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Source: *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Sep., 1986), pp. 315-332

Published by: [Wiley](#) on behalf of [The International Studies Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2600420>

Accessed: 12/06/2014 22:10

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The Electoral System and Constituency-oriented Activity in the European Parliament

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A common system of election to the European Parliament is called for in the 1957 Treaty of Rome, but this clause has never been implemented. Most proposals for a common system abolish the single-member districts of the British MEPs. This may have some important consequences for the future development of the European Parliament as an institution. The literature on constituency service and the perceptions of representatives suggests that representatives from single-member districts should have a stronger constituency orientation and electoral connection than representatives from multi-member districts. The attitudes and behavior of British and French MEPs are used to test this assertion. The evidence presented indicates that British MEPs are more constituency oriented, have a stronger electoral connection, and participate in constituency-oriented activities more frequently than the French. If the behavior of the French MEPs is any indication of the responsiveness of MEPs in general, the European Parliament may not be very responsive to the needs of their Euro-constituents. In the future, a common electoral system may decrease this responsiveness even more as the incentive to engage in constituency-oriented activities also decreases.

The first direct elections to the European Parliament took place in 1979, and the second elections occurred in June, 1984. Even though a common electoral system is called for in the 1957 Treaty of Rome, the 10 member states use 10 different electoral systems to elect the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). Great Britain elects MEPs from single-member districts, while the other nine systems are based on various forms of proportional representation. The European Parliament approved a draft of a common electoral system in 1982, but the British have used the unanimity rule in the Council of Ministers to block its adoption. The British staunchly refuse to abandon their first-past-

Author's note: An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 1984 meeting of the International Studies Association. The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Dr Thomas D. Lancaster, Dr Eleanor Main, and Dr Rick Cupitt. The comments of the anonymous reviewers were also extremely helpful. The author would like to thank the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Emory University for providing the financial assistance that made this study possible.

0020-8833/86/03 0315-18 \$03.00 © 1986 International Studies Association

the-post, single-member district electoral system because some MEPs believe they can better represent their electorate with single-member districts. The Conservative government also fears that a proportional representation system for the European elections will force them to adopt a similar system for national elections. Spain and Portugal, however, who will elect their first MEPs in 1986, also desire a common electoral system. This has increased the pressure on the British to drop their opposition to a proportional representation system.

The adoption of a common system for the 1989 European elections could change the character of the Parliament as an institution. The present plans for a single electoral system involve dropping single-member districts and regional lists. This could alter the attitudes of the MEPs and also decrease their incentive to engage in constituency-oriented behavior. The orientation towards a small distinct geographic area could be totally replaced by the desire to serve the national interest. Thus, the responsiveness of MEPs towards their constituents could decrease and, as a consequence, MEPs may participate in less constituency-oriented behavior.

This study examines these assertions by analyzing the influence of the differing electoral systems on the perceptions and actions of MEPs. The analysis focuses on several questions in reference to MEPs. First, do different electoral systems affect the constituency orientations of MEPs? Second, do differing electoral systems lead to different frequencies of constituency-oriented activity? This paper compares the perceptions and constituency service activities of French and British MEPs and examines the frequency of participation in constituency-oriented activities. This analysis illustrates the current level of responsiveness in the European Parliament. The results may also indicate the changes that could occur in the attitudes and actions of MEPs if the member states agree on a common electoral system.

Literature Review

The Electoral Connection

Representatives have a constituency orientation and engage in constituency service because of direct elections. Direct elections create an accountability link between representatives and their constituents, and thus the legislators must be responsive if they wish to remain in office (Schumpeter, 1950; Dahl and Lindblom, 1953). Legislators find constituency service to be an efficient way of being responsive because the costs are low and the electoral benefits are high. Studies of the US Congress have assumed that the primary goal of members of Congress is reelection and that they act purposely in order to fulfill this goal (Mayhew, 1974; Fiorina, 1977; Alpert, 1978). These purposive activities encompass a wide variety of constituency service. This 'electoral connection' (Mayhew, 1974) occurs in many diverse political systems (Mezey, 1979: 160–170). British Members of Parliament (MPs) believe it is important to serve the interests of their constituents if they desire reelection (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina, 1979, 1984). Legislators in Canada, India, Kenya, and the Philippines also have the perception that constituency service would help them get reelected.¹ Thus the electoral connection occurs in diverse political settings.

¹ This conclusion was reached for Canada by Clarke (1978), for India by Maheshwari (1976), for the Philippines by Franzich (1971), and for Kenya by Hyden and Leys (1972).

Constituency Orientation and the Electoral System

The literature also points to a relationship between constituency service, the type of electoral constituency, and the perceptions of representatives. There are several conditions, besides direct elections, that are necessary for constituency service to occur. There must be a demand for this service, some probability of success and a possibility of recognition or reward (Cain et al., 1979). These conditions can be affected by institutional differences such as the electoral system (Cain et al., 1979). In a multi-member district, proportional-representation electoral system there is little chance of recognition or reward. The voters have a problem identifying the representative responsible for instituting a policy or getting benefits for the district. As the number of representatives per district increases, this becomes even more difficult. The representative thus has little incentive to serve the interests of individuals in the constituency. The constituents also have a problem determining whom to approach with their problems, especially in a national party list system. On the other hand, a representative in a single-member district, first-past-the-post system has a higher probability of recognition and reward. The constituents usually know who to approach with their problems and who to reward for obtaining benefits for the district. Single-member districts also tend to generate more demands from constituents. Thus, representatives from single-member districts should have a stronger constituency orientation and engage in more constituency-oriented activity.

