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Central European MEPs and Their Roles Behavioral Strategies in the European Parliament

DOI 10.1515/wps-2016-0004

Abstract: This article helps to better understand the role orientations of the Central European Members of the European Parliament, the factors that influence their strategies, and the relationship between their roles and activities. Based on the results of a quantitative survey research with MEPs from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia in the 2009–2014 term, I argue that it is possible to explain the political roles of MEPs by their attitudes towards politics and policy, and the territorial focus of representation (European vs. national level). Due to the internal mechanisms of the EP and its position in the multi-level governance system of European politics, these two dimensions represent dilemmas that all MEPs face, when it comes to the efficient use of their scarce resources: time and energy. This study demonstrates that socio-demographic factors, attitudes and political socialization all have an influence on what roles MEPs choose. The time spent in the EP, age, previous political experience, party affiliation, left-right self-definition and career ambitions are all important factors that can explain the political behavior of MEPs. The Central European MEPs' focus on politics vs. policy and the European vs. national political arena have different roots, and different variables explain them. Orientation towards politics and policy largely depends on previous political experience and future career ambitions. Focus on the European or the national level is best explained by age, party affiliation and left-right self-definition.

Keywords: central European MEPs; elite research; European parliament; political behavior; political roles.

Original reference: Bíró-Nagy, András (2015). "Közép-európai EP-képviselők és szerepeik. Viselkedési stratégiák az Európai Parlamentben". *Politikatudományi Szemle* 24:2, 91–119.

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1 Introduction

Until recently, academic research about the European Parliament has neglected those who, uniquely in the institutional framework of the European Union, are elected directly: the Members of the European Parliament. Undoubtedly, the EP went through significant institutional developments since the first direct election of 1979; it evolved from a “fig leaf” into a “co-legislature” (Corbett et al. 2011: p. 3). In the case of this constantly changing, expanding, and increasingly powerful institution, it has been the historic development of the European Parliament which captured academic curiosity. The Europe-wide direct election generated considerable attention from researchers as well, along with the topics of dynamics of party politics, inter-party competition, and party cohesion. Since the European Parliament’s role can only be understood as a part of the European institutional system, the fourth main pillar of scholarship on the EP was made up of analyses of its place within the European Union’s institutional matrix and its interrelationship with other EU bodies (Hix et al. 2002).

The starting point for this study is that no institution can be understood without focusing on the actors who fill the institution with content and formulate strategies for adaptation to formal and informal rules. From the second half of the 1990s, it was this realization which drove the authors of pioneering research on MEPs (Katz 1997; Scarrow 1997; Norris 1999; Wessels 1999), who have completed significant achievements in exploring topics such as career paths, parliamentary recruitment, and representatives’ perceptions of their own roles. The 21st century brought considerable progress in the examination of MEP voting behavior (Hix et al. 2007), intra-EP activity (McElroy 2006; Yordanova 2009), and the relationships between representatives and parliamentary groups (Hix and Noury 2009). In the following pages, I will describe the role orientations of Central European MEPs, and this analysis will include their activities within and outside of the European Parliament.

In this study, I refer to those states from the Central European region which acceded to the European Union in 2004 as Central European countries. For the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, it was not only the history of the previous decades – the decades of socialism and the subsequent democratic transition – which resulted in a similar context for the development of political elites, but also the first decade after the 2004 enlargement of the EU. These 10 years allow for enough time to assess how the Central European political elite became Europeanized (Semenova et al. 2014) on a new platform: the European Parliament. In terms of their political role orientations, which factors influence them most (Katz 1997; Farrell and Scully 2003; Navarro 2008), and how do these manifest themselves in their activities inside and outside the EP? I examine Central European MEPs in light of these questions. In all cases where attitudes of

MEPs were necessary for providing answers, I relied on data from questionnaires answered by the Central European legislators of the 2009–2014 term.

In terms of its genre, this article is a neo-institutionalist elite research. Consequently, it places an emphasis on the effects of institutional frameworks on political behavior, but it also considers individual preferences (career plans, ideological positions, political experience) as significant factors. When developing the role typology used to identify dominant role perceptions, Strøm's (1997) theory on politicians' use of "scarce resources" served as an important influence. Along with his co-authors, Corbett et al. (2011: p. 64), who is an MEP himself, contended that "the main constraint on members is time." Because of scarce resources, MEPs have to simultaneously determine their priorities when it comes to time spent on European and national policies and decide on what activities to focus on within the EP, in terms of their relationships with other EU institutions, and political and non-political actors external to the EP. Due to concerns of re-election, it is impossible to completely ignore one's relationship to national politics. On the other hand, from the perspective of a European career, it is similarly difficult to neglect the drive to gain prestige in Brussels and Strasbourg through the quality of the representative's work, along with acquired tasks and positions. What strategic decisions a politician will make in these fields will be the result of individual deliberation. The same is true of the degree an MEP will make use of committee work to specialize in a given field. Should a parliamentarian be a generalist, or is it best to become an expert in a specific area? This, too, is a dilemma which requires legislators to make a choice.

In the first two parts I introduce the hypotheses of the study and the selected methodology, with special attention paid to a field research conducted through a questionnaire-based representative survey covering 40% of Central European MEPs in the 2009–2014 term. The third chapter identifies the fault lines along which politicians can be divided up, and this will serve as the basis for the development of a new role typology. The fourth section introduces the factors which proved to be the most influential in shaping the role perceptions of the representatives. The fifth chapter analyzes the link between activities and role orientations. Through the examination of officially documented activities in the EP and activities outside of it reconstructed through interviews with representatives, we can find out more about the connection between roles which manifest in coherent attitudinal structures and deeds.

2 Research Questions and Hypotheses

The research questions and the hypotheses of this paper are summarised in Table 1. Due to the lack of an "electoral connection," a relationship with national politics

is of tremendous importance for MEPs (Hix and Høyland 2013). An MEP certainly has to pay attention in two directions, and from the perspective of his or her activities inside and outside the EP, picking to focus on either the national or European level may be a definitive choice. In lieu of “party government,” the outstanding role of committees is also known (Judge and Earnshaw 2008; Yordanova 2009). All MEPs are assigned into committees, and consequently the question of how much time and energy a politician should spend on policy work arises instantly. The answer to this, which is also an act of positioning oneself on the policy/politics spectrum, may determine the nature, direction, and genre of the activities of a representative. As a result, the European/national and policy/politics dimensions are staples for which, whether consciously or not, every MEP has to create some sort of an approach, and in turn these will affect their behavior in and outside of the EP. Therefore, my hypothesis is that the European/national and policy/politics dimensions are suitable to describe the political roles of Members of the European

Table 1: Research Questions, Hypotheses and the Modes of Testing.

