Democratic Politics in the European Parliament

With the European Parliament comprising politicians from many different countries, cultures, languages, national parties and institutional backgrounds, one might expect politics in the Parliament to be highly fragmented and unpredictable. By studying more than 15,000 recorded votes between 1979 and 2004 this book establishes that the opposite is in fact true: transnational parties in the European Parliament are highly cohesive and the classic ‘left-right’ dimension dominates voting behaviour. Furthermore, the cohesion of parties in the European Parliament has increased as the powers of the Parliament have increased. The authors suggest that the main reason for these developments is that like-minded members of the European Parliament (MEPs) have incentives to form stable transnational party organizations and to use these organizations to compete over European Union (EU) policies. They suggest that this is a positive development for the future of democratic accountability in the EU.

Simon Hix is Professor of European and Comparative Politics in the Department of Government at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Abdul G. Noury is Associate Professor in the Department of Economics and the Institute for European Studies at the Université Libre de Bruxelles. Gérard Roland is Professor in the Departments of Economics and Political Science at the University of California, Berkeley.
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Democratic Politics in the European Parliament

Simon Hix
London School of Economics and Political Science

Abdul G. Noury
Free University of Brussels

Gérard Roland
University of California, Berkeley
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Independently of each other, Simon in London and Gérard and Abdul in Brussels began collecting the voting records of the Members of the European Parliament (MEP) in 1998. Abdul and Simon then ‘discovered’ each other at the American Political Science Association conference in Washington, DC in September 2000, when they presented almost identical papers analysing the dimensions of voting in the European Parliament. We quickly decided to pool our efforts, and started working on collecting the full set of roll-call voting data from July 1979 to June 2004. This proved more difficult than we had originally anticipated. The voting records from the first three parliaments had to be entered from hard copies of the annexes to the minutes of the European Parliament’s plenary sessions. This involved scanning each page and applying a specially written piece of software to transform the text files into a database. For the fourth and fifth parliaments, we were able to gain access to the original electronic files from the European Parliament.

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