



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG  
DEPT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

Programme of European Studies

# **A Gendered Division of Labour**

**Women's Representation in  
the European Parliament Committees**

Master Thesis in European Studies

Spring Semester 2010

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‘The composition of the committees shall as far as possible reflect the composition of Parliament’

(Rules of Procedure, European Parliament, 2004: 177.1).

## Abstract

**Title:** A Gendered Division of Labour – Women’s Representation in the European Parliament Committees.

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**Semester:** Spring 2010

**Number of pages:** 70

The powers and influence of the European Parliament (EP) and its committees have grown, mainly by the extension of the co-decision procedure through the Lisbon Treaty, and the increase in number of decisions and policy areas handled by the Parliament. It is in the parliamentary committees – whose political composition reflects that of the Parliament as a whole - that most of the work, deliberation and informal decision-making of the EP take place. Consequently, it is increasingly important to examine the internal organisation of the committees to understand how Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) organise within the parliament, including their concerns such as committee membership. This thesis explores the gendered power structures of EU decision-making by examining the representation of women *within* the European Parliament and by comparing the political/ideological and national dimensions of women’s representation in its committees. It finds considerable divisions of men and women within the different policy areas. Moreover, the findings demonstrate that gender differences in the examined committees are more significant in the large political groups of Socialists & Democrats and the Christian Democrats compared to the Liberal and the Green groups. Moreover, member states with more ‘Gender traditional’ cultures have more gender-segregated composition in the examined committees compared with more ‘Gender Egalitarian’ member states. The *MEP Gender Database* developed for this thesis could serve as an important tool for future research on women’s organisation and influence in the EP.

**Key words:** European Parliament, social representation, committees, women’s political representation, the politics of presence, gender divisions, Member of the European Parliament (MEP), political group, gender balance, gender composition, member states, socio-cultural differences, gender egalitarian attitudes.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 The under-representation of women in the European Parliament

Gender equality is recognised as one of the European Union's (EU) core values and a fundamental principle of democracy according to the treaties<sup>1</sup>. However, despite decades of Commission and Parliament's efforts to move towards gender balance in decision-making, women remain clearly underrepresented within the EU institutions. Women constitute more than half<sup>2</sup> of the EU's population, yet only 35 percent of the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are women. The under-representation of women in European institutions in general, but in the European Parliament (EP) specifically, involves the questions of democracy and legitimacy of the EU. Further, the gender imbalance within the EP - from an equality perspective - concerns the ability and power to influence and control the political agenda and policy content<sup>3</sup>. Despite the growing legislative powers of the EP, as well as the increased cohesion of the transnational European party groups, the connection between the EU citizens and their EP representatives is extremely weak<sup>4</sup>. 57 percent of citizens declare that they trust the EP, but the turnout in European elections continues to decline and stood at a low 43 percent in the last elections in 2009. The legitimacy of the EU is not all about its formal powers, but also about its political representatives<sup>5</sup>. There is increasing concern about the 'democratic deficit' of the European Union, undeniably linked to the lack of social representation within the Parliament<sup>6</sup>.

The importance of the European Parliament as the only directly elected and most democratic institution of the EU has gradually increased. With the Lisbon Treaty, in force as of December 2009, the EP has new important lawmaking powers. Virtually all EU legislation is now decided by the EP and the Council of Ministers together, increasing the co-decision procedure (ordinary legislative procedure) in many policy areas such as agriculture, immigration, energy and the EU budget<sup>7</sup>. The growth of the powers of the EP implies that the lives of European citizens are increasingly influenced by political decisions taken at the European level, despite the EP

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<sup>1</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=418&langId=sv>, 2010-02-18, Equality between women and men is a fundamental right, enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/en/index.htm>

<sup>2</sup> 53 % according to 2010 *International Women's Day Brochure*

<sup>3</sup> Anne Phillips 1995

<sup>4</sup> Hix et al 2007: 26. For a further outline of European party groups see chapter 5.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid: 27-28

<sup>6</sup> Norris and Marsh 1997: 161, Schmitt and Thomassen 1999

<sup>7</sup> Through the Lisbon Treaty (Treaty of the European Union (TEU) and the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)) co-decision becomes the 'ordinary legislative procedure', i.e. what used to be the exception in decision-making has become the norm for most policy areas. [http://ec.europa.eu/codecision/procedure/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/codecision/procedure/index_en.htm)

remaining less powerful than national parliaments. Most of the activity of the 736 MEPs is concentrated in the around 20 specialized parliamentary committees. To ensure continued efficiency, despite the increasing amount of co-decision files, more and more decisions are now taken at the level of EP committees<sup>8</sup>. Despite the important role played by these committees, little systematic research has been done investigating their overall composition.

The gender composition of parliamentary committees points to crucial aspects of politics, such as influence and power over the political agenda. However, women's political representation in the institutions at the European level has been largely neglected to date even by feminist explorations<sup>9</sup>. Apart from EU descriptive reports and statistics on the total number of women in the European political groups and comparisons between member states, little in-depth research has been done. However, Johanna Kantola has made an account of the gender composition of the European Parliament committees which showed significant variations in women's representation between policy areas. Kantola's results confirm previous research on committee assignments in national parliaments which has shown that men and women tend to engage in different areas of politics.<sup>10</sup> Female politicians have, for example, traditionally been involved in issues related to social welfare and environmental movements to a greater extent than men.<sup>11</sup> This division largely reflects the gender segregation in employment structures and society as a whole in contemporary Europe, e.g. women to a larger extent working in sectors related to reproduction (education, health care) compared to men. However, the differences between women and men's political interests have decreased and (still on-going) developments have led to a convergence in the lives of women and men<sup>12</sup>: As women's lives change in European post-industrial society, as a result of cultural shifts such as secularisation and changing societal attitudes towards gender equality, more women in gainful employment, higher educational achievement for women etc, it is to be expected that this would re-shape broader norms of political behaviour.

A Eurobarometer survey from 2009 regarding women's opinions and attitudes prior to the European elections shows that a majority of respondents, both women and men, believe that European politics is 'male-dominated'. Further, 83 percent of women and 76 percent of men feel that female politicians can bring a different perspective to politics. Around 46 percent of women answering the survey believe that their interests as women are not well represented in politics at the European level. Yet, the survey demonstrates significant variations in attitudes *between* EU

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<sup>8</sup> De Clerk-Sachsse & Kaczynski 2009: 1

<sup>9</sup> Kantola 2009

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Oskarson & Wängnerud 1995: 12, Thomas 1994, Vallance 1988

<sup>12</sup> Phillips 1995: 12

member states, e.g. regarding the views as to whether the EU represents women's interests.<sup>13</sup> The most satisfied with the way their interests are represented by the EU were women in Luxembourg. Women in Portugal, Latvia, Bulgaria and Spain express the lowest level of satisfaction with the representation of their interests. In terms of the relevance of the EP's activities on their lives, women see the biggest impact in the policy areas of education and women's rights<sup>14</sup>. Respondents were asked to define the ideal proportion of women having seats in the parliament: 48 percent of women and 39 percent of men surveyed, supported the idea that 50 percent, or more, of parliamentarians should be women. Only one-fifth of respondents said that women should occupy less than 40 percent of the seats in the EP.<sup>15</sup>

Despite this, women's representation in the EP currently stands at only 35 percent, yet it is at a higher level than in most European national parliaments and it has the largest proportion of women of the EU institutions<sup>16</sup>. Due to the EU institutional set-up, the European and national levels are closely linked and the diverse national levels shape women's political representation at the European level<sup>17</sup>. Women's representation of the EP is a concern for and responsibility mainly of the (national) political parties in the democratic process, as European elections are organised nationally and national parties appoint MEPs<sup>18</sup>. However, *within* the EP the MEPs organise in political groups according to ideological preference of their respective parties (rather than according to nationally). The European party groups play a vital role in the legislative politics and organisation within the Parliament.<sup>19</sup> The size of the political groups is the basis of committee formation and these groups in fact indirectly influence the gender composition of the committees<sup>20</sup>.

Women's representation is a dual concept: *descriptive representation* concerns the numeric division of women and men in decision-making bodies and *substantive representation* focuses on the effects of women's presence in parliaments and the attentions paid to women's interests in the decision-making process<sup>21</sup>. Feminist theories of representation justify the focus on numbers and highlight two questions in relation to women's descriptive representation; firstly, *where* are women

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<sup>13</sup> Eurobarometer: Attitudes and opinions of women in Europe prior to the 2009 EP Elections.

<sup>14</sup> 44 percent in both areas, when the alternatives high and moderate impact, are combined.

<sup>15</sup> Eurobarometer, Women and European Parliamentary Elections, February 2009.

[http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/flash\\_arch\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/flash_arch_en.htm)

<sup>16</sup> In the last European elections in 2009, there was a slight increase of female parliamentarians, from 30 to nearly 35 percent. See chapter 2 and section 6.4.

<sup>17</sup> Kantola 2009: 398

<sup>18</sup> Through nominations and sometimes gender quotas for candidates to the European elections.

<sup>19</sup> Hix et al 2007: 39

<sup>20</sup> "Rules of Procedure", chapter 5 and Appendix 4.

<sup>21</sup> Wängnerud 2009



represented or underrepresented and second, *which* women are underrepresented?<sup>22</sup> However, recent debates on women's political representation have widened the discussion to involve also the focus on the different sites where women are represented.<sup>23</sup> Representation could be measured and scrutinised in various ways, e.g. through data on voting behaviour, rapporteurship and committee membership.

Comparative international research on women's political representation has shown that multiple factors contribute to the low numbers of women in parliaments, including structural, institutional, social and cultural mechanisms. It is well established that party ideology plays a crucial role for women's political representation as left-wing parties have been more concerned with gender equality and have higher shares of women represented compared with right-wing parties.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, cultural norms in society indirectly influence the number of women in politics and shape perceptions of women and men's spheres of expertise in politics<sup>25</sup>. Norris and Inglehart show that socio-cultural factors, such as egalitarian values, also matter for women being elected to political office and that there are significant differences between the EU member states regarding this<sup>26</sup>. The differences *within* the EU regarding the *level of women's representation* are significant. Some European countries have an equal gender representation in their respective EP delegations. Sweden and Finland have even more women than men MEPs with 56 and 62 percent women respectively. Malta, on the other hand, has never had a female MEP, neither had Cyprus until the elections in 2009.

The European Parliament committees influence the political process within the EP and as a result European politics. Decisions made by the EP and processed in the committees, affect and influence women's lives (men's lives too for that matter, albeit sometimes in a different way)<sup>27</sup>. Yet, as mentioned European women do not feel that their interests are well represented at the European level and trust in the EP varies between women in member states. Perhaps this could be partly linked to the fact that 65 percent of MEPs are men, but also to the way that the MEPs organise internally? The empirical evidence for the internal organisation of women in the EP is, however, less developed and the importance of studying *where* women MEPs are represented remains.

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<sup>22</sup> Kantola 2009:380

<sup>23</sup> Ibid 2009 382, 387, Celis et al 2008, Dovi 2007: 299

<sup>24</sup> Kittilson 2006

<sup>25</sup> Lovenduski 2005

<sup>26</sup> Norris & Inglehart 2003:137, 144

<sup>27</sup> The Council of Ministers/The Council of the European Union is the EU's main decision-making body but the European Parliament is co-decision-maker following the ordinary legislative procedure in most policy areas. Through the Lisbon Treaty the ordinary legislative procedure has been extended to several new fields. [http://europa.eu/abc/12lessons/lesson\\_4/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/abc/12lessons/lesson_4/index_en.htm)

## 1.2. Purpose of study

Thus, much is known regarding what factors that influence women's representation, but less of how and where women organise. To improve the understanding of women's representation in the European Parliament, this thesis explores the gender composition of its committees. By compiling the necessary statistics and giving an in-depth description of the gender composition this thesis aims to give an indication of the power distribution between women and men *within* the EP and between policy areas.

There are, as mentioned, significant national differences regarding the level of women's representation in the EP, which depend on many factors such as institutional arrangements: party system and electoral system as well as historical and socio-cultural differences. Considering these differences and previous findings of political ideology affecting the proportion of women's representation this study aims to explore *two dimensions* of social representation in the EP: *the ideological/political* and *the national* when examining women's representation in the committees.

This thesis will not attempt to explain the levels of women's representation, but rather examine what is 'behind' the total share of women's representation in the committees and explore any internal variations between political groups and member states. The aim is to achieve an increased understanding of the gender compositions of committees and the nature of women's political influence in the EP in order to promote further discussion. Yet, this study may contribute to an explanatory understanding of the committees' gender composition and facilitate future further analysis of the reasons behind, as well as consequences of, gender segregation in parliaments. In addition, this thesis briefly examines the process preceding the allocation of committee assignments and the reasons stated by MEP's regarding choice of committee to explore *why* women and men organise in different committees.

## 1.3. Disposition

The study begins with a brief outline of relevant theories and results of previous empirical research on women's political representation, leading to the research questions. The design and method of the study is then discussed in chapter 4. Chapter 5 serves as a background and briefly outlines the organisation of the European Parliament as well as explores the process that precedes the allocation of committee assignments between MEPs within the political groups. In chapter 6 the empirical results are presented in three separate sections, one for each research question. Finally, the empirical results, including possible consequences of the results as well as reasons behind the gender composition of committees are discussed in the conclusions.

## 2. THEORISING WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

This chapter outlines relevant theories and previous research on women's political representation, but also the lack of it at European level. When evaluating women's representation, it is useful to reflect upon different understandings of representation. Ideas of representation reflect different assumptions about the nature of democracy, the linkages between the citizen and the state, and the role of legislators<sup>28</sup>. Representative democracy is a well-established model, and no academic researcher seriously questions its advantage. The *Responsible Party Model*, with responsible parties and prepared manifestos, has been an influential model for how representative democracy should function.<sup>29</sup> Within representative democracy, a distinction between representation of ideas – opinions – and social representation – similarity between the elected politicians and the population – is emphasised<sup>30</sup>.

John Burnheim has suggested that citizen's interests are better protected when politicians who share their experiences and interests represent them. According to Burnheim, similarity of living condition is a far better indicator than whether politicians might share the rather shaky opinions of citizens<sup>31</sup>. Hanna Pitkin, on the other hand, argues that the crucial dividing line in representation is the distinction between 'standing for' and 'acting for'. Pitkin states that an over-emphasis on the composition of political bodies diverts attention from the more urgent matter of the *activity* of representatives. In her view, it is more important to focus on what representatives *do* than on who they *are*. What matters is action and outcome: *the content of politics*. She contends that political representation should be conceived of in a substantive way, defining it as 'acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them'<sup>32</sup>.

Pitkin's thesis conflicts with feminist political theory in two crucial ways: First, feminists' concerns with gendered power structures and gendered divisions of labour in society draw attention to the universal *under-representation of women* in politics. For reasons of justice and fairness women should be present in political institutions<sup>33</sup>. Secondly, a rich body of empirical research<sup>34</sup> emphasises the relationship between the descriptive and the substantive component of representation; being female ('standing for') is conceived as an enabling condition for the

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<sup>28</sup> Norris & Marsh 1997: 153

<sup>29</sup> Wängnerud 1998: 13-15

<sup>30</sup> Esaiasson & Holmberg 1996, Schmitt & Thomassen 1999, Phillips 1995

<sup>31</sup> Burnheim 1985 (*Is democracy possible?*)

<sup>32</sup> Pitkin 1967: 209 (*The concept of representation*)

<sup>33</sup> Phillips 1995

<sup>34</sup> Ibid 1995, 1998, Vallance, 1988, Wängnerud 1998, 2000, Celis et al 2008

substantive representation of women ('acting for'). Although political representation is widely regarded as having a number of dimensions: formalistic, symbolic, descriptive, and substantive, most feminist work on the topic focuses on descriptive and substantive representation. It is complicated to evaluate the impact of women's political representation on policy outcome. However, when a large number of studies, including a wide set of different indicators on the importance of gender in the parliamentary process are put together, it becomes evident that female politicians contribute to strengthening the position of women's interests.<sup>35</sup> Research has shown that even if party affiliation of politicians is usually more important than gender for political behaviour, it has been women politicians that have initiated equality policies, often in cross-party alliances.<sup>36</sup>

### 2.1 *The Politics of Presence*

The democracy theorist Anne Phillips criticises the Responsible party model and the focus on opinion representation, and instead she introduces *The Politics of Presence*<sup>37</sup>. Phillips claims that social representation and opinion representation must not be treated as separate entities, as it is not possible to detach opinions from the people who represent them. Further, it is not only different opinions and ideas that should be represented in politics, but also different *groups* of people. Phillips argues that by excluding large parts of the population (such as women and other under-represented groups) from the legislatures, representativeness of opinion cannot be achieved. She argues from the basis of a combination of a Politics of Ideas and a Politics of Presence, as the two are not exclusionary opposites.<sup>38</sup>

Phillips identifies four key arguments for a the politics of presence: (i) the importance of symbolic representation as women politicians act as role models, (ii) numerically equal representation between men and women in parliaments is a sign of justice, (iii) women are positioned to represent women's interests better than men, (iv) women's political representation revitalises democracy<sup>39</sup>. Suzanne Dovi has developed two additional arguments: the *trust* argument implying that women's political representation is crucial for women's confidence in political institutions and the *legitimacy* argument meaning that the presence of women politicians strengthens the legitimacy of democratic institutions<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> Wängnerud 2009

<sup>36</sup> Dahlerup 2006:12, Vallance 1988.

