



What Kind of Parliament? A Comparative View on the European Parliament

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Basic structure: A parliament like others?

Functions:

- Co-election of commission
- Co-legislation
- Control
- Public debate

Organization:

- Plenary
- President, Conference of Presidents
- Party groups
- Committees

Decision rules: simple or absolute majority of votes/members

A changing institution

- before 1979: Assembly of delegates of national parliaments
- 1979: election of European Parliament: a deliberating institution
- Since 1986: extension of legislative powers, co-decision procedures
- Enlargement: growing number of seats, national groups
- ⇒ Evolution of a European party system
- ⇒ Dynamics of inter-institutional politics
- ⇒ Multilevel politics
- Lisbon Treaty: a new balance of power

EP compared to Westminster system



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- no European government responsible to the EP
- no duality between majority and opposition
- limited party discipline
- increasing role of parties, but fragmented party system
- crosscutting lines of conflicts

EP compared to US Congress

- Two legislative “chambers”, with different (supranational and intergovernmental) modes of decision-making
- no president as counterpart, no clear division of powers
- less influence of local electorate
- multilevel party system: incongruent, less integrated

EP in a particular consensus democracy



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Consensus between legislative institutions

- increasing need for joint decision-making with the Council of Ministers and the Commission
- Lisbon Treaty: “Co-decision” as ordinary legislative procedure

Consensus inside the European Parliament

- “Political balance” (proportionality) between party groups

Ordinary legislative procedure

- Initiative by Commission
- 1st reading
 - if EP and Council agree, act is adopted
 - if EP and Council do not agree →
- 2nd reading, based on Council position
- amendments required by EP (majority of seats) → qualified majority in the Council
- in case of disagreement: Conciliation procedure

EP-Council agreements

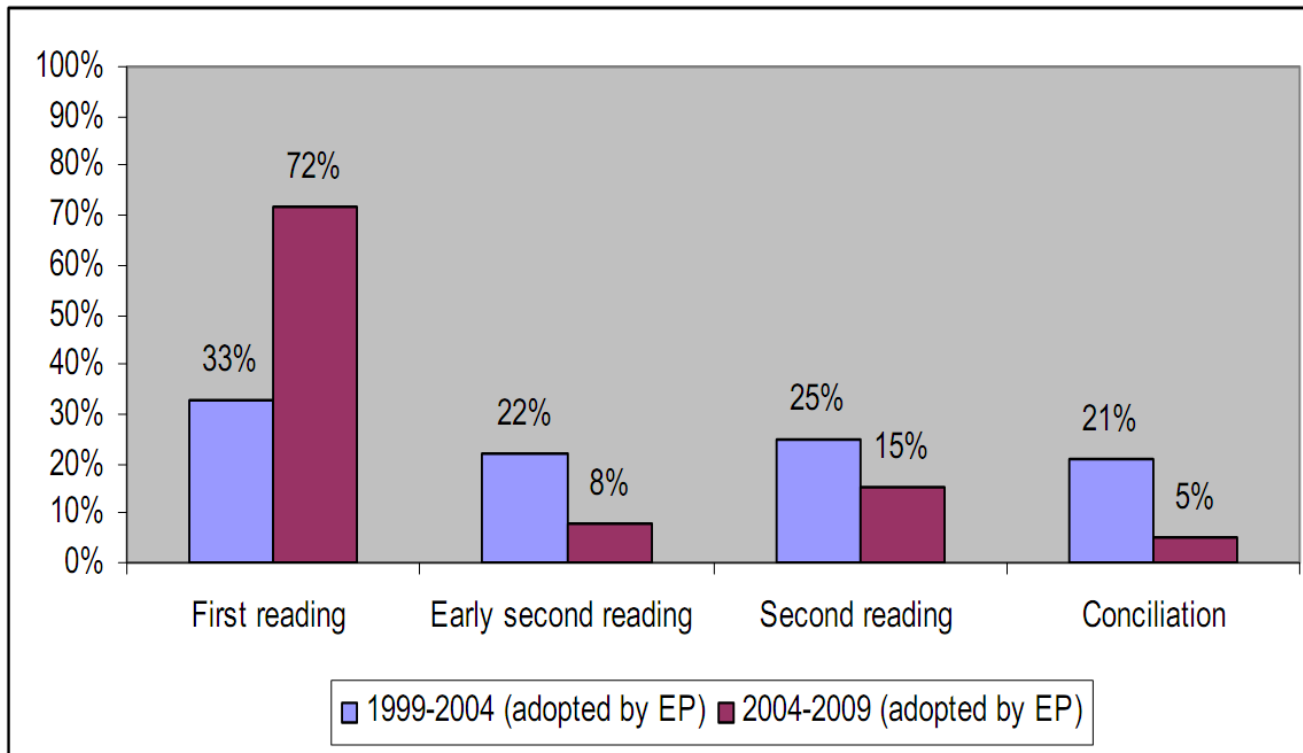


Figure 2: Comparison of stages of agreement between legislatures of 1999-2004 and 2004-2009.

Source: http://ec.europa.eu/codecision/statistics/docs/report_statistics_public_draft_en.pdf

EP in a particular consensus democracy



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- issue specific negotiations of majorities
- legislation as committee work
- powerful rapporteurs, selected by parties, but specialized in policy fields
- less deliberation more bargaining

Inter-parliamentary relations

- Subsidiarity control: Coordination with national parliaments
- inter-institutional agreement with Commission: Cooperation on legislative initiatives
- presumably strengthening of national groups in EP

Conclusion

Three basic trends

- increasing power of EP
 - ⇒ party politics
 - Enlargement, multilevel parliaments
 - ⇒ national diversity
 - Inter-institutional coordination; inter-parliamentary relations
 - ⇒ specialisation (committees; rapporteurs)
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- ☞ fluctuating, cross-cutting “policy coalitions”
 - ☞ non-hierarchical structure in party groups
 - ☞ considerable extent of informality
 - ☞ importance of inter-institutional cooperation