

now a well-established track record in political science for estimating the policy positions of political actors (see for example Castles and Mair 1984, Laver and Hunt 1992, Huber and Inglehart 1995, Benoit and Laver 2005) although none has ever been used so far to estimate directly the policy positions of party groups in the European Parliament. Expert surveys as a research tool are often chosen for their economy: frequently a survey of experts represents the quickest and least expensive way to gather data on party positions. Given their relative ease of setup, it is a fairly simple matter to survey experts at any given time point, without the setup costs of a huge data-gathering project, detailed document coding, time-consuming interviews, or costly opinion surveys.

Besides the practical virtue of economy, expert surveys also have several compelling substantive advantages in the context of measuring the policy positions of European party groups. A first compelling advantage comes from the explicitly *a priori* approach to locating policy positions of the expert survey strategy. The underlying assumption is that the key substantive policy dimensions in the European Parliament can be identified in advance of the location of party groups, based on substantive expert understanding of potentially salient EU policy issues. The unknowns which experts are then asked to estimate are the locations of each party group on these *a priori* dimensions. The estimates of party group positions are then taken to be the statistically aggregated judgment of the experts, on each pre-defined dimension. Unlike factor analytic scorings, constructed scaled measures, or locations in a purely inductive space from multi-dimension scaling analyses, expert survey summaries eliminate the need for subjective and often *ad hoc*, *a posteriori* interpretation of results in terms of substantive policy scales.

A second reason to use expert surveys relates to their desirable statistical properties, namely the property that according to well-understood statistical rules, we can represent our uncertainty about our estimates of party group positions, on the basis of both the fundamental variability of party positions as measured by differences in expert judgments, and the estimation variability that is determined by sample size.

Finally, especially with regard to a rapidly evolving political institution as the EP, we regard experts as the single best source of political information on European party groups.

This is because the behavioral benchmarks which might provide observable implications of party group policy positions are not only incompletely understood, but also constantly changing as the roles, powers, size, and composition of the European Parliament evolve. As we argue later in this paper, for instance, there is a potentially complex dynamic which maps policy preferences of constituent national parties into policy preferences of EP party groups, and it cannot be assumed that the latter can always be represented by the mean of the former. Manifesto texts and roll-call votes may suffer from similar problems. Indeed, when trying to resolve which method of estimating party positions is best, we typically fall back on the expertise and wisdom of political experts. By extension, then, we see systematic collection of judgments of political experts on party locations as the best way to harvest systematically this wisdom, which will take into account all relevant information about a party group's position, including voting behavior, political speeches, debates, expressed opinions of party leaders, and so on. Even though experts will vary in their judgments, we can combine and summarize these judgments as a substantive indication of a party's likely set of policy locations. In short, our best estimate of European party group positions on policy resides in the collective wisdom of EU experts, available through systematically collected and summarized expert judgments.

3. An Expert Survey of EP Party Group Policy Positions

Our survey of experts was conducted from April to June 2004, at the time of the historic expansion eastward of the European Union to include 10 new member states and just before the June 2004 elections to the newly expanded European Parliament. Our expert survey solicited 36 experts on the European Union and the European Parliament drawn from professional directories and citation indices. These experts were largely academic specialists drawn from 32 different institutions in 12 different countries but also included a handful of European Parliament researchers who have published on the topic. Our survey system used individually sent, English-language e-mail solicitations containing a unique URL linking the respondent's solicitation e-mail to our on-line survey questionnaire website. The questionnaire itself was an interactive, on-line system linked to a database server which

recorded respondent answers. Following an initial solicitation round on April 26, we sent a second round of request four weeks later to experts who had not yet responded. A total of 14 respondents completed questionnaires in the first round, and 10 more in the follow-up round, for a total of 24 respondents and an overall response rate of 67 %.

As in the Laver and Hunt survey, EP specialists were asked to use their best judgment to locate party groups on substantive policy dimensions. The party groups were the seven political groups existing in the European Parliament at the time of the survey. These groups and their abbreviations are listed in Table 1, along with their share of the total EP seats. For some of the results we report below, we weight by seat share. While previous presentations of expert survey results (e.g. Laver and Hunt 1992, Benoit and Laver forthcoming) have weighted by *vote* share, the national-based, decentralized nature of EP elections makes computing the vote share of EP party groups a complicated exercise and we have opted for seat share instead, given that some variant of PR is used in all member states we do not believe this method will significantly distort results.

[Table 1 about here]

Each policy dimension was titled in terms of its substantive content and anchored at each end by two short phrases setting out substantive policy positions. The survey provided respondents with a list of the European party groups (see Table 1, excluding "Other") and asked respondents to locate each groups on a 20-point scale for 8 different substantive policy dimensions. Substantive policy dimensions covered in the survey included a set of four "core" dimensions deployed in every country in the Laver and Benoit study (forthcoming). These were: increase spending v. reduce taxes; "social" policy; environmental policy; and decentralization. Also included, on the basis of advice from Parliament watchers, were policy dimensions dealing with, among other matters: immigration; deregulation; privatization; religion; treatment of former communists; media freedom; EU policy; security policy; health care; and foreign ownership of land. For instance, the question on economic deregulation presented a scale anchored by two opposing endpoints as: (1) *Favours high levels of regulation and control of the markets, such as telecommunications*, versus (20) *Favours deregulation at every opportunity*. For each dimension, Parliamentary specialists were also

asked to locate each party on a scale measuring the importance of the policy dimension to the party in question. In a significant extension of the Laver and Hunt approach, we also asked experts to locate all parties on a general left-right dimension. A full list of the question wordings and dimensions is provided in Appendix A.

In addition to locating each politically significant party on each scale, the questionnaire also asked respondents to indicate the relative importance of the issue to each party (also on a 1–20 point scale). This provides a position-independent measure of the salience of the issue for a particular party group, and may be used along with party group seat share to construct a measure of the overall political salience of a particular policy dimension.

4. Results: Policy positioning in the EP

Left-Right Positioning

A full statistical summary of the results of the expert locations of the party groups on each policy dimension is presented in Table 2. The first row shows the mean score, followed by the standard error (SE), the standard deviation, and the number of respondents for each party on each dimension. The party groups are presented from left to right according to their mean values on the general left-right dimension, and are ranked following the left-right dimension by descending order of overall salience (see Table 3 below).

