

## Political Representation Beyond the Nation State

Representation is one of the most fundamental political concepts. It is at the core of modern democracies. But as a complex phenomenon, it can be studied from a number of different angles. Both political theory and legislative studies have provided numerous studies on political representation. For long, these studies were confined to the national political arena as there was no representative democracy beyond the nation state. Even with the creation of the European Communities in the 1950s, the European assembly did not attract much attention from scholars, especially not in terms of political representation. The institution was mostly a talking shop, without real power and seemed the least interesting or original part of the newly established supranational political system. Specialists of European integration rather turned to the Commission and the Council, which also fitted the dominant theoretical frameworks at the time—i.e. neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism (see Costa and Rozenberg 2008).

It is only with the gradual empowerment of the EP and its direct election that the situation evolved. The parliamentarization of the EU has triggered research on the supranational assembly. Scholars have provided numerous analyses of the EP's powers, internal decision-making but also on EU elections and the emergence of politics outside the framework of the state (Blondel et al. 1998; Judge and Earnshaw 1994; Tsebelis 1994). From the 1990s onwards, a shift occurred as European studies evolved along with the EU, which started to resemble a normal, state-like political system. As a result, European studies

have undergone a process of “normalization”: specialists in comparative politics and legislative studies started studying the EU with concepts developed in the framework of the nation state (Keeler 2005; Kreppel 2012; Young 2016). The literature on the EP has expanded and become increasingly diversified. Scholars have been drawing on the insights of approaches and theoretical tools usually used to analyse national chambers, especially the US Congress, to examine the internal organization of the EP and the development of a supranational party system (Bendjaballah 2016; Hix et al. 2007; Kreppel 2002; Yordanova 2011).

But these studies tend to neglect older and more fundamental questions related to representative democracy beyond the nation state. By concentrating on the institution and its inner workings, they leave aside the analysis of the elected representatives at the individual level whereas the performance of a system is to a large degree dependent on the personnel acting within it (Katz and Wessels 1999, p. 11). It’s only recently, notably with “the representative turn” in EU studies (Kröger and Friedrich 2013), that a burgeoning literature on political representation at the supranational level has developed. It emphasizes individual MEPs, their attitudes, career paths and representative practices. And it has showed that an in-depth analysis of MEPs’ identity and behaviour is a promising avenue to understand the EU but also to re-examine concepts such as political representation, legitimacy and democracy (Costa and Rozenberg 2008, p. 251). Yet, the current knowledge of how MEPs understand their role as individual representatives remains limited, and there is much more we should know about how they perform their representative function (Busby 2013; Farrell and Scully 2007; Priestley 2008).

Building on these studies, this research aims at investigating parliamentary representation at the supranational level and its role in the democratic legitimization of the EU. It is argued that even if it is important to take into account the specific nature of political representation at the EU level, MEPs are first and foremost elected representatives, facing similar constraints as their national counterparts and driven by similar motivations (Bale and Taggart 2006; Kreppel 2012).

The ambition here is to concentrate on a specific group of elected representatives who have been neglected so far—Eurosceptic MEPs—to analyse how they conceive of and carry out their representative mandate. Indeed, once elected, they have to operate within an institution and a political system they strongly criticize or oppose. This situation is likely to trigger existential questions and tensions for these actors.

This research seeks therefore to determine how they cope with these issues and how they view their mandate. By shifting the focus from the institutional to the individual level (Jenson and Mérand 2010), the aim is to put the emphasis on opponents to the European political system in order to reflect on their role in the legitimization challenges the EU is currently facing.

To do so, this chapter presents the theoretical foundation of this book. It offers first a critical review of the relevant literature on political representation which can be conceptualized and studied in a range of different ways. It briefly explains studies devoted to the “descriptive” or symbolic side of representation, trying to assess the social and political representativeness of the EP. A second part then turns to the “substantive” approach to representation. It discusses research devoted to the relationships between MEPs, political parties, EP groups and constituents as well as the limited research on roles within the EP. Along with these recent studies on roles, political representation is considered here as a dynamic process in which it matters less to know the backgrounds of elected representatives than to know how they conceive of and carry out their mandate. The last sections concentrate therefore on role theory. The concept of role as understood by the motivational approach is central in this research: this analytical tool takes into account the subjective dimension of representation and helps understand how Eurosceptics conceive of and carry out their parliamentary mandate in the EP. This book is structured along two research questions: How can one categorize the roles played by Eurosceptic MEPs? And how can one best explain the variation between them? The central hypothesis states that the roles are the result of the interaction between the institutional context and individual preferences.

## 1 A “DESCRIPTIVE APPROACH” TO REPRESENTATION

Political representation is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, at the heart of modern democracies (Sartori 1987). It usually refers to the process by which a community is made present in a parliamentary assembly (Deschouwer 2005, pp. 85–86).<sup>1</sup> As a delegation mechanism, the notion essentially refers to a relationship between a representative and those represented by him or her (Walczak and van der Brug 2013). But despite this broad definition, political representation can be studied from various angles (Farrell and Scully 2007, p. 41).

A first way to analyse it is to adopt a so-called descriptive approach (Pitkin 1967) and investigate the representativeness of the assembly. The idea is to analyse the characteristics and identities of the representatives and to compare them to the represented, the quality of representation being measured by the proximity between the two (Best and Cotta 2000; Esaiasson and Holmberg 1996). Among this approach, two strands of literature can be distinguished. The first concentrates on the social representativeness of the parliament and studies the characteristics of its members. The second focuses on the political representativeness of the assembly by measuring the congruence between voters and elected representatives.