Three comparative studies have examined constituency service in two countries, Great Britain and the United States, that elect representatives from single member districts (Cain et al., 1979, 1983, 1984). Despite important cultural and structural differences between the US and Great Britain, the existence of single-member districts motivated representatives to serve the interests of constituents and the constituency. There was a remarkable similarity in the types of constituency service performed in the US and Great Britain. Constituency service concerned requests and problems brought forth by individuals rather than by organized groups. Helping constituents had an important impact on electoral outcomes in both countries. A difference of 6.5 percent existed between the vote for those British MPs considered to be 'good' constituency men and those perceived to be 'bad' constituency men (Cain et al., 1984: 121). Thus an MP who holds a marginal seat can benefit by participating in constituency service activities.

There have been few attempts to study constituency service in countries with multi-member, proportional-representation systems. The Netherlands has a proportional representation system where the entire country is one large multi-member district. Dutch MPs have indicated that weighing interest-group demands is just as important as making contacts with voters (Eldersveld, Koorman, and Van der Tak, 1981: 180). The interest group also held a central place in the representative's conceptualization of problems and their solutions (Eldersveld et al., 1981: 180). The general public also had the same perceptions of the importance of interest groups. They believe that MPs paid too much attention to interest groups, and did not devote enough time to individual constituents (Eldersveld et al., 1981: 185). A similar case exists in Israel, where the electoral system has one large multi-member district. The Israelis vote for national lists, not individuals, and thus no incentive exists to serve individual interests. This suggests that a relationship exists between representing multi-member districts and serving the interests of organized groups while neglecting individuals.

Loewenberg and Kim (1978) studied the relationship between the electoral system and the legislator's perception of constituency. They used survey research to determine MPs' perception of constituency in three industrialized nations—Italy, Belgium,

Switzerland—and three developing nations—Kenya, Korea, and Turkey. These countries have a variety of electoral systems as well as other institutional and cultural differences. Loewenberg found that MPs elected from multi-member districts focus on organized groups, i.e., interest groups, as their primary constituency (Loewenberg and Kim, 1978: 45). They found that the greater the number of members per district the higher the percentage of legislators who perceive their constituencies as organized. Groups are probably more easily identified by the representative, and the possibility of electoral reward may also be greater. On the other hand, representatives from single-member districts tend to view their constituency in geographical terms (Loewenberg and Kim, 1978: 45). The legislators from single-member districts considered the individuals in their district to be their primary constituency. On the whole, the main factor in determining the perception of constituency is not the party system, but the type of electoral system.

Research Methodology

The literature suggests that substantial differences should exist between French and British MEPs in terms of perceptions and frequency of constituency service. The British represent single-member districts. In contrast, the French represent one large multi-member constituency and are elected by proportional representation.² These differing electoral systems allow one to study the differences in perceptions and activity while controlling for the immediate legislative environment. All MEPs operate under the same systemic and legislative constraints, such as size of staff and financial resources. In this case, if the activities or attitudes of MEPs are similar, then certain factors, such as political culture or the different electoral systems, may be ruled out as explanatory variables.

The data for the analysis were gathered in several ways. Formal and informal interviews were conducted with French and British MEPs from June 20, 1983 to July 30, 1983 in Brussels, Belgium and Strasbourg, France. The French MEPs were questioned in their native tongue. The formal interviews used a structured questionnaire that was also sent to a random sample of the French and British delegations.³ Twelve of the 90 mailed questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 13.3 percent. Since the same questions were asked on the questionnaire and during the interviews the results were combined into one data set. The total responses, including interviews and questionnaires, consist of 12 French and 14 British MEPs, and this accounts for 15 and 18 percent, respectively, of their total delegations. Because of anonymity, however, those MEPs who answered the questionnaires may have been more truthful than those who answered the interview questions. An examination of the responses, however, did not reveal any discernible differences between the two data sources. Combining the data also raises a concern about the randomization of the sample. While the questionnaire data are random, the MEPs interviewed were those available and willing to be interviewed. The questionnaire data, however, did not differ greatly from the interview data, so it is possible to combine both sets of responses.

² The French abandoned proportional representation for national elections after the Fourth Republic, but reinstated this system for the 1986 French parliamentary elections. In the future, this may reinforce the effects of the multi-member proportional representation system on the behavior of French MEPs.

³ Most of the quotes taken from the interviews are attributed to the MEPs who made them. Some, however, appear to be sensitive, and thus are not attributed.