Research question	Hypothesis	Mode of testing
Can we distinguish various role orientations among Central European MEPs?	Various role orientations can be distinguished among the Central European MEPs. European/national and policy/politics dimensions are applicable to describe the different roles of Central European MEPs (H1)	Factor analysis and further two-variable analyses based on responses by Central European MEPs (and cluster analysis for grouping)
Are there differences between the role orientations of Central European MEPs in terms of their activities within the European Parliament?	There are differences between the different political roles in terms of activities in the EP (H2). (Policy/politics approaches are identifiable in the activities of Central European representatives within the EP)	Correlations between the roles of politicians and their activities within the EP
Are there differences between the role orientations of Central European MEPs in terms of their activities outside of the European Parliament?	There are differences between the different political roles in terms of activities outside of the EP (H3). (European/national approaches are identifiable in the activities of Central European representatives outside of the EP)	Correlations between the roles of politicians and their activities outside of the EP

Parliament (H1). I will examine the validity of this statement amongst Central European MEPs, attempt to establish a possible role typology and examine which variables best explain the role orientations of these politicians.

In two further hypotheses, I will treat the roles of MEPs as independent variables. I will discuss separately how the manifestations of roles inside and outside the EP affect behavior. In the former case, I assert that the policy/politics dimension of political roles is clearly visible in the activities MEPs choose in the EP (H2). However, the activities of an MEP are naturally not restricted to intra-EP work. Keeping in touch with other institutions, national politics, the domestic press, advocacy groups and citizens are also equally important. For this reason, I will also examine the hypothesis that role perceptions of MEPs can be demonstrated in activities outside of the EP (H3).

3 The Database

Several conclusions of this study are based on field research and the resultant database (Table 2). Without data from Central European MEPs, it would have been impossible to make substantive claims about their ideas of representation, political roles and activities outside of the EP. During two different periods, I have spent a total of 4 weeks – between 5–16 September 2011 and 25 June–6 July 2012 – conducting in-person questionnaire interviews with MEPs from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. Most of the questionnaire was adopted from the questions of the European Parliamentary Research Group's 2010 MEP survey (Farrell et al. 2011), and these were transplanted verbatim to increase comparability in the future. However, I also added some questions of my own to the questionnaire. Additional individual research was necessary due to the 2010 EPRG survey's low sample size among Central European legislators. For example, reaching Hungarian representatives proved to be especially ineffective in the EPRG 2010 research: EPRG was only able to include four MEPs out of a total of 22. In the end, the two surveys complemented each other well: both projects reached MEPs which the other did not, or did so to a much lesser degree.

During the creation of the final database, I assessed the effectiveness of both researches for inclusion. In both instances, I chose to utilize data from the research project which was able to reach more MEPs from a given party.¹ Where access rates

¹ My research included 33 interviews in Brussels and Strasbourg. After employing the effectiveness-based selection mechanism for each party, 26 data sets made it into the final database. I expanded this by making use of responses provided by 19 representatives (2/3 of whom were Polish) from EPRG's 2010 survey.

Table 2: MEPs According to Member States and Parliamentary Groups Among all Central European MEPs and those Included in the Survey Research (2009–2014 EP term).

Country	EP parliamentary group	All Central European MEPs	Number of MEPs in sample	Data source
Czech Republic	ECR	9	3	ABN
	S&D	7	4	EPRG
	GUE/NGL	4	2	ABN
	EPP	2	1	EPRG
Hungary	EPP	14	5	ABN
	S&D	4	4	ABN
	Independent	3	3	ABN
Poland	ECR	1	–	–
	EPP	28	9	EPRG
	ECR	15	2	EPRG
Slovakia	S&D	7	1	EPRG
	EPP	6	4	3 ABN+1 EPRG
	S&D	5	1	ABN
Slovenia	ALDE	1	1	EPRG
	EFD	1	–	–
	EPP	3	2	ABN
Slovenia	S&D	2	2	ABN
	ALDE	2	1	ABN
Central Europe	All parliamentary groups	114	45	

ABN, András Bíró-Nagy's 2011–2012 research; EPRG, European Parliamentary Research Group's 2010 research. The number of each parliamentary group's members reflects the initial situation of the 2009–2014 term. During the term, the Polish and Slovenian delegations gained one European People's Party MEP each.

were identical, I used my own data, because my survey included further control questions. As a result, I was able to assemble a database which included 40% of all Central European MEPs (45 responders), which, when compared to other EP survey research projects, is a good ratio.²

By combining the relevant parts of both databases, the result was a final database which offers relatively representative results according to political groups

² Julien Navarro's role typology (2008) was completed by interviewing a little over 10% of MEPs. The EPRG's 2010 survey officially reached 36.8% (270 responders), but if we consider the number of those who completed the questionnaire substantively, their access rate was considerably weaker. The left/right or European integrational scales, for example, were only addressed by 24% of all legislators (Scully et al. 2012: p. 675).

and member states. This study is mostly based on these new empirical results.³ It is important to add that both surveys attempted complete coverage. Through multiple rounds of emails, EPRG contacted all MEPs, while I addressed all representatives from the five Central European countries surveyed. The response rate can be seen even more favorably when we view only those MEPs who are actually active within the EP. If we only consider MEPs who have participated in at least 85% of all votes, then coverage immediately jumps to 68%.

In the database of Central European MEPs, only the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group and the Polish delegation could be considered as somewhat underrepresented. The main reason for this is that willingness to respond among Law and Justice (PiS) MEPs was rather meager. Because PiS started the 2009–2014 cycle with the second largest number of MEPs in the region, it is legitimately presumable that if their willingness to respond would have been more prominent, the regional average would have been shifted further to the right and more towards the support of national sovereignty.

The Eurosceptic ECR's generally rejective attitude was not limited to Central European MEPs: ECR was the most underrepresented group in the EPRG 2010 database as well. In terms of political power relations, however, it is much more significant that in the Central European database representativeness for the European People's Party (EPP), the largest faction, is identical among the total number of representatives and of those included in the sample, while there is also no significant deviation between the radical left-wing (GUE/NGL) and liberal (ALDE) groups (Table 3). Members of the socialist group (S&D)

Table 3: Distribution of all Central European MEPs According to Political Groups Among all Central European MEPs and MEPs Included in the Survey (%).

EP political group	Ratio among all Central European MEPs	Ratio in sample
EPP	46.5	46.7
S&D	21.9	26.7
ECR	21.9	11.1
GUE/NGL	3.5	4.4
ALDE	2.6	4.4
EFD	0.9	0
Independent	2.6	6.7

Numbers reflect the initial situation of the 2009–2014 EP term.