### *1.1 Social Representativeness of MEPs: An Elite like Any Other?*

The issue of social representativeness of parliaments has been central to the literature on democracy and the theory of representation. The extent to which the composition of the legislature reflects that of the electorate from which it is drawn matters for at least two reasons. On the one hand, the social representativeness of the parliament plays a role in the legitimacy of the political regime if the people identify themselves to the elite. Norris (1999, p. 88) highlighted in that regard that “legislative bodies which fails to reflect society may be perceived as symbolically less legitimate”. On the other hand, the legitimacy of elected representatives to stand for the represented is at stake. One of the assumptions of this approach in terms of “mirror-representation” is indeed that the social background of members of parliament has an impact on their behaviour, attitudes, priorities and role perceptions (Norris and Franklin 1997, pp. 185–186). The composition of the assembly will determine, at least partially, its policies and priorities (Clinchamps 2006; Pitkin 1967). Applied to the EP, the aim is to determine to what extent the assembly is an accurate reflection or a mirror of European society. These studies aim therefore to investigate who MEPs are in order to understand what they do (Beauvallet and Michon 2007, p. 9). This symbolic challenge related to the EP’s composition is significant in the EU because its legitimacy is frequently questioned. Scholars have therefore analysed the selection process of MEPs, their profiles and careers as well as their social backgrounds to evaluate to what extent the EP is a microcosm of the European people (Costa and Rozenberg 2008; Scarrow 1997).

These studies demonstrated that MEPs are not representative of their electorate in terms of their social backgrounds (Mather 2001). The social background of MEPs is more similar to those of political elites in general with a majority of well-educated middle-aged men, belonging to higher social-professional categories, with an underrepresentation of people from the farming or working classes. Second, the characteristics of MEPs have evolved over time. Whereas for a long time the status of MEPs may have been perceived as of second order, the situation changed: in many countries nowadays, MEPs are elected after a tough political competition and are often identified as specialists in EU matters (Costa and Rozenberg 2008, p. 121). There has been a process of professionalization of MEPs over time, and their profiles are close to those of their national counterparts. (Daniel 2015; Kauppi 2005; Marrell and Payre 2006).

These findings have generated a series of works on the emergence of a supranational elite, understood as a relatively homogenous political class, independent from the national level (Cotta 1984; Verzichelli and Edinger 2005). This political class is argued to be composed of “professionals living from and for Europe, accumulating political and symbolic resources allowing them to claim leadership positions in the EP” (Beauvallet and Michon 2009). Overall, European integration did not lead to the emergence of an autonomous political class because of the multilevel structure of the EU (Kauppi 1996, 2005). Careers and profiles of MEPs are still deeply embedded in national political cultures.

Even if the EP does not mirror European society and cannot claim a form of symbolic legitimacy derived from its social representativeness, the institution can still bring legitimacy to the European political regime. Indeed, since the 1990s, the EP has been a stepping stone for politicians who are marginalized at the national level such as women or representatives from small and fringe parties. One of the unintended consequences of the presence of both federalists and Eurosceptics in the EP is to increase the democratic legitimacy of the EP (Kauppi 2005, p. 97). However, this literature tends to concentrate on the development of a transnational elite and to overlook fringe actors such as Eurosceptics.

### *1.2 Political Representativeness: The Issue of Congruence Between Citizens and MEPs*

Drawing on the work of Miller and Stokes on the US Congress (1963), scholars have tried to determine to what extent the preferences of

citizens are reflected by their parliamentarians. In that approach, we can speak of democratic representation if there is a policy congruence between the views of citizens and the actions and preferences of representatives in the chamber (Powell 2004).

In order to apply this perspective to the EP, the majority of authors base their work on the Responsible Party Model of representation which focuses on the electoral process as a delegation mechanism. It assumes that for elections to work as instruments that link citizens' policy preferences with the positions of elected representatives, two main conditions need to be met. First, political parties need to offer a range of choices to the electorate in terms of policy proposals. Second, voters have to vote according to their policy preference and choose the party whose positions represent their preferences best. If both conditions are met, the electoral process will lead to policy congruence between a party and its voters (Costello et al. 2012; Katz 1997; McEvoy 2012; Thomassen 1994).

European elections are thus supposed to link citizens' and representatives' policy preferences. The EP, as institution, should then increase the transparency of the European decision-making process and translate citizens' preferences into legislation (Yordanova 2011). The aim is then to evaluate to what extent voters' positions are reflected by the positions of MEPs to determine if European elections are an efficient instrument for political representation at the supranational level (Thomassen and Schmidt 1997).

A series of works have analysed the voters-MEPs congruence on a scope of policy issues ranging from employment and the euro to border control and European integration. They found that the congruence between voters and MEPs' preferences is rather high for issues related to the left-right cleavage but moderate or even weak for matters regarding the process of integration as well as cultural issues (Dalton 1985; Marsh and Wessels 1997). Indeed, there is a gap between political elites and the electorate on cultural issues and on issues related to European integration. This could explain the success of populist and Eurosceptic parties across Europe since they mobilize voters on those very issues (Costello et al. 2012; Mattila and Raunio 2006; Van der Eijk and Franklin 2004). Schmitt and Thomassen (2000, p. 320) noted for instance that "if it comes to the specifics of European Union policy-making, the congruence between voters and their representatives is remarkably poor. Political elites are much more European-minded than their voters

regarding questions such as the abolition of border controls or the elimination of national currencies in favour of a new European currency". Similarly, recent studies demonstrated that parties do not represent their voters adequately on European issues, and this disjuncture seems to worsen over time (Lefkofridi and Casado-Asensio 2013; Lefkofridi and Katsanidou 2014; Mattila and Raunio 2012).

Because of the second-order nature of European elections, political representation at the EU level may be compromised. Citizens' lack of knowledge of (or interest in) European politics leads to a weak turnout at EU elections and a vote based on national rather than European issues. Moreover, parties do not offer voters a wide enough range of different positions on European issues and "European elections fail as an instrument of democracy at the European level in that they fail to express the will of the European people on European issues" (Mair and Thomassen 2010, p. 21). In order for the EP to be more representative, one option would be for MEPs to be less Europhile (Marsh and Wessels 1997, p. 238; Thomassen 2012). But as studies on socialization show, the EP is a bastion of Europhiles because of a (auto-) selection process. In sum, candidates in EU elections tend to be politicians interested in and favourable to Europe (Katz 1997; Kerr 1973). In other words, MEPs do not go native in the EP and Eurosceptics do not become more pro-European as a result of their experience at the supranational level (Scully 2005). The gap between the electorate and MEPs feeds the disconnection between the EP and European voters and contributes to the success of Eurosceptics' arguments.

