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The alignment of parties and interest groups in EU legislative politics

A tale of two different worlds?

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Abstract. Political science research on EU interest groups and parties represents two separate study fields and both literatures convey a somewhat different image of EU legislative policymaking. While most scholars of party politics endorse the notion that parties politicize EU legislative politics, scholarship of interest groups tends to portray EU policymaking as embedded in a somewhat de-politicized context in which expertise-based exchanges between societal interests and bureaucratic agencies is crucial. By analyzing the context of EU legislative lobbying in relation to 54 legislative acts we demonstrate that, in particular on controversial cases, the alignment of parties and interests groups reflects party political cleavages.

Key words. interest groups, political parties, European Parliament, European Commission, legislative lobbying

Introduction

For a long time the study of European interest group politics has remained somewhat disconnected from other sub-areas within the study of the European Union (EU), as well as from the general study of interest groups (Green-Cowles 2003; Woll 2006). Often, studies deal with one type of political organization (usually parties) and then make indirect inferences with regard to the other type (for instance interest groups). Although the importance of the European Parliament (EP) in the legislative process cannot be ignored, few scholars looked systematically at the alignment of parties and interest groups in EU policymaking (exceptions include Rasmussen 2012; Rasmussen and Lindeboom 2013; Marshall 2014; Wessels 1999). In this paper, alignment is defined as the propensity of two actors to adopt similar policy positions in relation to a specific policy issue. More specifically, the actors concerned here are interest groups (labeled ‘groups’) and European party groups (labeled MEP, while we use ‘individual MEP’ to refer to a Member of European Parliament). Gaining a better understanding of these alignments is important since they constitute a relevant, sometimes disregarded, factor of the European political order. The alignment between interest groups and elected officials could, for example, determine mobilization patterns and strategies of societal stakeholders or shape policy outcomes. More broadly, a closer look at these alignments is needed in order to obtain a better characterization of the structure of conflict and consensus in EU legislative politics. Contrary to some public policy literature that tends to depict the EU as a somewhat depoliticized, balkanized and bureaucratic system, we argue that MEP-group alignments can get politicized along some traditional ideological cleavages that are characteristic of contemporary European democracies.

An important observation in the party literature is that the dependencies between parties and traditional interest groups, such as labor unions or employer associations, have weakened, which might partially (but not only) be ascribed to the emergence of the cartel

party (Katz and Mair 1995; van Biezen 2005). This should especially be the case for the EU, where party federations lack a tradition of exclusive interactions with collateral organizations. In this regard, some scholars argued that, partly as a consequence of European integration, the importance of electoral and party politics appears to be in decline because the ‘authoritative allocation of values’ migrated into policy networks and negotiation systems where interest groups assume prominent positions (Bartolini 2005; Mair 2013). One drawback of taking the presumed weakening of ties between parties and interest groups as a starting point is that much of the party politics literature considers the interaction between parties and interest groups in a rather formal sense. The focus is usually on how traditional parties and collateral interests groups, mostly labor unions, organizationally depend upon each other (Kitschelt 2004). Yet, some organized interests, for instance civil society organizations or NGOs, may deliberately eschew strong formal ties with parties. Also, more recently established parties, such as the green or regionalist parties, usually lack collateral interest organizations. However, this absence of formal ties hinders neither alignment of policy positions of parties and interest groups, nor the establishment of lobbying alliances.

This article examines whether and how EU-level interest groups and party officials align in policy debates, and aims to identify contextual factors which shape the nature of these alignments. Such a perspective is useful in order to answer questions pertaining to the nature of the EU like: Can we speak about a European *system* of interest representation, namely a more or less predictable pattern of alignments between the worlds of parties and interest groups? The next section sketches some expectations regarding a possible structural pattern of MEP-group alignments. The second section presents our research design based on evidence on party and group involvement in the policy process surrounding 54 legislative proposals the European Commission (EC) submitted between 2008 and 2010. The empirical corpus of the article analyses patterns of conflict and agreement between organized interests and MEPs who

made public statements on 54 pieces of EU legislation. One of our main observations is that, in some ways, alignments between interest groups and political parties reflect party political cleavages, which implies that, EU-level interest group politics reflects the potential to reproduce party struggles.

Party-interest group alignments in EU legislative politics

In contrast to the party literature, the contemporary interest group literature makes little reference to an ideological cleavage structure that shapes the system of interest representation. Nonetheless, the classic literature on interest groups was much more conscious about MEP-group linkages (Allern and Bale 2012; Heaney 2010). For instance, Schattschneider already noted that party cleavages play an important role in interest group politics and that "the big game is the party game" (1960, 42-42 and 57). Therefore, it is not unreasonable to expect that ideological cleavages can be observed within interest group communities. Generally, the literature distinguishes three perspectives on the nature of MEP-group alignments.