[Table 2 about here]

At the far left of the political spectrum is the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE), with a mean value of 3.6 (SE .51), followed by the Greens (Verts) at 5.1 (SE .36). The three largest party groups, the Party of European Socialists (PES), the European Liberal and Democrat Reform Party (ELDR), and the European People's Party (EPP) occupied positions on the left-of-centre, centre, and right-of-centre respectively. The PES scored 7.4 (SE .30), the ELDR 11.8 (SE .43) and the EPP 12.6 (SE .39). On the farther right appear the Union for a Europe of Nations (UEN), scoring 16.5 (.58), and the Group for a Europe of Democracies and Diversities (EDD) at 17.1 (SE .49).

In Figure 1 we illustrate these positions graphically. Each point represents a party's left–right mean judgment, and with the bars representing the 95% confidence interval. The left–

right space appears to consist of four sets of party groups. First, the GUE and Verts appear on the far left, with a small degree of overlap in their 95% confidence intervals. Second, the PES inhabits the moderate centre left. Third, two political groups, the ELDR and the EPP, form a grouping with a substantial degree of overlap just right of the centre. Finally, the UEN and the EDD occupy the solid right position, with their positions being statistically indistinguishable.

[Figure 1 about here]

Specific Policy Results

Looking further at Table 2, we see more specific policy results for the party groupings. On the *taxes v. spending* economic dimension of policy, the rankings are the same from left to right as for the general left–right policy dimension, although there is both more variation (higher standard errors) and higher overlap. On *taxes and spending*, two groupings of parties whose estimated positions overlap one another appear: the GUE/Verts/PES on the left, and the ELDR, EPP, UEN, and EDD on the right. (We explore this pattern further below.) This broad grouping into economic left and economic right is matched by the results on deregulation, a result which we expect given the very high correlation between their mean scores (0.99).

On issues related to the authority and institutions of the European Union, we observe a pattern different from that of the economic left–right. On the pro-integration end of the spectrum, we find the PES and the ELDR most strongly supporting a federal vision of the European Union (mean 6.1 and 6.3 respectively), followed by the EPP (7.4) and the Greens (8.4). Positioned right at the centre of this issue is the GUE at 10.8. On the far right, preferring instead a union of nation-states, is the UEN and the EDD (16.6 and 19.9 respectively). On the *EU Authority* dimension, a very similar grouping of pro-European parties emerges. On the left end of the scale favouring increasing the areas in which the EU may set policy, we find the PES, Greens, EPP, and the ELDR being basically indistinguishable with mean scores ranging from 6.3 to 7.5. Once again the Greens are nearly at the centre at 9.5 (SE .82), and the UEN and EDD are found at the Euro-sceptic end favouring reducing the range of areas in which the EU may set policy (17.7 and 18.9

respectively). Quite similar results may be observed for the *EU Collective Security* dimension, with the PES once again emerging as the most strongly integrative, and the EDD the most Euro-sceptic.

Finally, we observe in Table 1 several non-economic dimensions of policy, such as social and moral issues, immigration and the environment. On the classic dimension of moral liberalism (measured by attitudes towards abortion, homosexuality and euthanasia), we see the EP divided into two distinct groups, one left of centre and one to the right. On the "left" of the spectrum, we find the Greens, GUE, ELDR, and the PES, with mean scores ranging 4.0–5.6 respectively. Closest to the centre but still distinctively right of centre is the EPP with a mean score of 13.9 (SE .58). Finally, the UEN and the EDD occupied their now familiar positions on the right, both with mean scores at 15.1. Very similar results were observed for immigration, with these same sets of parties divided into two similar camps, with the EPP once again closest to the centre at 12.0 (SE .70).

Finally, on the issue of the environment, party groups were generally less divided and more centrist. The exception was the Greens on the "left", meaning they favoured protecting the environment even at the cost of economic growth, with a mean score of 2.9. Left of centre were the GUE (6.9) and the PES (8.6), followed by the ELDR in the center at 10.9. The remaining parties EPP, UEN, and EDD were slightly to the right of centre at essentially the same positions (12.1, 12.8, and 12.9 respectively).

As measured by the Divergence column, we see that the policy dimensions where party positions were the most dispersed – indicating the policy dimensions with the highest degrees of policy differences between party groups – were first and foremost the classic economic and social left–right positions. Social policy had the highest position divergence, at 4.9, followed by *Taxes v. Spending* and *Deregulation* at 4.0 and 3.9 respectively. The three EU dimensions and also immigration ranged in the middle region of divergence between 3.2 and 3.9. Interestingly the least contested policy dimension was the environment, with a divergence score of just 2.1.

Summarizing the positional information graphically, we can visualize the political parties in two dimensions using a two-dimensional plot of economic left–right versus

positions on EU integration, the two most salient policy dimensions of *taxes v. spending* and *EU federalism*. Figure 2 portrays the main party groups in this two-dimension policy space, with each point representing the position mean on the two dimensions. The dashed lines indicate the nearest regions to each party, showing the midpoint lines between each set of adjacent points. This nearest-neighbourhood division of the space is known as a Voronoi tessellation and has been used to represent party policy in Laver and Hunt (1992). Finally, the circles around each party group point are drawn proportional to the seat share of each group.

[Figure 2 about here]

Figure 2 confirms what we observed earlier, that the are two broad camps of economic parties, with GUE, Greens, and PES on the left, the ELDR and EPP right of centre, and the UEN and EDD farther to the right. On EU integration, we see a grouping of the PES, ELDR, EPP, and Greens on the pro-integration side, the GUE in the centre, and the UEN and the EDD on the Euro-sceptic side. In two dimensions, there appear to be three broad sets of parties: the PES, Greens and GUE on the left and pro-integration, the EPP and ELDR on the centre-right, pro-integration region, and the UEN and EDD in their own policy region of economic right and Euro-scepticism.

5. The EP Issue Space

Relative Issue Salience

Expert respondents were also asked to indicate the relative importance of each policy dimension to each party group. Table 3 presents this information in the same format as Table 2. In terms of overall importance, the economic (*Taxes–Spending* and *Deregulation*) and EU issues (*Federalism*, *Authority*, and *Collective Security*) were the most overall important, as indicated by their average across all parties, weighted by party seat share (scoring between 14.1 and 14.9). *Immigration* also ranked highly at 13.9. The *Environment* and *Social Liberalism* were ranked as the least important, at 12.7 and 12.5 respectively. Interestingly, these two dimensions were also the two that turned out to be (from Table 2) the most divisive (social) and the least divisive (environment).