In a nutshell, the EP is not a perfect mirror of European societies. MEPs can hardly claim to embody the European people or draw some legitimacy from their resemblance with the electorate. But, they are not that different from their national counterparts: MEPs are not a coherent elite, cut off from national realities and going native in the EP. Contrary to national assemblies though, the weak representativeness of the EP could be problematic as its very legitimacy is called into question by a significant minority of its members (Farrell and Scully 2007, p. 95). If several studies mention that the increasing presence of Eurosceptics could have an impact on the institution, they do not provide any in-depth reflections on that subject. Moreover, these studies tend to present a frozen picture of representation, rather than a dynamic process and where the elected representative is often presented as being "passive" rather than as an actor (Pitkin 1967, pp. 90–113).

This is why this research turns to a more dynamic approach of political representation in order to understand Eurosceptic MEPs' strategies, how they interact with their environment and their impact on the EP and the EU.

## 2 A SUBSTANTIVE APPROACH TO POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

The other main angle of study of political representation is the so-called substantive approach which focuses on what elected representatives do, rather than on their resemblance to their electorate (Nay 2002; Pitkin 1967). Representation is seen here as a dynamic process with, at its core, a relation between represented and representative. According to this approach, we should examine what the representatives do with their mandate, their room for manoeuvre, their objectives and attitudes in order to understand political representation.

Political representation at the supranational level is hybrid and ambiguous. It is not clear whom MEPs are supposed to represent, because of the absence of a uniform electoral system and of a transnational constituency for EU elections as well as the weakness of the electoral connexion between citizens and EU decision-makers (Brack and Costa 2013; Costa 2001; Costa and Navarro 2003; Niedermayer and Sinnott 1995; Reif and Schmitt 1980; Schmitt 2005).

But despite the particular nature of representation at the EU level, MEPs are similar to any other elected representatives (Bale and Taggart 2006). Legislative studies' scholars have therefore applied concepts and methods from the literature on the US Congress and to a lesser extent on European national chambers to the study of MEPs' behaviour. They have showed how fruitful such approach can be to understand the European representative mandate.

### 2.1 *MEPs as Agents with Two Principals*

Numerous studies seek to understand how elected representatives deal with their multiple allegiances, their relations to their principals and whether they are independent of them or bound by a mandate from their principals. Because of the weakness of the electoral connexion at the supranational level, most of the work in EU studies concentrates on the relation between the MEPs, their national political party and EP group, while some recent researches have examined the linkage between MEPs and their constituents.

Drawing on the literature on electoral behaviour in American politics, a series of studies have analysed MEPs' behaviour through the lens of the "principal-agent" approach (Hix 2002; Hix et al. 2007; Mühlböck 2012). This approach conceives the individual MEP as an agent of two principals: his/her national party and his/her EP political group. Each principal pushes the agent to adopt its position during votes. But as the agent is driven by three main objectives (vote-, office-, and policy-seeking), each principal has an influence on the agent, depending on the hierarchy of his/her goals. European elections are in fact organized by national political parties at the national level, and the national party remains the gatekeeper for the MEP's re-election as well as for his/her career at the national level. But the EP group controls the resources within the chamber, i.e. offices as well as policy influence (Bowler and Farrell 1995; Coman 2009; Faas 2003; Lindstädt et al. 2012). Scholars have therefore examined the tripartite relationship between individual MEPs, the national party and the EP group through roll-call vote analysis. Through roll-call vote analysis, they demonstrate that in case of conflict between the positions of the two principals, MEPs tend to follow the voting instructions of the national party, as their first objective is to get re-elected. But at the same time, they have shown that political groups have been increasingly cohesive and that political competition in the EP is structured more by two ideological dimensions (the left/right cleavage and the pro-/anti-integration axis) than by nationality (Hix and Noury 2009).

Following a rigorous methodology, these studies greatly contributed to our understanding of the determinants of MEPs' behaviour and of the way the EP works. But they also triggered controversies regarding their extensive use of roll-call votes,<sup>2</sup> the normative implications of their findings and their narrow view of the European representative mandate.

The normative implications of their findings in particular triggered criticism, as Hix and his colleagues argue that their findings indicate a "normalization" of the EP. They noted that "politics in the European Parliament is very much like politics in other democratic parliaments, dominated by left-right positions and driven by traditional party families of domestic European politics", which is "an optimistic conclusion about the accountability and stability of EU governance" (Hix et al. 2007, p. 181). Other scholars consider that such conclusion overlooks the hybrid nature of political representation in the EU (Costa and Saint Martin 2011), but also the fact that multiple dimensions structure

political debates in the chamber and that variable coalitions occur in the EP depending on the issue, the period and the legislative procedure under study (Crespy and Gajewska 2010). Recent studies (Otjes and van Der Veer 2016) also demonstrate that the pro-/anti-EU divide is increasingly salient in the EP with the ongoing crisis, which could overshadow the left-right cleavage on specific policy issues. Settembri and Neuhold (2009) also refuted the idea of a normalization of the EP, showing that its functioning remains in line with consociationalism as political conflict in the chamber is rare.

The theoretical foundations of these studies have also been criticized as scholars consider that they rest on a narrow and simplistic view of the representative mandate. MEPs are reduced to the status of an agent of two principals, mostly motivated by his/her desire for re-election, and the mandate is reduced to the votes in plenary. The scope of MEPs' incentives is in fact broader than assumed in these studies (Navarro 2009). Not all MEPs seek re-election, and the hierarchy of their priorities might differ from one individual to another. Eurosceptics for instance might be more driven by policy-seeking objectives to satisfy their party and voters (Faas 2003). Strategies of MEPs might vary depending on their attitudes towards European integration, the size of their EP group or the status of their party at the national level (Hausermer 2006; Kaeding 2004). And because these studies exclusively analyse the voting behaviour of MEPs, they do not take into account the multidimensionality of the representative mandate. Whereas MEPs are involved in all kinds of activities, we still know little about how they perform their representative functions beyond roll-call voting (Priestley 2008).