A reiterated argument is that interest representation tends to be biased towards business interests relative to public interests and that these interests are inclined to contradict each other (Baumgartner and Leech 2001; Danielian and Page 1994; Lowery and Gray 2004). Accordingly, the conflict space of interest representation can be considered one-dimensional, with business and public interests on opposite sides. One expectation is that this structure is reflected in the MEP-group alignments. Mirroring (center-) right parties, it is expected that business interests will strive for a slim state, economic liberty and a competitive economic environment while NGOs and citizen groups, similar to more leftist parties, favor redistribution and social equality. Since much EU-policymaking reflects traditional political cleavages observed at the domestic level (Gabel and Hix 2002; Hooghe et al. 2002; McElroy

and Benoit 2007), we expect business interests to align closer with Christian-democratic, conservative and economic liberal party groups. Public interests, like NGOs, civil society groups and labor interests, would be more aligned with green and social-democratic parties, reflecting a more pro-regulation and interventionist stance.

Contrasting, others claim that the space in which interest groups operate cannot be reduced into a parsimonious map of alignments, which makes that interest groups and parties operate in a rather fragmented context. Many interest groups concentrate on narrow policy niches and depend on a small set of specialized bureaucrats and legislators (Gray and Lowery 1996; Maloney et al. 1994). Furthermore, their efforts are mostly geared to the protection and promotion of their niche. Risky high profile alignments, especially with political parties, are avoided. This is particularly the case for the EU where policies tend to be non-majoritarian and reflect broad compromises between different party families (Mahoney 2008). Seeking influence in this context does not require outspoken positioning and allying, but strategic maneuvering and bargaining. While the one-dimensional alignment perspective presupposes that opponents and allies encounter in policy debates on specific legislative proposals, a balkanized policy space presumes no overt conflict or ‘side taking’. Drawing from the perspective of a balkanized map of alignments, we would expect no ideological structure of MEP-group alignments in EU legislative politics.

The third perspective seeks a middle ground between the former perspectives, arguing that the structure of MEP-group alignments varies according to the context of legislative cases. One crucial aspect of this context is the institutional setting: some institutional venues are more aligned with business, while non-business interests hold a stronger grip on policymakers in other venues. In this view, patterns of alignment and mobilization are then not only explained by characteristics of the mobilized interest groups, but also shaped by the institutional context.

As Daviter (2011) demonstrated for the field of biotechnology, the DG responsible for drafting a legislative proposal is a major factor in explaining which interests mobilize and how political conflict unfolds. Daviter showed that, as competencies moved from DG Environment to DG Industry, the mobilization of environmental interests declined, the lobbying of business interests intensified and patterns of conflict shifted. This illustrates that the DG responsible for drafting legislation, more in particular whether it is a business-minded or a NGO-minded DG, impacts on who mobilizes and affects MEP-group alignments. We assume that business-minded DGs produce more ‘business friendly’ legislation leading to a stronger business mobilization and a closer alignment between the business community and rightist parties. This is different for NGO-minded DGs, where we expect a stronger mobilization of NGOs, and legislative output that is potentially more in line with the positions of public interest groups and leftist parties.

One question is how mobilization patterns relate to alignment. For instance, the number of interest organizations that are mobilized could be a symptom of a more politicized conflict in which policy positions strongly diverge. This condition may correspond with a strong MEP-group alignment along a left-right cleavage and an NGO-left and/or business-right alignment might be most prevalent under politicized circumstances. Therefore, not observing any of the expected alignments under the condition of politicized and competitive lobbying (i.e. when positions strongly diverge), would lend support to the notion of a more balkanized policy space. Yet, balkanization could also entail a bifurcated setting in which like-minded actors flock together. Then we observe little conflict in relation to specific issues, but the attention for issues follows a political cleavage. For instance, it could be that DG-friendliness stimulates the mobilization of a particular type of interests – NGO-friendly DGs attract NGOs and leftist parties while business-friendly DGs attract business interests and rightist parties – which makes that parties to the left will be less likely to align with business

interests compared to NGOs, not because of their ideological differences, but simply because they mobilize on other pieces of legislation.