[Table 3 about here]

A few expected results for individual parties stand out from Table 3, such as the very high importance attached to the environment for the Greens. Also, it is interesting that for the UEN and EDD—the two right, Euro-sceptic party groups—the international issues were the most important, with other policy dimensions of only middling importance.

The components of left and right in the EP

The results summarized in Figure 2 seem to suggest that two broad dimensions of policy competition are present in the European Parliament. The first represents the classic national policy issues associated with left and right, namely economic and social liberalism, and also a bundle of relatively newer issues such as immigration and the environment. The second dimension relates to the authority and institutions of the European Union itself. Substantively, the question is whether the EU policy space is uni-dimensional or instead consists of two or possibly more dimensions. The EP policy space has previously been described as uni-dimensional with the traditional left–right or "regulation" dominating (Tsebelis and Garrett 2000; Kreppel and Tsebelis 1999) or one-dimensional with geo-political pressures defining the principal axis of competition (Hoffman 1966, Moravcsik 1998). Other scholars, however, have described the European policy space as consisting of two dimensions, a left–right dimension composed of economic and socio-political issues from the domestic arena, and an orthogonal dimension of EU integration versus national sovereignty (Hix and Lord 1997). Variations on the two-dimensional characterization relate to whether positions on EU integration are significantly correlated with left–right (e.g. Hooghe and Marks 2001, Gabel and Hix 2004) or whether positioning on the two dimensions is independent.

In Table 4 we have used principal components factor analysis to group and separate the constituent policy dimensional scorings into orthogonal factors. In order to explore the issue of what policy dimensions were grouped with left and right, we also included the general left–right dimension. Two factors clearly emerge (having eigenvalues well above 1.0), together explaining more than 77% of the variance in specific policy placements. The last panel in the table provides the varimax-rotated factor loadings for the eight constituent policy dimensions

plus the general dimension of left–right, with the higher loading for each of the two factors highlighted in boldface. The results clearly confirm our earlier interpretation: left and right issues cluster into two orthogonal component sets, one related to classic national left and right issues from national party politics, and the second related clearly to EU issues. Moreover, the general left-right dimension loads very strongly with the first factor, which bundles together the classic socio-economic dimensions of national-level left–right policy. The second factor represents a purely EU dimension, with parties grouping themselves independently into pro-integration stances on one hand, and Euro-sceptic positions on the other.[1]

[Table 4 about here]

In the context of previous findings, our results provide strong support for the two-dimensional model of policy competition, based on two orthogonal dimensions consisting on one hand of classic issues of left–right socio-economic policy, and support for European integration on the other. These two latent factors, moreover, explain more than three-quarters of the variance in party positions on specific policy dimensions. Left–right is positively associated mainly with the first latent factor of socio-economic left–right, but also mildly positively associated with support for European integration. As suggested by Hooge and Marks (2001), we also found an association between socio-economic left-leaning policy and greater support for European integration, although our exploratory analysis would need further investigation and a more structured model before drawing any firmer conclusions.

So far, our analysis has looked only at the European Parliament level, yet there are important differences between the policy space at the EU level and the level of national political parties. As we demonstrate in our final section, the EU policy space is not simply a direct mapping of national patterns of party competition from the domestic to the supranational level. In the next section we take a first look at the degree to which policy competition between domestic political parties is congruent with party competition and affiliation at the EP level.

[1] We have tested the robustness of these results in a variety of additional ways, such as excluding the left–right dimension from the factor analysis, and then regressing the left–right placements on the factor scorings. These results (not shown) strongly confirm those in Table 4.

6. EP policy platforms and national member parties

One emerging area which students of politics in the European Union have only recently begun to explore relates to differences in policy competition at the national and EU levels. For instance, how much does agreement between policy positions explain which national parties join which EP party groupings? Do parties in national elections adopt policy positions as a result of policy influences from their EP party group? Or conversely, do EP party group policy positions directly reflect the policy platforms of their national constituent parties? It is quite possible that the nature and direction of these influences will differ according to policy arena. We view research into this area of the Europeanization of policy among EU political parties as one of the most promising areas for emerging research into the two overlapping arenas of European party competition.

Our preliminary investigation of this issue compares the estimated policy positions of EP party groups to the distribution of the policy positions of their constituent (member state) national-level political parties. Data on these national-level positions come from the left–right positions from the expert surveys reported in Benoit and Laver (forthcoming). Figure 3 portrays, for each EP party group, the kernel density estimate of member state party positions, as well as the mean and confidence interval of the EP party group position on each issue. The graphs also indicate how many national member parties were included in each analysis (a full listing is provided in Appendix B).[2]

[Figure 3 about here]

The first obvious result is the clear correspondence between the mean EP group position on left–right and the central tendency of the national party left–right positions. By and large, the EP party groups' left–right positions neatly reflect the central tendencies of their constituent parties. In addition, as seen from the shape of their kernel densities, the member parties of these EP groups clearly have similar national party positions on the left–right dimension, even though some groups include a small number of parties that are out of step with the central group position. It should be recalled that the EP and national country results

[2] The EDD was excluded from the analysis as we had only 3 expert surveys at the national level for their constituent parties.

were estimated in completely separate expert surveys—often administered in different languages. The clear correspondence of results not only suggests that expert surveys are an effective method for measuring the policy positions of EP party groups, but also augurs well for the issue of the cross-national meaning and stability of expert placements on the general left–right dimension as used in our survey and in Benoit and Laver (2005, forthcoming).

Beyond the clear correspondence of positions, we observe a few interesting individual results. Several party groups clearly contain national member parties whose positions are out of line with the central tendency of the other party group members. The EPP in particular appears to have adopted a more centrist position than the median position of its constituent national parties. While relatively centrist in the EP, the EPP is made up of mainly right-of-centre national parties. The UEN also contains several parties whose positions are clearly more centrist: the Polish Peasant Party (PSL) at 9.0 and the Lithuanian Union of Peasant and New Democracy parties (VNDPS) at 7.45. We see similar minor outliers for the UEN, with the Ireland's Fianna Fáil (FF) and the Estonia's Eestimaa Rahvaliit (RL) more centrist than the UEN, with means at 13.3 and 10.4 respectively. Among the Verts, we also see two parties whose positions are clearly more to the right than most of the other Verts members: the Spanish Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV) at 14.5 and the Latvian Green and Farmers' Union (ZZS) at 11.0.[3] Another interesting result relates to the variance of member party positions. The distribution of ELDR member parties' positions, for instance, has a wide variance relative to more policy concentrated groups such as PES, GUE, or UEN. While the ELDR is a relatively centrist party grouping, it clearly includes both left-of-centre and right-of-centre national parties.