## 2.2 *Subjective Dimension of Representation: Role Theory*

If the literature on how MEPs understand their role as representatives has been distinctly limited, recent studies have started to fill in this gap by analysing a broader range of political behaviour (see a.o. Benedetto 2005; Høyland 2006; Whitaker 2011). As elected representatives, MEPs face potentially infinite possibilities with a finite quantity of time, resources and energy; they must make choices and prioritize their activities. But they are relatively free to determine their own priorities. As a result, "parliamentarians differ considerably in the priorities they select and the models of representation they follow" (Farrell and Scully 2007, p. 94).

In order to understand how and why MEPs make these trade-offs, scholars have drawn on the insights of role theory, which emphasizes not only parliamentary behaviour but also the views of elected representatives on their duties and responsibilities. The concept of role has proved to be a useful theoretical tool to grasp the strategies of elected representatives, including in the EP. After falling out of fashion for two decades, this concept reappeared on the scientific agenda with the neo-institutional turn in political science. Although it has not been the main driver of research on the EP so far, it has made a discrete return in EU studies and provided scholars with a useful concept to understand the multiple facets of the European representative mandate through an actor-centred approach (Bale and Taggart 2006; Blomgren and Rozenberg 2012; Farrell and Scully 2003; Katz 1997; Navarro 2009).

The concept of role is central to this book: it is at the heart of the theoretical and methodological framework of this research. Indeed, following Blomgren and Rozenberg (2012, p. 9), my argument is that analysing roles enables us to open the “black box” of legislatures and to study some of the more complex aspects of political representation. It allows us to articulate parliamentary behaviours and parliamentary perceptions of their mandate and to explain why they act the way they do within the institution.

After briefly outlining the fluctuating success of role theory, the two main neo-institutional perspectives on roles will be presented and the theoretical approach of this research will be explained.

### *2.2.1 The Fluctuating Success of the Concept of Role in Political Science*

For a long period of time, the study of role was central to legislative studies, before falling out of fashion due to flaws and shortcomings of the two main approaches from which role analysis takes its legacy: functionalism and interactionism.

Functionalism assumes that understanding a political system requires analysing its functions, and the concept of role is a means to link MPs' behaviour to the functions of the legislature. The pioneering study for role theory is undoubtedly the volume by Wahlke, Eulau, Buchanan and Ferguson, titled *The Legislative System: explorations in legislative behaviour* (1962). Their study aimed at mapping the roles of members of four American state legislatures (California, Ohio, Tennessee and New Jersey) in order to uncover the underlying political processes and informal channels within institutions. Roles were closely connected to

institutional positions and behaviour and were defined as a coherent set of norms of behaviour (Wahlke et al. 1962, p. 552). Their work resulted in an abundant literature on legislative and political roles in democratic institutions (Aberbach and Rockman 1988; Cayrol et al. 1973; Clarke and Price 1981; Converse and Pierce 1986; Gross 1978; Rush 2001). But the impact of their study is mainly related to one specific core role: the so-called representational role. It refers to the relationship between elected representatives and their voters. Wahlke and his colleagues distinguished the focus of representation (i.e. whether a representative should represent a specific, territorial interest or the general interest) and the style of representation (i.e. whether MPs consider themselves as bound by the instructions of those they represent or as free agents). Regarding the style of representation, they developed three categories: the delegate (bound by a mandate from voters), the trustee (does not follow instructions but rather his own judgement) and the politico (trustee or delegate, depending on the circumstances). There has been considerable research applying these concepts and categories to MPs, especially on the US Congress (Eulau et al. 1959; see Jewell 1983 for an overview of this literature). In the framework of the EP, many studies on role orientations are based on these categories and seek to determine who MEPs feel they represent, how they solve conflicts between various principals, what their main duties are and how they set their priorities (Brack and Costa 2013; Hagger and Wing 1979; Katz 1999; Scully and Farrell 2003; Wessels 2005).

As a counterpoint, the interactionist approach emphasizes the theatrical metaphor: roles are taken and played by actors, according to the institutional context and their interlocutors (i.e. the framework of interaction). These scholars insist on the role taking: how politicians learn, negotiate and cultivate their roles in actual situations. The most influential study in this approach is the work of Fenno (1978) on the home style of Congressmen. He followed the activities of 18 members of the US House of Representatives in their district over a period of almost eight years to observe how they related to their constituents. He showed how the activities in their districts were connected to their actions in Washington but also that the two are different worlds and the roles and strategies of elected representatives in their district change over time. Wodak's study of the EP (2009) draws on this approach as she seeks to understand the various discourses MEPs deploy depending on their audience. The interactionist approach

focuses on the creation of roles in various social interactions, emphasizing the individual meaning that is given to them. It has the merit of highlighting the facts that individual elected representatives participate in defining their roles and that social situations shape roles. But the idea that parliamentarians are in a permanent state of representation, changing roles according to the audience is quite unrealistic. The professionalization and institutional socialization of MPs tend to generate a certain degree of role internalization, being a tool to reduce uncertainty for political actors (Costa and Kerrouche 2007, p. 185). As noted by Strøm (2012, p. 85), roles in politics as in any other aspects of our life exist to reduce uncertainty about effective and appropriate behaviour and help others develop plausible expectations about the ways in which we are likely to behave.