Next to the business or NGO ‘friendliness’ of DGs, also the political color of the Commissioner in charge could be an important contextual factor. MEPs from the same party as the Commissioner are less likely to oppose proposed legislation. They will tend to be loyal towards their party, support the proposal as it stands or seek only minor changes. This gives these MEPs less leeway to be responsive towards interest organizations who seek to influence the submitted legislative proposal. In addition, the overall pattern of alignments should reflect to some degree the political color of the EC as a whole. The policy positions MEPs and organized interest adopt – and the resulting alignments – concern position taking vis-à-vis legislative proposals submitted by the EC. In the period 2008-2010, the EC can – when considering the debates during its installment, its political program, and the appointed Commissioners – be characterized as being on the right/center-right (Dinan 2010). Therefore, we expect that parties such as EPP (European People's Party–European Democrats; until 2009/ European People's Party; from 2009 onward), ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe) and ECR (European Conservatives and Reformists; from 2009 onwards) should, generally, be more favorable towards EC proposals, while parties on the left – such as the Greens-EFA (The Greens–European Free Alliance), S&D (Party of European Socialists (PES); until 2009/ Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats; from 2009 onward), GUE/NGL (European United Left–Nordic Green Left) – should be more critical.¹ We expect the two main types of interest groups – business and NGOs – to position themselves according to the same logic: business groups more in favor and NGOs more against legislative proposals submitted by the EC.

¹ In this article our positioning of parties builds on the relative placement of the EU-party groups on a left-right scale as developed by McElroy and Benoit (2012) who positioned the GUE-NGL group as the most leftist and as most rightist the UEN (Union for Europe of the Nations; until 2009) and EFD (Europe of Freedom and Democracy; from 2009 on). In between, from left to right, McElroy and Benoit position the Greens-EFA, PES/S&D, ALDE, EPP-ED/EPP and the ECR.

To summarize, we expect that a structural pattern of MEP-group alignments exists and can be identified. We anticipate that 1) business will be more closely aligned with conservative, Christian-democratic or economic liberal parties and 2) NGOs are more closely aligned with the social-democratic or green parties. However, MEP-group alignments might vary according to the issue context. In this regard we expect that 1) legislative proposals of business-friendly DGs will result in a closer alignment between the mobilized interest groups and rightist parties and 2) MEPs from the same party as the Commissioner in charge of the proposal align to a lesser extent with the mobilized interest group community. Finally, if no structure of MEP-group alignment is observed, we can conclude that with regard to the EU party and interest group politics are two different worlds and that party competition is not reflected in EU lobbying.

Research design

The data we analyze were collected in the context of the larger INTEREURO project for which we drew a sample of 125 proposals from all legislation the EC proposed between 2008 and 2010. The sample was stratified in the sense that proposals needed at least two hits in five media outlets (European Voice, Agence Europe, Financial Times, Le Monde, Financial Times and the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung) in order to be selected (for technical details see Beyers et al. 2014a; De Bruycker and Beyers 2014). After sampling, EurActiv was added as a media source and we archived all articles related to the 125 proposals. Furthermore, we identified all actors – organized interests as well as policymakers – mentioned in each article that appeared in the European Voice, Agence Europe, Financial Times, Le Monde, Financial Times and Euractiv. Only coverage that was directly and substantively related to the proposal was included. This resulted in a total of 1501 articles on 122 proposals and 8499 mentions and/or statements of an actor in relation to the legislative case. Statements are parts of a news

item in which actors presented information and expressed their view in favor or against a legislative proposal. In total we identified 3796 public statements (related to n=118 proposals). Note that these statements are considerably concentrated around a small set of proposals; about one third generated less than ten statements and only twenty proposals received over fifty statements. Noteworthy is that 1631 or 43 percent of all statements came from interest groups and MEPs, which means that these EU-media are important venues for legislative debates in which both organized interests and MEPs get involved.

In the remainder we concentrate on the 54 legislative cases where representatives of at least one interest group *and* MEPs of at least one of the bigger party groups made public statements and adopted a policy position.² The included parties are S&D, ALDE, EPP, Greens-EFA, ECR and GUE/NGL.³ For these 54 cases we identified 1318 MEP- group dyads; these dyads are the units of observation for our data-analyses. One drawback of media sources and the requirement that at least one MEP and one interest group need to have taken a policy position, is that we primarily focus on publicly salient cases or cases where the EP has co-decision powers (see endnote 6). However, if the goal is to identify *politically salient cases*, a systematic screening of media-sources is a useful method. One major and specific advantage for our purpose is that media-sources allow us to rely on one single data source for *both* MEPs and interest group officials. This differs from previous research where either MEPs or interest groups were surveyed – for instance, through consultation documents, votes or political statements in the EP – and indirect inferences are made about other actor types (Marshall 2010). Instead, we analyze MEPs and interest groups on the basis of one single data source with public statements related to the same ongoing legislative processes. The

² For the other 71 proposals either no interest organization or no party made a public statement. Via interviews with EC-experts and interest group and extensive media analysis, we learned that for 40 of these 71 proposals no lobbying took place (Beyers et al. 2014c), which implies that no alignments could be measured.

³ The number of statements made by representatives of EFD (Europe of Freedom and Democracy; from 2009 onwards; 4 statements), IND/DEM (1 statement), UEN (Union for Europe of the Nations; until 2009; 1 statement) and the non-inscrits (2 statements) are too low to draw meaningful conclusions.

distribution of dyads across the 54 legislative proposals varies considerably with 52 percent of the proposals having less than 12 dyads and two proposals with more than 100 dyads. The skewed nature of the occurrence of MEP-group dyads corresponds with the overall attention levels, where most proposals attract little attention and only a few stimulate massive mobilization (De Bruycker and Beyers 2014).