The small sample size of the data also limits the type of statistical tests that can be used as well as inferences that can be made from the data. The sample size is not large enough to justify using chi-square or any other test of statistical significance based on the chi-square distribution. Thus this paper uses several measures of association as well as statistics based on the hypergeometric distribution. The measures of association used are the uncertainty coefficient and lambda. Fisher's exact test may also be used when the table involved is 2×2 .⁴

There is probably a sample bias towards those MEPs who have a predisposition towards responding to questionnaires as well as agreeing to be interviewed. Almost all of the MEPs approached by the author, however, agreed to be interviewed. If a bias exists towards more active MEPs answering questionnaires or agreeing to be interviewed then one would expect a high percentage of both the French and British to engage in constituency-oriented activities. This, however, is not the case. The French did not have a large percentage of their delegation engaging in constituency-oriented activities, and this indicates that the bias towards more active MEPs is not very strong. But the sample does have a bias towards those MEPs running for reelection. Ninety-two percent of the sample said they would run for reelection. In actuality, 62 percent of the MEPs ran for reelection in June 1984. In this case, the bias would be towards more active MEPs because they would be more concerned about getting reelected. This bias would overstate the percentages of both delegations who say they engage in constituency service activities. The electoral structure, however, should have a similar impact on MEPs from the same country. It would be very unlikely for the French and British data to be biased in different directions. Thus one can assume that the data are from a random sample of MEPs, but skewed towards those who decided to run for reelection.

MEPs and Constituency Orientation

The constituency orientation of the British and the French MEPs illustrates the relationship between attitudes and the type of electoral system. Table 1 shows that approximately two-thirds of the French MEPs believed that their constituency is their country. One French MEP remarked, 'My constituents are all of France' (Delatte, July 6, 1983). Another French MEP said that she considered her 'constituency to be all of France' (Martin, July 12, 1983). In contrast, 33 percent of the French had a regional orientation as they considered their constituency to be the region where they lived. An MEP from Brittany went so far as to identify himself as 'a militant regionalist' (Bernard, July 12, 1983). These data indicate that the vast majority of French MEPs may be more interested in serving the interests of France than the interests of specific constituents.

The constituency orientation of the British differs from the orientation of the French

⁴ Measures of association indicate only whether the relationship between the variables is strong, i.e., holds among a large proportion of the cases. The size of the sample has nothing to do with their value even though some results may be distorted if there are large differences in the marginals. Lambda is sensitive to situations where one of the cells is empty, and in this case it may have a value of 0 even when the association between the two variables is greater than zero. This is one reason why the uncertainty coefficient is also being used. The statistics are reported in the tables. Following standard practice they are mentioned in the text only if they are statistically significant. The measures of association are found primarily in the tables as it is impossible to report all the measures for each variable in the body of the paper.

Fisher's exact test is based on the hypergeometric distribution and it is useful when the cell frequencies are low. It treats the obtained sample as the actual population, and the resulting statistic indicates the probability that the distribution is primarily due to random error. Thus it is necessary to make the assumption that the sample is random, which may not entirely be the case.

MEPs. Almost 93 percent of the British MEPs believed that their constituency is their geographical electoral district. Being elected from single-member districts makes it very difficult to ignore the wishes of constituents. Thus the British, being the only delegation elected from single-member districts, should engage in constituency service more than the other MEPs.

The British and the French MEPs should also be oriented towards furthering the interests of their constituents. Table 1 illustrates that all of the British MEPs believed that serving the interests of their constituents is important. Many of the British indicated the saliency of this activity;

- (a) 'It is very important indeed' (Enright, June 21, 1983).
- (b) 'It must be. I am a representative' (Beazly, July 7, 1983).
- (c) '[Serving constituents] is the most important part of my job' (Hutton, June 29, 1983).
- (d) 'It is extremely important' (Griffiths, June 30, 1983).
- (e) 'You have a responsibility for them, to look after their interests' (Battersby, June 30, 1983).

The British MEPs clearly believe that serving the interests of their constituents is an important part of their role as an MEP.

The French are not quite as unanimous in this belief as the British, as illustrated in Table 1. Sixty-four percent of the French MEPs believed it is important to serve the interests of their constituents. One Frenchman stated, 'It is very important' (Delatte, July 6, 1983). In the same vein, another French MEP remarked, 'Yes, of course. It is extremely important' (Martin, July 12, 1983). The French MEPs who have a regional orientation, however, do not feel obligated to serve the interests of all Frenchmen. For example, one French MEP remarked that she represented 'a portion of the French people' (Fuillet, July 6, 1983). Another French MEP, who considered himself to be an ardent regionalist, remarked that he spends a lot of time promoting Breton language and culture as well as other interests of this region. The data indicate that French MEPs with a regional orientation did not have a great desire to serve the interests of the entire country. Nearly three-fourths of the French with a country orientation believed in the importance of serving the interests of their constituents, while only 50 percent of the French with a regional orientation had this belief. This suggests that the majority of the French MEPs consider their constituents to be the entire national electorate.