<sup>37</sup> Phillips 1995

<sup>38</sup> In the Politics of Ideas (Responsible party model) the voters are represented by the political parties and by several different central principles regardless of gender. Phillips: 24-25

<sup>39</sup> Phillips 1998

<sup>40</sup> Dovi 2007

The concept of a *critical mass*, developed by Drude Dahlerup, is a notion that women in parliaments will only be able to start making a difference when their share exceed about 30 percent.<sup>41</sup> According to this definition women in the current EP constitute a critical mass (35 percent) when looking at the *total share* of MEPs. Yet, some scholars have come to question the relevance of a critical mass, as there appears not to be a universal relationship between the percentage of women elected to political office and the passage of legislation beneficial to women as a group. In some cases, women are able to work more effectively together as their numbers grow, but in others, women appear to sometimes, in fact, make a greater difference when they form a small minority in legislatures, either because their increased numbers may provoke a backlash among male legislators or because their increased numbers allow individual women to pursue other policy goals<sup>42</sup>.

The point of departure for the politics of presence is sociological and it argues that different interests are connected to the social position, which in turn is linked to gender. It is based on the assumption that women's and men's different experiences mean that the gender of politicians makes a difference for policy outcome, suggesting that female politicians are better equipped to represent the interests of women than male politicians are. In other words, the theory predicts a link between numerical and substantive representation. As women are underrepresented in parliaments some positions and arguments are not even considered and certain concerns could be overlooked<sup>43</sup>. A more gender-balanced representation would make decision-making assemblies more genuinely deliberative, e.g. by giving room for new political preferences<sup>44</sup>. Thus, a more equal gender balance is necessary to achieve (greater) democracy. However, as Phillips points out the politics of presence is not about presuming that women pursue homogenous, static or essentialised group interests. A key challenge when studying political representation is to appreciate the diversity of women's positions and opinions as 'women's interests' cannot be grouped into one single category.<sup>45</sup> Following the theoretical arguments given above it is clear that women's representation in politics matter and that its nature needs to be further examined.

## **2.2 Gender and committee assignments – previous empirical studies**

Kantola found rather significant gender segregation when comparing the composition of EP committees in the parliamentary period of 2004-2009. Women dominated the committee for

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<sup>41</sup> Dahlerup 2006: 13 (1988)

<sup>42</sup> Childs & Krook, 2006

<sup>43</sup> Ibid: 151

<sup>44</sup> Ibid 45, 187. This was confirmed by surveys made on Swedish parliamentarians, Wängnerud & Oskarson 1995

<sup>45</sup> Kantola 2009: 381. Even among women with a gender identity, party ideology may override it, Heath et al 2005:420.

Women's rights (95 percent) and were well represented in Internal Market and Consumer Protection (52 percent), Environment (49 percent) and Human Rights (40 percent). In the Transport and Tourism, Legal Affairs, Constitutional Affairs and Security and Defence committees women took up less than 20 percent of the seats. Kantola not only highlights the low share (25 percent) of committees chaired by women, but also in which policy areas they hold chairman positions, e.g. Internal market and Consumer protection, Human rights and Women's rights.<sup>46</sup>

Empirical research on women's substantive representation in the EP is limited. However, Elizabeth Vallance examines the contribution that women MEPs have made to policy outcome, specifically in the context of community legislation on gender equality, and what impact women's presence has had on issues relating to women's interests. Vallance found that women parliamentarians devoted much more time and effort, compared to men MEPs, to 'women's concerns' and gender equality policy, which in turn affected policy outcome.<sup>47</sup> Thus, she found a clear linkage between the increase in the representation of women in the EP (after the introduction of direct elections in 1979 women's representation increased from 6 percent women to 17 percent<sup>48</sup>) and policy outcome regarding gender equality.

When researchers in the field of women's representation started to investigate women's political influence on national level they focused on the parliamentary committees, as well as on the parties<sup>49</sup>. Sue Thomas found clear gender patterns when studying the distribution of committee assignments between men and women politicians on state-level in the United States<sup>50</sup>. Women were significantly more likely than men to be assigned to health and welfare committees; women were also less likely than men to sit on committees dealing with business and private economic concerns. Her conclusion was that gender patterns resulted from legislators' choices rather than coercion or discrimination. Lena Wängnerud deals with women's representation in the Swedish Parliament including activities such as committee membership. Wängnerud measures the divergence of women's representation in the committees from the total level of women parliamentarians in order to depict the committees as either 'women-profiled' or 'men-profiled'.<sup>51</sup> Her study demonstrates clear-cut gender differences between the various committees, yet she

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<sup>46</sup> 2009: 391-392. Women chaired five out of 20 committees in the second half of the previous legislature. Committee chairs are often changed between the two largest political groups halfway through the legislative term. Consequently, the gender composition of committee chairs is altered.

<sup>47</sup> Vallance 1988 (*Women MEPs and Equality Policy*)

<sup>48</sup> Norris & Franklin 1997: 188. In 1978 – before direct elections had been held- women's representation stood at 6 percent.

<sup>49</sup> Oskarson & Wängnerud 1995: 102

<sup>50</sup> Thomas 1994: 66-67

<sup>51</sup> Oskarson & Wängnerud 1995: 102-107, Wängnerud 1998, focuses on standing committees during the period 1970–1996.

finds that these gender differences have decreased over time.

Heath et al explores how women in Latin American legislatures are disproportionately assigned to women's and social issues and kept off power and economic/foreign affairs committees, also when the number of women legislators increases. It is argued that increasing women's representation is a serious threat to scarce political resources, such as committee assignments, and male legislators sidelines women in an effort to preserve those resources. When it is possible to isolate female legislators on a women's issues committee, women are placed on those committees. Men - the traditionally dominant group in politics – are drawn to power committees. Seniority (age, experience) appears to have no effect on women's committee assignments.<sup>52</sup>

### 2.2.1 *The Gender System*

Different explanations for the lasting gender patterns have been put forward. According to Yvonne Hirdman *the gender system* is the reason for the segregation of women and men in politics and it is a problem for democracy, as the division implies a separation and subordination of women. She argues that the increased number of women in politics in the Nordic countries has had consequences for policy areas of reproduction, such as consumer protection, social welfare and cultural policy, but less for areas of production such as defence policy. By such a gender division the principle of equality is not fulfilled in the political system. Despite an increase of women in politics and gainful employment the gender separation remains. Moreover, Hirdman argues that since the end of the 1970's there is a 'new order' within the gender system, which she calls the *gender equality contract*. This 'new' period of social ideology does not focus on the similarities between women and men, but rather on making the two categories of 'femaleness' and 'maleness' equal, without changing them. In other words, women and men may be engaging in different spheres of politics, yet being equal.<sup>53</sup> The *gender equality contract* implies that functional gender divisions in politics are not a problem of democracy or equality and fails to acknowledge the unequal power distribution of women and men.

Hege Skjeie, on the other hand, emphasises the *strategic choices* of women politicians focusing on 'women's interests' and criticises Hirdman for assuming powerlessness of women politicians and argues that it is not necessarily desirable that women and men engage in the same policy areas<sup>54</sup>. The positions of Skjeie and Hirdman differ in the way they interpret the positions of women in politics. Skjeie's position implies that the gender differences in politics are a possible indication

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<sup>52</sup> Heath et al 2005

<sup>53</sup> Oskarson & Wängnerud 1995: 22

<sup>54</sup> Skjeie 1992

that women's conditions are improving, whereas Hirdman argues that the gender differences constrain women to sub-ordinate positions<sup>55</sup>. Haavio-Manilla et al speaks of two kinds of divisions between women and men: those related to formal power (hierarchical gender structures) and those related to policy areas (functional gender structures): the fact that women, once in politics, tend to be concentrated to certain policy areas<sup>56</sup>.

However, as the academics point out it is uncertain whether it is due to a personal choice on behalf of the women or to men not letting women into 'their' sphere. If the latter holds true, speaking of functional division is hardly appropriate. Both arguments are strengthened by surveys of the Swedish Parliament where Swedish parliamentarians were asked: '*Given a free choice, of which committee would you most like to be a member?*' The survey revealed differences between women and men politicians regarding their desired committees and policy areas. Women ranked the Foreign policy, Employment and Social committees highest. Men, on the other hand, ranked Enterprise, Transport and Finance committees highest. The survey also showed that women who desired traditionally 'male' committees found it harder to have their desires fulfilled<sup>57</sup>. Equally, the (few) men who desired traditionally female committees found it difficult to achieve. Further, the proportion of parliamentarians having their wishes fulfilled was greater among men than among women. Thus, the gender differences in the Swedish Parliament were largely due to different preferences – which could be characterised as *gender stereotypical* - but also to difficulties for women seeking seats in traditionally 'male' committees.<sup>58</sup>

Several conclusions can be drawn from research on gender and committee assignments. Gender bias exists in committee assignments throughout the world. Heath et al find that despite a growing number of female legislators in Latin America women continue to be sidelined to less powerful policy areas. Wängnerud, on the other hand, find that gender differences in committee assignments in the Swedish Parliament have decreased over time and to date these differences are in fact non-existing. Moreover, results point to that functional divisions stem from men's and women's different preferences for committees.

Thus, it could be expected that the social representation of committees will have consequences for policy outcome, even though it will not be explored in this thesis. Following the theoretical arguments of the importance of women's presence in the deliberation and decision-making

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<sup>55</sup> Oskarson & Wängnerud: 32

<sup>56</sup> 1983

<sup>57</sup> Surveys conducted in 1988 and 1994. E.g. a large share of women wished to be members of the clearly male-dominated Transport and Enterprise committees

<sup>58</sup> Wängnerud 1998



process - including how it could matter for democratic legitimacy of the EU- together with the empirical findings of previous research regarding women's engagements in national parliaments and the EP, including explanations for and interpretations of the gender division, prompts for a further exploration of the gender composition of the EP committees. This leads to the first research question of this thesis; how does women's representation vary between the European Parliament committees?

### **2.3 Party ideology and women's representation**

Research has shown that the political system of a country is undoubtedly relevant when studying the *level* of women's representation. Yet, variations in the proportion of women to men in politics are even larger across parties than across nations.<sup>59</sup> The point of departure for any analysis of women's representation is that political parties are gatekeepers when it comes to nominations and elections to political posts. It is the political parties on national level that recruit and select candidates, including for the European elections.<sup>60</sup> However, when it comes to the process of allocating committee assignments the pan-European party groups are crucial<sup>61</sup>.

Scholars have concluded that leftist ideology is a strong predictor for a higher number of women elected to parliaments.<sup>62</sup> Left-wing parties have e.g. more commonly used gender quotas, although in some countries quotas have been adopted across all parties.<sup>63</sup> 'Parties that value environment over economic growth and are permissive in social policy tend to have more women elected'<sup>64</sup>. Participatory ideals, which tend to be strong in Leftist and Green parties are likely to be favourable to women's political representation<sup>65</sup>. A distinction between 'Old left' and 'New left' ideology in cross-party comparative research shows that the latter is the significant factor for a higher level of women's representation<sup>66</sup>. Even though an increased proportion of liberal and conservative parties have also become more 'gender-balanced', the egalitarian values of leftist ideology appear to have had a central impact on the change towards a more gender-balanced parliamentary presence.

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<sup>59</sup> Kittilson 2006 makes cross-national comparisons including the substantial variations between parties within and across European democracies.

<sup>60</sup> Norris & Lovenduski 1995. Dahlerup 2006:10

<sup>61</sup> See chapter 5

<sup>62</sup> Wängnerud 1998, 2009:55, Dahlerup 2006:11, Norris & Inglehart 2003: 92.

<sup>63</sup> Norris & Franklin 1997:197

<sup>64</sup> Wängnerud 2009:55

<sup>65</sup> Kittilson 2006: 124-127

<sup>66</sup> Kittilson 2006, Kantola 2009:388

Women more often vote for left-wing parties than men do, which is referred to as *the gender gap*.<sup>67</sup> Parties attracting more women's votes relative to men's, have higher numbers of women politicians<sup>68</sup>. Kittilson argues that pragmatic, flexible parties are more likely to include new demands and groups, a behaviour she relates to party ideology<sup>69</sup>. Yet, Kittilson subscribes to the idea that institutionalised/centralised parties are more likely to include more women on their lists than do informal/non-institutionalised parties<sup>70</sup>. This shows a great ambiguity regarding decentralisation versus centralisation and institutionalisation contra flexibility for women's political representation. Less egalitarian party ideology may be triggered to demonstrate a more gender-balanced political representation, depending on e.g. nomination procedures and processes of allocating committee seats. Gains for women in parliaments largely follow a 'change from above'-pattern strengthening the argument of importance of parties. Thus, political parties are important actors and are vital to women's representation (and arguably also vice versa), yet embedded in the political context of specific countries.<sup>71</sup>

To sum up, the results of studies outlined above are important knowledge to bear in mind when comparing the political/ideological dimension to women's representation in committees. Yet, not all of these interesting aspects can or will be further dealt with in this thesis. Given that women's representation varies between national political parties and previous research outlined above, the second research question of this thesis is: how does women's representation in the European Parliament committees vary between the European political groups? If differences are even more significant in some political groups than others it implies that these groups and perhaps also ideology matters for women's representation in committees.

## **2.4 National dimension of representation in the European Parliament**

The EP is an interesting object for studies of representation as there is considerable heterogeneity in cultures, histories, economic conditions and political institutional set-up among the EU member states.<sup>72</sup> Such characteristics make the EP a legislature with high dimensionality (many dimensions to representation). Studies have found that a high level of political representation for women correlates with socio-economic and socio-cultural factors such as high levels of gainful employment and education among women, secularisation, a longer period of time since enfranchisement and, not least, an electoral system based on proportional representation rather

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<sup>67</sup> Oskarson & Wängnerud 1995: 82, Norris & Inglehart 2003: 83

<sup>68</sup> Kittilson 2006: 126

<sup>69</sup> 2006: 28-29, 33, 47

<sup>70</sup> 2006: 29, 56

<sup>71</sup> Kittilson 2006: 136

<sup>72</sup> Hix 2007:67, Norris & Franklin 1997

than plurality-majority systems. The share of women in the EP must be understood from the national perspectives, from which several explanatory factors are possible: social, cultural, institutional etc<sup>73</sup>.

Cultural ideas in society about women and men affect both the general levels of representation, but also individual women's choices and possibilities to engage in politics.<sup>74</sup> The political culture including national party ideology and subsequently, the extent of women's political participation is influenced by the attitudes and values that characterise the society. Women's representation tends to be higher in countries with a more *gender egalitarian* political culture than in countries with a more *gender traditional* political culture. Majority Protestant countries' have higher percentages of women in parliaments compared with 'majority Catholic countries'.<sup>75</sup> The Nordic countries along with Germany and Netherlands demonstrate more egalitarian attitudes in society toward women in politics, compared with for example the post-Communist countries.<sup>76</sup>

Cultural barriers, including traditional values of gender roles, have declined in post-industrialised nations, such as many of the EU member states. However, such cultural barriers remain prevalent, especially in the catholic southern European countries as well as in the Eastern European member states. The latter experienced a revival of conservative gender stereotypes after the fall of the communism, which in many cases pushed women back to the private sphere (as opposed to gainful employment). Further, cultural factors and 'contagion effects' from one country to another are seen as increasingly important and is especially relevant in the case of the EP.<sup>77</sup>

There are significant differences between the EU member states regarding socio-economic and cultural factors, which in turn could be assumed to influence women's representation within the EP committees. Nevertheless, there are many similarities between the member states, including the fact that almost all states apply proportional representation as electoral system in the European elections<sup>78</sup>. However, there are member states differing from the generalisations of socio-cultural factors (religion etc) regarding women's representation in the EP. Spain, for example, is a case standing out from other, mainly catholic member states in terms of women's

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<sup>73</sup> Countries such as Malta, Hungary, Cyprus and Italy have very low proportions of women political representatives, also at national levels.

<sup>74</sup> Kantola 2009: 388

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Norris & Inglehart 2003: 137, 144.

<sup>77</sup> Dahlerup 2006:11

<sup>78</sup> Exceptions of UK and Ireland. PR-system: the wanted proportionality is usually based on the use of party list. Political parties present lists of candidates. The party lists are either closed or open to preferential voting by the voters. In Single Transferable Vote, voters rank-order candidates in multi-member districts. (Dahlerup 2006)

political representation and gender egalitarian attitudes (for reasons not outlined here). Moreover, Estonia stands out from most Eastern European member states in terms of level of women's representation in the EP (having few EP seats make the percentage of women much more 'sensitive' to minor fluctuations)<sup>79</sup>. Thus, socio-cultural factors, such as religion, cannot solely explain the level of women's representation in the EP. To conclude, social change forces appear to be a necessary but not always sufficient condition for party change in terms of women's representation.

Given what is known of the general effects of socio-cultural factors on women's representation and the variations in the proportion of women throughout the EU member states: in national parliaments and the EP, the third research question of this thesis is formed: how does women's representation in the EP committees vary between member states? Could national differences in committee assignments be attributable to differences in gender egalitarian attitudes?

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<sup>79</sup> Estonia has six MEPs, out of which three are women.

### 3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As said, this thesis focuses on the *political/ideological* and *national dimensions* of women's representation when exploring and comparing the gender composition in the European Parliament committees. Given the organisation of the EP into political groups, including their influence on MEP's committee membership, in combination with the national dimension of EP representation: MEP's nationality, national party belonging, socio-cultural influence etc, women's representation in the EP committees will be compared by the European political groups and by the member states. It is assumed that these factors influence the *gender composition* of committees just as it influences the proportion of women's representation in politics.

To sum up, this study intends to answer the following research questions:

- (i) How does women's representation vary between the European Parliament committees? If gender does not matter, women will occupy the same percentage of seats across all types of committees.
- (ii) How does women's representation in committees vary between the *political groups*? If all these groups have an equal gender distribution (of their relative proportion of women) across all types of committees political group/ideology does not appear to matter.
- (iii) How does women's representation in committees vary between the *member states*? If variations between member states are found, it could be expected that national differences, such as *gender egalitarian attitudes towards women in politics* affect also gender composition of committees.<sup>80</sup>

Do women constitute a critical mass in committees? It will be discussed whether any ideological and national or socio-cultural differences with regard to gender composition of committees is found. Different engagement in terms of committee assignments among women and men MEPs would suggest gender specific interests and priorities (compare with gender divisions in society and results of Eurobarometer regarding different priorities of women and men).