Overall these findings suggest interesting patterns between EP policy group positioning and the policy positions of national-level member parties. In particular, it should suggest a note of caution for methods that automatically assume that EP party group positions can be inferred as the central tendency of constituent national party measures. Our preliminary look using left–right positions suggest that this will not always be the case, and further exploration among more specific policy dimensions (not shown here) suggest even greater divergence in

[3] Interestingly, in the following Parliament (the 6th), the Partido Nacionalista Vasco joined the Liberal group.

national and EU positions. We expect this dynamic between national politics and EU politics to form one of the more interesting topics in the study of party competition for future research.

7. Discussion

A broad range of empirical and spatial analyses in political science depend on the specification of the policy positions of political parties, covering topics as diverse as coalition formation, political representation, macro-economic policy development and legislative decision making. In this paper we have provided the first measure of such policy positions in the European Parliament using expert surveys. Given the changing political and institutional context of European party groups, we find the use of summaries of expert judgments—systematic summaries of the collective wisdom of well-informed experts—to offer compelling advantages over other methods, especially inductive or indirect measurements. While broadly consistent with the findings from recent placements based on roll call analyses (Hix et al. 2005), for instance, our approach has the benefit of providing precise and direct numerical placements, on well-specified *a priori* dimensions of policy that do not need to be subject to uncertain, inductive interpretation.

Our results indicate that on the two most salient dimensions (*taxes versus spending* and *EU federalism*), there appear to be three broad sets of party blocs: the PES, Greens and GUE on the redistributive left and pro-integrationist in character; the EPP and ELDR on the centre-right of the redistributive spectrum but broadly pro-integrationist; and finally the UEN and EDD in their own policy region on the economic right and distinctly Euro-sceptic on the EU federalism dimension.

Another central finding of this study is that the first dimension of policy space in the European Parliament strongly bundles with the traditional left–right axis of European party systems, principally socio-economic in nature but also incorporating newer issues such as immigration and the environment. In addition, we found strong evidence of a second axis of policy competition, orthogonal to the first, consisting of support for EU integration.

Finally, in order to examine the relationship between national parties and their European Party parent groups we compared the estimated policy positions of the EP party groups with those of their domestic affiliates, and found that the EP political groups are generally placed at the centre of the distribution of domestic party policy positions. These intriguing preliminary results suggest a remarkably close correspondence between the EP groups and national political parties and point to interesting possibilities for future research on the dynamic between national and European policy positioning.

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Party	Label	Seat %	Seats
European People's Party	EPP	37.5	294
Party of the European Socialists	PES	29.5	232
European Liberal and Democrat Reform Party	ELDR	8.4	66
European United Left/Nordic Green Left	GUE	7.0	55
Greens	Verts	6.0	47
Union for a Europe of the Nations	UEN	3.8	30
Group for a Europe of Democracies and Diversities	EDD	2.2	17
Other	Other	5.6	44
		100.0	785

Table 1. Political Party Groups in European Parliament pre-2004 Election
Source: European Parliament official website
(http://wwwdb.europarl.eu.int/ep5/owa/p_meps2.repartitiion).[4]

[4] These figures represent the standing just prior to the European Parliament Elections of 2004, the 785 member total is composed of the 626 members from the 15 pre-enlargement states and the temporary members representing the accession states since May 1st prior to the June elections.

Policy dimension	Party abbreviation GUE	Verts	PES	ELDR	EPP	UEN	EDD	Divergence
Left-Right	3.6	5.1	7.4	11.8	12.6	16.5	17.1	3.8
	0.51	0.36	0.30	0.43	0.39	0.58	0.49	
	2.4	1.7	1.5	2.1	1.9	2.5	2.1	
	23	23	24	24	24	19	18	
Taxes v. Spending	4.9	5.7	6.4	13.1	13.4	13.9	14.1	4.0
	1.01	0.72	0.35	0.73	0.60	1.06	1.28	
	4.4	3.1	1.6	3.3	2.7	4.0	5.1	
	19	19	20	20	20	14	16	
EU: Authority	9.5	7.3	6.3	7.5	7.4	17.7	18.9	3.0
	0.82	1.00	0.54	0.64	0.63	0.50	0.32	
	3.8	4.7	2.6	3.1	3.0	2.3	1.4	
	22	22	23	23	23	21	20	
EU Federalism	10.8	8.4	6.1	6.3	7.4	16.6	18.9	3.0
	1.07	0.99	0.72	0.85	1.04	1.13	0.56	
	4.7	4.4	3.3	3.9	4.8	5.0	2.4	
	19	20	21	21	21	20	19	
Deregulation	4.0	6.7	7.4	14.2	13.5	13.0	14.6	3.8
	0.62	0.82	0.43	0.89	0.50	1.04	1.02	
	2.9	3.9	2.1	4.4	2.5	4.0	3.9	
	22	23	24	24	24	15	15	
EU Collective Security	12.2	11.2	5.7	6.3	6.0	16.8	18.5	3.6
	0.92	1.12	0.46	0.64	0.77	0.83	0.50	
	3.9	4.9	2.3	3.1	3.8	3.9	2.3	
	18	19	24	23	24	22	21	
Immigration	6.1	6.5	7.3	7.4	12.0	17.5	17.5	3.4
	0.75	1.22	0.63	0.73	0.70	0.50	0.40	
	3.1	5.3	2.9	3.4	3.3	2.2	1.7	
	17	19	22	21	22	19	17	
Environment	6.9	2.9	8.6	10.9	12.1	12.8	12.9	2.8
	0.89	0.83	0.50	0.96	0.55	0.82	0.91	
	4.2	3.9	2.4	4.6	2.6	3.4	3.8	
	22	22	23	23	23	17	18	
Social	4.3	4.0	5.6	4.4	13.9	15.1	15.1	4.9
	0.45	1.05	0.41	0.40	0.58	0.76	0.90	
	2.0	4.7	1.9	1.8	2.7	3.1	3.5	
	20	20	21	21	21	17	15	

Table 2. Policy Positions of European Party Groups

Note: Mean, Std. Error, Std. Deviation, N. Dimensions following Left-Right are ranked by importance as per Table 3 below. Divergence is the weighted standard error of mean party positions on each issue.