³ I gathered data about the activities of MEPs within the EP from Votewatch's database.

are also only slightly overrepresented, while the weight of independent MEPs (practically speaking, the legislators from Hungarian far-right Jobbik) is somewhat higher within the sample pool since all three of them chose to reply to the questionnaire.

In terms of member state representativeness, due to the relative underrepresentation of Polish MEPs (26.7% of the sample is Polish, while their ratio among the total number of MEPs is 43.9%), the weight of other Central European countries increased slightly. Nonetheless, the Poles (tying with the Hungarians) provided the largest number of representatives for the sample. The favorable ratio for reaching Hungarian and Slovenian MEPs – over 50% – resulted in slight overrepresentation, while to a lesser degree this is also true for Czech and Slovak legislators, for whom the same indicator was 45%. With the exception of the Polish delegation, however, these deviations did not upset the natural proportions resulting from differences in size. Slovenians are present in the sample with the fewest MEPs, and are followed by the Slovaks and the Czechs.

4 The Roles of Central European MEPs

One of the characteristics of neo-institutional role research, despite varying approaches, is that the exploration of roles uses the attitudes of representatives as a starting point (Searing 1994; Strøm 1997; Navarro 2008; Blomgren and Rozenberg 2012). What is of decisive importance for sketching out the strategies of politicians, is how representatives view themselves. I followed this principle when using the results of the survey of Central European MEPs about the perceptions of their political roles for analysis. The original EPRG survey gave a separate block of questions for attitudes related to representation. This featured questions on the direction and content of representation, as well as its (geographical) focus. Furthermore, questions which examined embeddedness into the EU's institutional system were also important. The direction of interest and attention may be revealed from this data, too.

I approached the theme of representation through the use of several questions during the research. I got to the examination of role types through an established two-part methodological maneuver. First, I attempted data condensation and the exploration of the correlations with the data structure and variables through factor analysis. After identifying the components which did not correlate with each other, as the second step of my analysis strategy, I used cluster analysis to organize the 45 Central European MEPs in the sample into relatively

homogenous groups. I conducted the cluster analysis with variables obtained from the factor analysis.⁴

Of the six variables, two cover the direction of representation in terms of its content and genre, two are concerned with the (geographical) focus of representation, and two probe the strength of MEPs' relationships with the EU's executive, the European Commission. Including a question on legislative work was of fundamental importance. Not only did Central European MEPs believe this was the most important aspect of their work (4.37 on a five-point scale), but it is simultaneously a great indicator for the openness towards policy work, regardless of whether the focus of that work is on the European or national level. The inclusion of attitudes towards "developing common strategies for EU policies" is justified by our gaining valuable information on interest in European matters. Questions examining the geographical focus of representation are also crucial, specifically because they aim to establish whether sharply distinguishable "national" and "European" attitudinal structures exist. The two questions pertaining to this topic assessed how important it was for MEPs to represent all people in Europe, or whether they kept the interests of their own countries' constituents in mind. The two questions on MEPs' relationships with the European Commission were gauged towards measuring the degree of policy-orientation once again, albeit this time in an indirect manner. A close relationship with Commission officials, who are sealed off from political work and expression, is a clear sign of an MEP's strong interest in a given field of policy. Such relationships would illustrate what an MEP would like to affect and find out more about the processes of public policy. Keeping in contact with commissioners already creates the possibility of a cooperation more political in its nature, but the strictly demarcated portfolios and the stipulation that EU commissioners cannot intervene in the domestic politics of member states take the nature of relationships with MEPs in a policy-oriented direction. Consequently, these variables are very appropriate for measuring the degree to which an MEP considers the policy dimension of his or her work to be important.

Based on the data from the factor analysis contained in Table 4, we can conclude that MEPs' responses signal a coherent attitudinal structure. The analysis shows that two different dimensions exist which correlate with each other.

⁴ It is a basic methodological requirement in factor analysis for the sample size to be at least five, but possibly ten times larger than the number of examined variables. Keeping this in mind, it was only possible to introduce a limited number of variables into the factor analysis. In the end I examined six variables which intended to grasp representatives' self-assumed roles from various directions. As such, the sample size is 7.5 times the number of the examined variables, which fulfills the methodological criteria.

Table 4: Rotated Factor Matrix ($n=45$).^{*a}

	Component	
	1: Explained variance 39.76%	2: Explained variance 26.79%
Working on legislation	-0.738	0.170
Developing common strategies for EU policies	-0.253	0.756
Representation – all people in Europe	-0.216	0.829
Representation – all people in my member state	-0.444	-0.494
Relationship with officials in the Commission	0.901	-0.267
Relationship with European Commissioners	0.849	-0.062

*KMO=0.55 ($p<0.000$); Run based on a PCA extraction method with the use of Varimax rotation. Bold values indicate the relationship between the variables and the components.

^aVariables used – The original question in the case of “Working on legislation” and “Developing common strategies” for EU policies was: When thinking about your work as an MEP, how important are the following aspects of your work? (on a scale of 1–5). The original question for the representation of “all people in Europe” and “all people in my member state” was: How important is it to you to represent the following groups of people in the European Parliament? (on a scale of 1–5). The original question on the relationship with officials in the Commission and European Commissioners was: How frequently are you in contact with the following groups, people, or institutions? (on a scale of 1–6).

The factor analysis – conducted in the exploratory mode according to the Kaiser criterion – indicates that two components were formed from the six variables, and these explain 66.55% of the complete variance.

The variables about which it was possible to suppose that they measure affinity towards either policy or politics, clearly belonged to the first component. On the other hand, out of the variables which operationalized the focus of representation, the data relating to the representation of all people in Europe and the opinions on common European strategies formed a new dimension. Based on factor weights, the fit of variables is very convincing: only the fit of the focus on the citizens of an MEP’s own country is questionable. This latter variable is somewhat less connected to both components.

Though European orientation can clearly be separated from the dimension of representative activities, responses pertaining to the representation of fellow countrymen did not make the interpretation of factors any easier. However, we must note that the indicator used in the EPRG research, in reality, did not measure the polarization of responders along the line of national advocacy. Those who believed the representation of all European citizens to be extremely important (and awarded the maximum score on a five-point scale) obviously thought that

their countrymen's representation was also essential (on average, they allowed for a score of 4.19), because their fellow nationals are also EU residents. As such, to see how responders approach national advocacy and whether this is independent of representative activity, it was worthwhile to supplement the EPRG survey with more confrontational questions.