In addition, an attempt to briefly answer the question of *why* women and men organise in different committees is made. How are committee assignments allocated and what reasons are stated behind choices of committees? Yet, only a provisional answer can be given, as it will not be thoroughly examined in this thesis.

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<sup>80</sup> See indicators in empirical chapter – in connection to presentation of results and in Method-chapter.

## 4. METHOD

### 4.1. Empirical Data – A new database including the gender-variable

Most of the data on EP committees required for this study is available on the European Parliament official website<sup>81</sup>. However, in order to simplify accumulation, the necessary statistics have been put together with existing data from [Votewatch.eu](http://www.votewatch.eu) into a new *MEP Gender Database*, set up specifically for the purpose of this study. This database on ‘individual level’ includes all 736 MEPs (total sample) in the current parliament<sup>82</sup>.

Votewatch is an independent website providing access to the political decisions and activities of the EP for research purposes. The website covers the EP's activities during the entire 2004-2009 term and the start of the 2009-2014 term, the latter is updated following each voting session in plenary<sup>83</sup>. Votewatch uses the EP's own attendance, voting and activity record, available through the EP's website, to give a full overview of MEP activities, broken down by e.g. nationality, national political party and European party grouping. Data on MEPs' political group belonging, nationality and committee membership, used in this study have been retrieved from Votewatch. However, due to the lack of gender-disaggregated statistics on Votewatch, the gender variable has been added from the EP's website for the purpose of this study.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, data on committees' gender compositions from previous parliamentary periods have been retrieved from the European Database on Women in Decision-making and data provided on request by the European Parliament, Equality and Diversity Unit, DG Personnel. Thus, the statistics used are collected from reliable scientific sources including the EP official website. The reliability – defined as the absence of random errors - should be high as the calculations and statistics have been put together carefully and thoroughly. In addition, a reliability test has been carried out to recalculate the statistics before finalising the results of the thesis<sup>85</sup>. Yet, as the data collection has been carried out partly manually it is possible that occasional errors occur in the data<sup>86</sup>.

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<sup>81</sup> European Parliament Official Website: Search Your MEP: Advanced search.

<sup>82</sup> The new Lisbon Treaty, entered into force 1 December 2009, allow 751 seats. During the course of this study this change was not yet ratified and the 736 MEPs that were elected in June 2009, according to the Nice Treaty, were still in office. Committee composition usually remain during the whole course of a legislature, yet, minor changes in committee composition may occur during the parliamentary period.

<sup>83</sup> VoteWatch.eu is a non-for-profit and non-partisan project. It uses statistical methods developed by political scientists from the London School of Economics and Political Science and the Université Libre de Bruxelles. See [www.votewatch.eu](http://www.votewatch.eu) for more information.

<sup>84</sup> More on (the lack of) gender statistics in appendix 1.

<sup>85</sup> A reliability test was carried out in July 2010. See Esaiasson et al 2007.

<sup>86</sup> The *MEP Gender Database*, based on figures as of April 2010, available on request: E-mail: [skalin.maria@gmail.com](mailto:skalin.maria@gmail.com) or: <http://euwomen.weebly.com/>

The European Parliamentary Research Group (EPRG) conducted a survey with MEPs in the year 2006. The survey includes some questions concerning the reasons behind the MEPs' choice of committees, which will be used for this study<sup>87</sup>. However, an apparent weakness of the survey is the low response rate of 35 percent (272 out of 785 MEPs). Therefore, the survey will be referred to as an indication of reasons behind committee membership, without generalising the results. As complement, the survey results are combined with answers to questions posed to a number of key persons in the EP organisation regarding the process preceding the allocation of committee seats within the political groups, with a focus on gender composition, to answer the additional research question of *how* the seats are allocated within the respective political groups and *why* women and men organise in different committees<sup>88</sup>. However, no attempts to generalise or attempt at a full explanation is made, partly as not all political groups have participated and only a few key persons have been contacted etc. This section is rather to be seen as an additional contribution as it is not part of the main objectives of this thesis.

## 4.2. Categorisation – the Analytical Strategy

As there are so few, sometimes no, MEPs from each member state in each committee, with the exceptions of large countries such as Germany, France and UK, it would make no sense to compare each member state individually. Therefore, member states are categorised into three groups to facilitate a more straightforward description of the national dimensions of women's representation. The groupings of member states follow the results of Norris and Inglehart with data from World Value Study and European Values Study regarding *egalitarian attitudes towards women in politics*<sup>89</sup>. Many of the member states are fairly similar also in terms of socio-cultural factors, making such groupings less complicated. There are problems attached to grouping member states together, such as missing out on in-group variations and 'extreme cases'<sup>90</sup>. However, given what is known regarding the level of women's representation in the EP and the influence of other factors, e.g. religion, and the explorative purpose of this study, such a grouping is necessary for purposes of analysis and for practical reasons. How the different gender egalitarian attitudes between the European countries might be explained is however out of the scope of this study and will not be dealt with further.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Access to data available on request. <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/EPRG/>. See Appendix 5 for the precise survey questions.

<sup>88</sup> MEPs as well as political group secretariats were contacted during April 2010. See Appendix 3.

<sup>89</sup> Norris & Inglehart 2003:137. See pp. 48-50 for more details.

<sup>90</sup> E.g. Germany has great internal differences regarding 'gender egalitarian attitudes', e.g. as parts of Germany, such as Bavaria, are largely catholic. Comparing and examining the internal differences of Germany will, however, not be done in this thesis.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. *Gender Egalitarian Attitudes*. See section 6.4 for a more outlined discussion on the groupings.

#### 4.2.1. Definitions

According to the European Council's recommendation of 1996 an equal distribution of power between the sexes in decision-making positions, throughout the whole political, democratic decision-making process is an important and necessary factor in order to achieve gender equality. In 2000 The European Commission gave a new definition of balanced gender representation and set 40 percent as the minimum level of participation of women or men in committees and expert groups. This definition was urged by the EP as the member states defined it very differently with the Nordic countries and the United Kingdom targeting 50 percent participation whereas most countries considering a participation rate of at least 30 per cent to represent a balance. A group is *women-dominated* if women make up more than 60 percent of a group and vice versa, if men make up more than 60 percent the group is *men-dominated*. According to the definition the European Parliament is a male-dominated institution, as 65 percent of MEPs are men.<sup>92</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Design

The comprehensive study by Lena Wängnerud on women's representation in the Swedish parliament has been an inspiration for the design and method of this study. The comparative approach regarding the variations in the number of women in committees as well as measuring the divergence from the total share of women in parliament has been inspired by Wängnerud's dissertation.<sup>93</sup> The committees with a lower share of women than the EP average (of women) are depicted as *women-underrepresented* committees and committees with a higher share of women than the average are labelled *women-overrepresented* committees. Committees close to the EP average of women are depicted '*gender-balanced*'. As seen, good gender representation are defined and assessed in different ways, e.g. as complete gender balance. This thesis has the *total share of women in the EP* as a starting point when comparing the level of women's representation in the committees, as this is the reality of women's representation today but also because if gender did not matter for composition of parliaments, in theory there would be 35 percent women in each of the committees.

The aim of this thesis is *not* to study changes over time, however, the last three parliamentary periods (1999-2004, 2004-2009, 2009-2014) are included in the first section of the analysis (table 1) in order to strengthen the descriptive results and avoid claims that the gender patterns found in committees are random or coincidental. For purposes of comparison, however, the gender

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<sup>92</sup> Kantola 2009: 384. European Commission, 2000. Communication from the Commission 7 July 2000, Addressed to Member States on the Commission Decision Relating to a Gender Balance within the Committees and Expert Groups Established by it. 2000/C 203/03.

<sup>93</sup> 1998



composition of political groups and groups of member states in committees are based on the numbers in the current legislature 2009-2014, using the database mentioned above. To enable a more viable descriptive analysis nine committees are selected when scrutinising the committees' gender composition by political groups and by member states. The results found in these nine committees are expected to be fairly representative of the other 13 committees. A total inclusion by merging all 22 committees into a few categories would not serve the purpose of the study, namely to describe the gender composition of the committees in-depth. Grouping committees together would raise the risk of interesting results being concealed.

## 5. STUDYING THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

### 5.1. Social representation in the European Parliament

Social representation, as one type of political representation, is widely regarded as critical for the legitimacy of democratic bodies<sup>94</sup>. It refers to the demand for parliaments to reflect the social compositions of the electorate in terms of social class, gender, ethnicity, language and religious faith, including reflections of minority groups<sup>95</sup>. In some electoral systems the concept of social representation is legally embodied, reserving seats for specified groups e.g. gender quotas. The social representation within the EP, as in many other legislatures is dissatisfying in terms of gender, but also in terms of social class background and ethnicity<sup>96</sup>. A sampled survey in 1994 revealed that less than 5 percent of candidates to the EP had working-class background, thus not being very reflective of European society as a whole.<sup>97</sup> Thus, it is known that the European Parliament fails in terms of social representation in total which is important to remember when analysing the composition of the EP committees.

On national parliament levels in the EU member states representation is commonly understood to work through the ‘responsible party government’ model in which the electorate selects the politicians based on their policy promises and performances. However, the EU is a different, complex system of divided powers and the political majority of the EP does not form an EU government or executive power. The European electorate can exert influence both indirectly through the respective national governments which are represented in the Council of Ministers and directly through the elections to the European Parliament. The EP powers are rather limited compared to national parliaments, partly as it shares legislative power with the Council through the co-decision procedure in many policy areas.<sup>98</sup> In some policy areas, such as culture, education, and tourism the EP has no say and no legislative power. In others, such as consumer protection and transport regulation the EP’s powers are more wide-ranging.

#### 5.1.1 *European political groups*

Since 1952 MEPs have organised in European party groups reflecting political affiliation, rather than nationality<sup>99</sup>. These groups are made up of many different parties from 27 member states, yet there is a fairly strong party discipline among most political groups within the EP and they

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<sup>94</sup> Marsh & Norris 1997: 161

<sup>95</sup> Phillips 1995

<sup>96</sup> Franklin & Norris 1997, Lovenduski & Norris 1993

<sup>97</sup> Norris & Franklin 1997:188

<sup>98</sup> Kantola 2009: 382

<sup>99</sup> Ibid: 391

have an organised structure, Hix et al argues<sup>100</sup>. The European political groups are perceived as the strongest predictor for attitudes and voting behaviour of the MEPs, and thus crucial to understanding the workings of the EP. Politics in the EP is quite similar to other legislatures, in that the classic left-right dimension dominates voting-behaviour and policy preferences<sup>101</sup>, which is beneficial, not only for the functioning of EU policy-making, but also for democratic accountability. The growing power of the EP has led to growing incentives for the political groups to shape EU policy outcomes in particular ideological directions and the EP groups have become increasingly well organised, competitive and cohesive<sup>102</sup>.

MEPs have two party principals: national parties and European political groups. The national parties control the selection of candidates in European elections and the electoral connection between voters and MEPs operates via national parties rather than European parties. At the same time the European political groups control the ability of MEPs to secure policy and office goals *within* the parliament. However, there is a strong congruence between European and national parties and conflicts are rare.<sup>103</sup>

### *5.1.2 European Parliament Committees*

The parliamentary work is divided into 22 standing committees and each committee is led by a committee chair and a number of vice-chairs<sup>104</sup>. The committee chairs coordinate the work of the committees in the Conference of Committee Chairs. The political composition of the committees reflects that of the Parliament as a whole, i.e. a political group with 35 percent of EP seats have around 35 percent of seats in each committee<sup>105</sup>. Average committee size has risen over the years, reflecting the increased workload, but the number of members also varies significantly between the committees within a parliamentary period. For example, the current Legal Affairs Committee is composed of a mere 25 members, whereas the Foreign Affairs Committee has 76 members<sup>106</sup>

The EP committee system has steadily grown in diversity and importance since the introduction of direct elections in 1979<sup>107</sup>, as mentioned, partly due to the increase in the use of the co-legislation procedure. The committees prepare the work for the parliament's plenary session by

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<sup>100</sup> Hix et al 2007

<sup>101</sup> Ibid: 180-181, 67

<sup>102</sup> Ibid: 104

<sup>103</sup> Hix 2007: 133 See also discussion on political groups and committees in chapter 6.

<sup>104</sup> The DROI and SEDE committees are subcommittees of AFET. The temporary Special Committee on the Financial, Economic and Social Crisis (CRIS), set up following the 2009 elections, is not included in this study.

<sup>105</sup> McElroy 2006. See also Rules of procedure below and in Appendix 4. Kantola 2009: 391

<sup>106</sup> McElroy 2006: 8-9. For all complete list of numbers in each committee, see appendix 2.

<sup>107</sup> Before the direct elections the Common Assembly was composed of delegates from national parliaments.

drawing up reports on legislative proposals and own-initiative reports.<sup>108</sup> Much of the central work and ‘real’ decisions are made within the committees through negotiations and crucial bargaining before voting in plenary.<sup>109</sup> When the formal voting procedure in plenary takes place the issue is often decided upon in advance. MEPs clearly value committee posts and believe that the committee system is a crucial point of power that matters to the legislative process within the EP.<sup>110</sup>

Despite the highly specialized committee system, relatively little empirical work has investigated *how* and *why* MEPs are assigned to EP committees and what consequences this process has for representation and policy-making. However, McElroy examines the growth of EP committees and committee membership and finds that the EP committee system is, by and large, ideologically representative of the EP as a whole, but no specific attention is paid to committee representativeness in term of gender. Despite the relatively specialized knowledge, experience and interest of committee members, they do not tend to be significantly different from the overall legislature in terms of *policy views*, neither on the left–right dimension nor in their specific policy domains.<sup>111</sup> The results support the idea that political group leadership succeed in the effort of making the committees representative, McElroy claims<sup>112</sup>. Three committees with varying overall influence on policy are examined (the Environment and Industry committees are two of the most powerful in the EP in terms of legislative power, whereas the Legal Affairs committee is somewhat less ‘prestigious’ in this sense)<sup>113</sup>.

The results largely confirm the specialization hypothesis in that there are predictable patterns in the *selection of* MEPs onto committees. MEPs with a medical background or links to environmental groups are more likely to be on the Environment committee. At the same time, lawyers end up on the Legal Affairs committee, just as those with links to industry end up in Industry. Interviews with MEPs have implied that party leadership have an interest in assigning MEPs with specialized competence to certain committees, as it would strengthen the bargaining position for committee seats within the political group. Equally, it may simply indicate that parties actively and knowingly exploit the policy knowledge of their members for efficiency

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<sup>108</sup> In the current parliament there is one temporary committee, i.e. 23 committees in total. Only the 22 standing committees will be included in the analysis.

<sup>109</sup> Kantola 2009

<sup>110</sup> McElroy 2006:9. The importance of the committee system was underscored by a MEP survey carried out in 2000. When asked to choose their first preference from among the EP posts of Group President, EP President, National Delegation Leader or Committee Chair, most respondents opted for the committee chair alternative.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid:7-8

<sup>112</sup> Ibid: 21, 25

<sup>113</sup> Ibid:15

reasons<sup>114</sup>. Furthermore, McElroy finds that not only expertise, but also previous experience of committee membership matters for MEPs assignments to committee positions. ‘High-profile’ committees such as Foreign Affairs and Legal Affairs have a much higher number of returning MEPs than do low-prestige committees such as Culture and Education or Regional Policy<sup>115</sup>. McElroy concludes: ‘It is not possible to infer from these results, however, whether these patterns reflect a process of self-selection on the part of the members, or whether the party chooses to place policy specialists on the Legal Affairs, Environment and Industry committees’<sup>116</sup>.

It is difficult to make a straightforward division of the committees into *legislative* and *non-legislative*. Many committees deal with various policy areas, some of which are more or less decided on the EU-level, including a varying degree of EP influence<sup>117</sup>. Examples of policy areas where the EU has (partly or solely) decision-making power are fisheries, agriculture, international trade, environmental policy, foreign policy, immigration and fighting cross-border crime/police cooperation. Policy areas involving social welfare, such as health care, education, and taxation, on the other hand, are mainly decided on national level. However, there has been a development over time that more decisions taken on the European level which have consequences also for the policy areas decided on national level - called the ‘spill over-effect’ - and more policy areas have been included in decisions made at the EU level. Yet, there is a significant divide between legislative (e.g. Environment) and non-legislative committees in the EP. Whitaker shows that, for the most part, national parties ensure higher levels of representativeness on committees that have legislative power. His results support the assertion that, as the EP’s actions matter more, national parties have become more concerned with their MEPs’ activities<sup>118</sup>.

There are different approaches as to why parliamentarians join certain committees and how the committees are formed. The *distributional* approach predicts that members deliberately join committees in order to exercise disproportionate influence over the policy areas under the committee’s jurisdiction. This might result in very unrepresentative committees, compared with the parliament as a whole. The *informational* approach, on the other hand, argues that committees are created to enhance efficiency by members’ specialization in particular policy sub-fields, as legislatures otherwise would be overburdened. Traditionally, informational advantages brought about by specialization were perhaps the only means by which the EP could challenge the

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<sup>114</sup> McElroy 2006:13-14

<sup>115</sup> Ibid: 27

<sup>116</sup> Ibid: 17-18

<sup>117</sup> See De-Clerck Sachsse & Kaczynski 2009

<sup>118</sup> Whitaker 2005

legislative authority of the European Council.<sup>119</sup> The informational approach was confirmed by McElroy's study, as the committees are highly representative of the parliament as a whole.