Since the majority of the British and the French have a constituency orientation, they should spend some time working for the interests of constituents. The French and the British did spend a lot of time furthering the interests of their constituents. Almost 86 percent of the British MEPs believed that they spent a great deal of time engaged in this activity, compared to 90.9 percent of the French. The British appear to have more of a demand from their constituents to watch out for constituency interests. Over 85 percent of the British believed they are frequently contacted by constituents. One British MEP stated that one gets 'quite a variety of individual approaches' (Griffiths, June 30, 1983). In contrast, only 25 percent of the French stated that constituents contacted them frequently. MEPs from single-member districts should be contacted more by constituents than MEPs from multi-member districts. Single-member districts make it easier for constituents to know and approach an MEP because only one representative per district exists. Thus the different electoral structures may explain why the French did not receive much contact from their constituents.

TABLE 1. Perceptions of French and British MEPs in percentages (N = 26).

<i>British (n = 14)</i>		<i>French (n = 12)</i>	
Perception of constituency			
District	93 (13)	District	0 (0)
Country	7 (1)	Country	67 (8)
Region	0 (0)	Region	33 (4)
Important to serve interests of constituents			
Yes	100 (14)	Yes	64 (7)
No	0 (0)	No	9 (1)
Sometimes	0 (0)	Sometimes	27 (3)
Lambda = 0.36; uncertainty coefficient = 0.22			
Amount of time spent serving interests of constituents			
Great deal	86 (12)	Great deal	91 (10)
Not much	14 (2)	Not much	9 (1)
None	0 (0)	None	0 (0)
Lambda = 0.0; uncertainty coefficient = 0.17			
Frequency of contact by constituents			
Frequently	86 (12)	Frequently	25 (2)
Rarely	14 (2)	Rarely	63 (5)
None	0 (0)	None	13 (1)
Lambda = 0.37; uncertainty coefficient = 0.35			
Important to help interest groups			
Yes	50 (7)	Yes	0 (0)
No	7 (1)	No	56 (5)
Sometimes	43 (6)	Sometimes	44 (4)
Lambda = 0.15; uncertainty coefficient = 0.24			
Frequency of contact by interest groups			
Frequently	86 (12)	Frequently	18 (2)
Not much	14 (2)	Not much	46 (5)
None	0 (0)	None	36 (4)
Lambda = 0.27; uncertainty coefficient = 0.29			

The French and the British MEPs also differed on their interest group orientation.⁵ A majority of the British believed they should help interest groups with their problems. Fifty percent responded that this is important, while another 43 percent of the British MEPs stated that it depended on the problem. One MEP stated that 'It is important for the members to be aware of the various interest groups and so on that exist in the constituency' (Collins, July 5, 1983). The MEPs also need to be 'concerned with institutions, organizations, maybe major lobbies with an international appeal' (Normandton, June 21, 1983). The French MEPs, though, did not have as strong an interest-group orientation and helping interest groups was not a salient concern. Approximately 56 percent of the French believed that it is not important to serve the

⁵ A transnational legislature does not often deal with entitlement programs, as do national governments. Thus one would not expect the MEPs to be contacted very frequently by individuals. The one exception is steel redundancy payments given to steelworkers who have lost their jobs. The large majority of contact should be by businesses or lobbies, and one gets this impression from the interview data.

interests of organized groups. The remainder of the French MEPs indicated that helping interest groups depended on the nature of the problem.

This suggests the French MEPs do not receive very much contact from pressure groups. Only 18 percent of the French MEPs reported frequent contact by interest groups and 46 percent said they are rarely contacted. Some French MEPs do have links with professional organizations or receive communications from them. A French MEP remarked that the French 'have relations with professional organizations' (Delatte, July 6, 1983). Another commented on the constant contact by interest groups connected in some way to his speciality, maritime affairs (Bombard, July 6, 1983). The British MEPs, on the other hand, report a higher frequency of contact by organized groups. Approximately 86 percent of the British said organized groups and businesses contacted them often. One MEP commented that he gets 'a lot of correspondence from individual companies' (Battersby, June 30, 1983). In the same vein another British MEP stated that 'specific companies will come to you with problems' (Rogers, July 5, 1983). The British MEPs had frequent contact with organized interests and also believed that helping these groups is important. Thus the British appear to have a stronger interest-group orientation than the French MEPs. This contradicts the assertion of Loewenberg and Kim (1978) that representatives from multi-member districts should perceive their constituency as organized groups.

Publicity and the Electoral Connection

The British MEPs have a stronger constituency orientation than the French MEPs. In this case, one would also expect the British to have a stronger electoral connection. One indicator of an electoral connection is if MEPs publicize their activities that help their constituents or constituency. Table 2 illustrates that a large majority of MEPs do take credit for their actions. Although 67 percent of the French stated that they publicized their constituency-related activities, almost all of the British said they engaged in publicity. The following statements reflect the attitudes of the British MEPs on credit claiming.

- (a) 'It is absolutely intrinsic to our role' (Jackson, June 20, 1983).
- (b) 'As a politician you need publicity' (Rogers, July 5, 1983).
- (c) 'I think we rightly take credit for it. We can't be bashful in that respect' (Enright, June 21, 1983).

TABLE 2. MEPs and publicity ($N = 26$).