On one hand, I added to the elements testing the direction of representation a reply option for "standing up for national interest," the importance of which could be indicated, similarly to previous responses, on a five-point scale.⁵ Fifteen of the 25 Central European MEPs responding to the question on the protection of national interests thought it deserved the maximum score on a five-point scale, which shows that we have discovered an important and previously less-emphasized consideration. During comparison with the two components from the factor analysis, it was revealed that "standing up for the national interest" can only really become interpretable within the national/European dimension (Table 5), while it shows no connection to the policy/politics axis.

Table 5: The Connection Between the Protection of National Interests and the Components of the Factor Analysis ($n=25$).*

Standing up for national interest**	"Policy/politics" dimension (factor values)	"National/European" dimension (factor values)
0		
Average	-0.10	0.41
Sample size	10	10
Variance	0.86	0.46
1		
Average	0.25	-0.76
Sample size	15	15
Variance	1.55	1.30

Source: Own calculations.

*The correlation with policy-related activity: $\eta^2=0.03$ ($p=0.453$); the connection with national/European representation: $\eta^2=0.27$ ($p=0.008$).

**Description of variable: 1=those who thought that standing up for national interest to be extremely important and gave it a score of 5 on a five-point scale.

⁵ Because additional questions were only included in my questionnaire, these variables are only available for a group that is smaller than the complete Central European sample. As a result, they could not be included in the factor analysis, though they are perfectly suitable for the further testing of components gained from the factor analysis.

On the other hand, I added to the original questionnaire a question about which parliamentary activity suits the MEP in question the most. Highlighting plenary speeches from possible responses clearly indicated dedication towards political activities, while emphasizing the role of the rapporteur, the most prestigious policy role in the EP, was a good indicator of a policy-oriented approach. The preference for the tasks of a rapporteur and plenary speeches showed an important correlation with the first, policy/politics dimension as well. These additional questions reaffirmed the results of the factor analysis in terms of content: the two distinguishable components are really the fault lines of “policy/politics” and “European/national.” As such, the factor analysis and the two-variable test prove that the role perception of Central European MEPs cannot be assessed based on a single dimension. Both policy/politics activities and the focus of geographical representation have independent significances.

Based on the poles of the two dimensions, four ideals of role perceptions emerge. In relation to these, firstly I am interested in where Central European MEPs are located in the space stretching between these two dimensions. Secondly, I create homogenous groups based on these two parameters which are substantially different and will serve as a good basis for further multivariate analysis.

Cluster analyses are very sensitive to deviant or salient data. Because these are not part of the basic population, they distort the real structure. For this reason, in the first round I removed, after hierarchical clustering, six MEPs who clearly stood out from the rest. In the second phase, I placed them in the relevant clusters, because they really were the most typical examples of a given role type. With the reintroduction of the outliers, the final distribution was born (Figure 1). According to this, the largest group of MEPs in the sample are the ones whose work has a European focus and is policy-related in its nature – out of the 45 MEPs, 17 fit into this category. The second most populous group of 13 legislators included those who are closer to matters of policy, but the focus of their work is national. The third group consisting of 11 members had a European focus, and they are mostly comfortable with political topics and tasks. The last assemblage of four parliamentarians, is made up of those who have a national focus and prioritize political debates vis-à-vis policy work.

Those whose professional lives are characterized by EU-level policy work and placing EU public policy at the top of the agenda belong to the category of EU Policy-makers. When an EU Policy-maker takes up a cause, whether the item allows for advocating for national interest or not is not a definitive factor.

The tools used by a National Policy-maker are identical to those espoused by EU Policy-makers, but the focus of their work is completely different. In the European Parliament, a National Policy-maker is a person whose main goal is the achievement of changes favorable to his or her home country. They are also

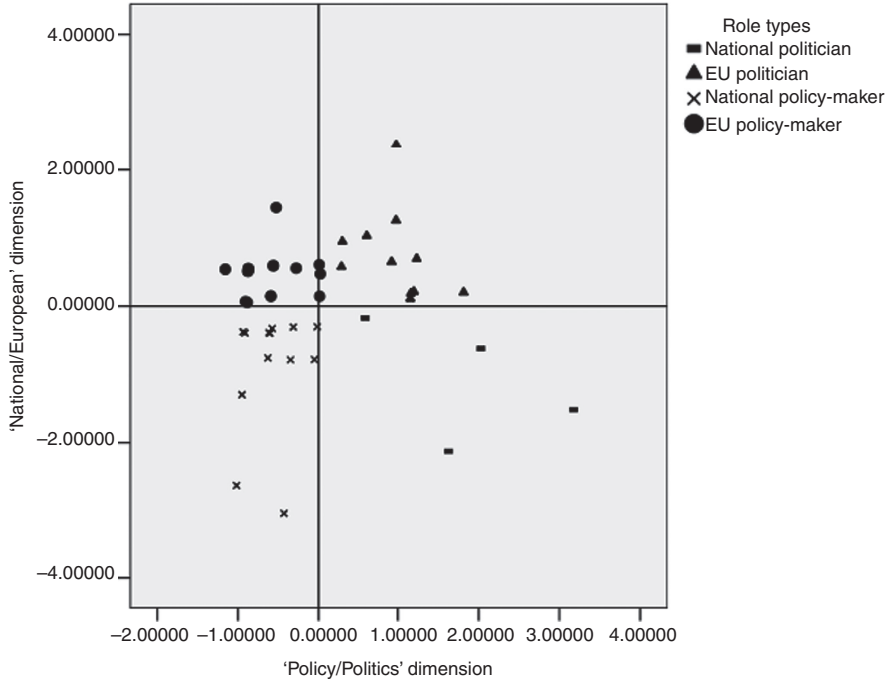


Figure 1: Central European MEPs According to their Role Types ($n=45$).

dominantly oriented towards policy work, but the benchmark of their success is a tangible public policy benefit for their native land.

An EU Politician is one who looks at solving the challenges facing the European Union as a political entity as the centerpiece of his or her agenda. When it comes to enforcing interests, the basis for action is not the national but a generalist worldview and system of values. Politics-related matters fit the political profile of this category best, as opposed to topics of public policy.

The National Politician prioritizes issues which have become, for one reason or another, decisive political issues in his or her state. Those who regard the promotion of national interests as their top priority emphasize matters of politics where championing such interests is one of their countries' strategic political goals.