More generally, the inconclusive and contradictory results of the both interactionist and functionalist perspectives have gradually contributed to discrediting role theory. As noted by Jewell (1985, pp. 103–104), “most research on legislative roles have simply classified legislators according to their role orientations and little effort has been made to identify the variables explaining role orientations and even less to identify behavioural consequences”. Also, the meaning of the concept itself is rather vague, and the conceptual pluralism in role theory has created confusion rather than clarification (Biddle 1986; Searing 1994). While some authors consider that there exists a consensus around the concept and that therefore there is no need to define it, others retain only one dimension of the role—mostly the trustee/delegate/politico categories—reducing roles to a bare minimum. As those roles do not exist in the minds of politicians and seem to describe academic ways of conceptualizing parliamentary representation rather than cohesive patterns of norms and behaviour, they appear meaningless (Price 1985, p. 169). This fragmented conceptualization explains the discrepancy often found between role orientations and behaviour, contributing to the discredit of the very concept of role (Navarro 2005; Price 1985). As Blomgren and Rozenberg (2012, p. 18) appropriately remark that “inconclusive results, conceptual confusion, empirical costs, and parochialism all contributed to a substantial decline in the use of the role concept in legislative research during most of the 1980s and 1990s”. Even though the concept continued to be used in multiple studies, there were no theoretical or methodological developments in role theory until the “neo-institutionalist turning point” (Vom Beyme 2006).

### 2.2.2 *Rediscovering Roles: The Neo-Institutionalist Approach*

The neo-institutionalist turning point in political science has generated a renewed interest in role analysis. Two authors in particular have had an important impact on the reappearance of role theory in legislative studies: Kaare Strøm and Donald Searing. Each is associated with a variant of neo-institutionalism: Strøm outlined a strategic perspective while Searing proposed a motivational approach.

Both these approaches have made great theoretical contributions to legislative studies and role theory. They are presented as contradictory to each other, whereas they in fact share a number of similarities. They agree on one of the basic tenets of methodological individualism, i.e. that human action is the key to explaining social phenomena. They also agree on saying that the concept of role is a relevant analytical tool to make sense of the behaviour of elected representatives and that beyond individual interpretations of the role, each representative predominantly plays one single role. And they consider that roles are the results of the interaction between the institutional context and individual preferences. The strategic and motivational approaches should therefore be seen as degrees on a continuum of new institutionalism rather than as irreconcilable positions (Aspinwall and Schneider 2009; Lowndes and Roberts 2013; Peters 2011).

#### **Strøm's strategic approach**

This approach provides a conceptual framework inspired by rational choice theory to understand parliamentary behaviour. The concept of role is defined as “strategies for the employment of scarce resources towards specific goals” (Strøm 1997, p. 155).

According to Strøm (1997, p. 163, 2012, pp. 87–88), roles are routinized strategies induced by the representatives' pursuit of their political objectives, constrained by the institutional environment in which they operate. Parliamentarians have four kinds of goals relative to their legislative service: reselection, re-election, party office and legislative office. In order to maximize their likelihood of achieving their preferences and objectives, they develop strategies or game plans to allocate their scarce resources most efficiently, i.e. political roles. Role differentiation results from the various ways in which parliamentarians allocate such scarce resources. But these strategies are not only driven by MPs' goals but also constrained by the institutional setting in which they operate. Institutions define the range of behaviours available to parliamentarians by shaping the incentives they face.

As parliamentarians' strategies are prescriptions and not directly observable, one must infer them from the patterned behaviour displayed by these representatives. Furthermore, one should systematically identify the institutions which affect the ability of parliamentarians to achieve their goals. Each goal is connected to a particular institutional constraint: the selection procedure (reselection), the electoral system (re-election), the member's position within the party (party office) and his or her position within parliament (legislative office).

This approach has been quite influential. Several studies have shown how the clarity of the concept and the parsimonious nature of the model proposed are particularly suited for comparative studies. One of the strengths of the strategic approach lies in the systematic analysis of the actors' resources as well as of the institutional constraints leading to the selection of a role (Blomgren and Rozenberg 2012; Zittel 2012; Zittel and Gschwend 2008). But the strategic approach has also been criticized on two elements: its view on actors' motivations and rationality on the one hand and its definition of role as strategy on the other hand. Its view on rationality has been considered rather restrictive. Portraying representatives as utility maximizers, i.e. able to rank priorities on a scale of static and exogenous preferences, this approach considers parliamentarians as motivated by an instrumental rationality (Aspinwall and Schneider 2000, p. 10). Their actions are based on cost/benefit analysis to determine the most efficient strategy to maximize their gains (Esaïsson and Holmberg 1996, p. 59). Yet, political action cannot be reduced to strategic calculations to achieve a rational interest (Brubaker 1984, pp. 49–51; see also March and Olsen 2005; Navarro 2007). Politicians are not always calculating their expected utilities: "political behaviour, like other behaviour, can be described in terms of duties, obligations, rules and roles. Actions are not solely based on calculations of the return expected from alternative choices" (March and Olsen 1984, p. 744). And preferences are not purely exogenous: institutions are not a neutral framework for the strategies of elected representatives but frame, enable and constrain their actions' repertoire and preferences (Aspinwall and Schneider 2000; Giddens 1984; March and Olsen 1984). In addition to that, the definition of the role by the strategic approach triggered some questions. Roles are considered as routinized strategies<sup>3</sup> enabling actors to rationalize a complicated environment characterized by constant arbitrations. As such, it concentrates on patterns of behaviour, leaving aside any normative elements. However, preferences and normative

incentives are generally considered an integral part of roles. One could then wonder if the concept does not become superfluous if one can talk of strategies only (Rozenberg and Blomgren 2012, p. 28). As argued by Searing (2012, p. xxii), the parsimony of the strategic approach in defining roles as strategic behaviour may be so parsimonious that its constructs are no longer recognizable as roles and is not well suited for in-depth analysis of case studies such as a supranational parliament (Searing 1991, 1994, 2012).

### **Searing's motivational approach**

Inspired by the new institutionalism of March and Olsen (1989) and Powell and DiMaggio (1991), Searing developed a conceptual framework for the analysis of roles. He seeks to incorporate the insights from both sociological (functional and interactional) and strategic traditions. He believes that the previously disappointing results of role theories are not due to the concept itself but to the way it was used and defined. Through a study of the members of the House of Commons, he proposed a motivational approach to roles (Searing 1994). His main claim is that roles should be studied on the basis of how MPs view them. Politicians are purposive actors, but they are embedded in an institutional context.