<i>British (n = 14)</i>		<i>French (n = 12)</i>	
Publicizes role in obtaining grants from the EC			
Yes	92 (12)	Yes	67 (9)
Lambda = 0.0; uncertainty coefficient = 0.10			
Reasons for publicizing role			
Electoral	78 (7)	Electoral	33 (1)
European	0 (0)	European	67 (2)
Both	22 (2)	Both	0 (0)
Lambda = 0.25; uncertainty coefficient = 0.38			

This suggests the British have a stronger electoral connection than the French MEPs.

One must also determine if there is an electoral incentive behind the credit claiming. Table 2 shows that over 77 percent of the British MEPs said they publicized their actions for mainly electoral reasons. The reasons ranged from showing the constituents that they are doing their job, to increasing their margin of victory. In contrast, the French publicized grants for entirely different reasons. French MEPs wanted to publicize the benefits that the French people receive from membership in the European Communities. This is consistent with the assertion that the majority of the French MEPs consider their constituents to be the entire national electorate. These data indicate that the British have a stronger electoral connection than the French MEPs.

Nationality and Constituency-oriented Activity

The previous section indicated that the British have a stronger constituency orientation and a stronger electoral connection than the French. The British MEPs should thus engage in constituency-oriented activities on a more regular basis than the French, especially after direct elections.⁶ British MEPs should try to help businesses or local authorities from their districts obtain money from the European Community. Since an MEP has little to offer the individual voter they try to serve businesses and local authorities (Robinson, 1983). The MEPs have 'grasped the fact that the EEC is a source of grants and loans' (Robinson, 1983: 294). She stated that the British MEPs work hard to help groups take advantage of available resources. The MEPs also receive a tremendous amount of mail from these groups. The British MEPs believed they needed to pick a particular case or policy and pursue it in order to remain in the public eye (Robinson, 1983). The British MEPs thus actively attempt to obtain benefits for their constituency, especially in the area of grants. Grants can be targeted to specific areas and this tends to help representatives from single-member districts. These data, however, do not tell us whether the British participate more frequently in these activities than the French.

On the whole, more of the British MEPs engaged in constituency service than the French. Table 3 shows that a statistically significant difference exists between nationality and giving advice on how to obtain grants. Over 71 percent of the British MEPs gave some kind of grant advice. This advice usually informed local authorities of available funding or sent constituents who misunderstood the grant process to the right people. A British MEP stated that he suggested 'areas of funding that are available to them (constituents, local authorities)' (Enright, June 21, 1983). One-half of the French MEPs engaged in this behavior. Seventy-one percent of the British MEPs also used other methods to help their constituents obtain grants. The MEPs helped with applications and lobbied to get all possible funding for their constituency. This attitude was reflected by one British MEP who stated that,

Supposing you have a constituency which has a certain problem and there is a pile of money out there, and you come within the rules for that, you will obviously fight for your constituency (Jackson, June 20, 1983).

⁶ The types of constituency service that are being used are directly derived from the interviews. These activities are: suggesting projects to national governments, supporting proposals that benefit constituents, consulting with local authorities, helping constituents to get grants, giving some type of grant advice, informally presenting projects to the European Commission, bringing groups to Brussels to meet bureaucrats, and putting formal and written questions to the Commission. This list includes almost all of the constituency service activities that an MEP can perform, except for sending information and giving talks.

TABLE 3. Nationality and constituency service (percentage responding yes; $N = 26$).

<i>British (n = 14)</i>		<i>French (n = 12)</i>	
<i>British</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>British</i>	<i>French</i>
Suggests projects		Helps to get grants	
Yes 62 (13)	Yes 50 (12)	Yes 71 (14)	Yes 27 (11)
Lambda = 0.0		Lambda = 0.63	
Uncertainty coefficient = 0.00		Uncertainty coefficient = 0.54	
Gives grant advice		Fisher's test*	
Gives grant advice		Informally presents projects to the Commission	
Yes 71 (14)	Yes 50 (12)	Yes 67 (9)	Yes 0 (5)
Lambda = NA		Lambda = 0.50	
Uncertainty coefficient = NA		Uncertainty coefficient = 0.40	
Fisher's test*		Fisher's test*	
Consults with local authorities		Brings groups to Brussels	
Yes 82 (11)	Yes 20 (5)	Yes 44 (9)	Yes 0 (5)
Lambda = 0.50		Lambda = 0.0	
Uncertainty coefficient = 0.27		Uncertainty coefficient = 0.26	
Fisher's test*		Fisher's test = 0.12	

* Denotes significance at 0.01 level.

Another British MEP said he had 'been pressing claims for projects in my constituency' (Griffiths, June 30, 1983).

The MEPs also consult with local and regional authorities in order to help these authorities obtain grants and to suggest projects that may be eligible for European Community funding. Table 3 shows that a statistically significant difference exists between nationality and meeting with local authorities. Approximately 82 percent of the British MEPs consulted with local authorities. One British MEP stated that he guides his 'local authority towards the sorts of things that are available and give them the best advice that I can' (Hutton, June 29, 1983). Only 20 percent of the French MEPs said they consulted with local authorities. The MEPs also informally presented projects or proposals to the European Commission in Brussels. The MEPs bluntly ask whether certain projects qualify for aid under the regulations of the European Regional Development Fund (RDF). Local authorities thus know whether some projects will receive an RDF grant before they even submit the application. The relationship between informally presenting projects to the Commission and nationality is statistically significant. Sixty-seven percent of the British MEPs stated that they engaged in this activity. Most of the British MEPs reported that they did a great deal of informal lobbying at the Commission in Brussels. Several MEPs remarked that their national governments asked them to intercede at the Commission on behalf of regional projects. None of the French said they informally presented projects to the Commission.