Looking at the distribution of role types, it is visible that those who focus on the European level outnumber the nationally-oriented Central European MEPs 28 to 17. The policy/politics fault line features 30 MEPs on its policy side and 15 who are geared more towards politics. From the specific placement of MEPs on Figure 1,

it can be seen that pure roles are rare amongst the politicians in the sample pool. It is much more important to stress that we are talking about dominant and not exclusive roles. The diagram shows which fields are the most prominent for specific representatives based on their own responses and self-categorizations. However, this does not mean that, depending on the situation, they do not try other roles as well (Bíró-Nagy 2010). No MEP conducts only one type of work, and no one is excluded from other roles by the demarcation of dominant roles. It is easily fathomable that an MEP builds a strong profile as an EU Policy-maker, but simultaneously and frequently weighs in on matters of domestic politics in his or her home country. Parallels within the roles are not to be regarded as a confusion of roles which negate each other. Instead, they show the possibilities offered by being an MEP and show the potential diversity of life in Brussels and Strasbourg.

When we break the data down by countries, the situation of Czech MEPs is balanced in both the European/national and policy/politics dimensions. In both regards, the ratio is 5 to 5 out of a total of 10 legislators. The two most frequent roles among them are EU Politician and National Policy-maker.

Hungarian MEPs are also divided fairly equally by the two axes. In both cases the ratio is 7 to 5, with the European and policy-oriented fields being slightly more populous. All four typologies have Hungarian adherents. The most frequent category among Hungarians is the EU Policy-maker.

Only policy-oriented Polish representatives made it into the sample pool, with 5 National Policy-makers and 7 EU Policy-makers. It is worthwhile to mention here, too, that if Eurosceptic MEPs would have shown more willingness to respond, the National Policy-maker category would have most likely been even larger, and there could have been Polish legislators among the National Politicians as well.

There was only one Slovenian MEP whose focus was national, while the remaining four were geared more towards the direction of Europe. The ratio along the policy/politics axis was 3 to 2, with a slight majority in the latter category. The most common Slovenian typology was the EU Politician with three out of the total of five Slovenian MEPs belonging to that category.

The majority of Slovak parliamentarians had a European focus (5 to 1) and preferred policy-making (4 to 2). Out of the six Slovak legislators in the sample pool, three were EU Policy-makers and two were EU Politicians.

Regarding a breakdown based on European political groups, there is a notable difference between mainstream and less influential, non-mainstream representatives (Table 6). Two-thirds of Central European MEPs at the European People's Party and 80% of S&D politicians had a European focus in the period between 2009 and 2014. Of the 33 legislators from the two largest families of parties, only one – a member of Hungary's governing party Fidesz – was a National Politician.

Table 6: Role Orientations of Central European MEPs According to European Political Groups ($n=45$).

Role orientations	EP political group						Total
	EPP	S&D	ALDE	ECR	GUE-NGL	Independent	
National Politicians							
Number of MEPs	1	0	0	1	0	2	4
% within parliamentary faction	4.8	0.0	0.0	20.0	0.0	66.7	8.9
EU Politicians							
Number of MEPs	4	5	2	0	0	0	11
% within parliamentary faction	19.0	41.7	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	24.4
National Policy-maker							
Number of MEPs	6	2	0	3	2	0	13
% within parliamentary faction	28.6	16.7	0.0	60.0	100.0	0.0	28.9
EU Policy-maker							
Number of MEPs	10	5	0	1	0	1	17
% within parliamentary faction	47.6	41.7	0.0	20.0	0.0	33.3	37.8
Total							
Number of MEPs	21	12	2	5	2	3	45

Source: Own calculations.

As such, those who work in the largest political groups are usually open to policy work. In the EPP, the EU Policy-maker is the dominant typology – 10 of 21 MEPs belong to this category. In the social-democratic (S&D) faction, the EU Politician and the EU Policy-maker proved to be equally popular roles.

Nationally focused roles are characteristic of parliamentary factions outside of the EP's mainstream parties. The Central European MEPs sitting with the European Conservatives and Reformists included only a single European Policy-maker, while an additional four colleagues were National Policy-makers or National Politicians. The Czech lawmakers in the radical leftist GUE-NGL group represent a certain type of “national communism”: both of their representatives included in the sample pool were National Policy-makers. Two of the three independent Jobbik MEPs have adopted the profile of a National Politician, while their third peer emphasized the role of an EU Policy-maker, especially in questions of industry and energy.

Navarro (2012) calls attention to the notion that political experience, institutional learning and changing career goals can result in changes for MEPs' roles. Someone who enjoyed plenary debates during one period of his or her term in office may become a specialist in another. The converse, naturally, can also be true, and crossing or switching over to further roles may also be possible. The role types determined at a given moment and the categorizations of MEPs may only

provide us with a snapshot which, at a later date, may change along with parliamentarians' role perceptions. Of course, this line of thought is true for all role research, just as much as it is for the categorization introduced above.

5 Variables Affecting the Roles of Central European MEPs

When looking at Table 7, we can see which of the simultaneously displayed independent variables (sociodemographic background, political experience, attitudes, party affiliation, electoral systems, and career ambitions) best indicated the position of an MEP on the European/national and policy/politics axes. It is not only important to rank the ten variables according to their influence, but it is also practical to draw a line between relevant and less weighty factors.

Based on the model, classification according to a European or national focus is mostly affected by four factors. The two strongest correlations in this case are age and political group. MEPs older than the average (over the age of 49) and belonging to the two largest factions (European People's Party and Socialists & Democrats) are very likely to orient themselves towards the European Union. Younger and smaller European parties' representatives tend to have a stronger national focus.

A slightly less significant factor than these latter two which is nonetheless relevant is the time spent in the EP. Those starting the 2009–2014 term as incumbents are more likely to be drawn in the national direction, while fresh arrivals to the EP are dominated by a European focus. This suggests that in the second term after accession, the typical MEP arriving to the institution had a European representative focus. It is also possible – although untestable without more detailed data – that new arrivals are more idealistic and enthusiastic about EU politics, and this could be mirrored numerically. Ideological positions, that is to say self-identification on the left/right spectrum, is also noteworthy. Central European MEPs positioning themselves on the left tended to bolster the camp of those focusing on the European level, while right-wingers were more likely to support a national focus. According to the variables which demonstrated the strongest correlation, the stereotype of the Central European MEP with a European focus would be best exhausted by an S&D member over 50 who was a novice in 2009.

When it comes to the policy/politics axis, previous political experience and future career ambitions are definitive. Experience in local politics tends to signal a more generalist political role perception, while its lack strengthens the probability of a profile open to policy work. The reason for this might be that in local

Table 7: Logit Models Estimating Politicians' Roles, $n=44$.