All statements were coded by two trained researchers using a technique that resembles Koopmans and Statham's political claims analysis (1999).⁴ Our key variable is the political goal stakeholders put forward in relation to one legislative proposal. This position was coded as being 1='seeking major changes or blocking the proposal', 2='supporting the proposal, but asking for changes', and 3='supporting the proposal without changing it'. For some proposals we had multiple statements from the same groups or from different MEPs belonging to the same party group. In cases with conflicting statements we double-checked our coding and subsequently used the modal position in order to determine one position per actor-proposal combination. Sometimes minor incongruences could be detected in MEP positions; these were mostly related to different, rather detailed aspects of the proposal that were discussed in the statements. In the rare occasion that no unambiguous position could be coded, the MEP position was labeled as 'unclear' and omitted from further analysis. We did not observe any individual MEP who changed positions on a proposal. Note that, for the purpose of this paper, we ignore the precise substantive nature of the position, i.e. we do not qualify positions as being 'leftist' or 'rightist'. We only consider the alignment of the adopted positions, not the precise content of the positions themselves. How the positions of different organized interests align with various party groups implies that we have an 'indirect measure' of left-right. Indeed, on some occasions some groups may have adopted positions which do not correspond with their traditional ideological line. Yet, as we show below, we can produce a robust

⁴ Krippendorff's alpha reliability coefficients calculated on a double coding of a randomly selected set of 100 statements are satisfying (.82 or higher).

account of alignments and de-alignments, even if we ignore the precise substance of policy positions and rely on the traditional left-right profile of parties.

Furthermore, we coded the organized interests into several categories. A first category consists of NGOs representing a diffuse constituency such as environmental groups, consumer groups, religious groups, labor unions or other civil society organizations. The next category is business interests and includes business associations, professional organizations and individual firms. Finally, we have smaller categories for research institutes and associations representing sub-national authorities.

Mapping and analyzing patterns of alignment

Our analysis proceeds in three steps. First, we analyze how MEPs and interest groups position themselves in policy debates and the extent to which this results in alignments. Second, we characterize MEP-group alignments by describing which parties and group types adopted similar (and dissimilar) positions. Finally, we analyze the conditions under which different types of groups are closely aligned to or strongly distanced from different parties.

When categorizing the MEP-group dyads according to three substantive positions, we get nine different combinations (see Table 1). At first sight, parties and groups do not align well; the relation between the positions taken by both actors is weak and insignificant ($\text{Chi}^2=5.403$, $\text{df}=4$, $p=.2484$) and we observe groups and parties taking similar positions in only 33 percent of the dyads (the diagonal of Table 1; $n=435$). Second, there is a considerable difference in position taking by MEPs and interest groups. Most MEPs ($n=738$ or 56 percent) take a moderate position, i.e. they support the legislative proposal or ask for some minor amendments. In contrast, interest groups are more likely to adopt outspoken positions: in 44 percent of the observations they seek to block the proposal or ask for changes which would drastically transform the proposal. In only 24 percent interest groups support the EC-proposal

without asking for modifications. However, the diagonal – indicating the propensity to adopt similar positions – is misleading in order to analyze alignment and de-alignment between MEPs and interest groups. Equally interesting are the situations where MEPs support the EC proposal unconditionally, but where interest groups seek to block or change the proposal profoundly (cell 3 1; n=117), or vice versa (cell 1 3; n=80).

Table 1. Mapping Party-Group Alignments (n, percentages)

MEP positions	Interest group positions			Total
	1=seeking major changes or blocking the proposal	2=supporting the proposal, but asking for changes	3=supporting the proposal without changing it	
1=seeking major changes or blocking the proposal	(cell 1 1) 140	(cell 1 2) 91	(cell 1 3) 80	311 24%
2=supporting the proposal, but asking for changes	(cell 2 1) 318	(cell 2 2) 242	(cell 2 3) 178	738 56%
3=supporting the proposal without changing it	(cell 3 1) 117	(cell 3 2) 99	(cell 3 3) 53	269 20%
Total	575 44%	432 33%	311 24%	1318

Table 2. Patterns of Party-Group Alignments and De-Alignments (row percentages)