The British MEPs also tended to be more concerned about helping constituency groups obtain money from the European Communities. Slightly more than two-fifths of the British said they brought groups to the Commission in Brussels. Not one of the French MEPs said they arranged these types of trips. The British set up meetings

between constituency groups and Commission officials so these groups can learn the correct way to apply for grants. This helps local authorities to speed up the application process, which is important because most grants are awarded on a first-come, first-serve basis.

The data indicate that many of the British MEPs engaged in these informal constituency-oriented activities. The British consistently had a higher percentage participating in the various constituency-oriented activities discussed in this section. MEPs participate in these activities in order to funnel more resources into their constituencies. This greater representation of local and regional interests may be a consequence of the stronger and more focused demands generated from single-member districts. This suggests that the type of electoral constituency may have an effect on the performance of constituency service.

An alternative explanation, however, is that there is a relationship between previous office-holding and representational style. British MEPs may be just carrying over behavior they learned while in political office. An analysis of the backgrounds of the British MEPs interviewed reveals that only one out of 10 had been a member of the House of Commons. Four out of 10 British MEPs had been members of local councils. Thus there is only a small amount of national political experience. The same can be said of the French MEPs. Only two out of the six French MEPs interviewed had any type of political experience. The numbers, however, are so small that it is difficult to make any valid inferences. One should not overlook, though, the fact that both the British and French national electoral systems are based on single-member districts. This means that any representational style learned while in office may be fairly similar. In this case, one might expect the behavior of these two delegations to have some resemblance, but this did not occur.

The Electoral System and Regional Fund Grants

(a) *The British and Regional Fund grants.* Since the British actively try to obtain grants for their constituency, their action may be reflected in RDF grant indicators. These indicators are the number of applications for RDF grants, the number of RDF grants awarded, and the approval rate. The most important indicator is approval rate. The majority of the activities described in the previous section are designed to increase the efficiency of the application process. The more efficient the process, the greater the number of regional grants going to the local authorities. The changes in all the RDF grant indicators after direct elections in 1979 should be greater for Great Britain than for France. The project indicators for Great Britain changed substantially after direct elections in 1979. Table 4 shows that the number of project applications increased from 1978 to 1979. A fairly steady increase in the number of projects funded also occurred after 1978, except for a decrease in 1980. The number of project applications and the number of projects funded decreased as the 1979 elections grew nearer. This may indicate that the appointed MEPs did not have very much motivation to help obtain grants, unless they decided to run in 1979. Table 5 illustrates averages computed for the period before direct elections, 1975–1978, and the period after direct elections, 1979–1983. The average number of project applications, projects funded and percentage of projects approved increased slightly in the period after direct elections. This small increase does not give a clear indication of the affect of direct election on the actions of the British MEPs.

The average number of grant applications and projects funded per eligible region in each country gives a more specific indication of any trends. Only certain areas or

TABLE 4. Great Britain and project indicators (1975–1983).

	<i>Project applications</i>	<i>Projects funded</i>	<i>Projects denied funding</i>	<i>Percentage approved</i>
1975	607	534	173	88
1976	870	691	53	79
1977	592	505	87	85
1978	512	455	57	89
1979	668	484	184	72
1980	623	325	298	52
1981	598	583	16	97
1982	688	674	14	98
1983	1042	938	104	90

Source: Commission of the European Communities, ERDF First–Ninth Annual Reports (1975–1983).

regions in a country can receive RDF project assistance. The number of regions in Britain eligible for RDF aid has varied from eight to nine from 1975 to 1983. The average number of grant applications and projects still had only a small increase after elections in 1979. This raises the possibility that the newly elected British MEPs needed some time to learn the grant allocation process and the expectations of their constituents. Kirchner (1983) found that only 15 percent of the British MEPs had any previous political experience, so this is a plausible hypothesis.

In order to test this assertion, the RDF grant indicators are analyzed separately for three periods: 1975–1977, 1978–1980, and 1981–1983. A transition and learning period would have occurred from 1978 to 1980. Table 5 illustrates some evidence that a learning period may have taken place. The second or learning time period has the lowest average number of applications, grants awarded, and grant approval rate, as well as the lowest average number of grants and applications per region. In contrast, the third time period, 1981–1983, had the highest average number of grants awarded and a 95 percent approval rate. This period also had a higher number of project applications and projects funded per assisted region than the other two time periods. The high approval rate may

TABLE 5. Great Britain and period averages.