Roles are defined here as “particular patterns of interrelated goals, attitudes and behaviors that are characteristic of people in particular situations” (Searing 1994, p. 18). It is composed of a motivational core (career goals and emotional incentives) and secondary components—characteristic attitudes and behaviours. But emotional incentives are the principal energizing forces in all parliamentary roles, rooted in the personality of the MP. The role here is not dictated by predetermined theoretical models but is the result of an inductive and interpretive approach so that the role reflects how the actor understands it.

In order to understand elected representatives' behaviour, the motivational approach pays particular attention to their perceptions and visions of their mandate, as indicators of the motivations underlying their behaviour. Indeed, seeking to describe the roles from the actor's point of view, this approach examines what actors do, how they do it and why they think it is appropriate to act this way rather than another (Searing 1994, p. 351). But this motivational core, composed of beliefs, goals and desires, is closely related to attitudes and behaviour: “in studying purposive roles, the motivational approach seeks to reconstruct characteristic

clusters of desires, beliefs and behaviours that are inherently intertwined. These are the roles and the behaviour is part of the role” (Searing 1994, p. 380). The roles are established if there is a correspondence between the motivational core and attitudes and behaviour.

According to the motivational approach, roles are “the place where individual choices meet institutional constraints” (Searing 1994, p. x). This means that MPs are rational actors, motivated by career goals and emotional incentives and constrained by the formal and informal rules of the institution. Roles are embedded in institutional contexts: elected representatives enter parliament with their own motivations and preferences, but once in the institution, these preferences and goals can change to adapt to the situation.

Two steps are involved in the analysis of roles according to the motivational approach (Searing 1991, p. 1255). The first one is a mapping operation, in order to identify the major roles. The idea is to understand political roles from the players’ point of view but to go beyond individual interpretations of the role to reconstruct, with sufficient generality, composite patterns of beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. The second is to explain, through an interpretive approach, the connections between the components of the roles, examine their origins and consequences, and illuminate their institutional contexts (Searing 1994, p. 22).

This approach is not without drawbacks. Mapping the roles relies on an inductive process, which is inherently subjective as well as time-consuming given the large numbers of interviews needed. This process complicates cross-national comparisons and is better suited for in-depth case studies or international institutions, but it also makes it difficult to replicate and poses a challenge in terms of generalizability (Searing 2012, p. xxii).

However, several studies have shown that the conceptual framework of the motivational approach and its inductive complexity are its greatest strengths. Wood and Yoon (1998) have demonstrated that the preference roles identified by Searing withstood the test of time and are still played today by members of the House of Commons. Others have shown that the motivational approach and its emphasis on emotional incentives enable scholars to grasp particular behaviour which could not be explained by the strategic approach (Rozenberg 2005). Navarro’s work (2009, 2012) reveals the relevance of the motivational approach in the case of the EP and its members. Offering a middle way between sociological and strategic perspectives, it is particularly suited for the

specific situation of MEPs. Indeed, the uncertainties surrounding the nature of the European representative mandate, the weak electoral connection at the EU level and the multitude of tasks and demands MEPs face give them a significant degree of freedom in the way they carry out their mandate. They are relatively free to set their own priorities. In addition to that, the motivational approach takes into account the impact of the formal and informal rules of the institution on elected representatives' behaviour and preferences. This is crucial in the context of the EP. While most research on political roles tend to underestimate the interplay between rules and preferences, or use simplified understandings of rationality, the motivational approach considers that politicians' preferences are both endogenous and exogenous. In other words, political actors define their goals and motivations in an ongoing dialogue with the rules that structure their environment (Searing 1991, 1994). Their behaviour is seen as rational, that is to say, oriented towards certain ends, but it is never entirely strategic. As Hooghe argues (1998, p. 8), politicians "are neither puppets on a string nor 'thick' rationalists calculating utilities of particular strategies to achieve given ends".

For all these reasons, this approach provides the best conceptual and methodological framework to understand how Eurosceptic MEPs conceive of and carry out their mandate.

### 3 A MOTIVATIONAL APPROACH TO STUDY THE ROLES OF EUROSCEPTIC MEPs

The aim of this research is to analyse how Eurosceptic MEPs conceive of and carry out their representative mandate. To do so, it relies on the concept of role as defined by the motivational approach and is structured around two research questions: (1) How can one categorize the roles played by Eurosceptic MEPs? (2) How can one best explain the variation between their roles?

The concept of role will enable to overcome the apparent heterogeneity of their behaviour taken individually and to highlight the way in which motivations, attitudes and behaviour are articulated. More precisely, the research follows a two-step structure. A first one seeks to identify through an inductive method the roles played by Eurosceptic MEPs and to propose a typology of roles. The second step uses this typology as the dependent variable and examines the factors which explain the variations of roles among Eurosceptics.

### 3.1 *Mapping the Roles Played by Eurosceptic MEPs*

MEPs tend to resort to familiar patterns to achieve their goals, and their choice of a course of action depends on their interpretation of the situation rather than on a purely utilitarian calculation. Therefore, these familiar patterns—the roles—cannot be reduced to a rational strategy but also include a subjective dimension that should be taken into account to understand their behaviour.

Roles are thus understood here as dynamic patterns of interrelated goals, attitudes and behaviours that are characteristics of people in particular situations. The first step in the research is to reconstruct the roles played by Eurosceptic MEPs by identifying their main components (motivations, characteristic attitudes and behaviour). Emphasis will be put on the motivational core of the role, that is the goals and emotional incentives of the MEP and the way they perceive their mandate. But characteristic behaviour will also be taken into account.

However, because of the particular nature of the population studied (a minority of anti-system actors), the motivational approach will be amended on one aspect. Roles here will be closer to ideal types than to categories that live in the minds of politicians. The EP is not as institutionalized as the British House of Commons; it is a relatively young institution, with a high turnover, and whose powers and organization are in constant evolution and where multiple national parliamentary traditions coexist. Therefore, the roles of Eurosceptic MEPs reconstructed here rely on the perceptions, attitudes and behaviour of Eurosceptic MEPs, but in order to go beyond their individual interpretation of the role and identify the contrasts between roles, the characteristics of each have been emphasized. Each MEP was then categorized according to the role he/she was the most similar to.<sup>4</sup>

### 3.2 *Explaining Role Choice*

The second challenge of role theory is to determine why an elected representative plays one role rather than another. The roles identified during the first step become the dependent variable, with the aim to explain the variation among them.