	MEPs and IGs strongly de-aligned		MEPs and IGs strongly aligned		MEPs and IGs moderately aligned or de-aligned				
	MEPs strongly oppose and IGs strongly support	MEPs strongly support and IG strongly oppose	Both MEP and IG strongly oppose	Both MEP and IG strongly support	MEP strongly opposed versus moderate IGs	Moderate MEPs versus strongly supportive IGs	MEPs and IG have the same moderate position	IGs strongly opposed versus moderate MEPs	Moderate IGs versus strongly supportive MEPs
Cell Table 1	(1 3)	(3 1)	(1 1)	(3 3)	(1 2)	(2 3)	(2 2)	(1 2)	(3 2)
n	80	117	140	53	91	178	242	318	99
ECR	16%	84%	58%	42%	8%	12%	25%	29%	27%
EPP	55%	45%	70%	30%	8%	22%	29%	35%	6%
ALDE	11%	89%	35%	65%	2%	17%	26%	40%	15%
S&D	34%	66%	84%	16%	11%	21%	25%	32%	12%
Greens	53%	47%	90%	10%	13%	20%	27%	33%	7%
GUE/NGL	100%	0%	100%	0%	31%	16%	16%	33%	3%
Correlations	Chi ² =48.3534, df=5, p<.0001 Cramér's V = .50		Chi ² =33.6682, df=5, p<.0001 Cramér's V = .42		Chi ² =86.6826, df=20, p<.0001 Cramér's V = .15				

In the next paragraphs, we examine whether center-right politicians (ALDE, EPP, ECR)

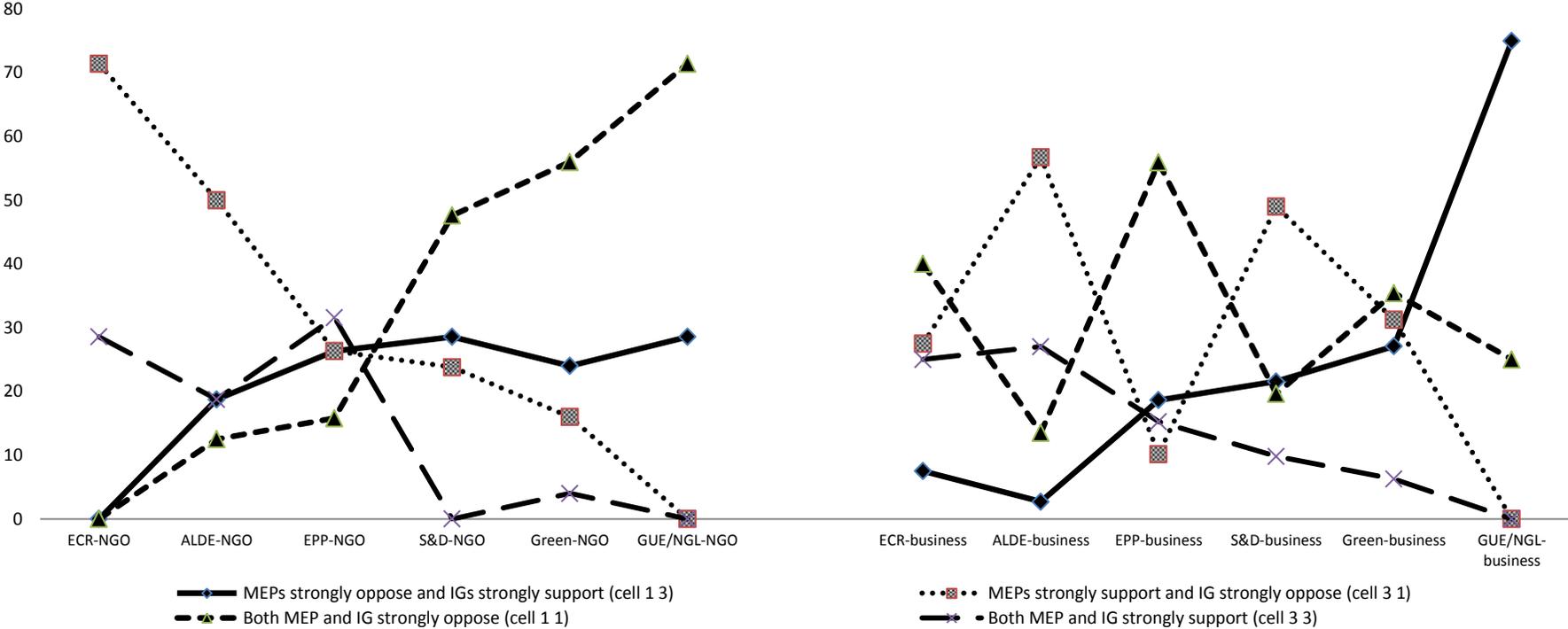
and business interests mostly endorse legislation submitted by a center-right EC, while more leftists MEPs (Greens, S&D, UEN/GNL) and NGOs are more likely to oppose legislation proposed by the EC. Generally, such political competition should be more visible when groups and MEPs adopt positions that are strongly in favor or against proposed legislation. Therefore, we should observe significant differences in group-party alignment between the four constellations where a) both MEPs and groups strongly support the EC (cell 3 3; n=53), b) both MEPs and groups strongly oppose the EC (cell 1 1; n=140), c) MEPs support, but groups oppose the EC (cell 3 1; n=117) and d) MEPs oppose, but groups support the EC (cell 1 3; n=80). Moreover, these cases should differ from cases where alignment or de-alignment is weaker and/or reflects more moderate positions.