Policy dimension	Party abbreviation GUE	Verts	PES	ELDR	EPP	UEN	EDD	OVERALL Mean	SE
Taxes v. Spending	14.6	12.1	15.3	15.8	15.2	10.5	9.9	14.7	1.5
	1.23	0.90	0.73	0.66	0.43	1.00	1.37		
	5.2	3.8	3.2	2.9	1.9	3.9	5.3		
	18	18	19	19	19	15	15		
EU: Authority	12.8	14.8	14.3	14.0	14.8	17.9	19.0	14.7	1.2
	0.63	0.76	0.65	0.72	0.56	0.53	0.33		
	2.8	3.4	3.1	3.4	2.6	2.4	1.5		
	20	20	22	22	22	20	19		
EU Federalism	11.4	13.1	14.6	14.6	14.9	17.5	18.7	14.6	1.4
	0.76	0.84	0.49	0.65	0.78	0.67	0.58		
	3.2	3.7	2.2	2.9	3.5	2.9	2.4		
	18	19	20	20	20	19	18		
Deregulation	15.3	14.1	14.5	15.9	14.9	11.3	11.6	14.6	1.0
	0.90	0.62	0.57	0.56	0.40	1.18	1.44		
	4.2	2.9	2.7	2.7	1.9	4.4	5.6		
	22	22	23	23	23	14	15		
EU Collective Security	12.0	11.3	14.0	11.4	14.7	16.8	17.3	13.9	1.6
	0.94	0.86	0.62	0.80	0.66	0.63	0.87		
	3.9	3.6	3.0	3.8	3.2	2.9	3.9		
	17	18	23	22	23	21	20		
Immigration	14.5	13.5	13.3	13.1	13.8	16.7	17.2	13.8	1.0
	0.70	1.12	0.80	0.79	0.76	0.65	0.50		
	2.9	4.8	3.7	3.5	3.5	2.7	2.1		
	17	18	21	20	21	18	17		
Environment	13.0	19.5	14.2	13.0	12.1	8.7	9.1	13.2	2.3
	0.95	0.18	0.39	0.53	0.56	0.97	0.94		
	4.4	0.8	1.8	2.5	2.6	4.0	3.9		
	21	20	22	22	22	17	17		
Social	11.7	14.8	12.5	13.9	12.6	10.1	9.9	12.6	1.1
	0.86	1.15	0.78	0.86	0.85	1.14	1.34		
	3.9	4.9	3.5	3.8	3.8	4.6	5.2		
	20	18	20	20	20	16	15		

Table 3. Salience of Policy Dimensions, by European Party Group

Note: (Mean, Std. Error, Std. Deviation, N; ranked by importance). “Overall” refers to mean (and std error) importance of each dimension weighted by party vote share

(obs=108)

Factor	Eigenvalue	Proportion	Cumulative
1	5.38433	0.5983	0.5983
2	1.60174	0.1780	0.7762
3	0.47473	0.0527	0.8290
4	0.38006	0.0422	0.8712
5	0.31682	0.0352	0.9064
6	0.25950	0.0288	0.9352
7	0.22970	0.0255	0.9608
8	0.21443	0.0238	0.9846
9	0.13870	0.0154	1.0000

Varimax Rotated Factor Loadings

Variable	1	2	Uniqueness
Left-Right	**0.85188**	0.28394	0.19369
Taxes_v. Spending	**0.87801**	0.15368	0.20548
Deregulation	**0.87705**	0.03004	0.22987
Environment	**0.82225**	0.23735	0.26757
Social	**0.73288**	0.42018	0.28634
Immigration	**0.69539**	0.54692	0.21732
EU:_Security	0.04094	**0.87965**	0.22453
EU:_Authority	0.28213	**0.86025**	0.18037
EU: Federalism	0.26091	**0.85040**	0.20875