The central hypothesis derived from the motivational approach postulates that roles result from the interaction between individual preferences and institutional rules. However, while Searing's approach provides

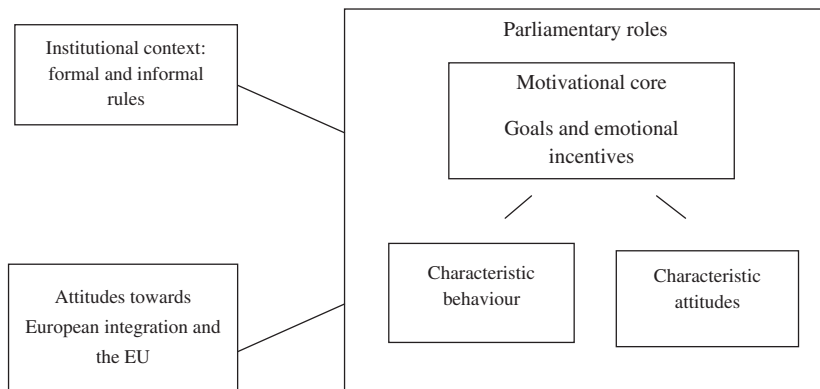
a detailed and thorough analysis of the roles, it does not offer the same level of sophistication when it comes to explaining why elected representatives play one role rather than another. He proposes an interpretative explanation, i.e. explaining “the roles by identifying and describing the relevant sets of characteristic desires, beliefs and behaviours and their interconnection” (Searing 1994, p. 22). As this remains rather descriptive, this research turns to the literature on legislative studies, and more particularly on parliamentary behaviour in EU studies, to clarify the central hypothesis of this research. Studies on MEPs’ role orientations identified three alternative sources of variance.

A first source comes from institutional variables. On the one hand, the formal and informal rules of the institution have an impact on the roles of elected representatives (Strøm 2012, p. 97). But these constraints and resources are not the same for all as they depend on the representative’s position within the institution (March and Olsen 2005; Searing 1994). In the framework of the EP, Bowler and Farrell notice that the institutional context does in fact affect parliamentary behaviour: “it is all too easy—especially when comparing across different nations—to forget factors which affect the behaviour of parliamentarians that are more related to the legislature in which they work” (Bowler and Farrell 1993, pp. 48–49). It has been shown elsewhere that the formal and informal rules of the EP influence the way radical right MEPs conceive of and carry out their mandate (Brack 2012). On the other hand, institutional factors also refer to the electoral system. Indeed, there have been debates within legislative studies on the impact of the electoral system on parliamentary behaviour. While some scholars show that it has a significant impact on the strategies of elected representatives (André and Depauw 2013; Cain et al. 1987; Carey and Shugart 1995; Norton 2002; Thomassen and Esaiasson 2006), others nuanced this statement and offered alternative explanations (Bogdanor 1985; Davidson 1969; Desposato 2006; Thames 2005). On the basis of these studies, scholars have examined the relationship between the electoral system and MEPs’ behaviour and view of representation (Bowler and Farrell 1993). Scully and Farrell (2003, 2007) examined role orientations of MEPs, i.e. the way they see the people they represent and the most important aspects of their mandate. They highlight two explanatory variables: district magnitude and ballot structure. Smaller districts and an open ballot structure tend to incentivize MEPs to cultivate a personal vote as they might be rewarded for their efforts towards the constituency. “As the electoral system becomes

more open, greater emphasis is placed on individual politicians, who in turn, it can be hypothesised, place greater emphasis on the representation of individual constituents and on personal vote chasing” (Farrell and Scully 2010, p. 8). This analysis reveals a relation between electoral system design and the representative style of MEPs. But this impact remains moderate due to the relative homogeneity of the electoral system for EP elections. In other words, electoral system effects do not fully account for MEPs’ attitudes and behaviour (Scully and Farrell 2007, p. 122; Scully and Farrell 2010). On the basis of those works, the aim will be therefore to systematically identify the constraints and resources originating from the institutional framework which affect how Eurosceptic MEPs perceive and carry out their role. In that respect, it can be hypothesized that there is a relation between the (formal and informal) rules of the EP as well as the electoral system (more particularly the ballot structure) and the roles played by Eurosceptics.

The second source of variance refers to cultural factors. General cultural differences across countries in the expectations and demands placed upon elected representatives are essential to understand parliamentary behaviour. Katz (1997, 1999) in particular argues that the constituency orientation of British MEPs is not due to the electoral system, since they are elected on closed lists but is the result of the national culture. Yet, he observed that MEPs’ attitudes towards Europe also influence significantly the way they perceive their roles (Katz 1999). Other research also tends to confirm the (moderate) impact of nationality on the way MEPs see their mandate (Costa 2001; Wessels 1999).

A third source of variance is related to individual factors. Political sociology has emphasized the impact of the individual background, especially career paths and political experience (Beauvallet and Michon 2010; Georgakakis 2002, 2012). Bale and Taggart (2006) argue that political roles cannot be explained by nationality or political affiliation and that research should investigate individual-level variables. More particularly, they consider that professional training, seniority and political experience impact the way MEPs respond to their environment whereas variables related to social background variables offer little to explain legislative role-taking. Many studies also mention individual preferences, as an additional variable, alongside cultural and institutional factors. The studies by Hagger and Wing (1979) as well as by Katz (1999) underline the influence of MEPs’ attitudes towards European integration and the institutional architecture of the EU on role orientations. Similarly,



**Fig. 2.1** Roles—components and explanatory model

Scully and Farrell (2003, 2007) reveal that MEPs' perception of their mandate depends in part on their vision of the EP. As the effect of the electoral system seems moderate, they suggest research needs to move on to an individual-level approach and take into account more subjective elements. Navarro (2009) for his part argues that normative considerations are central to understand MEPs' roles. In his study of MEPs, he shows that neither social background variables nor seniority can explain the variance of their roles. Although he fails to analyse Eurosceptic MEPs, his analysis shows that the choice of a role depends not only on MEPs' career goals but also on their views of European integration and democracy (Navarro 2009, p. 255).