In order to analyze this we combined the constellations according to degree of alignment and divided the dyads in three categories; a category where MEPs and groups take the same position towards the EC proposal (1=strong alignment; cells 1 1 and 3 3), a category where MEPs and groups strongly disagree (2=strong de-alignment; cells 1 3 and 3 1) and, finally, a category where at least one of both types takes a moderate position (3=moderate alignment, cells 1 2, 2 3, 2 2, 2 1 and 2 3). Table 2 presents the percentage of MEP-group dyads for six party groups and the positions articulated in the statements. The results strongly confirm that party competition becomes more visible when both groups *and* parties adopt an outspoken position in favor or against a legislative proposal. Overall, the relation between alignment of organized interests and the party group is much weaker for the cases where either parties or groups take moderate positions (Cramér's $V=.15$) compared to cases where parties and groups completely oppose each other (Cramér's $V=.50$) or where parties and groups are perfectly aligned (Cramér's $V=.42$). However, even for the moderate cases, center-right and right parties are significantly much more likely to support the EC, which confirms the image of center-right MEPs as defenders of the EC vis-à-vis potential interest group

opposition. For instance, ERC and ALDE statements, compared to interest group statements are generally more supportive towards the EC (55 and 56 percent respectively), while statements by the more centrist S&D and EPP are generally much less supportive (44 and 41 percent respectively). Finally, the statements in which the Greens and the GUE/NGL are involved are somewhat less likely to be supportive (40 and 34 percent respectively). Looking at the dyads with strong group-party alignment, we observe a pattern that reflects left-right party competition quite well. S&D, Greens and GUE/NGL are very likely to oppose EC legislative proposals, but the propensity to be among the opponents is much lower for the ECR and especially ALDE. In the cases of de-alignment, we observe strong support from ALDE and ECR, but also strikingly from the S&D, while, in contrast, support from EPP, Greens and UEN/GNL is much lower.

While this analysis shows the presence of party competition, it offers no evidence on which party is aligned with which interest group type. Therefore, in Figure 1 we compare 12 possible MEP-group combinations and the extent to which these combinations resulted in a joint support for the EC, a joint opposition against the EC, a situation where the MEPs supported the EC, but the interest group opposed and a situation where interest groups supported the EC, but the MEPs opposed.

Figure 1. Party-Group Alignment (percentages)



The figure on the left shows the party combinations with NGOs and the different alignments. The relation is statistically significant ($\text{Chi}^2=38.4154$, $\text{df}=15$, $p=.0008$, Cramér's $V=.37$), which confirms a non-random pattern of alignments between NGOs and various party groups. To begin with, we observe that MEPs belonging to ECR and ALDE are more likely to support EC proposals, while there are a considerable number of NGO statements opposing the EC. Next, for left parties (GUE/NGL, Greens and S&D) and NGOs we observe joint opposition towards the EC proposal (compared to a negligible number for ALDE, EPP and ECR). Although this finding shows that NGOs are closer to left parties, we should acknowledge that not everything points unambiguously into this direction. For instance, for the EPP we observe a (small) number of instances where EPP opposes a proposal, but where the proposal gains solid support from NGOs. Furthermore, there are a considerable number of cases where left parties oppose the proposal, but where NGOs support the EC.

The second part of Figure 1 confirms this nuanced picture. The relation is statistically significant ($\text{Chi}^2=89.3290$, $\text{df}=15$, $p<=.0070$, Cramér's $V=.34$) and some results fit well in the expected alignment structure. For instance, if MEPs from leftist parties are against a legislative proposal, they often encounter business interests strongly supporting the EC. Moreover, the number of cases where left parties and business jointly support a proposal is low, much lower compared to the number of rightist MEPs who support a proposal in combination with supportive business interests. Yet, elsewhere the outcome is more blurred. For example, there are quite a number of ECR and EPP combinations with business interests where both type of actors oppose the EC proposals, while this frequency is much lower for dyads with ADLE and S&D. There are also many instances where Greens and business interests are on the same side.

To further test our expectations we regressed, in a separate analysis for each party, the ordinal distance between the party and the interest groups on several explanatory factors (see

Table 3). To deal with the nested structure of the data, clustered standard errors with the legislative proposal as group variable were used. The dependent variable ‘ordinal distance’ takes three values: 1=group and party take the same position, 2=the difference in position is only one ordinal category and 3=group and party take highly divergent positions in favor or against the legislation.