Table 4: Principal components analysis of expert judgments of party positions

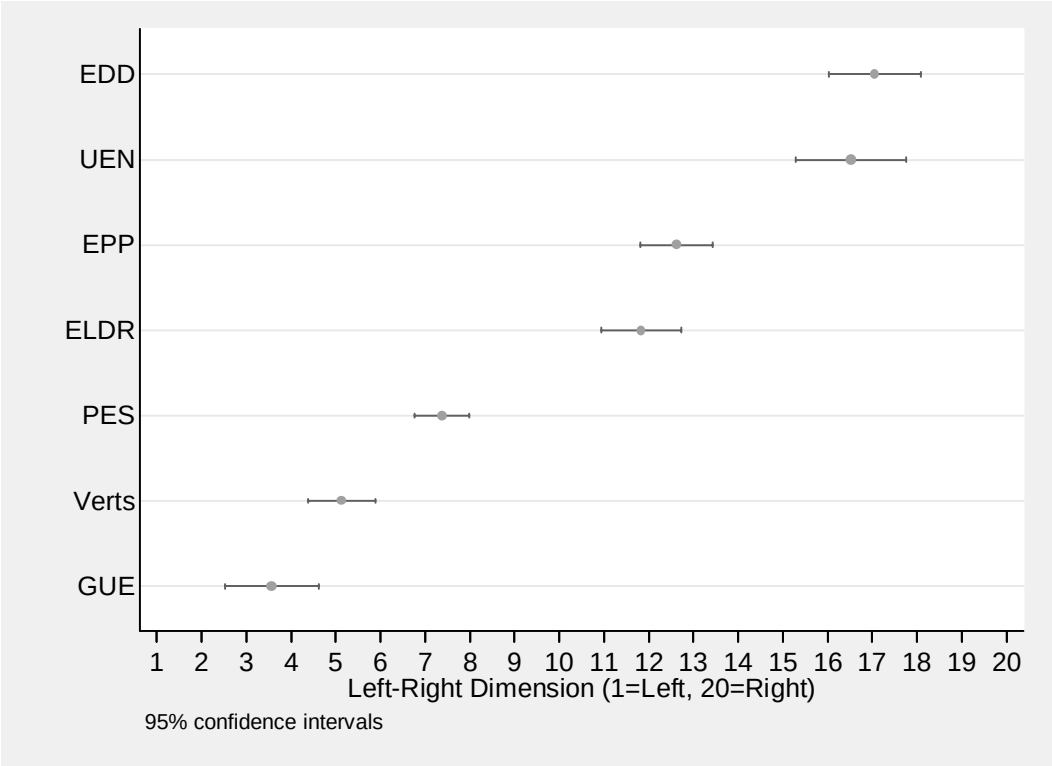

Figure 1. European Party Groups on the General Left-Right Scale

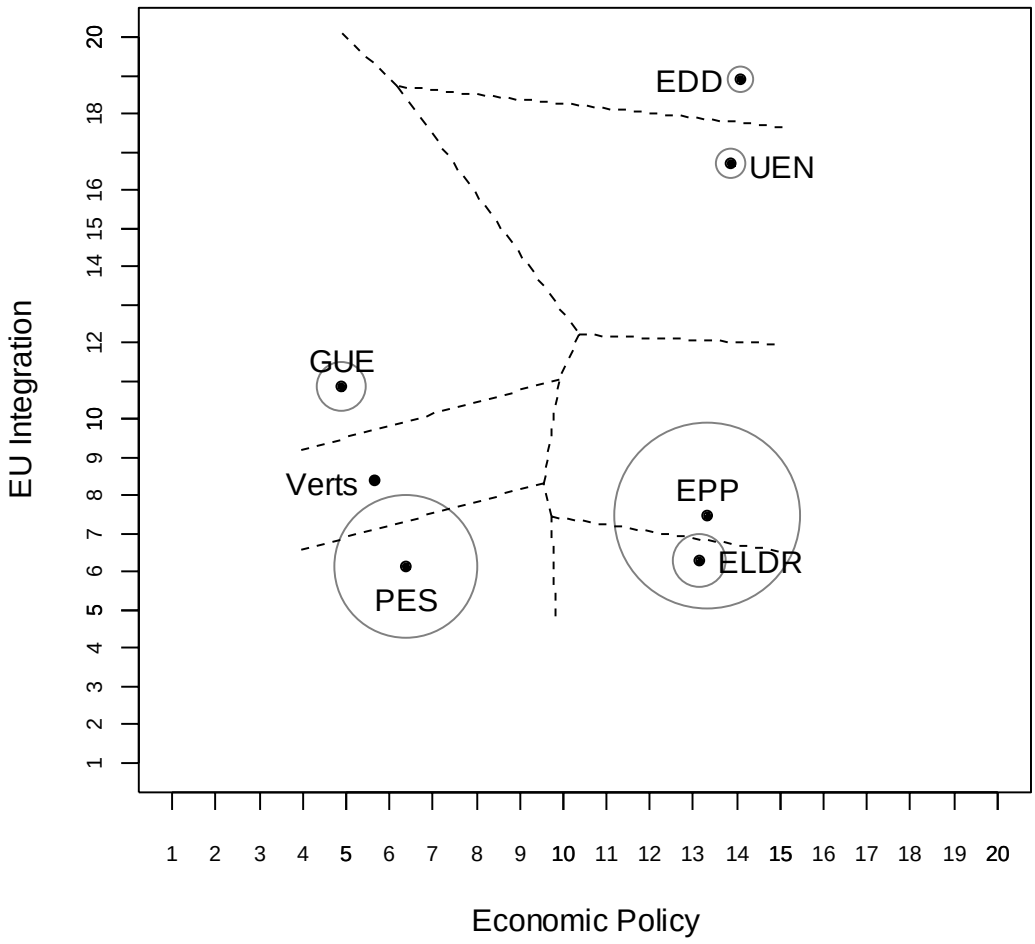

Figure 2. EP Party Group Locations in Two-Dimensional Space.

Note: Dashed lines indicate policy neighbourhoods, circle size is proportional to vote share. EU Integration is "EU Federalism" dimension, Economic Policy is "Taxes and Spending" dimension.

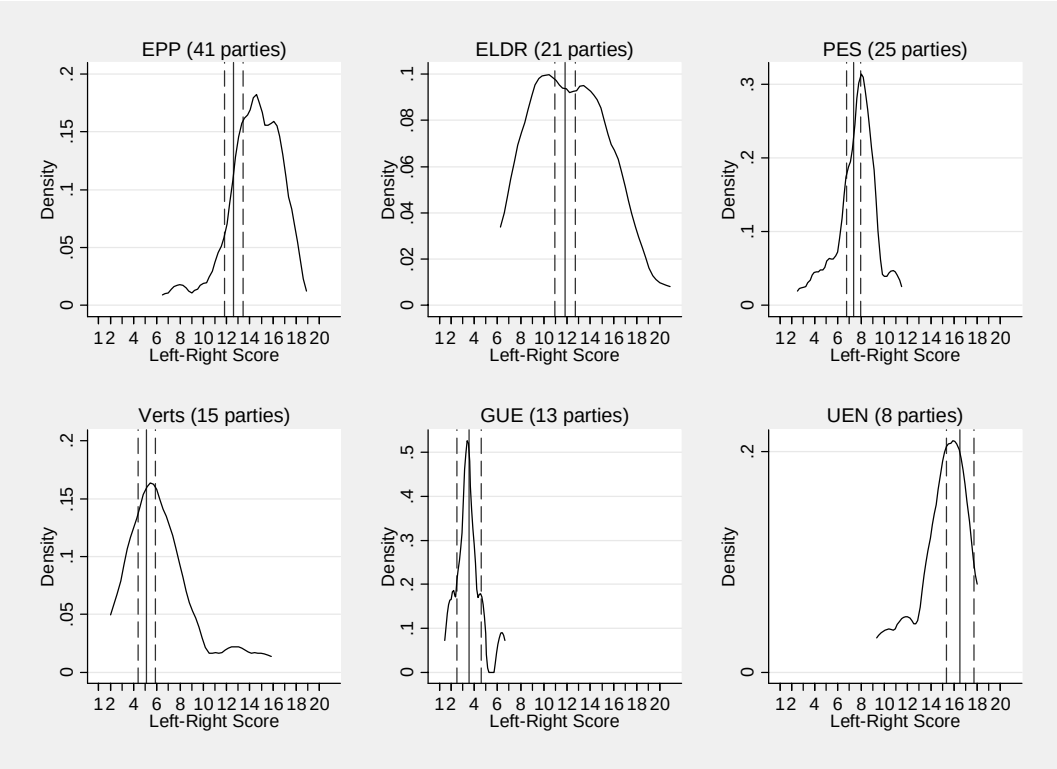

Figure 3. EP Party Group Positions and the Distribution of National Member Parties, Left-Right Scores