The findings of 'specialisation' on behalf of the MEPs committee assignments are interesting as it may indirectly influence the gender composition of committees. As mentioned, women and men are largely occupied in different areas of society also in their professional expertise. How could this be linked to the gender composition of committees? Moreover, the divide into legislative and non-legislative committees are an important aspect of committee power which will further dealt with below.

## 5.2 Allocation of Committee Assignments

This section briefly explores how committee assignments are allocated with the aim of strengthening the understanding for the committee composition, with specific attention to gender and possible differences between the groups. How committee specialization occurs and how committee members are chosen has generated much interest from academic study. One key question in committee studies is whether committees are representative of the legislatures they serve. Despite advantages of 'division of labour' and specialized competences of committee members, there is a risk of 'unrepresentativeness' compared with the parliament as whole. However, by and large, in terms of party group representation there is a very close correspondence between the overall make-up of the chamber and the committees.<sup>120</sup> Yet, the political groups sometimes have more seats in some committees compared to the expected proportion of seats, as perfect proportion cannot always be achieved<sup>21</sup>.

The *EP Rules of Procedure* demand proportional representation of political groups within committees, but it does not demand proportionality neither of national representation nor of gender representation<sup>122</sup>. Thus, there are no formal rules regarding gender composition of committees, only recommendations and definitions of balanced representation of women and men in committees<sup>123</sup>. Nonetheless, national proportionality in committee assignments indeed seems to be the norm<sup>124</sup>. The leaders of the political groups, together with the President of the EP, constitute the Conference of Presidents, which lead the work within the EP and take the

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid: 9-10

<sup>120</sup> Mc Elroy 2006: 3

<sup>121</sup> McElroy 2001: 34

<sup>122</sup> Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament. See Appendix 4.

<sup>123</sup> In 2000 the Commission gave a new definition of balanced representation and set 40 percent as the minimum level of participation of women or men in committees. European Commission, 2000, Communication from the Commission on Gender Balance within the committees and Expert groups, 2000/C203/03.

<sup>124</sup> Mc Elroy 2006: 11-12

final decision on the composition of committees, taking into account the size of the committee in the previous legislature as well as its importance in legislative terms.<sup>125</sup> The Conference presents a proposal of each committee's size and the number of seats of each political group according to the political composition of the EP, using the D'Hondt method.<sup>126</sup> The political groups then decide internally upon their candidates for each committee.

As for this internal allocation all political groups have been contacted with a number of questions regarding the procedure specifically for this thesis.<sup>127</sup> The groups apply no formal rules, but one example is the procedure in the Liberal group (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe-ALDE), where all MEPs are requested to send a list of three (ranked) preferences for their full and substitute committee memberships.<sup>128</sup> Based on the number of seats available in the respective committee it is sought to accommodate these preferences to the extent possible. In the European political group of Greens/European Free Alliance (EFA) the MEPs indicate their committee preferences to their Secretary General, who then negotiates the allocation of seats on their behalf, 'barring the preferences in mind'. In the Confederal Group of the European United Left- Nordic Green Left (GUE-NGL), the political group secretariat, together with the group leader and vice-presidents, make a proposal according to the preferences of the MEPs. The proposal is then further discussed within the group and when the list is presented and discussed there is a final possibility for MEPs to make alterations<sup>129</sup>.

In the larger Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D), the heads of national delegations negotiate the allotted seats of the group, based on preference lists of delegation members. The final committee seats are then decided and allocated within the respective national delegations.<sup>130</sup> Thus, the national delegations might have greater influence over committee allocation in the larger political groups, such as S&D. The smaller political groups, on the other hand, often have only a few members from each member states and thus have no or small national delegations. Moreover, it could be that the larger political groups (S&D but also the Christian Democrats) have less overview of committee allocation as national delegations are highly involved in the process, whereas the smaller group of

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<sup>125</sup> Hix et al 2007: 112. The Conference of Presidents is made up of seven men and only one woman.

<sup>126</sup> The Rules of Procedure, Appendix 4.

<sup>127</sup> See Appendix 3 for precise questions in the informant interviews.

<sup>128</sup> E-mail correspondence with the ALDE President's office, April 2010.

<sup>129</sup> E-mail correspondence with GUE-NGL vice-president, April 2010.

<sup>130</sup> E-mail from S&D MEP, April 2010.

Greens (through the Secretary General) have a better insight which in turn could affect gender representation in committees.<sup>131</sup>

There are several additional factors that are taken into account when allocating committee assignments. The results of McElroy's study regarding MEP's specialisation and professional expertise were confirmed when corresponding with political group secretariats: Apart from members' interests, expertise and preferences, MEP's professional and political *experience* are declared to be taken into account. Moreover, it is claimed that current members are given preference to a committee that they have previously served, as they already have expertise on their respective committee. Often, the new MEPs *are last in line* to choose committee. The size of the national delegation is of course also important, to maintain the overall balance in giving out committee assignment. The engagement, activity, knowledge and presence of MEPs at political group meetings are also declared to play an important role when deciding on committee seats.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Compare Kittilson p 13 and discussion on institutionalised/informal parties.

<sup>132</sup> Informant interviews. Appendix 3. Compare with finding in previous research that seniority is of little importance.

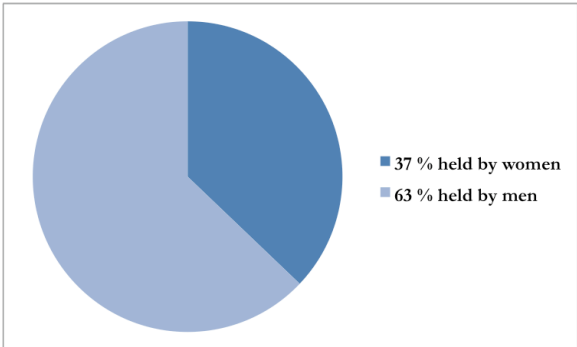


# 6. WOMEN’S REPRESENTATION IN THE COMMITTEES

## 6.1 Women MEPs holding more committee seats in proportion to men

This section presents the results of the first objective of the thesis: to explore the gender composition of the European Parliament committees. In the current parliamentary period 99 percent of MEPs (728 out of 736) are members of at least one committee. This means that only eight MEPs have no committee membership, most of who have other assignments such as political group leaders or President of the Parliament. Moreover, 27 percent (198 MEPs) are members of at least two committees, but only one percent (nine MEPs) has three committee assignments.<sup>133</sup> As nearly one in three MEPs have more than one committee assignment the total number of committee seats is 935. Figure 1 below demonstrate that women hold 347 of all committee seats, equalling 37 percent (+2 percentage points from the total share of women in the EP) and men hold 588 of the seats (63 percent)<sup>134</sup>.

**Figure 1. Total Share of Committee Assignments 2009-2014 – by Gender (%)**



**Table comments:** Source: *MEP Gender Database 2010*. 935 committee seats, out of which 347 are held by women and 588 by men.

There are 207 seats more than the actual number of MEPs with full committee memberships (728). Out of these ‘additional’ committee assignments, men MEPs hold 117 and women hold 90. In other words, women hold 43 percent of these ‘second’ and ‘third’ committee assignments. In relation to the gender balance of ‘first’ committee assignments (those who ‘only’ have one membership), the share of women is only 35 percent. Out of the nine MEPs who have three committee assignments six are women. What is more, 33 percent of women MEPs have at least two committee memberships, as opposed to 24 percent of the men<sup>135</sup>. In other words, more than

<sup>133</sup> See table 1 for further details. Source: *MEP Gender Database 2010*. Those who have no committee membership are often the MEPs who are leaders of political groups. I.e. 7 of the 8 MEPs with no committee membership are men, out of which 3 are members of the conference of presidents. The only woman with no committee seat is Rebecca Harms, leader of the Green group. Percentage: 198/736 and 9/736

<sup>134</sup> Only full committee membership is counted (substitutes not included).

<sup>135</sup> Number of women with at least 2 committee seats/total number of female MEPs: 84/258

one in three women MEPs have dual committee memberships, as opposed to less than one in four men. This is an interesting finding as it means that women MEPs are on average more active - in terms of more committee assignments - than men MEPs. Perhaps this could be partly explained by the fact that more men hold positions such as committee chair, political group leaders etc and thus have less committee memberships. An MEP's second or third committee assignment is almost always on a 'neutral committee'. They are considered neutral because membership does not come at the cost of a position on another committee. 'Neutral committees' include Women's Rights, Fisheries and Petitions and tend to be weak, non-legislative committees.<sup>136</sup> Thus, women on average hold multiple committee membership to a larger extent than men, whereas men focus on one committee and – as will be seen below – hold power positions, such as committee chair and vice chair to a larger extent than their women colleagues. This implies that membership in traditional 'male' committees count more than traditional "female" committees – for which two assignments are 'needed'.

## **6.2 The Gender Division between Policy areas**

In table 1 (below) the proportion of women in the committees is compared with the total share of women in the EP, i.e. 30 percent in 1999-2004, 31 percent in 2004-2009 and 35 percent in 2009-2014<sup>137</sup>. By comparing the share of women in the committees with the divergence (in percentage points) from the total share of women MEPs, committees that are women under- or overrepresented can be demonstrated.<sup>138</sup> According to this, women are relatively 'overrepresented' in a committee in the current Parliament when they hold more than 35 percent of the seats. A committee with less than 35 percent women, on the other hand, will have a minus divergence from the total share of women.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> McElroy 2006.

<sup>137</sup> Compare Wängnerud and the Swedish Parliament committees, 1998: 57. The gender composition in the committees in table 1, is not measured according to the percentage of committee seats held by women (37 percent in 2009) as then the effect of dual memberships would be included in the analysis.

<sup>138</sup> Compare the design used by Oskarson & Wängnerud 1995:105, Wängnerud 1998, Thomas 1994.

<sup>139</sup> See Wängnerud 1998, Oskarson & Wängnerud 1995.

**Table 1. Women in Committees of the European Parliament during the Parliamentary terms 1999-2004, 2004-2009 and 2009-2014 (%)**

Including over- and underrepresentation (divergence in percentage points) in relation to total average of women in EP in each parliamentary term. Ranked after average divergence.

Parliamentary term	1999-2004 Percentage of women	Divergence	2004-2009 Percentage of women	Divergence	2009-2014 Percentage of women	Divergence	Average divergence in three legislatures
<i>Total share of women in the EP</i>	30		31		35		
<b>Committees</b>							
1. Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM)	90 (F)	+60	94 (F)	+63	85 (F)	+50	+58
2. Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI)	54 (F)	+24	49	+18	52	+17	+20
3. Culture and Education (CULT)	43	+13	48	+17	47 (F)	+12	+14
4. Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE)	28	-2	45	+14	52	+17	+10
5. Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL)	39	+9	33	+2	51 (F)	+16	+9
6. Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO)	29 (F)	-1	47	+16	44	+9	+8
7. Petitions (PETI)	30	0	33	+2	50 (F)	+15	+6
8. Human Rights (DROI)	17*	-13	43 (F)	+12	43 (F)	+8	+2
9. Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE)	30	0	34	+3	36	+1	+1
10. Development (DEVE)	26	-4	33 (F)	+2	37 (F)	+2	0
11. Budget (BUDG)	24	-6	30	-1	32	-3	-3
12. Budgetary Control (CONT)	24	-6	29	-2	28	-7	-5
13. Legal Affairs (JURI)	29**	-1	24	-7	28	-7	-5
14. Agriculture and Rural development (AGRI)	24	-6	29	-2	27	-8	-5
15. Regional development (REGI)	19***	-11	32	+1	27 (F)	-8	-6
16. Fisheries (PECH)	25	-5	16	-15	33 (F)	-2	-7
17. Transport and Tourism (TRAN)	19	-11	23	-8	32	-3	-7
18. Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON)	27 (F)	-3	18 (F)	-13	29 (F)	-6	-7
19. International Trade (ITRE)	30****	0	25	-6	17	-18	-8
20. Security and Defence (SEDE)	17*	-13	19	-12	24	-11	-12
21. Foreign Affairs (AFET)	17*	-13	18	-13	22	-13	-13
22. Constitutional Affairs (AFCO)	23	-7	17	-14	4	-31	-17
Female committee chair in percent (F)	24%		18%		41%		

**Table comments:** Temporary committees not included. Include members only. Yet sometimes even larger gender differences are found if substitutes are taken into account. The number of MEPs in each committee varies between approx. 25-80 members. For number of MEPs in each committee see Appendix 2. The divergence is measured after the respective percentages of women in each legislature +/- . \*Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights and Common Security & Defence Policy formed one committee. \*\*Legal affairs previously formed a committee with Internal market. \*\*\*Regional policy was previously part of a committee with Transport and Tourism. \*\*\*\*External trade was part of the Industry, research and energy. Committees ranked after *average divergence* from the share of women in all three parliamentary periods, starting with the committee with the highest share of women MEPs. *Source:* 1999-2004 European Database Women in decision-making, Committees of the European Parliament, 2004-2009 Statistical data from EP, Equality and Diversity Unit, DG Personnel, data as of May 2005. 2009-2014, EP website & MEP Gender Database. EWL report *Women in the new EP July 2009*.

From table 1 it is clear that the committees for Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs and Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, both with 52 percent women in the current parliament, have a significant overrepresentation of women compared to the total average (+17 percentage points). The same holds for the Employment and Social Affairs committee with 51 percent women (+16 percentage points from average) and Culture and Education with 47 percent women (+12). The Internal Market and Consumer Protection committee has 44 percent women and Human Rights has 43 percent. The clearest overrepresentation of women is found in Women's rights and Gender Equality Between Women and Men Committee (FEMM). With a divergence from the total share of women MEPs of +50 percentage points it currently stands at 85 percent.<sup>140</sup> In the two previous parliamentary periods the proportion of women in FEMM was even higher, 94 percent in 2004-2009 and 90 percent in 1999-2004. Thus, gender equality clearly appears to be marginalised/isolated into being a 'women's problem' within the EP.

In the committees for Constitutional Affairs, with four percent women in the current parliament (-31 percentage points from the total average of women), International Trade 17 percent (-18), Foreign Affairs 22 percent (-13), and Security and Defence 24 percent (-11), women are significantly underrepresented. The imbalanced allocation between men and women is even more striking when considering the *relative* distribution, as 65 percent of all MEPs are men. In the 2009-2014 EP men are in a total majority (taking up more than 50 percent of the seats) in 17 out of 22 committees. However, ten out of 22 committees have a higher share of women members than the total share of women in the current EP of 35 percent.

The last column in table 1 shows the *average* divergence from the total share of women in the three legislatures. On the whole, apart from exceptions such as Fisheries, Constitutional Affairs, Petitions, and Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL), the gender composition of committees has remained stable over the three legislatures in the past decade.<sup>141</sup> The proportion of women in Fisheries increased from 16 percent in 2004 to 33 percent after the 2009 elections. Constitutional Affairs, on the other hand, had a dramatic decrease of women from 17 percent to only 4 percent in 2009. Other interesting examples are the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs committee, which had 28 percent women in 1999 and in 2004 the share was 45 percent, and EMPL who went from 33 percent women in 2004 to 51 percent women in 2009.

Another matter of relevance to *where* women and men are represented in the EP is the gender composition of committee chairs, also demonstrated in table 1 (F). These positions are crucial to

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<sup>140</sup> 29 out of 34 members are women.

<sup>141</sup> Compare with previous findings that previous experience from the policy field lead to certain committees.

EP committee work and points to important aspects of power and influence. In the 1999-2004 parliament only four out of 17 committee chairs (24 percent) were women and in 2004-2009 four out of 22 (18 percent). The share of female committee chairs more than doubled in 2009 and currently stands at 41 percent, which is higher than the total share of women MEPs.<sup>142</sup> The committees of Human rights, Development, Employment & Social Affairs, Culture & Education, Women's rights & Gender Equality, Economic & Monetary Affairs (ECON), Petitions, Fisheries and Regional Development currently have women chairs. Many of these committees are typical 'soft' policy areas of reproduction, some with little or no legislative power<sup>143</sup>. Altogether, traditional gender divisions between policy areas are evident also regarding committee chairs. However, there are some exceptions from the 'expected' gender compositions, e.g. that Economic and Monetary Affairs has had a female chair both in 2004-2009 and 2009-2014. As a result, the *Conference of Committee Chairs* has a rather equal gender balance regarding the *proportion* of women. Yet, the gender patterns remain stereotypical with regard to *which* committees and policy areas that have female or male committee chairs.

It is clear that women's representation is affected by changes to committee composition of policy areas. When the Foreign Affairs committee in 2004 was divided into two subcommittees: Human Rights and Security & Defence (SEDE), there was a significant gender division between the two<sup>144</sup>. The former with 43 percent women has an overrepresentation of women compared to SEDE with 24 percent. Moreover, the Regional Development committee has more women after being separated from Transport and Tourism (from 19 percent women MEPs in 1999 to 32 percent in 2004). Following these examples, it would be interesting to examine whether there are internal gender divisions within committees, e.g. the IMCO committee, between MEPs that are mainly concerned with consumer protection or with internal market<sup>145</sup>. In other words, the composition of committees in terms of policy areas appears to affect gender representation, but on the whole the gender patterns remain very stable and have done since the introduction of the direct election in 1979<sup>146</sup>.

### 6.2.1 Gender affecting representation in EP committees

This study has no intention of ranking the committees or policy areas by prestige or status or to

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<sup>142</sup> 100 percent increase after the elections in 2009, rising from six/four to nine female chairs out of 22. CRIS committee not included. The EP (the large political groups) often agree on alternating/changing the committee chair and vice-chair half-way through the parliamentary period resulting in changes in gender composition of committee chairs during the legislature.

<sup>143</sup> The EP Legislative Observatory: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/>. Maurer 2008, De Clerk-Sachsee et al 2009.

<sup>144</sup> The Foreign Affairs committee still exist as one committee but two subcommittees were established in 2004.