The models test whether group type, the Commissioner and the DG predict the ordinal distance. The DG-variable, which reflects the institutional venue where the proposal was drafted, distinguishes between DGs that are, because of their task-orientation, 1) more business-minded 2) more NGO-minded, or 3) others (see Bernhagen et al., <THIS ISSUE: PUBLISHER TO ADD /UPDATE DETAILS AT PROOF>). One of our questions is the extent to which similar organization types flock together around specific DGs. Interestingly, compared with business-MEP dyads there is a significant higher chance that NGO-MEP dyads are tied to the NGO-minded DGs ($\chi^2=84.95$; $df=4$; $p<.0001$). Of the NGO-dyads, 38 percent are connected to these DGs, while 27 percent of the business-MEP dyads concern proposals that originate from these DGs. In contrast, there are relatively more business-MEP dyads showing an interest for business-minded DGs; 60 percent of the business-dyads are connected to these DGs while only 34 percent of the NGO-MEP dyads focus on business-minded DGs. Generally, we expect that if the proposal originates from a business-minded DG the distance between MEPs and groups will be larger for leftist parties, while the distance will be larger for rightist parties in case of a NGO-minded DG. Another key explanatory variable is the party group of the responsible Commissioner: ALDE, EPP, S&D or a combination of ALDE and EPP.⁵ The expectation is that MEPs stemming from the same party group as the Commissioner will align less well with the mobilized interest group community. Finally, we

⁵ For DG Transport and Energy, the two responsible Commissioners stemmed from EPP and ALDE. This is why we included the category ALDE-EPP as a dummy for party group of the Commissioner responsible for a DG in the multivariate analysis.

control for the type of legislative procedure, which affects the EP's legislative power; a dummy-variable distinguishes the co-decision procedure from other procedures.⁶

Table 3 shows some clear patterns: with regard to 'group type', we observe that the S&D and the Greens have a significantly higher chance to show a larger distance to business groups compared to NGOs, which is in line with our expectations. However, we should remain cautious when interpreting the non-significant results, since the lack of patterns might be due to the heterogeneous 'business interests' category, but also because groups that align with (center-) right parties – such as ALDE and ECR – are not necessarily only business interests, an observation that was already apparent in Figure 1. The party of the Commissioner only proved significant in the ALDE-model, namely we observe a larger distance between ALDE-MEPs and interest groups if the Commissioner is affiliated with ALDE. Nonetheless, the expectation that MEPs stemming from the same party as the Commissioner would decrease (or increase) the distance does not gain systematic support as this variable remains insignificant in other models.

⁶ Some comments about Table 3. To start with, note that we do not control for the Commissioner and legislative procedure when modeling alignment with ECR and GEU/NGL, because we lack sufficient variation for these two variables. Striking is that the vast majority of dyads (91 percent) concerns cases where the co-decision procedure applies, which exceeds the prevalence of co-decision cases in the population of legislative cases (about 58 percent in 2008-2010; see Beyers et al. 2014a; Häge 2011). It shows that co-decision cases generally gain more media-attention. Therefore, this control-variable does not allow us to demonstrate whether co-decision affects alignment for all EU-legislation. Finally, we also considered controlling for shared responsibility between DGs, but again the distribution was too skewed to yield meaningful results.

Table 3. Ordered Logistic Regressions of Ordinal Distance Between Interest Groups and Party Groups

		ECR	ALDE	EPP	S&D	Greens	GUE/NGL
Cut	cut 1	-.27 (.63)	-0.86 (.51)	.12 (.45)	-.02 (.57)	-.48 (.33)	-1.18 (.48)
	cut 2	2.06 (.82)	2.03 (.57)	3.02 (.62)	2.46 (.59)	1.98 (.42)	1.56 (.33)
DG type	NGO-friendly (ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Business-friendly	-.98 (.49)**	-1.11 (.50) **	.86 (.27) **	.65 (.50)	-.98 (.15) ***	-.01 (.40)
	Other	.77 (.80)	-1.10 (.57) *	.48 (.67)	.86 (.97)	1.06 (.90)	-.94 (.29) ***
Group type	NGO (ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Business	.48 (.50)	.21 (.36)	-0.05 (.43)	.72 (.36) **	.81 (.31) ***	.38 (.54)
	Other	.05 (.43)	0.00 (.66)	.05 (.48)	.25 (.52)	.56 (.49)	-.52 (.80)
Party group of responsible Commissioner	S&D (ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-
	ALDE		1.07 (.46) **	-.02 (.33)	0.37 (.52)	.19 (.26)	
	EPP		.43 (.49)	.48 (.45)	.55 (.77)	-.05 (.66)	
	ALDE-EPP		0.30 (.62)	-.28 (.48)	-.83 (.65)	.48 (.44)	
	Independent		1.59 (.87) *	.29 (.84)	-.08 (1.21)	-1.34 (.93)	
Legislative Procedure	Co-decision (ref)		-	-	-	-	
	Other		.66 (.90)	.27 (.35)	-.44 (.52)	.02 (.58)	
n		126	251	329	263	258	91
clusters		13	33	43	33	27	8
df		4	9	9	9	9	4
Wald Chi (df)		6.91	18.46	23.19	9.05	86.79	41.87
Prob > chi2		0.14	0.03	0.01	0.43	0	0