Source: Benoit and Laver (2005) for national party left-right scores

Appendix A: Dimension Text Wording

Economic (Spending v. Taxes)
(At the national level) Prefers raising taxes to increase public services (1)
(At the national level) Prefers cutting public services to cut taxes (20)

Deregulation
Favours high levels of regulation and control of the markets, such as telecommunications (1)
Favours deregulation at every opportunity (20)

Social
Favours liberal policies on matters such as homosexual law, abortion, and euthanasia (1)
Opposes liberal policies on matters such as homosexual law, abortion, and euthanasia (20)

Environment
Supports protection of the environment, even at the cost of economic growth (1)
Supports economic growth, even at the cost of damage to the environment (20)

EU Authority
Favours increasing the range of areas in which the EU can set policy (1)
Favours reducing the range of areas in which the EU can set policy (20)

Immigration
Favours policies designed to help asylum seekers and immigrants integrate into European society. (1)
Favours policies designed to restrict access of asylum seekers and immigrants to Europe (20)

EU Federalism
Promotes a federal vision for the EU (1)
Promotes a Europe of nation-states (*Europe des Patries*) (20)

EU Collective Security
Favours a common defence and security policy for member states (1)
Opposes development of common defence and security policy (20)

Left-Right
Please locate each political group on a general left–right dimension, taking all aspects of group policy into account. Left (1). Right (20).

Appendix B. Party Group Membership of National Parties (June 2004)

EP Party Group	Country	Party Label	Party Name	Total MEPS	
EDD	FR	CPNT	Chasse, Pêche, Nature, Traditions	5	*
EDD	FR	RPF	Rassemblement pour la France	3	
EDD	NL	CU	ChristenUnie	3	
EDD	NL	SGP	Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij	3	
EDD	UK	UKIP	UK Independence Party	3	*
ELDR	BE	VLD	Flemish Liberals and Democrats	3	
ELDR	BE		Other	1	*
ELDR	CY	DIKO	Dimokratikon Komma	1	
ELDR	CZ		Indpendent	1	*
ELDR	DK	RV	Radikale Venstre	1	
ELDR	DK	V	Venstre, Danmarks liberale parti	5	
ELDR	EE	Kesk	Eesti Keskerakond	1	
ELDR	EE	Ref	Eesti Reformierakond	1	
ELDR	ES		Others	2	*
ELDR	FI	KESK	Suomen Keskusta	4	
ELDR	FI	SFP	Svenska Folkepartiet i Finland	1	
ELDR	FR	UDF	Union pour la démocratie française	1	
ELDR	HU	SZDSZ	Alliance of Free Democrats	2	
ELDR	IE		Independent	1	*
ELDR	IT	It.Val.	Lista di Pietro Italia dei Valori	2	
ELDR	IT		Others	2	*
ELDR	IT		I Democratici	4	*
ELDR	LT	LDP	Liberal Democratic Party	1	
ELDR	LT	LiCS	Union of Liberals and Center	2	
ELDR	LT	NS/SL	New Union- Social Liberals	2	
ELDR	LU	DP	Democratic Party	1	
ELDR	NL	D66	Democraten 66	2	
ELDR	NL	VVD	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie	6	
ELDR	SE	C	Centerpartiet	1	
ELDR	SE	FP	Folkpartiet Liberalerna	3	
ELDR	SI	LDS	Liberalna Demokracija Slovenije	3	
ELDR	SK	ANO	New Civic Alliance	1	
ELDR	UK	LD	Liberal Democrats	11	
GUE	CY	AKEL	Anorthotikon Komma Ergazemenou Laou	2	
GUE	CZ	KSCM	Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia	3	
GUE	DE	PDS	Party of Democratic Socialism	6	
GUE	DE		Independent	1	*
GUE	DK	SF	Socialistisk Folkeparti	1	
GUE	DK		Den frie Socialdemokrat	1	*
GUE	DK		Folkebevægelsen	1	*
GUE	ES	IU	Izquerda Unida	4	
GUE	FI	VAS	Vasemmistoliitto	1	
GUE	FR	PCF	Parti Communiste Francais	3	
GUE	FR		Others	12	*
GUE	GR	KKE	Kommunistiko Koma Ellados	3	
GUE	GR		Others	4	*
GUE	IT	PDCI	Partito dei Comunisti Italiani	2	
GUE	IT	RC	Rifondazione Comunista	4	
GUE	NL	SP	Socialistische Partij	1	
GUE	PT	PCP	Portuguese Communist Party	2	

EP Party Group	Country	Party Label	Party Name	Total MEPS	
GUE	SE	V	Vänsterpartiet	3	
GUE	SK	KSS	Slovak Communist Party	1	
EPP	AT	OVP	Austrian People's Party	7	
EPP	BE	CD&V	Christian Democratic & Flemish	2	
EPP	BE	CDH	Humanist Democratic Centre	1	
EPP	BE		Others	2	*
EPP	CY	DISI	Dimokratikos Synagermos	2	
EPP	CZ	KDU	Christian and Democratic Union-Czechoslovak People	3	
EPP	CZ	ODS	Civic Democratic Party	8	
EPP	CZ	US	Freedom Union-Democratic Union	1	
EPP	CZ		Independent	1	*
EPP	DE	CDU/C	Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union	53	
EPP	DK	KF	Konservative Folkeparti	1	
EPP	EE	Isam	Erakond Isamaaliit	1	
EPP	EE	ResP	Ühendus Vabariigi Eest - Res Publica	1	
EPP	ES	PP	Partido Popular	27	
EPP	ES		Other	1	*
EPP	FI	KD	Suomen Kristillisdemokraatit	1	
EPP	FI	KOK	Kansallinen Kokoomus	4	
EPP	FR	UDF	Union pour la Democratie Francaise	1	
EPP	FR	UDF	Union pour la Democratie Francaise	6	
EPP	FR	UMP	Union pour un Mouvement Populaire	14	*
EPP	GR	ND	Nea Dimokratia	9	
EPP	HU	FIDESZ	Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Party	9	
EPP	HU	MDF	Hungarian Democratic Forum	3	
EPP	IE	FG	Fine Gael	4	
EPP	IE		Independent	1	*
EPP	IT	FI	Forza Italia	23	
EPP	IT	UDC	Unione di Centro	4	
EPP	IT		Others	7	*
EPP	LT	LKD	Lithuanian Christian Democrats	1	
EPP	LT	TS	Homeland Union	1	
EPP	LT	VNDPS	Union of Peasant and New Democracy Parties	1	
EPP	LU	CSV	Christian Social People's Party	2	
EPP	LV	JL	New Era	2	
EPP	LV	LPP	Latvia's First Party	1	
EPP	LV	TP	People's Party	2	
EPP	MT	NP	Nationalist Party	2	
EPP	NI	UUP	Ulster Unionist Party	1	
EPP	NL	CDA	Christen Democratisch Appe`l	9	
EPP	PL	PO	Citizens' Platform	5	
EPP	PL	PSL	Polish Peasant Party	5	
EPP	PL		Others	3	*
EPP	PT	PSD	Social Democratic Party	9	
EPP	SE	KD	Kristdemokraterna	2	
EPP	SE	M	Moderata Samlingspartiet	5	
EPP	SI	NSi	Nova Slovenija-KrÅ¡Ä anska Ljudska Stranka [???]	1	
EPP	SI	SDS	Socialdemokratska Stranka Slovenije	1	
EPP	SI	SLS	Slovenska Ljudska Stranka	1	
EPP	SK	KDH	Christian Democratic Movement	2	
EPP	SK	SKDU	Slovak Democratic and Christian Union	3	
EPP	SK	SMK	Party of the Hungarian Coalition	2	
EPP	UK	Con	Conservative Party	36	