<sup>145</sup> IMCO = Internal market and Consumer protection committee.

<sup>146</sup> Kantola 2009, Vallance 1988

trivialise the political activities of women, as indeed ‘soft’ policy areas are often seen as less important etc<sup>147</sup>. However, when analysing the results of gender compositions it could be useful to discuss the committees in terms of both political and legislative power. A good indicator of legislative power of committees is the amount of co-decision files<sup>148</sup>. Prestige and status of committees is not always linked to legislative power, e.g. Foreign Affairs is very prestigious and popular despite its relatively modest legislative power, so is the Economic and Monetary Affairs committee. Perhaps it could be partly explained by them being old, established policy area of the EU – but also as they are traditionally ‘male’ policy areas? At the same time, policy areas could gain increased prestige, as they receive more public attention, such as Foreign Policy, Environment, Economic and Monetary Affairs as well as Gender Equality.<sup>149</sup> Internal Market and Consumer Protection is perceived as a high-status committee, largely due to its legislative importance. Fisheries, Constitutional Affairs, Petitions, Human Rights and Gender Equality are examples of ‘low-status committees’ and they do not have wide-reaching legislative power. On the other hand, Foreign Affairs is prestigious and. From the gender divisions shown in table 1 it is difficult to draw any conclusions regarding whether women are more represented in legislative or in non-legislative committees. Results are ‘mixed’ as women are overrepresented in legislative committees like ENVI, but also in less legislative Women’s Rights and Culture and Education. The picture is further complicated by the fact that most committees have some ‘legislative power’, i.e. they are rarely entirely powerful or powerless.

This section has dealt with the first objective of this thesis: to describe the gender composition of the EP committees and to answer the question of how women’s representation varies between committees. If gender did not matter, women would occupy the same percentage of seats across all types of committees. This is however clearly not the case as the level of women’s representation varies significantly, from 4 percent to 85 percent, between committees. It is difficult to relate the committees directly to areas of either production or reproduction. However, when looking at the committees where women are overrepresented or well represented compared to women average, such as Women’s Rights, Culture and Education, Employment and Social Affairs and Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, these all deal with ‘soft’ policy areas regarding values rather than ‘hard’ policy areas/production. The same goes for Human Rights as well as the Development committee with 37 percent women. Two other committees with a high share of women are the admittedly legislatively powerful committees, yet dealing with typically

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<sup>147</sup> Wängnerud & Oskarson 1995: 24-25. Compare Sainsbury regarding trivialising women’s political positions.

<sup>148</sup> See De Kleerck Sasche & Kazcynski 2009 for more on the legislative power of committees measured by amount of co-decision files. From EP Legislative Observatory, website

<sup>149</sup> With more political attention has been given to gender equality the status of the Women’s Rights committee has been boosted.

'soft' policy areas: Environment, Public Health & Food Safety and Internal Market & Consumer Protection. Most committees with clear male-domination such as Security and Defence, Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Agriculture could be related to areas of production. At the same time, committees such as Industry, Research & Energy, Transport & Tourism, Fisheries as well as Budget involving policy areas of production are all fairly gender balanced in relation to the total average. Moreover, the structure of the committee system, such as fusion of policy areas such as Transport & Tourism, Internal Market & Consumer Protection (IMCO), Industry, Research & Energy may result in a more balanced gender composition in committees. On the other hand, Women's Rights and Gender Equality being a separate committee, Culture & Education as one committee and the separation of Foreign Affairs into Human Rights and Security & Defence could be seen to strengthen the gender division.<sup>150</sup>

Given the significant differences between committees in terms of women's representation presented above and in order to facilitate for a more straightforward comparison of the political groups and member states in the next section, nine committees have been selected for further scrutiny. The two subsequent empirical sections are based on the gender composition of the current EP committees<sup>151</sup>.

### 6.2.2 *Reasons behind choice of committee*

This section briefly looks into the reasons behind choices of committee membership, with the aim of coming closer to the answer of *why* there are such gender divisions between committees. Personal desires and preferences of the MEPs combined with influence and final decisions of political group leaders are stressed as the most important factors determining the allocation of committee seats, following the questions posed to political group secretariats and MEPs. This is partly confirmed by a survey of 2006, asking MEPs of the reasons behind their choice of committee that emphasised the importance of *personal interests* of MEPs.<sup>152</sup> 58 percent of all MEPs responding the survey stated that their personal interest was a 'very important' factor behind choice of committee. Merely 10 percent of men and 13 percent of women stated that their personal interest was 'only a little important' or 'not important at all'. Being asked by European political group was 'moderately important' for both women and men. Yet, somewhat less important for women: 44 percent stated it was not important compared to 38 percent of men.

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<sup>150</sup> Compare reasoning of Heath et al 2005.

<sup>151</sup> *MEP Gender Database*

<sup>152</sup> EPRG MEP Survey 2006, 272 answered survey. Retrieved from EPRG website. Question: Committee Choice because of National Party Decision "I was asked to serve on the committee by my national party": 1, Extremely Important, 2 Moderately important, 3 somewhat important, 4 only a little important, 5 not at all important.

Only 14 percent of men and 13 percent of women stated ‘being asked by European political group’ was important for their choice of committee. Furthermore, the survey implies that national parties have quite little influence on the allocation of committee seats. Over 40 percent of both men and women MEPs stated that national party was ‘not important’ or ‘only a little important’ for their choice of committee, as opposed to ‘very important’ for 14 percent of MEPs surveyed.<sup>153</sup>

At the same time, 56 percent of women and 49 percent of men MEPs declared that *voters’ interests* were very important for their choice of committee. *Professional expertise* was an important factor for 60 percent of men and 56 percent of women MEPs. The reason that ‘the committee covers important issues’ was confirmed by nearly 70 percent of women and 60 percent of men surveyed. Thus, there are little differences between women and men regarding their choices of committees. Both women and men MEPs state personal and voters’ interests and their own professional expertise as important for committee choice, but European and national parties as less important for their choices.<sup>154</sup>

The survey question presumes a *choice* of committee assignment rather than asking which *factor* was most determining for committee seat allocation. There is a tendency to overstate one’s own preferences and choices when answering surveys<sup>155</sup>. The low response rate of 35 percent further weakens the possibilities of generalising from the survey results. Even though the survey cannot fully explain the reasons behind choices of committee it gives a good indication of the experiences of MEPs regarding committee seat allocation. When the survey results are combined with the explanations of allocation processes given by MEPs/political groups above the findings are pointing in the direction that MEPs largely have their personal preferences fulfilled regarding committee assignments. The fact that the committee assignments largely reflect MEPs’ personal preferences may, of course, in turn be caused by gender segregation and tradition (gender-stereotypical roles) in society as a whole. Consequently, committees dealing with issues of greater interest to women MEPs and vice versa will have a biased gender composition. As the assignments appear to be closely related to the MEPs’ own preferences, the question of why MEP’s chose their particular committee should be asked to the MEPs.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Moreover, respondents were asked to rate the importance of representing women as a group. 53 percent of female MEPs stated it is important for them to represent women, compared to only 31 percent of men. Moreover, 20 percent of men stated it was not important for them to represent women compared with only 7 percent of women

<sup>154</sup> Compare findings of McElroy.

<sup>155</sup> Esaiasson et al 2007: chapter 13

<sup>156</sup> Would require further study. See section 7.2.



### 6.3 Women's Representation in Committees by Political groups

The results in the previous section showed significant differences regarding the share of women between committees. This section explores the ideological dimension and compares the gender composition in committees between the political groups and attempts to answer the research question: how does women's representation in committees vary between the political groups? It begins with a brief account of the political groups including their respective proportion of women in the present parliament. As known, studies have shown that ideology matters for the level of women's representation in parliaments. If variations are found between political groups (also with respect to relative proportion of women within group) ideology could be assumed to influence also the *composition* of committees.

The European political groups are each led by a chair or two co-chairs. There is one female co-chair (i.e. 7 percent of political group leaders) representing the group of the Greens/EFA.<sup>157</sup> As the political size of a group has significant consequences for the composition of committees table 2 shows the percentage of MEPs of each political group, total the number of MEPs, as well as the ideological belonging of each political group.

**Table 2. Political groups in the European Parliament 2009-2014**

Political group	Ideology	Number of MEPs	Percentage of MEPs
Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) (PPE)	Conservatives	265	36 %
Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D)	Socialists	184	25 %
Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)	Liberals	84	11 %
Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA)	Greens	55	8 %
European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)	Conservatives/ Euro-sceptics	54	7 %
Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left (GUE-NGL)	Radical left	35	5 %
Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group (EFD)	Anti-Europeans/ Euro-sceptics	31	4 %
Non-attached Members (NA)	Independents	28	4 %
<b>Total</b>		<b>736</b>	<b>100 percent</b>

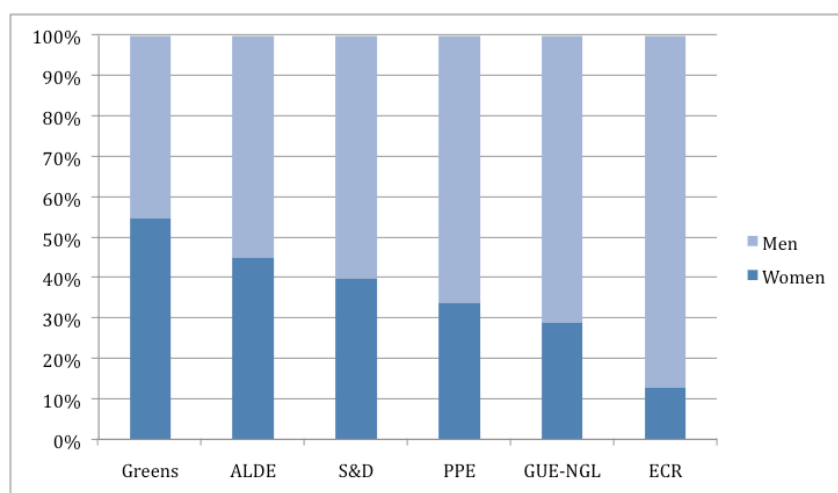
**Table comments:** The ideology column describes the general policy positions of the national members' parties in each European political group (Hix et al, 2008: 822). Numbers retrieved from: *MEP Gender Database*

<sup>157</sup> *European Parliament Elections Results 2009: Representation of Women*, August 2009. 50/50 Campaign.

The European People’s Party (PPE) is the largest political group holding 36 percent of EP seats. The Socialists & Democrats<sup>158</sup> hold 25 percent of the seats and the Liberals (ALDE) hold 11 percent. The Group of the Greens/EFA has 8 percent of EP seats. The European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) have 7 percent of the seats and the Radical left (GUE-NGL) 5 percent. The smallest group is Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD) with 4 percent of the seats. Finally, 4 percent of all MEPs are non-attached members and not part of any political group.

Figure 2 demonstrates the gender distribution in the six largest political groups in the current EP and reveals fairly big variances in the proportion of women and men *between* the political groups.<sup>159</sup> These six out of seven political groups are included in the analysis and comparison of women’s representation below (table 3).

**Figure 2. Gender distribution in the European Parliament political groups 2009-2014**



**Table comments:** The percentages refer to the current legislature 2009-2014. Explanation of abbreviations of the political groups including numbers: Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, 30 women and 25 men. Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) 38 women and 46 men. Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D), 73 women and 110 men. European People's Party (Christian Democrats) (PPE) 90 women and 176 men. Confederational Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left Group (GUE/NGL) 10 women and 25 men. European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) was formed after the elections in 2009, preceded by UEN, 7 women and 47 men. The two groups not included in table: EFD: 4 women and 27 men = 13 percent women. NA: 6 women and 22 men = 21 percent women. Source: *MEP Gender Database* and European Women’s Lobby, Gender Audit Report 2009.

The Greens with 55 percent women and the Liberals with 45 percent women have the highest shares of women MEPs out of the political groups. The two largest groups the Socialists & Democrats and the Christian Democrats, together holding 61 percent of total EP seats, have 40 percent and 34 percent women respectively. The Radical left group has 29 percent women

<sup>158</sup> Formerly known as PSE - Party of the European Socialists

<sup>159</sup> Non-attached members (NA) and Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group (EFD) are not included due to the EFD their small size and their few numbers of women members that a further scrutiny would make little sense. See table 2 for ideology of political groups and further information. Furthermore, NA MEPs cannot be grouped together as they are not part of any group

members whereas the European Conservatives have only 13 percent women. The size of the political groups and their shares of women in particular are important to bear in mind when moving on to comparing the gender composition in committees between the groups. Given the variations in the level of women's representation of the political groups, do some groups have more 'gender-segregated' representation in the EP committees than others?

### *6.3.1 How does women's representation in committees differ between political groups?*

For further analysis of the gender composition of the EP committees between the political groups, nine committees have been selected representing three different categories based on the numbers of the current parliament (2009-2014) shown in table 1. The selected committees are partly those which demonstrate the most significant gender patterns of all committees: the three most *Women 'overrepresented' committees* and the three most *Women 'underrepresented' committees* ('extreme cases'). In addition, the three committees showing the least divergence from the total share of women of 35 percent is categorised as '*Gender-balanced*'.<sup>160</sup> In actual numbers most committees have an underrepresentation of women, but this categorisation refers to the share of women in the current EP. This selection is made partly for practical purposes (it would be too extensive to study all committees in depth), but also to let the empirical results stand for themselves by not grouping committees together or pre-selecting committees and to study the most relevant cases.<sup>161</sup> The strategic selection is also made with due consideration of committee size and variance in policy area.<sup>162</sup> The Constitutional Affairs and Women's Rights committees have been left out, despite their significant gender divisions (see table 1). However, there is so little gender variance - 4 percent women and 15 percent men in the two committees respectively - that further scrutiny would be of little use. Furthermore, the Security and Defence committee with 24 percent women in the current EP is left out, as it is quite small in number of seats (29 members) and also very similar to Foreign Affairs regarding committee composition (many MEPs have dual membership in the two). As for Agriculture & Rural Development, with 27 percent women, the size of the committee (45 members) determined the final selection, despite the fact that Security and Defence has a lower share of women. Thus, the selection is based mainly on the empirical results of the gender divisions of the current parliament, but there is also a good variation in terms of policy areas (legislative power, political influence etc) in the included committees.

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<sup>160</sup> The committees are described one by one and no fusions of the committees are made. The categories only serve as labels.

<sup>161</sup> See Method chapter. The categorisation of committees in this study are made in order to make the empirical findings of gender divisions visible

<sup>162</sup> See Wängnerud 1998: 42, 49 and 83 regarding the categorisation of policy areas. Esaiasson et al 2007.

How does the share of women in committees vary between the political groups? Do some political groups demonstrate more significant ‘gender divisions’ in committees than others? If so, how do they differ – could any specific patterns be established? If the political groups have an equal distribution of their women and men MEPs in the examined committees political group or ideology does not matter. If the proportion of women in committees varies between the political groups (with consideration to their relative share of women) it could be said that political group, and perhaps also ideology, matter for the gender composition of committees. Reversely, if the political groups have an equal gender distribution of their women and men throughout the examined committees political group does not matter for the variation in women’s representation in EP committees.

Table 3 presents the percentage of women in nine committees, divided into three categories, by political group. There are many dimensions and ‘levels’ of comparison. The proportion of women in each political group should be compared with the average number of women in committees (shown in bottom of table 3) but also with the relative distribution of women in the political groups (shown in far right column of table) and most importantly between the groups.

**Table 3. Percentage of Women in Committees by Political group 2009-2014**

Political group (% of EP seats)	Women-overrepresented committees			'Gender-balanced'* committees			Women-underrepresented committees			Share of women in political group
	LIBE Civil Liberties, Justice & Home affairs	ENVI Environment, Public health & Food safety	EMPL Employment and Social affairs	DEVE Development	ITRE Industry, Research & Energy	BUDG Budget	AGRI Agriculture and Rural development	AFET Foreign Affairs	INTA International Trade	
Greens EFA (8%)	75	60	100	100	25	67	0	83	0	55%
Liberals ALDE (11%)	71	43	67	0	50	20	50	44	33	45%
Socialists & Democrats S&D (25%)	79	50	38	25	57	36	27	16	0	40%
Christian Democrats PPE (36%)	40	57	53	50	30	31	29	15	40	34%
Radical Left GUE/NGL (5%)	33	100	33	100	33	0	0	25	0	29%
Conservatives ECR (7%)	0	40	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13%
Total share of women in committee*	52	52	51	37	36	32	27	22	17	-
Number of women in committee	28	33	25	11	20	14	12	17	5	
Total number of MEPs in committee	54	64	49	30	55	44	45	76	29	

**Table comments:** The table shows the percentage of women of each political group's respective seats in nine committees. \*Total share of women in committee include all MEPs, i.e. also Non-attached MEPs (28 MEPs) and Europe of Freedom and Democracy group (31 MEPs), which are not included in the table analysis for reasons outlined above. Thus, not a total number in each committee. NA has 100 % women in EMPL and 50 percent in BUDG. The EFD-group has 50 percent women in BUDG, EMPL & ITRE, as well as 33 % women in ENVI. \*'Gender-balanced' in relation to the total share of women in EP committees, 35 % in 2009-2014. Total number of women/total members of each group in each committee: LIBE 54 members: PPE has 8 women out of their 20 seats, S&D 11/14, ALDE 5/7, Greens 3/4, GUE/NGL 1/3, ECR 0/2. ENVI has 64 members, out of which PPE has 13/23, S&D 8/16, ALDE 3/7, Greens 3/5, GUE/NGL 3/3 and ECR 2/5. EMPL has 49 members out of which PPE has 9/17, S&D 5/13, ALDE 4/6, Greens 4/4, GUE/NGL 1/3 and ECR 0/3. DEVE has 30 members out of which PPE has 5/10, S&D 2/8, ALDE 0/4, Greens 3/3, GUE/NGL 1/1, ECR 0/2. ITRE has 55 members out of which PPE has 6/20, S&D 8/14, ALDE 3/6, Greens 1/4, GUE/NGL 1/3, ECR 0/4. BUDG has 44 members out of which PPE has 5/16, S&D 4/11, ALDE 1/5, Greens 2/3, GUE/NGL 0/2, ECR 0/3. AGRI has 45 members out of which PPE has 5 women out of 17 seats, S&D 3/11, ALDE 2/4, Greens 0/3, GUE/NGL 0/1, ECR 0/4. AFET 76 members: PPE has 4 women out of 27 members, S&D 3/19, ALDE 4/9, Greens 5/6, GUE/NGL 1/4 and ECR 0/6. INTA has 29 members: PPE has 4/10, S&D 0/7, ALDE 1/3, Greens 0/2, GUE/NGL 0/2 and ECR 0/2 seats. **Source:** MEP Gender Database and EP official website: Find an MEP- Advanced Search.

