

Legislative Organization of the European Parliament

The Legislative Role of Committees

Nikoleta Yordanova
PhD Candidate
Department of Social and Political Sciences
European University Institute, Florence, Italy

Supervisors: Professor Adrienne Héritier and Professor Peter Mair
External supervisor: Professor Simon Hix, London School of Economics and Political
Science

Abstract

Although in many areas the European Parliament (EP) now acts as an equal co-legislator with the Council of Ministers in drafting European legislation affecting daily 500 million European citizens, its legislative organization is under-researched. Addressing this gap, this thesis studies the *legislative organization* and *impact* of its parliamentary committees. Drawing on congressional literature, I confront distributive, informational and partisan accounts to answer the main research questions of this project, namely whether and why the EP committees and their legislative output are dominated by preference-outlying legislators with special interests, specialists serving the informational needs of the plenary, or loyal members of the predominant majority party group coalition. To answer these questions, statistical empirical analyses of the committee assignments, the allocation of legislative reports falling under the consultation and codecision procedures, and the plenary adoption of committee draft reports in the 6th European Parliament (2004-2009) are conducted, which are complemented by evidence from qualitative interviews. The results show that while special interests and expertise account for assignments to committees depending on the predominant character of their legislative output (distributive or regulatory), party group affiliation and loyalty determine the allocation of legislative tasks. None of these factors, however, affects committees' influence on the draft legislation adopted in plenary when an informal inter-institutional agreement is reached, which increasingly often renders decision-making in committees largely obsolete. The explanatory power of the distributive, informational or partisan rationales in accounting for the different aspects of the EP legislative organization is conditional upon three main factors: 1) whether formal or informal parliamentary rules apply; 2) the policy area concerned; and 3) the balance of power and coordination mechanisms of the Parliament and the other legislative institutions in the European Union.