EP Party Group	Country	Party Label	Party Name	Total MEPS	
PES	AT	SPO	Austrian Social Democratic Party	6	
PES	BE	PS	Socialist Party	5	
PES	BE		Other	1	*
PES	CY	EDEK	Kinima Sosialdimokraton EDEK	1	
PES	CZ	CSSD	Czech Social Democratic Party	7	
PES	DE	SPD	Social Democratic Party of Germany	35	
PES	DK	SD	Socialdemokratiet i Danmark	2	
PES	EE		Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond	1	*
PES	ES	PSOE	Partido Socialista Obrero Español	23	
PES	ES		Other	1	*
PES	FI	SDP	Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue	3	
PES	FR	PS	Parti Socialiste	17	
PES	FR		Other	1	*
PES	GR	PASOK	Panellinio Sosialistiko Kinima	9	
PES	HU	MSZP	Hungarian Socialist Party	10	
PES	IE	LB	Labour	1	
PES	IT	DS	Democratici di Sinistra	15	
PES	IT	SDI	Socialisti Democratici Italiani	1	
PES	LT	LSDP	Lithuanian Social Democratic Party	5	
PES	LU	LSAP	Luxembourg Socialist Workers' Party	2	
PES	LV	TSP	People's Harmony Party	1	
PES	MT	MLP	Malta Labour Party	2	
PES	NI	SDLP	Social Democratic and Labour Party	1	
PES	NL	PvdA	Partij van de Arbeid	6	
PES	PL	SLD	Alliance of Democratic Left	22	
PES	PL	UP	Labour Union	2	
PES	PL		Socjaldemocracja Polska	3	*
PES	PT	PS	Socialist Party	12	
PES	SE	SAP	Socialdemokratiska Arbetarepartiet	6	
PES	SI	ZLSD	Zdruzena Lista Socialnih Demokratov	1	
PES	SK	Smer	Party Direction - Third Way	2	
PES	UK	Lab	Labour Party	28	
UEN	DK	DF	Dansk Folkeparti	1	
UEN	EE	RL	Eestimaa Rahvaliit	1	
UEN	FR	RPF	Rassemblement pour la France	2	
UEN	FR	UMP	Union pour un Mouvement Populaire	2	*
UEN	IE	FF	Fianna Fail	6	
UEN	IT	AN	Alleanza Nazionale	9	
UEN	IT	Patti	Patti Segni	1	*
UEN	LV	TB/LNNK	Alliance Fatherland and Freedom-LNNK	1	
UEN	PL	PiS	Law and Justice	4	
UEN	PT	CDS/PP	People's Party	2	
UEN	SK	LU	People's Union	1	
Verts	AT	Gru	The Greens	2	
Verts	BE	Eco	Ecolo	3	
Verts	BE	Gro!	Groen!	1	
Verts	BE		Others	2	*
Verts	DE	GRÜ	Green Party	4	
Verts	ES	PNV	Partido Nacionalista Vasco	1	
Verts	ES		Others	4	*
Verts	FI	VIHR	Vihreä Liitto	1	
Verts	FI		Independent	1	*

EP Party Group	Country	Party Label	Party Name	Total MEPS	
Verts	FR	V	Les Verts	9	
Verts	IE	GR	Greens	2	
Verts	IT	Green	Federazione dei Verdi	2	
Verts	LU	G	The Green	1	
Verts	LV	PCTVL	For Human Rights in a United Latvia	1	
Verts	LV	ZZS	Green and Farmers Union	1	
Verts	NL	GL	Groen Links	4	
Verts	SE	MP	Miljöpartiet de Gröna	2	
Verts	UK	PCy	Plaid Cymru	2	
Verts	UK	SNP	Scottish National Party	2	
Verts	UK	UKGre	Green Party	2	*
Indep	AT	FPO	Freedom Party of Austria	3	
Indep	AT		No Affiliation	3	*
Indep	BE	VB	Flemish Block	2	
Indep	BE	VLD	Vlaamse liberalen en democraten	1	
Indep	ES	EH	Euskal Herritarrok	1	*
Indep	FR	FN	Front National	5	
Indep	FR	MPF	Mouvement pour la France	3	
Indep	FR		No Affiliation	2	*
Indep	IT	LDE	Liberali Democratici Europei	1	*
Indep	IT	LN	Lega Nord	3	
Indep	IT	Pann	Lista Pannella Bonino	7	
Indep	NI	DUP	Democratic Unionist Party	1	
Indep	PL	LPR	League of Polish Families	3	
Indep	PL	S	Self Defence of the Polish Republic	4	
Indep	PL		Others	3	*
Indep	SK	HZDS	Movement for a Democratic Slovakia	2	
			Total	785	

Note: Party group affiliations are taken from June 2004 (see Table 1 note). Parties marked with an asterisk are those for which the Benoit and Laver survey did measure, or (in the case of France) did not directly measure left–right policy. All non-asterisked parties are included in Figure 3.

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