Coefficients are presented with clustered robust standard errors between brackets and significance level indicated by * $\alpha \leq 0.1$ ** $\alpha \leq 0.05$ *** $\alpha \leq 0.01$

We have more systematic support for the role of DGs. For proposals originating from business-minded DGs, the chance of having a larger distance towards interest groups is significantly smaller for ECR, ALDE and the Greens compared to proposals from NGO-minded DGs. Also the EPP is significantly more likely to have a larger distance towards interest groups in case of a business-minded DG. This confirms that the institutional venue, in particular the DG in charge, matters for MEP-group alignments. Nonetheless, we acknowledge that some results remain ambiguous. For instance, the alignments with the Greens increase when a proposal stems from a business-friendly DG, which is at odds with our expectation, but confirms the descriptive analysis in Figure 1. Controlling for the legislative procedure yielded no significant results, which means that the amount of power of the EP does not influence MEP-group alignment.

Conclusion

MEP-group alignments constitute an important contextual aspect of EU legislative lobbying and party competition. More in particular, we demonstrated that the alignment of parties and organized interests reflects a left-right cleavage. Organization type, namely the distinction between business and public interests, coincides to some extent with party cleavages. Overall, business is more closely aligned with EPP, ECR and ALDE. In contrast, NGOs are strongly aligned with the S&D, GEU/NGL and the Greens. Finally, a considerable number of MEPs take a more moderate or centrist position, which is particularly the case for the EPP. This structure of alignments is reflected in the institutional context surrounding legislative proposals. For instance, the type of DG – being business- or NGO-friendly – is a significant predictor of MEP-group alignments. Proposals stemming from business-friendly DGs arouse closer alignments with interest groups for ALDE, ECR, but also the Greens, while they result in lower alignments for the EPP. The evidence also shows that, compared to

the DG, the political background of the Commissioners is much less crucial, which confirms the key importance of bureaucratic politics in the EC.

It is obvious that EU interest group mobilization corresponds to a considerable extent with party competition, whereby on average NGOs (business) are closer to left (right) parties and distanced from right (left) parties. Nonetheless, the absence of a perfect match NGO-left parties (or business-right parties) also urges us to remain careful and refrain from making highly deterministic claims. For some dyads, we observed more articulated positions and larger political distances, while in other instances parties and groups adopt more moderate positions. It is important to emphasize that we expected that some actors are *on average* more aligned. This qualification ‘on average’ is rather relevant, given the absence of a perfect match for all observations. How can we explain this?

Although the EC (in 2008-2010) was more to the right than the left, for many of its policies support from center-left parties, especially the S&D, was needed in order to get a majority endorsement from the EP. Generally, European legislative politics is characterized by a consensual political culture and a strong propensity to establish large majorities. This is one of the reasons why MEPs and, possibly, some interest groups refrain from adopting radical positions, but rather present moderate views as this puts them in a position to become involved in policymaking bargains. Two other reasons explain the absence of a perfect match. First, although EP party groups show considerable cohesion in terms of voting, these parties are quite heterogeneous, not only in terms of nationality, but also with respect to ideology. For instance, the largest group, the EPP, consists of a conservative faction and a more progressive social-Christian wing. This within-party heterogeneity makes that MEPs might use public venues to express their own, sometimes dissenting, views. Therefore, the public arena possibly may show a somewhat less coherent picture compared to the party cohesion observed in the EP’s voting records. Second, on several legislative cases business is strongly

divided whereby some support the EC, while others lobby against it.

This leads to a somewhat blurred picture. Nonetheless, our observations are relevant as they reject the notion that MEP-group alignments are unique for each distinct legislative case. Instead, it appears that lobbying to some extent reflects party competition, which is somewhat ignored by interest group scholars. Party and interest group politics do not represent two entirely different worlds. However, our findings point at two other worlds of lobbying with, on the one hand, a considerable number of cases that attract little or no political attention and, on the other hand, a smaller set of cases where many lobbyists are active and where conflicts among lobbyists reflect party political competition. Both worlds represent crucially distinct contexts for lobbyists (see De Bruycker and Beyers 2014; LaPira et al. 2014). Still, our results show that these more politicized legislative processes have a rather low degree of dimensionality and that for these cases party politics is an important ingredient of EU legislative lobbying.

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