	<i>Project applications</i>	<i>Projects funded</i>	<i>Percentage approved</i>	<i>Applications per region</i>	<i>Projects per region</i>
British pre-election (1975–1978) and post-election (1979–1983) period averages					
Pre-election	645	546	85	76	64
Post-election	724	601	82	83	69
British pre-learning (1975–1977), learning (1978–1980), and post-learning (1979–1983) period averages					
Pre-learning	690	577	84	79	66
Learning	601	421	70	71	51
Post-learning	776	732	95	89	84

reflect the activities of the British MEPs that help local government apply for grants more efficiently. While not conclusive, these findings do tend to support the assertion that the British MEPs had a learning period from 1978 to 1980.

(b) *The French and Regional Fund grants.* The data indicated that only a minority of the French delegation participated in activities designed to help constituents receive project grants. This lack of activity may be reflected in the project indicators. Tables 6 and 7 show mixed results for the project indicators. The number of applications and grants awarded increased substantially after direct elections. This may be a result of the accountability created by direct elections. Table 7 also indicates that a learning period did not occur for the French. The RDF grant indicators did not decrease during the 1978–1980 transition period, with the exception of approval rate. One possible explanation is that the French MEPs had more political experience than the British and more quickly adapted to the European Parliament. The most important indicator of MEP activity, however, is the grant approval rate. The French have never had higher than an 82 percent project grant approval rate, compared to a high of 95 percent for the

TABLE 6. France and project indicators (1975–1983).

	<i>Project applications</i>	<i>Projects funded</i>	<i>Projects denied funding</i>	<i>Percentage approved</i>
1975	282	232	50	82
1976	365	209	113	57
1977	370	184	186	50
1978	539	432	107	80
1979	665	428	237	64
1980	393	271	122	69
1981	1011	619	393	61
1982	1224	309	915	25
1983	1463	856	607	59

Source: Commission of the European Communities, ERDF First–Ninth Annual Reports (1975–1983).

TABLE 7. France and period averages.

	<i>Project applications</i>	<i>Projects funded</i>	<i>Percentage approved</i>	<i>Applications per region</i>	<i>Projects per region</i>
French pre-election (1975–1978) and post-election (1979–1983) period averages					
Pre-election	389	264	68	19	13
Post-election	951	497	56	48	25
French pre-learning (1975–1977), learning (1978–1980), and post-learning (1979–1983) period averages					
Pre-learning	339	208	61	17	10
Learning	532	377	71	26	18
Post-learning	1233	595	48	62	20

British. Most strikingly, the approval rate for the French fell by 44 percent from 1980 to 1982. One explanation may be that the local authorities in Great Britain have more expertise in preparing grant applications. The British have always been more concerned with regional policy than the French. However, the number of grant applications submitted by the French did increase after direct elections. This indicates that the French local authorities are becoming more involved in obtaining RDF grants. Thus one possible explanation for the falling approval rate is that local government is not receiving enough help from the French MEPs.

A third explanation for the changes in the RDF indicators is related to the RDF budget. An analysis of Table 8 shows that the RDF budget has increased every year except for 1977, when it remained constant. This suggests that project applications and project grants after direct elections may have increased because there was more money available for grants. MEPs may have had nothing to do with the increase in applications and grants. The evidence, however, does not totally support this assertion. The correlation between the percentage increase in the budget over the previous year and the percentage increase in project applications over the previous year is 0.495. The correlation between the increase in the budget and the increase of project grants is 0.548. The average increase in the RDF budget is 29 percent, while the mean increase in project grants is 11 percent lower. Therefore, the increase or decrease in the number of project grants and applications cannot be totally explained by an increased amount of funds. As a matter of fact, in 1978 and 1980 the RDF budget increased while the number of grants and application decreased. In 1982 the budget increased by 5 percent, but applications increased by 51 percent and grants increased by over 15 percent. The evidence indicates that a fairly weak relationship exists between the size of the RDF budget and the number of applications submitted and grants awarded. Thus the differences in the RDF indicators may still be a reflection of the amount of help MEPs give local authorities with the application process.

TABLE 8. European Regional Development Fund (RDF) budget.

<i>Year</i>	<i>EUAs (millions)</i>	<i>Percent increase</i>	<i>Percent of EC budget</i>
1975	300	—	4.8
1976	500	66	6.2
1977	500	00	5.2
1978	581	16	4.7
1979	945	62	6.5
1980	1165	23	7.5
1981	1540	32	8.1
1982	1610	05	7.4
1983	2010	25	8.7

Source: *Sixteenth General Report of the European Communities* (1983).

Parliamentary Questions

Another constituency-oriented activity is asking oral and written questions. MEPs can bring the problems of their areas to the attention of the Commission and also get some

TABLE 9. Parliamentary questions on regional policy (1975–1983).

	1975–1978	1979–1982	Percent increase	1983
Belgian	5	39	680	15
Danish	3	1	–200	2
West Germans	27	27	0	4
French	23	39	70	11
Irish	21	46	119	12
Italians	6	26	333	6
Luxembourgers	3	1	–200	0
Dutch	2	17	750	7
British	57	115	102	41
Total	147	311	112	98

Source: *Official Journal of the European Communities* (1975–1983).