Independent variables**	European focus*		Politics focus*	
	p-Value	Exp(B)	p-Value	Exp(B)
Sex	0.257	4.154	0.887	0.834
Age	0.045	54.551	0.405	3.631
Experience in government	0.323	4.510	0.749	0.640
Experience in local politics	0.779	0.691	0.066	12.162
Future political ambition	0.578	2.104	0.106	6.112
Political group	0.041	44.840	0.857	0.815
Support for European integration	0.461	0.302	0.998	1.000
Left-right self-identification	0.130	10.990	0.998	1.000
Electoral system	0.265	0.120	0.588	0.512
First term in office – not an Incumbent	0.064	14.794	0.121	5.187
Nagelkerke R ²		0.62		0.61
Hit rate in null model		60.50%		67.40%
Ratio of correctly predicted cases		88.40%		83.70%

Source: Own calculations.

*Description of dependent variables: All dummies are variables. European focus: 1=MEPs classified as having a European focus according to the factor and cluster analyses; Politics focus: 1=MEPs classified as Politicians by the factor and cluster analyses. Shaded areas indicate those independent variables that explain the dependent variables the most.

**Description of independent variables: For an easier comparison of odd ratios, all variables are dummies: sex: 1=male, age: 1=over 49 (the relevant date is 2009); experience in government: 1=has experience; experience in local politics: 1=has experience (mayor, local government representative, member of regional government); future political ambitions: 1=would like to remain in the EP in 10 years, 0=did not choose this option; political group: 1=member of EPP or S&D; pro-European integration: in comparison with the sample average, MEP is more dedicated to deepening integration (marked at least 7 on a scale of 1–10); left-right self-identification: classified him/herself as more left-wing (on a scale of 1–10, where 1 indicates the most left-wing position, MEP marked him/herself as a 5 at most); electoral system: 1=ran in a preferential voting system, 0=got in on a closed list; first term in office: 1=was not an MEP prior to 2009.

politics (in the case of MEPs, characteristically in positions such as mayors or leaders of regional government) there is less of a need to specialize in a specific area of policy than as a former member of a national parliament or, especially, the executive. The more generalist approach of local politics goes hand in hand with the avoidance of policy-centered roles in the EP. We should add that the nature of the electoral system in the model shows a significant overlap with having experience in local politics. 13 of the 15 MEPs with experience in local politics got into the EP through preferential voting lists. If we did not know data on prior careers, the significance of the electoral system would be greater in the model.

The MEPs who see themselves in the legislative body in the long term are more likely to be Politicians than Policy-makers. Returning to national legislatures was not an appealing prospect for either group, but Policy-makers felt that becoming a member of a national executive was a much more appealing venture.

It is useful to mention the importance of time spent within the institution in the case of the Politician/Policy-maker split. Incumbents were represented in greater numbers among Policy-makers. Based on the data, it cannot be decided if this is the result of the learning process within the EP or if the ones who stayed for another term after the 2004–2009 cycle were those who adopted the profile of a Policy-maker. In either case, MEPs who started their second term in 2009 were characteristically more favorably inclined towards policy than newcomers. According to the three most strongly correlating variables, the Central European generalist Politician is a first-timer MEP coming from local politics who envisions him or herself remaining in the newly acquired office even after 10 years.

On the whole, it can be said of the models based on the European/national and policy/politics axes that they help forecasting the roles of MEPs. Time spent in the EP, age, previous political experience, European political group and career ambitions are extraordinarily important information if we would like to determine a parliamentarian's dominant role perception. Categorization is further advanced by knowing the position on the left-right spectrum. As such, socio-demographic factors, attitudes and political socialization together influence the formation of roles. If we are familiar with these parameters, we are likely to be able to predict which dominant role an MEP will adopt.

It is important to emphasize that identifying variables which provide explanations reinforces previous results: it is actually important to distinguish European/national and policy/politics dimensions. Further evidence of this is that different variables explain the position occupied in these two dimensions, apart from the incumbency variable which has substantial explanatory power in both cases. In conclusion, what was proven is that the European/national and policy/politics dimensions have different roots.

6 The Roles of Central European MEPs and their Activities

In addition to what determinants influence the role orientations of Central European MEPs, it is useful to review the relationship that exists between various roles and the work of legislators, because the roles are, naturally, not only made of attitudes but also of behavioral characteristics. The activities of parliamentarians

must be split into two parts: officially documented activities inside the European Parliament and all other work conducted outside of the institution.

6.1 The Roles of Central European MEPs and their Activities in the EP

Orientation towards politics or policy is very visible when we look at what parliamentary activities MEPs spend their energy on (Table 8). In the three policy-related parliamentary genres (being a rapporteur, drafting opinions and submitting amendments) both the National Policy-Makers and EU Policy-makers of the 2009–2014 term were much more active than National Politicians and EU Politicians. A Central European MEP who has a Policy-maker profile generally received four rapporteur assignments during the 2009–2014 term, while the same indicator was less than two among those who were classified as having the role perception of a Politician. Among National Politicians, there was only one legislator who applied for such a task and actually succeeded in receiving it, too. The large gap between the two profiles is also apparent when we look at drafting opinions. During the examined period, the average for Central European MEPs in this field was 2.5, with Policy-makers having more experience in this realm and Politicians underperforming. EU Policy-makers were also ahead of the curve in amendments. With an average of 70 amendments, they outperformed National Politicians by a 3.5 multiplier, but they appreciably surpassed EU Politicians and National Policy-makers, too.

In the field of politics-type activities (plenary speeches, motions for resolutions, parliamentary questions, and written declarations), it can be deduced that Policy-makers are not less active than Politicians. National Policy-makers are especially active in supporting motions for resolutions which tend to bear symbolic relevance, and in posing parliamentary questions. The latter are very important, because they are the main MEP-level manifestations of the oversight function over the Commission and the Council. Consequently, they are great tools for National Policy-makers for proving to public opinion and their parties that they will indeed check up on EU institutions in matters which are relevant in terms of the national interests of their own countries. At the same time, EU Policy-makers are the most active in plenary speeches, which signals a type of general hyperactivity, and, concomitantly, that they are not narrowing their foci only on policy tools but making use of all available genres.

Concerning concrete numbers, Central European MEPs who have a Politician profile are not more active in politics-type activities than Policy-makers, but within their own activities these actions have a bigger role. While the activities of

Table 8: The Activities of Central European MEPs in the European Parliament According to Role types, 2009–2014.

	Plenary speeches	Motions for resolutions	Parliamentary questions	Written declarations	Reports	Opinions	Amendments
National Politician	134.25	1.25	14.25	0*	0.25	0.25**	19**
EU Politician	139.82	34.36	29.45	2.09	2	1.64	48.82
National Policy-maker	111.77	62.23	41	2.23	3.85	3.46*	53.77
EU Policy-maker	151.56	51.63	30.13	1.5	4.19	2.94	70.25*
All Central European MEPs	135.3	45.86	31.73	1.73	3.18	2.52	55.36

Source: Own calculations, original data from Votewatch.eu.