All three committees with clear overrepresentation of women are fairly large, ranging from 49 to 64 members<sup>163</sup>. It is important to mention that small groups, such as the Greens, the Conservatives and the Radical left have very low number of seats, ranging between one and six, in each of the examined committees (see table comments for exact numbers) making the percentage of women sensitive to minor changes of just one MEP, i.e. three women out of four committee seats result in 75 percent women, despite that the political group in that case is only one seat from perfect gender balance. The Socialists & Democrats demonstrate very high levels of women with 79 percent in Civil Liberties, Justice and Home affairs, compared to their total share of women in the group being 40 percent. The same holds for The Greens and the Liberals with 75 and 71 percent women respectively. The Christian Democrats have 40 percent women and the Radical Left has 33 percent, both largely corresponding to their internal proportion of women.

The European Conservatives and Reformists have no women represented in any of the examined committees, except for the Environment committee (ENVI) in which women hold 40 percent of the group's seats, which is hardly surprising, given that they only have seven female MEPs. In ENVI, with a total share of women of 52 percent, all political groups have large proportions of women. However, the Liberals with 43 percent women and the Greens with 60 percent have - in relation to their total share of women in their respective political groups - not such high levels of women. The Christian Democrats have the relatively highest proportion of women in ENVI with 57 percent compared with group average of 34 percent women (see far right column in table 3). In Employment and Social affairs with a committee average of women of 51 percent again, obvious variations between the political groups are found. The Greens have 100 percent women (out of four seats) and the Liberals have 67 percent (four out of six seats).

The Christian Democrats (PPE) with 53 percent of their seats held by women are well above their internal women's representation of 34 percent. The Socialists & Democrats stand out from most of the other political groups as they have a much lower level of women, only 38 percent, in EMPL. As said, the low numbers of seats for the smaller political groups result in more 'extreme' percentages making comparisons between the groups somewhat complicated. The large groups on the other hand should have greater possibilities to have equal gender distributions between committees as they have more seats (S&D have 13 seats in EMPL, but only 5 women and PPE has 17 seats and 9 women). Moreover, the two large groups surely influence committee average as they together make up 61 percent of seats.

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<sup>163</sup> See bottom of table 3 for the numbers in each committee.

The ‘Gender-balanced’ committees selected for further study include the committees of Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE), Development (DEVE) and Budget (BUDG). These committees are all close to the EP average of women’s representation with 36, 37 and 33 percent women respectively. In ITRE the Socialists & Democrats with 57 percent and the Liberals with 50 percent have the highest shares of women. The fact that the largest group of Christian Democrats has 30 percent women (close to political group average) brings the committee average to 36 percent. Women MEPs take up all seats of the Greens and the Radical left groups in the Development committee (DEVE). Indeed this could be viewed as a committee of political importance for both of these groups. Again it is a significant difference between the Socialists & Democrats and the Christian Democrats regarding the level of women (balancing up each other). S&D have only 25 percent women in DEVE, whereas the Christian Democrats have 50 percent. This might also reflect the political importance of the committee, as the S&D has a slight advantage of seats in this committee, whereas the PPE has a slight disadvantage compared to the total composition<sup>164</sup>. As for the Budget committee the two biggest political groups the Christian Democrats have 31 percent and the S&D 36 percent, which affects the total committee average of 33 percent. The Liberals have only 20 percent women whereas of the Greens’ seats women hold 67 percent.

Table 3 also shows the proportion of women by political groups in the three most ‘women-underrepresented’ committees and reveals clear differences regarding the level of women’s representation between the groups. Women hold 83 percent of the Greens’ seats in the Foreign affairs committee (AFET) compared with the committee average of 22 percent. Thus, the Greens have an overrepresentation of women in AFET also in relation to their total share of women of 55 percent. The Liberal group has 44 percent women in Foreign Affairs, corresponding well with the share of women in the group as a whole (45 percent). The same goes for the Radical left with 25 percent women in AFET, compared with 29 percent women in the political group. The two political groups of Christian Democrats and S&D both demonstrate extremely low numbers of women in the Foreign Affairs committee, with 15 and 16 percent respectively. It is especially low considering the relative share of women within the respective groups (34 and 40 percent) and the high number of seats that the two groups hold in the large AFET committee of 76 members<sup>165</sup>. In the International Trade committee (INTA), the Christian Democrats (PPE) have 40 percent women and the Liberals have 33 percent. None of the other political groups have any women, bringing down the committee average to a low 17 percent. According to the measurement of

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<sup>164</sup> McElroy 2001: 34 and *MEP Gender Database*

<sup>165</sup> PPE have 27 seats in Foreign Affairs but women hold only 4 of them. S&D have 19 seats but women hold only 3.

committee seat advantage by McElroy it appears that the PPE prioritise International Trade more than do the S&D. Thus, any 'political importance' explanation to the non-existence of S&D women in INTA is difficult to establish. Lastly, in the Agriculture and Rural Development committee (AGRI) the Liberals have 50 percent women, the S&D have 30 percent and the Christian Democrats have 29 percent, i.e. fairly balanced gender representation. The remaining three groups have however no women in AGRI, resulting in a committee average of 27 percent women.

### *6.3.2 Do variations in women's representation reflect political importance?*

An interesting aspect of the empirical results above is that women's representation appears to vary according to the political importance of the committee policy area to the respective political groups. For example Employment and Social affairs for the Socialists & Democrats, Environmental policy for the Greens and Civil Liberties, Justice and Home affairs for the Christian Democrats. Further, the results suggest that the proportion of men is higher in committees dealing with policy areas relatively more important for the political group. Moreover, the popularity of committees varies between political groups. In the Radical left group the most popular committees apparently include Employment and Social Affairs, Internal Market & Consumer Protection (IMCO) and Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, all women-overrepresented committees and with a high representation of women in the political group.<sup>166</sup> Among the Greens, the Environment committee is unsurprisingly especially popular.

As not all EP committees are included and the political importance not thoroughly examined and established, any general conclusions are difficult to make. Very few MEPs in the Socialists & Democrats group preferred membership in Civil Liberties, Justice and Home affairs (LIBE) which is interesting given the gender composition of the S&D of 79 percent women in the committee. Is the LIBE committee extremely popular among S&D women or is the gender division simply a reflection of S&D men not being interested in its committee membership? Consequently, it is likely that the policy areas of great importance to the political group as well as national parties is of great importance and interests also for their MEPs. The groups with a higher share of women (such as the Greens and the Liberals) could be expected to have more women also in the committees important for their political priorities (as women could be expected to have 'higher status' in their groups).

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<sup>166</sup> E-mail with Vice-chair of GUE-NGL.



To sum up, when scrutinising the gender composition of committees it is found that the Liberals and the Greens have a more gender-balanced representation or even overrepresentation of women also in the Women-underrepresented committees<sup>167</sup>. As for the Liberals the share of women in overrepresented committees largely corresponds to the group's average of women. The Christian Democrats and the Socialists & Democrats, on the other hand, demonstrate rather significant gender divisions between policy areas (with a few exceptions), with clear relative overrepresentation of women in the Women-overrepresented committees and clear underrepresentation of women in the Women-underrepresented committees. The S&D have in fact the lowest share of women in the latter committees given their large number of seats and their internal proportion of women. The two largest groups internal gender distributions strongly affect committee average as they have much more seats, e.g. making their low representation of women in Foreign Affairs even more remarkable. When comparing the proportion of women from each political group in committees with the supposed political importance of the group interesting patterns are found. It could be discussed if a political group that has a high proportion of women in a committee with great political importance to the group is more gender equal than if it has a large share of women in a less important committee, this is linked to previous findings that women tend to be marginalised to certain less powerful committees.<sup>168</sup>

For instance, the Socialists & Democrats have 79 percent women in Civil Liberties, Justice and Home affairs, which is 27 percentages above committee average (52 percent) and 39 percentages above group average of women (40 percent). It is even more remarkable considering the claim that very few members of S&D preferred a seat in the LIBE committee. Moreover, S&D has a high share of men in the usually women-overrepresented committee of Employment and Social affairs (62 percent men, as opposed to the committee average of 49 percent men) The EMPL committee is also one of the most popular committees for MEPs of the Radical left (GUE-NGL) and their share of men in the committee is 67 percent. However, it is difficult to make any generalisations as GUE-NGL has so few seats (between 1-4) in each committee.

To conclude, women's representation varies between committees depending on political group affiliation and variations are stronger in some groups than others. However, the variations do not entirely follow the ideological differences as found in previous research regarding the levels of women, i.e. that left-wing political groups have more equal gender representation than right-wing groups. The levels of women within each political group affect the possibility to have a higher

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<sup>167</sup> With the exception of no women in AGRI for the Greens. In Foreign Affairs women in the Greens hold 5 out of 6 seats.

<sup>168</sup> Compare Heath et al 2005.

share of women across committees. Yet, it is the two biggest political groups – but particularly the Social Democrats - representing both sides of the ideological scale that have the most divided gender representation throughout the examined committees. The European Conservatives with very few women in total are bound to have a low share of women. The Liberals, but also the Greens, have a less gender-segregated composition in their committee delegations, especially considering their lower number of seats in each committee making gender balance in percentage more difficult to achieve. To conclude, if the Greens and the Liberals were a larger share of the EP the gender division would be less significant in many of the committees, and vice versa.

## 6.4 Women's representation in Committees by Groups of Member states

### 6.4.1 National dimension of women's representation in the EP

This section explores the national dimension of gender composition of committees to answer the research question of how women's representation in committees differs between member states. As outlined, the political context and background, including socio-economic and cultural factors, such as the share of women in national parliaments, of women politicians differ between the EU member states. All these factors have consequences for the level of women's representation in the EP, but perhaps also for the *gender composition of committees*? In other words, national and socio-cultural differences, such as 'gender egalitarian attitudes', could be expected to affect also *where* women (and men) MEPs 'are placed' and organise within the EP in terms of committee membership.

The picture is not all dismal regarding women's representation in the EP when comparing with national parliaments in the EU, which have an average of women parliamentarians of only 24 percent.<sup>169</sup> Further, in 24 member states the percentage of women holding seats in the EP is higher than in the respective national parliaments, with the exceptions of Malta, Belgium and Luxembourg.<sup>170</sup> Several explanations as to why there are more women in the EP as opposed to national parliaments, some of which relate to institutional circumstances such as electoral system, have been put forward.<sup>171</sup> Another possible explanation to the higher level of women in the EP

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<sup>169</sup> Inter-parliamentary Union [www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org) Single and lower Houses, as of June 2010.

<sup>170</sup> France is probably the clearest example of this with 45 percent women in the EP, but only 19 percent women in the national legislature. Other examples are Estonia with 50 percent women in the EP (largely due to the very few MEPs, six in total) compared with only 23 percent in the national parliaments and 39 percent of the Irish MEPs are women, compared with only 14 percent in the national parliament. Slovenia, Slovakia and Romania are other member states with considerable differences between national parliaments and the EP regarding women's representation.

<sup>171</sup> Norris & Franklin 1997: 192. The UK is the only country using single member districts with simple plurality voting. Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland use a single transferable vote system in multi-member districts. There is a broad consensus among scholars within the field of electoral studies that multi-member constituencies and proportional representation are connected to a higher number of women parliamentarians, compared to e.g. majority electoral systems and single member constituencies: Kantola 2009: 387. Even though most member states apply proportional representation in the European elections,

compared to national parliaments is the power – or lack of it – of the EP. As seen, men politicians seek power committees to a greater extent than women and with the EP being ‘second-order’ this might influence the higher proportions of women.<sup>172</sup>

The focus of this study is however to compare the gender compositions within committees between the member states rather than explaining the national differences in proportions of women. Yet, table 4, presents the share of women by member state in order to get a better understanding of the national dimensions of the gender composition of committees as well as of the groupings after ‘Gender Equality Culture’ presented later in this section. The table includes number and percentage of women from each member state in the current EP and the two previous parliamentary periods (1999-2004 and 2004-2009).

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national traditions and voting patterns could still be expected to influence the EP elections.

<sup>172</sup> Heath et al 2005, Schmitt et al 1997.

**Table 4. Women in the European Parliament by Member state and ‘Gender Equality Culture’ of Member State**

Include the three previous parliamentary periods

Member state	‘Gender Equality Culture’	1999-2004		2004-2009		2009-2014	
		%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
Finland	Most Gender Egalitarian	44	7	48	6	62	8
Sweden	Most Gender Egalitarian	41	9	47	9	56	10
Estonia	Gender Traditional	-	-	50	3	50	3
Netherlands	Most Gender Egalitarian	35	11	48	13	48	12
France	Intermediate	40	35	45	35	47	34
Denmark	Most Gender Egalitarian	38	6	43	6	46	6
Austria	Intermediate	38	8	23	5	41	7
Slovakia	Gender Traditional	-	-	36	5	38	5
Latvia	Gender Traditional	-	-	22	2	38	3
Germany	Most Gender Egalitarian	37	37	33	33	37	37
Spain	Intermediate	34	22	26	14	36	18
Romania	Gender Traditional	-	-	34	10	36	12
Belgium	Intermediate	28	7	33	8	36	8
Portugal	Intermediate	20	5	25	6	36	8
Hungary	Gender Traditional	-	-	38	9	36	8
Bulgaria	Gender Traditional	-	-	44	8	35	6
United Kingdom	Intermediate	24	21	26	20	33	24
Cyprus	Intermediate	-	-	0	0	33	2
Greece	Intermediate	16	4	29	7	32	7
Slovenia	Gender Traditional	-	-	43	3	29	2
Ireland	Intermediate	33	5	38	5	25	3
Lithuania	Gender Traditional	-	-	38	5	25	3
Italy	Intermediate	11	10	25	16	22	16
Poland	Gender Traditional	-	-	15	8	22	11
Czech Republic	Gender Traditional	-	-	21	5	18	4
Luxemburg	Intermediate	33	2	50	3	17	1
Malta	Intermediate	-	-	0	0	0	0
Total percentage of women in the European Parliament		30		31		35	

**Table comments:** Member states ranked after share of women in 2009-2014. Percentage and numbers of women elected to the EP 1999-2004, 2004-2009 and 2009-2014 by member states: Figures rounded to one decimal. Ten new member states joined the EU in 2004 and two in 2007. *Source:* Period 1999-2004 and 2004-2009 *L'évolution de la répartition femmes/hommes pe sortant V legislature 2004-2009*, Directorate General for Internal Policies, Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, the secretariat, 2008. 2009-2014: *Women in the European Parliament 2010, International Women's Day*. ‘Gender Equality Culture’ grouping based on the scale by Norris and Inglehart (2003).

Table 4 shows that the average 35 percent women in the EP is a result of significant variations between the member states regarding women’s representation. In the current parliament, Finland and Sweden actually have more women than men MEPs, with 62 and 56 percent respectively.<sup>173</sup> The Nordic countries, along with France, Estonia and Netherlands remain, over the three legislatures the most gender-balanced member states. Italy has the lowest levels of women MEPs of the long-established member states, with 22 percent women. Many of the Eastern European member states have rather low proportions of women, yet there are significant variations among the countries. Estonia currently has 50 percent women MEP’s and Slovakia 38 percent, whereas the Czech Republic with only 18 percent women and Poland with 22 percent are found at the other end of this spectrum. Further, the levels of women in these countries are rather unstable, with Slovenia dropping from 43 percent women in 2004 to 29 percent in 2009. The proportion

<sup>173</sup> *Women in the European Parliament 2010 – International Women's Day 2008*: 13, Equality and Diversity Unit, European Parliament.

of female MEPs from Luxembourg also decreased dramatically after the 2009 elections. This shows that women's representation is far from linear and stable in the established member states and particularly not in the 'new' member states. It also shows that in member states with very few MEPs 'small' changes have dramatic effects on the gender distribution. In 2004-2009 two of the most gender equal countries had only six MEPs. The two most gender unequal states were the small countries of Malta and Cyprus.

#### 6.4.2 *Women's representation in committees by groups of member states*

Hence, the gender composition varies between committees and there are significant divisions between men and women MEPs' engagement in different policy areas. It has also been shown that the level of women's representation in committees varies between political groups. This section attempts to answer the research question of: how does women's representation in committees vary between member states? For the purpose of exploring the national dimension to women's representation, the gender composition in the nine selected committees is broken down to groups of member states. As mentioned in the Method-chapter the grouping of member states is made after results of the European Values Survey regarding *egalitarian attitudes towards women in politics* after which Norris and Inglehart have rated nations by a gender equality scale.<sup>174</sup> However, not all EU member states are included on the scale/rating so it has been combined with other factors such as region (geographical considerations) and religion. Even though significant in-group variations in terms of level of women's representation and arguably also Gender Equality Culture surely exist between the member states the grouping is primarily made after 'egalitarian attitudes towards women in politics'. The grouping largely corresponds to the level of women's representation within the respective member states, (as shown in table 4)<sup>175</sup>.