Note: The electoral systems of the member states are as follows: Great Britain—single-member districts (78); Italy—five constituencies, proportional representation, party list; Belgium—three constituencies, proportional representation, party list; Ireland—four constituencies, proportional representation, party list; Germany—a national list for the Social Democrats and a state list for the Christian Democrats, and proportional representation; France—one constituency, proportional representation, party list; Holland—one constituency, proportional representation, party list; Denmark—one constituency, proportional representation, party list.

publicity. Parliamentary questions allow MEPs to lobby the Commission for increased aid for their constituencies. Since MEPs from single-member districts tended to have a stronger geographical orientation, one would expect a relationship to exist between the type of electoral system and the volume of questions on regional policy. Table 9 controls for country and illustrates the relationship between electoral system, constituency orientation, and parliamentary questions. After direct elections, the MEPs from the UK asked the greatest number of questions on regional policy. They posed over 61 percent of all questions during this period. Generally, the countries with regional or single-member constituencies asked the greatest number of questions after direct elections. MEPs from the UK, Belgium, and Ireland asked the most questions, respectively. The only exception is the Italian MEPs, who asked fewer questions than the French and the Germans. This may be explained by the fact that Italy has over 16 MEPs per constituency.

All of the countries asked more questions after direct elections, with the exception of Denmark and Luxembourg; but these two countries asked only a small number of questions. The MEPs from the Netherlands and Belgium had the greatest increase in questions on regional policy after direct elections, 750 and 680 percent respectively. Except for the Netherlands, all of the countries with the greatest increase have some type of constituency system based on regions or single-member districts. The data suggest that MEPs from these electoral systems more actively promote constituency interests than MEPs from multi-member/single-constituency systems. This also implies that MEPs who represent regions or single-member districts have more of an interest in regional policy.

Conclusion

MEPs do engage in some form of constituency service, as one would expect because of direct elections. Two different electoral systems, the French and the British, illustrate how different constituencies may lead to differing constituency orientations. The British, elected from single-member districts, have a stronger orientation towards their constituents and organized groups than the French. Apparently, French MEPs feel more concerned about furthering the interests of the national electorate than the interests of groups and individuals. The data do not support the conclusion of Loewenburg and Kim (1978) that representatives from multi-member districts will perceive their constituency as organized groups. One possible explanation for this unexpected finding is that the British are being contacted by organized groups from their constituencies and thus have some motivation to help them. On the other hand, the French MEPs would not receive very many electoral benefits from helping organized groups. The French tended to be more concerned with the national interest than helping interest groups with their problems. Another possible explanation is that British political culture in general is more group oriented and associational than French political culture. Unfortunately, there are not enough data available to determine which is the more plausible explanation.

The stronger electoral connection and constituency orientation of the British motivated them to engage in more constituency-oriented activities than the French. The British delegation participated in grant-related activities more frequently than the French. This assertion is supported by the RDF project indicators. The British had a higher grant approval rate after direct election in 1979. MEPs from Britain also asked the most parliamentary questions on regional policy. Thus single-member districts appear to lead to representatives who have stronger constituency orientations and engage in more activities of benefit to their constituencies.

The analysis in this paper also gives some indication of the possible future development of the European Parliament as an institution. The advent of a common electoral system could change the representational style of the MEPs. The abolition of single-member districts and regional constituencies might make the Parliament as a whole less responsive. The motivation for MEPs to engage in constituency-oriented activities could decrease. The MEPs might become more oriented towards serving the national interest. In this case, the needs and problems of groups or individuals would be neglected, as the MEPs would have less of a territorial affiliation to small geographic districts, and the needs of different and diverse areas of a country might be sacrificed to the national interest. Therefore, a common electoral system, based on multi-member districts, can decrease regional representation. Conversely, the argument for a common system is that groups are underrepresented by single-member districts. This is certainly the case for the Liberal party in Great Britain. The author does not make a judgment as to whether responsiveness or representativeness is the more desirable quality for a legislature. In any case, the adoption of a single electoral system will have important consequences for the development of the European Parliament and the future role orientations of MEPs.

Appendix I: Questions Used in Interviews and in Questionnaire

1. What is your nationality?
2. Do you plan to run for reelection in 1984?
3. Do you believe it is important to represent the interests of your constituents?
4. If yes, to what extent does this activity occupy your time?
5. Are you ever approached by interest groups to act on their behalf?
6. Are you able to help such groups?
7. Do you consider helping such groups to be an important part of your job?
8. Do you suggest regional development projects to your national government?
9. Do you suggest or support projects or proposals in the European Parliament that benefit your constituents?
10. Do you help your constituents obtain grants from the Regional Development fund?
11. Do you publicize your role in helping your constituents get grants?
12. What do you consider to be your constituency?
13. Do you ask formal oral or written questions on regional policy to the Commission?
14. Do you bring groups to Brussels to meet members of the Commission?
15. Do you help your constituents get grants from the EEC?
16. Do you consult with local authorities about getting grants from the EEC?
17. Do you give advice to constituents who want to get grants from the EEC?
18. Do you informally present projects to the Commission?
19. How frequently are you contacted by your constituents?

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