Significance levels: *sig.<0.1, **sig.<0.05.

Policy-makers expand to all genres to at least an average degree, Politicians can only say this about politics-type tasks. On average, National Politicians and EU Politicians tend to deliver more speeches in plenary sessions than National Policy-makers, and, in this regard, they are not that far behind EU Policy-makers, the most active group. Other than this, National Politicians do not reach the average in any other forms of activity, which shows an overall passivity towards policy, and a distance from political genres which are somewhat more difficult to mediatize. In all of their activities, EU Politicians outdo National Politicians. When compared with National Politicians, they use parliamentary questions, motions for resolutions and written statements more, and they are not as passive in the field of policy as their nationally focused peers.

Based on the data, it can be stated that role orientations are detectable in MEPs behavior within the European Parliament. MEPs with a politics focus show average political activity, but they undertake much less policy work – they resolutely keep away from policy dossiers. Policy-makers use political tools to an average degree, but they are extraordinary in spending their energy on policy genres.

6.2 The Roles of Central European MEPs and their Activities Outside of the EP

The work of MEPs cannot be understood in its totality without analyzing activity outside of the institution. Because of the intra-institutional focus of most academic studies we have a large amount of knowledge about what happens in the European Parliament, but we know very little about how MEPs cultivate relationships with the outside world – the public lives of their own countries, the press and other EU bodies. This direction for examination is also relevant because MEPs' extra-parliamentary activity is institutionalized by the so-called green week, an initiative which assigns a week each month for work within the constituency. The survey research conducted with Central European MEPs included some questions which are suitable for drawing a few conclusions about the extra-parliamentary dimension of role perceptions. When discussing the research results, it is useful to distinguish between networks outside of politics and the strength of relationships with political actors who are not in the EP.

Table 9 shows the frequency of Central European MEPs' relationships, according to their own admissions, with non-political actors broken down by role types. All four analyzed categories show below-average intensity for EU Politicians. This coincides with the usual passivity experienced by generalist Politicians, while the European focus seems to weaken the motivation for prioritizing relationships with journalists and citizens.

Table 9: Frequency of Central European MEPs' Relationships with Non-Political Actors Outside of the EP According to Role Types ($n=45$, percentage).

	National Politician	EU Politician	National Policy-maker	EU Policy-maker	All Central European MEPs
Individual citizens					
At least weekly	75	36.4*	61.5	70.6	60
At least monthly	25	36.4**	30.8	29.4	31.1
Organized interest groups					
At least weekly	0	18.2	30.8	17.6	20
At least monthly	50	27.3	38.5	52.9	42.2
Lobbyists					
At least weekly	0	18.2	15.4	23.5	17.8
At least monthly	0**	9.1	38.5	41.2**	28.9
Journalists					
At least weekly	50	36.4	23.1	52.9	40
At least monthly	0	27.3	69.2	35.3	40

Source: Own research, EPRG 2010.

Original question: How frequently are you in contact with the following groups, people, or institutions?

Significance levels: *sig.<0.1, **sig.<0.05.

Three of the four National Politicians meet with voters each week, and the fourth also confesses to monthly contact at minimum. However, it was conspicuous that two out of the four are completely passive when it came to keeping in touch with non-politicians, while the other two meet with journalists at least on a weekly basis and with interest groups monthly. None of them meet with lobbyists at least monthly.

Analyzing the frequency of non-EP relationships also proves that EU Policy-makers are active in all areas, and that extra-parliamentary interest groups and lobbyists know that they are the ones to be targeted for achieving tangible results. Two-thirds of EU Policy-makers meet with lobbyists and organized pressure groups at least on a monthly basis, which is the highest rate among all role types. In addition to this, they do not neglect relationships with journalists and citizens either. Seventy percent of EU Policy-makers meet with their constituents each week, and half of them welcome journalists with similar commonness. On a monthly basis, all politicians in this category meet with electors, and almost everyone gives interviews to the press frequently. Thus EU Policy-makers really can be viewed as political actors who are active in all fields. They are not only familiar with the EP's policy processes, but their activity is generally extraordinary.

The frequency of National Policy-makers' relationships with non-political actors is average or extraordinary in all areas. Notably, almost all of them give interviews to the press at least monthly, though there are much fewer politicians among them who meet journalists weekly than among EU Policy-makers. Half of National Policy-makers meet with lobbyists monthly, two-thirds of them with organized interest groups, and almost all with constituents. Generally speaking they are more active in cultivating non-political relationships outside of the institution than MEPs with a politics focus, but their activity levels lag somewhat behind that of EU Policy-makers. The real differences – as it was visible with behavior inside the EP – are not along the national/European axis, but along the policy/politics divide. One of the best examples for this is the frequency of relationships nurtured with lobbyists. While EU Politicians and National Politicians rarely give accounts of such meetings, these are wide-spread among National Policy-makers and EU Policy-makers.

It is also interesting to look at what ties exist between Central European MEPs and non-EP political actors (Table 10). Among the questions, there were elements prodding both national and European politics. The results reinforce previously visible trends. National Politicians are characterized by general passivity when it comes to EU political actors, and even in connection with other MEPs from their own countries. All of them stay in contact with MPs of their own countries, however, and they meet with the members of their national governments and party leaderships. In theory, EU Politicians could treat nurturing relationships with the leaderships of their parliamentary factions as an absolute priority. Nonetheless, in the case of Central European MEPs, this is not so. When compared with National Policy-makers and EU Policy-makers, they are less active in this field as well: less than two-thirds of EU Politicians keep in touch with the leaders of their parliamentary groups, while the same indicator for Policy-makers is 90%. EU Politicians do not have substantial relationships with the European Commission either, including both Commissioners and officials. In their case, the European focus means a weaker link with their national political elites. The strength of their ties to the leaders of their national parties and MPs is below average, and it is particularly weak with members of their national governments.

The relationships of the two groups of Policy-makers have comparable fortitude in many respects except when it comes to the European Commission, to which EU Policy-makers have stronger ties. A National Policy-maker focus does not mean a stronger connection with domestic politics. The cause for this, once again, might be that the European activities of EU Policy-makers are not executed to the detriment of other relationships; they also take care to build strong national links necessary for re-election.

Table 10: Frequency of Central European MEPs' Relationships with Political Actors Outside of the EP According to Role Types ($n=45$, percentage).