The proportion of women MEPs from the respective countries is surely affected by these egalitarian attitudes, but to study that relationship is out of the scope of this thesis. These attitudes are expected to influence committee belonging of women and men MEPs (being more or less gender stereotypical). The EU member states with the most egalitarian attitudes towards women in politics have been grouped together and called *Most Gender Egalitarian States*. The second group of *Intermediate Gender Egalitarian States* include the member states in the middle on the 'Gender equality scale'. The third group of *Gender Traditional States* is made up of the countries demonstrating the least egalitarian attitudes towards women in politics: the post-communist states that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007 respectively (for an overview of the groupings see

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<sup>174</sup> Norris & Inglehart 2003: 32-33, 137.

<sup>175</sup> With exceptions such as Malta, Cyprus, Spain, Estonia and Luxemburg.

column 2, table 4).<sup>176</sup>

Table 5 demonstrate the percentage of women in the nine committees by groups of member states. The share of women for each group of member states in each committee will be compared with the proportion of women of the respective political group, with the respective committee average of women and with each other.

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<sup>176</sup> There are difficulties with grouping, for example Germany being a large and homogenous country. See discussion in Method-chapter. In-group variances regarding women's representation between member states within the respective groups surely exist and are a limitation of grouping member states together. Yet, the practical advantages are fundamental.

**Table 5. Percentage of Women in Committees by groups of Member states 2009-2014**

Groups of member states* (% of seats in EP)	Women-overrepresented committees			'Gender-balanced' committees			Women-underrepresented committees			Share of women in group of member states
	LIBE Civil Liberties, Justice & Home affairs	ENVI Environment, Public health & Food safety	EMPL Employment and Social affairs	DEVE Development	ITRE Industry, Research & Energy	BUDG Budget	AGRI Agriculture and Rural development	AFET Foreign Affairs	INTA International Trade	
Most Gender Egalitarian States (23%)	50	53	55	50	42	45	57	38	20	43%
Intermediate Gender Egalitarian States (51%)	41	55	52	35	41	33	20	23	18	34%
Gender Traditional States (26%)	77	42	45	29	25	17	23	12	14	30%
Total share of women in committee	52	52	51	37	36	32	27	22	17	-
<i>Number of women in committee</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>5</i>	
<i>Total number of MEPs in committee</i>	<i>54</i>	<i>64</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>76</i>	<i>29</i>	

**Table comments.** Source: the *MEP Gender Database* and the EP official website: Find Your MEP. Advanced Search. The percentage base for each group of member state is 100 percent, i.e. all member states and all MEPs in each committee are included. Total share of women in committee, refers to total share of women in committee 2009, see table 1. This average is based on the numbers of MEPs in each of these groups of member states above. The in-group percentage presented above refers to the 'in-group' distribution of women. \*Grouping made after results of European Values Survey, 1995-2001 'Egalitarian attitudes towards women in politics' (Norris & Inglehart 2003:137, 155) but also considering the proportion of women's representation of the member states in the EP. *Most Gender Egalitarian States* are: Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Netherlands and Germany with 73 women and 95 men. *Intermediate Gender Egalitarian States* are Belgium, Luxemburg, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Ireland, United Kingdom, Austria, Malta and Cyprus with 128 women and 250 men. 'Gender Traditional States' are comprised of Slovenia, Slovakia, Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, the Baltic States, Romania and Bulgaria with 57 women and 133 men. Note: not all member states have MEPs in each of the examined committees. LIBE: Most Gender Egalitarian (group 1) 7 women out of 14 members, Intermediate Gender Egalitarian (group 2) 11/27, Gender Traditional States (group 3) 10/13. ENVI: Group 1: 10/19, Group 2: 18/33, Group 3: 5/12. EMPL: Group 1; 6/11, Group 2: 14/27, Group 3: 5/11. DEVE: Group 1: 3/3, Group 2: 6/17, Group 3: 2/7. ITRE: Group 1: 5/12, Group 2: 11/27, Group 3: 4/16. BUDG: Group 1: 5/11, Group 2: 7/21, Group 3: 2/12. AGRI: Group 1: 4/7, Group 2: 5/25, Group 3: 3/13. AFET: Group 1: 6/16, Group 2: 8/35, Group 3: 3/25. INTA: Group 1: 1/5, Group 2: 3/17, Group 3: 1/7.

The gender divisions in committees found in the previous sections largely remain also when examining groups of member states. However, the group of Most Gender Egalitarian States, (including the Nordic countries, Netherlands and Germany), with 43 percent women in total, has significantly less gender segregation between the three committee-categories (Women-overrepresented, Gender-balanced and Women-underrepresented). The Gender Traditional States, with fewer women in total percentage of MEPs (30 percent), demonstrate much clearer divisions between men and women among the examined committees. The gender composition in committees when examining the Intermediate Gender Egalitarian States (34 percent women MEPs) reveals large similarities to committee average of women. Many of the large member states are included in this group and it comprises the highest numbers of MEPs) making their influence on committee average more significant.

As seen in table 5, the group of Most Gender Egalitarian States with 43 percent women on average is, unsurprisingly, less divided across committees. In the Women-overrepresented committees the levels of women largely converge with committee average, even having 55 percent women in Employment and Social Affairs. Yet, considering the internal average of 43 percent it is not quite as significant. In the Foreign Affairs committee the share of women is 38 percent, well above committee average of 17 percent, yet, slightly below the average of women within the group of states. In the Agriculture committee the Most Gender Egalitarian States have 57 percent women, making it a women-dominated committee within this group of member states (+30 percentage points from average). Again, this could be linked to the relatively low political importance of this committee for this group of member states, but also to mere coincidence as the group of states have rather few seats in the committee. Also in the Gender-balanced committees, this group of Gender egalitarian countries increase the average of women's representation. With 45 percent women in the Budget committee it is 12 percentage points above committee average and 50 percent in Development is 13 percentage points above member states' average of women. As the Most Gender Egalitarian states are relatively small in terms of numbers of MEPs (23 percent of EP seats) their effect on committee average is smaller than that of the Intermediate Gender Egalitarian states.

The Intermediate Gender Egalitarian States have slightly more significant variations in the women's representation between committees compared with the Most Gender Egalitarian States. They have, e.g. low levels of women in the Women-underrepresented committees: 23 percent in Foreign Affairs and 18 percent in International Trade, the latter being the lowest share of women found for this group. The high level of men's representation in Agriculture (80 percent) could be



interpreted as reflecting the political importance of the policy area for this group of member states? As for the Women-overrepresented category, the Intermediate Egalitarian State's share of women is almost identical to the total committee average (being the largest group). The group demonstrate the highest number of women in Environment Public Health & Food Safety with 55 percent (+21 percentages from total share of women in group). In Budget it is 33 percent, one percentage below group average.

The Gender Traditional States have quite low proportions of women in the Women-underrepresented committees with only 12 percent women in Foreign Affairs and 14 percent in International Trade. In the Budget committee, categorised as 'Gender-balanced' (as the total share of women MEPs is 33 percent) the level of women within this group of states is only 17 percent. However, looking at the Women-overrepresented committees, women take up 77 percent of this group's seats in the Civil Liberties, Justice & Home Affairs committee, which is 47 (!) percentages above the average proportion of women of these states. In the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety and the Employment and Social Affairs committees these states have 42 and 45 percent women, which is well above the total average of women in this group of countries of 30 percent.

#### *6.4.3 Egalitarian attitudes and political importance affect national dimension of gender composition*

There are clear variations in gender composition of the examined committees between the groups of member states. It is revealed that some committees with a total majority of men, such as Agriculture, Foreign Affairs and Budget are significantly less gender-segregated in some groups of member states than others. The Gender Traditional States have a more gender-segregated and *traditional* composition of their examined committee assignments. They demonstrate significant variations in women's representation across the committees ranging 77 percent in Civil Liberties, Justice and Home affairs to a low 12 percent women in Foreign Affairs. The Most Gender Egalitarian States, on the other hand, have a more balanced representation of women throughout all examined committees (with the exception of International Trade where they have only 20 percent women), ranging between 57 percent women in the 'male-dominated' Agriculture and Rural Development to 38 percent women in Foreign Affairs. The Intermediate Gender Egalitarian States have a similar variation between the committees and the average of these states are also fairly 'balanced', ranging between 55 percent in ENVI to 18 percent in International Trade, yet with a lower share of women throughout the respective committees.

Thus, it appears that the gender egalitarian attitudes of member states affect, not only the *level* of women's representation, but also *where* women (and men) politicians organise within the EP in

terms of committee assignments. National differences in women's representation in committees also exist. The political importance of the policy area for the respective group of member state also appears to affect the level of women's representation within the committee. For example, Agriculture is expected to be more important to the member states within the Intermediate states, than to the Most Gender Egalitarian States, which arguably could be confirmed (!) by the proportion of women. Thus, some member states have more gender-segregated compositions of committees than others, partly due to the varying proportion of women MEPs to start with, but also to differences in committee engagements in policy areas. Certain regional patterns of women and men-dominated policy areas are found, just as political patterns of women's representation were found in the previous section. Some committees are perceived to be more important to some member states' national interests than others.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

### 7.1 Gender Divisions between Committees

This study has aimed to explore the variations in women's representation in the European Parliament committees and has demonstrated that there are significant variances in the proportion of women's representation between the examined committees. Following the theoretical arguments of the politics of presence (outlined in chapter 2) if women are only a small minority (less than 30 percent according to the concept of *critical mass*) they cannot be expected to achieve substantial political influence. When scrutinizing women's representation in committees, it is shown that in nine committees women take up less than 30 percent of the seats and in an additional five committees their representation is below 40 percent.<sup>177</sup> Men on the other hand make up 65 percent EP seats and are not below the point of a critical mass in any committee, except in Women's Rights & Gender Equality. As a result, the politics of presence *within* the EP committees is not guaranteed. It is a problem for women's political influence when they are in such clear minority in many committees. However, this study makes no claims regarding the *substantive* representation of women, other than what could be assumed from committee assignments (i.e. this study does not measure what women achieve in the respective policy areas).

Committee seats in policy areas such as Foreign policy, Security and Defence, International Trade and Economic and Monetary Affairs are predominately held by men, whereas seats in Women's Rights and Gender equality, Employment and Social Affairs, Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, as well as Civil liberties, Justice and Home Affairs committees are dominated by women. Women MEPs are to a larger extent members of committees involved in areas of reproduction compared with men, implying a gendered 'division of labour'. The division of committee assignments between men and women, as shown in this study, reflects certain gender specific interests also found in national parliaments<sup>178</sup>.

#### 7.1.1 The Political and Ideological Dimension

The results of the second aim of this thesis show that the gender division cannot be wholly explained by ideological differences, as the left-wing group of Socialists and Democrats demonstrate just as significant gender divisions between committees, sometimes even more, as

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<sup>177</sup> See table 1 p 30

<sup>178</sup> Wängnerud & Oskarson 1995:137, Wängnerud 1998.

do e.g. the Christian Democrats<sup>179</sup>. Even though the Liberals with 45 percent women and the Greens with 55 percent have the highest proportion of women, the big groups of S&D and PPE have more women in numbers, but most importantly the latter have more seats in each committee, which implies that they have greater possibilities to have a more balanced gender composition in committees, than groups with very few women and seats.<sup>180</sup>

When breaking gender composition down to political groups while exploring the ideological dimension women's representation varies between the examined committees. Almost all examined political groups have a lower level of women in the Foreign Affairs committee, yet the Christian Democrats and the Socialists & Democrats show surprisingly low figures compared to their relative proportions of women and number of seats in the committee. The Greens and the Liberals, on the other hand, have high shares of women in Foreign affairs, even when considering their internal representation. The Liberals demonstrate rather balanced gender compositions in almost all of the examined committees, including the Women-underrepresented, with a few exceptions such as Development where they have no women and Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs where they have 71 percent women. However, considering their small number of seats it is easy to get more 'extreme percentage figures', despite being only one MEP from gender-balance. Equally, for the other small political groups with very few seats in committees achieving gender balance (in percentage) is more difficult. The European Conservatives, who only have 13 percent women MEPs, demonstrate, not surprisingly, a very gender-segregated representation with 40 percent women in Environment, but no women in any of the other examined committees<sup>181</sup>.

In summary, it is the two largest political groups that demonstrate the most segregated gender composition in the examined committees out of all political groups, especially considering their internal total proportion of women. The Socialists & Democrats demonstrate significant divisions between women and men both in the Women-underrepresented and Women-overrepresented committees, perhaps contrary to what could be assumed regarding their relatively high share of women MEPs (40 percent). The differences in gender compositions of committees between political groups differ, yet they do not seem to follow any ideological patterns of left and right. The Greens and the Liberals, not representing the extremes on the ideological scale, yet could be said to represent both the left and right ideology dimension and

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<sup>179</sup> More difficult to relate the results to the Radical Left group as they have such few seats in each committee.

<sup>180</sup> The total share of women in the Socialists & Democrats party group is 40 percent and in Christian Democrats group it is 34 percent.

<sup>181</sup> As the total number of women in ECR is only 7, it is difficult to make any general conclusions.

both have rather 'balanced' gender compositions. Rather, gender compositions of committees by political groups differ between policy areas and political preference.

The division between men and women MEPs in terms of committee membership is significant and the results largely follow the patterns of production and reproduction found in the Swedish Parliament<sup>182</sup>. The clear division in policy areas between women and men MEPs do not differ so much from how it looked in the 1980's when Vallance conducted her study. As mentioned, such gender divisions and separation of men and women in politics has been interpreted as an expression of a gender system which preserves the subordination of women<sup>183</sup>. Other scholars have claimed that the gender patterns are results of women's own strategic deliberation when aiming to pursue 'women's interests'<sup>184</sup>. Skjeie argues that it is not necessarily desirable that women engage in the same policy areas that men do and that female politicians make strategic choices when focusing on policy areas affecting most women's lives (in turn reflecting the gender division in society as a whole). The findings of this thesis partly confirm the 'strategic choice' argument of Skjeie. Yet, any definite conclusions regarding this cannot be made.

#### *7.1.2 The Effect of Gender Equality Culture on National dimension*

For the purpose of exploring the national dimension of committee composition, member states were grouped together by their egalitarian attitudes towards women in politics. Again the results indicate a higher share of men in the areas thought to be of higher political importance to the groups of member states. For instance, in the Intermediate Gender Egalitarian states, 80 percent in the Agriculture committee are men and in the Gender Traditional group, 77 percent are men. In the Most Gender Egalitarian-group on the other hand 'only' 42 percent in AGRI are men. As for the male-dominated Foreign Affairs committee, 38 percent of members from the Most Gender Egalitarian states are women, which is well above committee average. In addition, the Gender Traditional states have 88 percent *men* in the Foreign affairs committee and 77 percent *women* in the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs committee. In the Gender Traditional States the level of women's representation is lower and women in these states also engage in 'policy areas of reproduction' to a greater extent than do women MEPs in Gender Egalitarian states, even with respect to their internal proportion of women. The low level of women, along with the 'traditional' gender division of committee seats within the new member states

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<sup>182</sup> Wängnerud 1998

<sup>183</sup> Hirdman 1990

<sup>184</sup> Wängnerud 1998: 208, Skjeie 1992

comprising this group, could perhaps partly be strengthened or at least understood by the fact that they are fairly new in the EP-institution.

Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that the political groups are made up of MEPs from all member states examined in the national dimension. Thus, the ideological dimension measures the influence of political groups and the national dimension measure the influence of individual MEPs. Hence, the gender composition of political groups in committees is affected by the nationalities and socio-cultural attitudes of their members. Therefore, it should also be considered how these two dimensions combine, e.g. how many MEPs of the respective political groups that represent the various groups of member states, considering the ‘effect’ of being a Liberal women MEP from a Scandinavian country as opposed to a Conservative woman MEP from an Eastern European member state on committee assignments and the likelihood of belonging to a ‘women-overrepresented’ committee or vice-versa.

To conclude, the gender divisions reflect the realities of women in European society, but ‘the division of labour’ within the EP committees sustain the unbalanced ‘power-positions’ of men and women in society: men are mainly involved in areas of production and women in areas of reproduction. The unequal representation of men and women in the EP committees can be partly explained by the fact that only 35 percent of seats are held by women but also to political and national differences as some political groups and some member states have more gender-segregated composition than others. Thus, gender divisions are largely a result of national differences, based in turn on differences regarding gender egalitarian attitudes and of differences between party groups, not so much ideology as the variations are found throughout the ideological spectrum (even though the Conservatives have very few women MEPs).

### *7.1.3 Committee membership largely reflecting personal choice of MEPs*

‘Gender segregation continues to take place [in the EU institutions] on the basis of which sectors are *delegated* to women and which to men’, Kantola concludes. Research on women in cabinets has highlighted tendencies to *place* women on the softer socio-cultural ministerial posts, rather than on the harder and politically more prestigious posts of foreign and economic affairs.<sup>185</sup> However, from this study it appears that this ‘gendered division of labour’ between committees is largely based on a *personal choice* and preferences of MEPs, rather than women being ‘placed’ there (as for minister posts referred to above) or to assignments being ‘delegated’ *to* the women. This is confirmed by the MEP survey of reasons stated behind committee choices. Rather it appears to

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<sup>185</sup> Kantola 2009:397

be a *strategic choice* and a reflection of *personal interest* on behalf of women MEPs<sup>186</sup>. (Yet, arguably traditionally and indirectly delegated to women in society as a whole).

Committee assignments appear to largely correspond to the MEPs personal desires and choices, but further research is required to fully establish this connection. However, it gives an indication that flexibility, high levels of ‘self-selection’/’personal preferences’, together with the absence of formal rules on gender composition contribute to strengthening gender stereotypical patterns of committees. The presidencies of the political groups may indeed act as gatekeepers for women MEPs in the allocation process and thereby making sure that gender segregation in committees are maintained. However, the findings of this study do not point in that direction. The relative specialisation of MEPs and the parties in the EP could therefore strengthen the segregation between committees also in terms of gender. The above findings imply that if the level of women’s representation in the Eastern European countries were to increase, the level of women in women-overrepresented committees would increase too. A higher proportion of Liberals in the EP would decrease gender differences. More women in the S&D would increase the share of women in LIBE?

## 7.2 Discussion and Implications

It remains to be examined whether women’s political organisation within the EP will affect the course of the political outcome and development. Previous research on the Swedish Parliament has shown that women’s impact on politics increases with a higher share of female parliamentarians but also that committee compositions become more gender representative as more women take up seats in the legislature<sup>187</sup>. The significant heterogeneity between member states suggest that the EP will remain largely gender-segregated, especially since the new member states are ‘lagging behind’. Moreover, the findings of this study suggests that a even increased proportions of women e.g. from the Eastern European States would not facilitate a reduced ‘gender division of labour’. Instead, the results point in the direction that if the Liberals and the Greens would increase their number of seats in the EP, women would gain more committee seats, also in traditionally women-underrepresented committees.

The findings strengthen the theory of the politics of presence in that women bring different perspectives and interests into politics, as women MEPs organise in other committees than men do. Further, women deal with issues of importance to women voters. If committee membership

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<sup>186</sup> Both women and men MEPs answering the survey state ‘personal preferences’/’interest’ as important reasons behind choice of committee.

<sup>187</sup> Wängnerud 1998 and 2009

could be translated into 'acting for', the findings imply that women MEPs better represent women's interests as women MEPs engage to a larger extent than men in areas of politics stated to be more important to women voters. The gender divisions of committees largely correspond to the priorities of women voters according to the Eurobarometer opinion poll mentioned in the introduction. Yet, the division of women and men between policy areas appear to further reinforce the gender division in society as a whole implying that economic affairs and agriculture are 'male' policy areas. Given McElroy's findings regarding the 'specialisation hypothesis' of committee members it would not be far-fetched to say that the EP's internal organisation largely reflects gender segregation in European labour markets and society as a whole. Essentially, these results reflect divisions in society as a whole, with European women being largely responsible for areas of reproduction and thus engage in related policy issues. However, as mentioned, there is an increased convergence in the lives of women and men today. The national differences in socio-cultural factors, such as gender egalitarian attitudes, between for example post-communist states and the Nordic countries are reflected in the differences in gender compositions of EP committees. The differences in women's political representation between member states largely reflect the differences in social positions, socio-economic factors etc and lives between women in the different parts of Europe, as outlined in the thesis. In more 'gender egalitarian' societies such as the Nordic countries, where the social positions of men and women are less segregated, politics also appear to be less gender segregated between policy areas.

Helga Hernes has developed the concept of the *women-friendly welfare state*. Her analysis claims that as the welfare state has developed in the Scandinavian/ Nordic countries women's political influence has grown but also that the increase of women politicians has affected the political system and the policy areas dealt with (in interaction).<sup>188</sup> Partly because more women have had the possibility to engage in politics, but also because politics are increasingly about women's specific interests and living conditions, conditions which in turn are grounded in society structures. It is possible that women in the EP could have a similar influence. With the increase of women in the EP, perhaps there will be an increased 'opportunity' for women politicians to affect the outcome of European politics, e.g. by increasing the work done on gender equality, social policy and civil liberties? Perhaps it could, in the long run, lead to more European women feeling that European politics is less of a 'male-dominated' world? A recent Eurobarometer showed that women would like the EU to be more active on consumer protection and public health. Thus, the same patterns as are found among MEPs in terms of committee assignments are found among voters. By

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<sup>188</sup> Hernes 1987, Oskarson & Wängnerud 1995: 31



interpreting from committee assignments it is clear that women MEPs who engage in policy areas which European women voters consider to be more important such as: consumer protection, environmental issues, gender equality and social affairs to a greater extent than men politicians do.<sup>189</sup> This implies that it does matter *who* is representing the voters.

The imbalanced and segregated gender distribution within the EP is a democratic problem (compare notion of critical mass). The low level of women's representation in the EP, the only directly elected EU institution, may contribute to the *democratic deficit* and low legitimacy of the EU, as many women feel that European politics do not concern their interests. Furthermore, the low share of women is presumably related to the lower level of trust in EU politics and institutions on behalf of European women<sup>190</sup>.

### 7.2.1 *Suggestions for further research*

A core issue concerns to what extent the women in the EP have *real* power to influence the European political agenda. Given the results of this study of women's representation there is reason to believe that the significant gender segregation between different policy areas the EP committees affects policy outcome. How the unequal gender representation affects the policy outcome and priorities of the EP – *the substantive representation*- remains to be studied. To measure real power and which groups have a controlling presence in politics is extremely difficult<sup>191</sup>. Substantive representation and the level of influence by women MEPs could be investigated e.g. by studying the level of activity of MEPs (reports, rapporteurship, parliamentary questions, voting patterns etc.) comparing men and women in different committees. Do women promote (write proposals etc) policy areas more important to women voters compared to men and vice versa? Moreover, do women in 'women-underrepresented' committees behave differently, such as being less active, than women in 'women-overrepresented' committees? Or do women exercise greater influence in committees where they are in minority?<sup>192</sup> The *MEP Gender Database* set up specifically for this study, including data on party affiliation, committee membership, substitutes, nationality, age, committee chair and vice-chairs etc, could serve as a useful tool for further research mentioned<sup>193</sup>.

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<sup>189</sup> *Attitudes and opinions of women in Europe prior to the 2009 EP elections* February 2009, Eurobarometer

<sup>190</sup> Norris & Franklin 1997

<sup>191</sup> Oskarson & Wängnerud 1995: 135

<sup>192</sup> Compare the discussion on critical mass in method chapter.

<sup>193</sup> The *MEP Gender Database* could be retrieved from [www.euwomen.weebly.com](http://www.euwomen.weebly.com) or on request from [skalin.maria@gmail.com](mailto:skalin.maria@gmail.com)

This thesis has briefly touched upon the reasons behind the gender segregation, such as differences in gender egalitarian attitudes towards women, personal preferences of MEPs and differences between political groups. A more in-depth study on reasons behind choice of committee through interviews or surveys similar to the one carried out in the Swedish Parliament would help facilitate a deeper understanding of the gender composition of the EP committees. A question such as *'Given a free choice, of which committee would you most like to be a member?'* would give vital information on whether women and men MEPs in fact have different aims and preferences of committee membership or if the gender division is caused largely by 'traditional power structures' within the Parliament. Moreover, it would be interesting to examine how the gender imbalance in committees affects the work on *gender mainstreaming* within the EP including which factors that influence the success of gender mainstreaming implementation<sup>194</sup>.

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<sup>194</sup> Mainstreaming involves ensuring that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities such as policy development, legislation, resource allocation, implementation and monitoring of programmes and projects. Eurofond on Gender Mainstreaming.

## SUMMARY

The main purpose of this Master thesis is to explore the gender compositions of the European Parliament committees. The foundation of this study is theories on women's political influence and the politics of presence. More specifically, the intention is to explore and compare two dimensions of European social representation: *the political/ideological dimension* – comparing the European political groups and *the national dimension* – comparing the *member states* regarding their representation of women in committees and between policy areas.

After the first empirical description including all committees revealing significant differences regarding the share of women's representation, the nine most significant examples were divided into three categories: 'women-overrepresented', 'gender-balanced' and 'women-underrepresented' committees and further examined by political groups and by groups of member states. The member states are grouped together after 'egalitarian attitude towards women in politics', which is assumed to affect women's representation in committees. From this, more significant gender division in certain political groups than others was revealed. The large political groups of Socialists & Democrats and Christian Democrats have more significant gender divisions between the examined committees than do the Liberals and the Green group. Moreover, the gender segregation is more significant in some groups of member states than others. Gender Traditional States are more gender segregated between policy areas than are the Most Gender Egalitarian States. The results imply that the share of women is higher in committees of less political importance of the political group (and groups member states) and vice versa regarding politically important committees. What is more, it was found that women MEPs, on average, are more active within the EP in terms of committee assignments as 33 percent of women are members of at least two committees, compared to 24 percent of their male colleagues.

This thesis also briefly examines the process of allocating committee seats in an attempt to touch upon the reasons as to *why* women and men organise in different committees. The composition of committee seats appears to largely reflect the individual MEPs personal preferences and interests, rather than the influence of the political parties (European and national). The contribution of this thesis is mainly empirical, but draws on theoretical implications regarding the substantive representation of women in European politics and how it is related to the low legitimacy of the EU.

## SAMMANFATTNING

Syftet med denna magisteruppsats har varit att, med utgångspunkt i teorier om social representation och närvarans politik, undersöka och jämföra könsfördelningen i Europaparlamentets utskott. Tidigare forskning har funnit stora skillnader avseende vilka politikområden som engagerar kvinnliga respektive manliga politiker. Mer specifikt har intentionen varit att undersöka två dimensioner av social representation i EP: *den politiska/ideologiska dimensionen* – genom att jämföra de Europeiska politiska grupperna och *den nationella dimensionen* – genom att jämföra medlemsländer med avseende på deras kvinnorepresentation i de olika utskotten och politikområdena.

Efter den första empiriska jämförelsen av könsfördelningen i samtliga utskott fokuserar studien vidare på nio särskilt utmärkande utskott enligt tre kategorier: ”kvinnoöverrepresenterade”, ”könsbalanserade” och ”kvinnounderrepresenterade” utskott. Resultaten visar tydligare könsskillnader i vissa politiska gruppers utskottsfördelning, jämfört med andra. Ett resultat är att de större politiska grupperna Socialister & Demokrater och Kristdemokrater har en mer könsstereotyp fördelning jämfört med mindre grupper, såsom den Liberala och den Gröna gruppen, givet deras relativa andel kvinnor. Vidare har medlemsstaterna grupperats i tre olika grupper efter ”jämställd attityd till kvinnor i politiken”. Könsskillnader i utskottsfördelning tycks vara starkare i vissa grupper medlemsstater jämfört med andra. De så kallade ”Könstraditionella” medlemsstaterna är mer segregerade mellan kvinnodominerade och mansdominerade utskott, jämfört med gruppen av så kallade ”Jämställda” länder. Studiens resultat tyder på att kvinnors representation minskar i utskott av större politisk betydelse för den politiska gruppen, t.ex. utskottet för Sociala frågor och Sysselsättning som generellt är tydligt kvinnodominerat, men hos S&D är ”endast” 38 procent kvinnor. Vidare visar studien att kvinnliga MEP:ar är mer aktiva avseende utskottsuppdrag då en av tre kvinnor har minst två utskottsuppdrag, jämfört med färre än en av fyra av män.

I syfte att öka förståelsen för *varför* kvinnor och män organiserar sig i olika utskott och politikområden behandlas kort processen bakom utskottsfördelningen inom de politiska grupperna. En enkät från 2006 visar att en majoritet av deltagande MEP:ar angav personligt intresse ligga bakom val av utskott, snarare än den Europeiska politiska gruppens eller nationella partiets önskemål. Studien ger främst ett empiriskt bidrag om kvinnors representation i EP-utskotten men har också teoretiska implikationer för kvinnors substantiella inflytande på europeisk politik.

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## Appendix 1. Gender statistics

“Gender statistics is a new field that cuts across all traditional statistical fields and pertains to the entire statistical system. The main requirement for the production and dissemination of statistics that reflect the realities of women and men is that users and producers work together to identify the issues to be addressed and the necessary statistical output”<sup>195</sup>

In order to make both women and men visible, statistics must be disaggregated by sex. The Swedish Parliament, have decided that gender statistics are to be part of official statistics. The goal is that all statistics concerning individuals shall be collected, analysed and presented by sex. Disaggregation by gender shall be a fundamental basis for all statistics on individuals.<sup>196</sup> In Eurostat and other European statistics, databases etc there is a notable lack in gender-disaggregated statistics. In the regulation of European statistics from the EP and the Council nothing is mentioned regarding statistics disaggregated by sex.<sup>197</sup> Yet, because of the lack of comparable data the Commission launched a European database ‘Women and Men in Decision-making: A Database with facts and Figures’ in 2004. Statistics on EP, its MEPs and committees divided by gender, exist but are less easy to access. *Separate* statistics on “Women in the European Parliament” are, however, more frequent.<sup>198</sup>

Gender issues are all aspects and concerns with how women and men interrelate, their differences in access to and use of resources, their activities and how they react to changes, interventions and policies. Gender issues exist in all spheres of society and are therefore relevant to the production of statistics in all fields and intervene at every step of the production process. Adequate statistics reflecting gender issues take the different socio-economic realities women and men face in society in consideration.<sup>199</sup>

## Appendix 2. The European Parliament Committees

Committees and Abbreviations	Number of Members 2009-2014
Foreign Affairs AFET	76 members
Environment, Public Health and Food Safety ENVI	64 members
Industry, Research and Energy ITRE	55 members
Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs LIBE	54 members
Employment and Social Affairs EMPL	49 members
Regional development REGI	49 members
Economic and Monetary Affairs ECON	48 members
Agriculture and Rural development AGRI	45 members
Budget BUDG	44 members
Transport and Tourism TRAN	43 members
Internal Market and Consumer Protection IMCO	39 members
Petitions PETI	35 members
Women’s Rights and Gender Equality FEMM	34 members
Culture and Education CULT	32 members
Development DEVE	30 members
Human Rights DROI	30 members
Budgetary Control CONT	29 members

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<sup>198</sup> E.g. Women in the European Parliament 2010 - International Women’s Day 8 March.

<sup>199</sup> United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), Gender statistics:

<http://www.unece.org/stats/gender/genstats/genstats-1.htm>

Security and Defence SEDE	29 members	
International Trade INTA	29 members	
Legal Affairs JURI	25 members	
Constitutional Affairs AFCO	25 members	
Fisheries PECH	24 members	

## Appendix 3. Questions regarding allocation of committee seats

Questions to MEPs ('informant' interview) regarding the allocation of committee seats

"Dear Sir/Madame

My name is Maria Skalin, I am a student at the European Programme, Gothenburg University, Sweden, and I am writing my master thesis on gender patterns within the European parliamentary committees. Because of your position as an xx Committee President, I am contacting you for a number of short questions regarding how the committee seats in the EP is allocated.

The share of women in the European Parliament, since the elections in 2009, is 35 percent. However, the share of women varies strongly between the committees: from 4 percent in the Committee for Constitutional Affairs, to 85 percent in the Committee for Women's rights and Gender Equality, to mention an example from the current parliamentary period. In the Committees for Security and Defence and the Committee for Foreign Affairs, the share of women stays around 20 percent, whereas in the Committees for Employment and Social affairs and Committee for Environment, Public Health and Food Safety the number is over 50 percent.

I am interested in analysing these *gender patterns* of committee placements further, but also **how the committee seats are allocated between the MEPs**. I am interested in the general conditions - and the perhaps nation or party specific? As part of my thesis, I would be very grateful if you could (briefly) answer the questions below by returning the E-mail and write your answers after each question.

*1. How are the committee seats allocated after the European elections? Does each MEP get to 'wish' by writing a list or how does it work? Are there any formal rules or policies which governs the process?*

*2. What do you perceive to be the strongest predictor(-s) / explanatory factor(-s) when allocating the committee seats? E.g. the European parliamentary group, the national party, national delegations, the MEP's personal interests, experiences (such as committee member in previous parliamentary period).*

*3. Do you believe that the process is different between different party groups or member states?*

*4. What do you regard as the main explanation for that some committees are (continuously) less gender-balanced compared to other committees?*

*5. Do you consider the different committees to have different status ranking? If yes, what do you consider the reason to be?*

Finally, I would, be very grateful for any additional comments You might have regarding committee membership and gender.

Your answers will, of course, be handled confidentially.

Many thanks for your participation.

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Best regards,

Maria Skalin

Mobile: + 46 73- 968 74 09

E-mail: [skalin.maria@gmail.com](mailto:skalin.maria@gmail.com)"

## Appendix 4. Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament<sup>200</sup>

### Rule 186: Composition of committees

1. Members of committees and committees of inquiry shall be elected after nominations have been submitted by the political groups and the non-attached Members. The Conference of Presidents shall submit proposals to Parliament. The composition of the committees shall, as far as possible, reflect the composition of Parliament. When Members change their political group they shall retain, for the remainder of their two-and-a-half year term of office, the seats they hold in parliamentary committees. However, if a Member's change of political group has the effect of disturbing the fair representation of political views in a committee, new proposals for the composition of that committee are made by the Conference of Presidents in accordance with the procedure laid down in paragraph 1, second sentence, so that the individual rights of the Member concerned are guaranteed. The proportionality among political groups must not depart from the nearest appropriate whole number. If a group decides not to take seats on a committee, the seats in question will remain vacant and the committee will be reduced in size by the corresponding number. Exchange of seats between political groups is not allowed.
2. Amendments to the proposals by the Conference of Presidents shall be admissible only if they are tabled by at least 40 Members. Parliament shall vote on such amendments by secret ballot.
3. Members shall be deemed to be elected on the basis of the proposals from the Conference of Presidents, as and where amended in accordance with paragraph 2.
4. If a political group fails to submit nominations for membership of a committee of inquiry in accordance with paragraph 1 within a time limit set by the Conference of Presidents, the Conference of Presidents shall submit to Parliament only the nominations communicated to it within that time-limit.
5. The Conference of Presidents may provisionally decide to fill any vacancy on a committee with the agreement of the persons to be appointed, having regard to paragraph 1.
6. Any such changes shall be placed before Parliament for ratification at the next sitting.

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<sup>200</sup> <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+RULES-EP+20091201+RULE-186+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN&navigationBar=YES>