	National Politician	EU Politician	National Policy-maker	EU Policy-maker	All Central European MEPs
Leaders of my European political group					
At least weekly	25	18.2	30.8	47.1*	33.3
At least monthly	0**	45.5	61.5	41.2	44.4
MEPs of other parties from my member state					
At least weekly	0	54.5	15.4*	52.9	37.8
At least monthly	25**	27.3	76.9	29.4	42.2
Officials in the European Commission					
At least weekly	0	0	0	35.3***	13.3
At least monthly	0**	0***	76.9*	58.8***	44.4
European Commissioners					
At least weekly	0	0	0	0	0
At least monthly	0*	9.1**	46.2	64.7**	40
Members of my national political party					
At least weekly	75	18.2**	61.5	52.9	48.9
At least monthly	0	81.8	30.8	41.2	44.4
Members of my national party executive					
At least weekly	0	18.2	30.8	23.5	22.2
At least monthly	75	54.5	53.8	70.6	62.2
MPs from my national parliament					
At least weekly	50	9.1	23.1	23.5	22.2
At least monthly	50	36.4**	46.2	58.8	48.9
Ministers from my national government					
At least weekly	0	9.1	7.7	0	4.4
At least monthly	75	18.2	46.2	41.2	40

Source: Own research, EPRG 2010.

Original question: How frequently are you in contact with the following groups, people, or institutions?

Significance levels: *sig.<0.1, **sig.<0.05, ***sig.<0.01.

When it comes to the European Commission, according to the responses of Central European MEPs, National Policy-makers also seek out their colleagues in the executive and Commissioners when their cause, typically of national relevance, mandates this. For EU Policy-makers, it is essential to maintain close contact with the European Commission. Two-thirds of EU Policy-makers have the networks for monthly audiences with European Commissioners, which, when compared to other role types, is exceptional.

It can be concluded that most Central European MEPs do keep an eye on the actors of national politics and nurture a close relationship with them. A slight

exception to this is the group of EU Politicians, but they also often speak to national party leaders, who are key to re-election. The general difference between the activities of Policy-makers and Politicians is also observable in the field of non-EP relationships. This is very discernible in terms of attention paid to the European Commission, but it can also be traced in relation to the strength of relationships maintained with journalists, lobbyists and interest groups.

7 Conclusion

To identify the role orientations of Central European MEPs, in line with the standards of neo-institutionalist elite research, I used the attitudes of politicians as a starting point. The described role types are not subjective constructions but coherent attitudinal structures based on quantitative research utilizing the analysis of responses provided by MEPs. The results of the survey reinforced the hypothesis that both the policy/politics and European/national axes are suitable for classifying Central European MEPs (H1). Due to the special institutional position of the EP and its internal functioning, these two dimensions cover a dilemma which exists in the lives of all MEPs. They necessitate a strategic response to the problem of what an MEP should spend the scarce resources of time and energy on in terms of representation. Through the poles of these two axes, four types of ideals become visible. Consequently, the four possible role types are National Politicians, EU Politicians, National Policy-makers and EU Policy-makers.

Multivariate analyses confirmed that socio-demographic factors, attitudes and political socialization all influence the role orientations of MEPs. The institutional framework and personal preferences both proved to be important, and this strengthened the practical relevance of the neo-institutionalist theoretical framework. Time spent in the EP, age, the nature of previous political experience, party affiliation, left-right self-definition and future career ambitions are parameters which allow for a fairly accurate assessment of a politician's role orientation. One important research result is that the policy/politics and European/national axes have different roots; they are explained by different variables. In the former, the most important determining factors are previous political experience and career ambitions. In the latter, the most precise indicators of a politician's position are age, political group and left-right self-definition. The only factor which aids the forecasting of an MEP's role orientation in both dimensions is time spent in the EP, otherwise known as the incumbency factor.

Activity trends inside and outside of the EP demonstrate that the dimensions used to demarcate role orientations are detectable in the behavior of Central

European MEPs. The differences between politics and policy orientations are visible in officially documented parliamentary genres (H2). As rapporteurs, in the preparation of opinions, and in submitting amendments, individuals with a policy profile are considerably more active than Politician MEPs. Those with more of a generalist and politics-oriented profile favor plenary speeches, but EU Politicians are active in submitting questions to other EU institutions as well. The fact that Policy-makers show signs of above average activity in policy genres does not mean that they shy away from more political tools (plenary speeches, motions for resolutions, parliamentary questions and written statements). EU Policy-makers are the most omnivorous representatives. In addition to doing the most amount of work, their political activity does not lag behind their politics-profiled peers. As such, this shows a universal hyperactivity on the part of EU Policy-makers which consists of average political and above average policy work. Those with a Politician profile tend to generally be more passive than their Policy-maker colleagues. They keep a strict distance from policy, but they obviously favor political tools.

Within the EP, the fracture is clear between policy and politics, as expected. When looking at the frequency of activities outside of the EP, however, the difference between European and national foci is verified only partially (H3). The main reason for this is the above-mentioned versatility of EU Policy-makers. Not only do they create strong networks within the European institutional framework, but they also pay attention to nurture ties with national public life. The hypothesis which follows from the European/national focus, according to which nationally-oriented representatives formulate closer ties with their country's public life, is fulfilled only partially. When viewed against EU Politicians the difference is indeed visible, and it favors National Politicians and National Policy-makers. In other words, the hypothesis applies to National MEPs, but out of those with European profiles it only applies to politics-focused individuals. In the case of the latter, the European orientation weakens motivation to keep in touch with constituents and the press back home. While a policy/politics orientation is very much identifiable in terms of intra-EP activity, the European/national focus is less apparent in work outside of the EP, thanks to the hyperactivity of European Policy-makers.

In the field of activities outside of the EP, the significance of the policy/politics axis is detectable, too. It is almost exclusively true that only MEPs open to policy-making seek contact with the European Commission, and it is them who lobbyists and other interest groups try to connect with. Those with the profile of a National Politician and EU Politician have almost no contact with these actors. This is understandable, since the European Commission has a strong policy-making character, and also because lobbyists know that public policy dossiers are affected best through Policy-makers.

The political roles sketched out in this study form coherent attitudinal and behavioral structures, but this does not mean that MEPs cannot be open to multiple directions. As it is true for the literature on political roles in general, in this case, too, the roles are not exclusive. Instead, it is much more adequate to speak of dominant roles. Clear-cut roles are rare, the categories outlined in this paper are rather useful to show the most characteristic faces of Central European MEPs. Through the example of legislators from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, it was possible to get closer to understand what motivates MEPs and how adopted roles correlate with their everyday legislative activities.

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