Combining these studies with the motivational approach, the general hypothesis of this research states that the variance of roles results from the interaction between institutional factors and individual preferences. Figure 2.1 summarizes the theoretical framework used here: the roles played by Eurosceptic MEPs depends on the institutional context and members' preferences with regard to European integration and the EU.

## 4 DATA AND METHOD

This approach takes an actor-centred and interpretative perspective to understand how Eurosceptic MEPs conceive of and carry out their mandate. Individual actors and their subjectivity are at the centre of

the analysis (Searing 1994). Most of the research relies on a qualitative method in order to grasp the meaning MEPs give to their actions and to understand the motivations underlying their behaviour (Della Porta and Keating 2008, p. 26). But quantitative methods will also be combined to the qualitative methodology as this blend is more likely to provide a better understanding of the variation in the roles played by Eurosceptic MEPs.

#### *4.1 An Inductive Method to Identify Parliamentary Roles Played by Eurosceptic MEPs*

An inductive method was used to identify the roles played by Eurosceptic MEPs. Because the literature on Eurosceptic MEPs is particularly limited, such a method is useful to analyse the behaviour and attitudes of these actors without losing information. Indeed, it is particularly suited for the purpose of this research because of its bottom-up perspective Morse et al. (2002). Such an inductive approach takes into account the complexity of the parliamentary mandate by seeking to reconstruct the roles from the actors' point of view, focusing on their meanings and motivations (Searing 2012).

First, priority is given to the way Eurosceptics conceive of their role as MEP. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of 101 Eurosceptic MEPs as well as with 32 parliamentary assistants, civil servants and non-Eurosceptic MEPs. The answers they gave during the interviews served as indicators to determine how they perceive their role and what their motivations and priorities are. In addition to that, the observation of group meetings (EFD and EUL/NGL) and the interviews with non-Eurosceptic MEPs provide information on the broader context of the group and on the interactions among MEPs. Data on MEPs' parliamentary behaviour were also collected and served as indicators for the identification of roles given that, according to the motivational approach, the perception of role and behaviour forms a coherent and dynamic whole. Indeed, their parliamentary activities were analysed to determine their priorities and establish how they use their time and resources. These data also allow to determine to what extent they are involved in parliamentary work and to which activities they devote more resources and energy. Moreover, including behaviour in the analysis tests whether there is a correspondence between what Eurosceptics say and what they actually do. Finally, data regarding their responsibilities within

the EP were also examined to assess their level of integration in the parliamentary structure. Rather than rely on a single indicator, these elements were combined to develop the typology of roles (see annex on the operationalization of the concept of role). Following Martin (2011), this approach combines observational studies, self-presentations during interviews and behavioural analysis in order to account for how elected representatives conceive of and carry out their mandate.

Each Eurosceptic MEP is more or less close to one role. To categorize him or her, priority was given to his or her role conception and motivations (the motivational core) as well as to the overall consistency between the perception of the mandate and the parliamentary activities of the MEP.

#### 4.2 *Testing the Hypothesis: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods*

The second central question of this research addresses the variation between roles. Why does an actor play a parliamentary role rather than another?

The hypothesis argues that roles are the result of the interaction between the institutional framework and individual preferences relative to European integration and the EU. The analysis will therefore seek to identify in a systematic way the constraints and resources derived from the institutional framework which could influence the room for manoeuvre of Eurosceptic MEPs and their perception of the institutional reality. This entails not only analysing the evolution of the formal rules of the EP through an analysis of its rules of procedure but also examining the informal rules. Then, the influence of MEPs' preferences regarding European integration on the roles they play will be examined. To do so, the analysis is based on data from the interviews pertaining to MEPs' positions vis-à-vis European integration and the European institutions. The combination of qualitative and a quantitative analysis will enable me to determine whether there is a relation between MEPs' Euroscepticism and the role they play.<sup>5</sup>

## 5 CONCLUSION

The EP is by now at the heart of a very rich body of literature, essentially because of its role in the debates on the democratic deficit of the EU. Parliamentary representation is the core of modern democracies. With

the parliamentarization of the European political system, people hope to increase the EU's legitimacy and to develop a democratic European polity. Many studies have therefore been devoted to the role of the EP in the integration process and the democratic legitimacy of the EU. For long, this literature has concentrated on the institution's powers and organization, but as the EU evolved towards a more "state-like" political regime, scholars started examining the issue of political representation at the supranational level. They showed how the EP could be used as a laboratory to test hypothesis on legislators' behaviour derived from comparative politics and legislative studies. Indeed, they revealed that despite the hybrid nature of the EP, MEPs are elected representatives like any other, facing similar constraints and driven by similar motivations as national parliamentarians. These studies greatly contribute to our understanding of the EP internal decision-making process as well as of the relationship between its members, its political groups and national parties. But they tend to provide a partial account of the representative mandate as they focus almost exclusively on voting behaviour. There is a need to move to an individual-level approach to enrich these quantitative roll-call analyses with qualitative and longitudinal methods. As Farrell and Scully note (2010, p. 37), "representation is a dynamic process and to understand it, we need to move beyond a macro perspective on institution and aggregate outcomes towards a more micro-level analysis of individuals. We need to consider how these elected representatives interpret and seek to carry out their role as representatives".

This is precisely the aim of this research to analyse, through an actor-centred approach, how Eurosceptics operate once elected in the EP. Recent studies have shown that MEPs are still in an "experimental phase" in the sense that there is no consensus on the best way to carry out the European mandate (Costa and Navarro 2003, p. 132). As a result, they display very divergent views and behaviours. In the specific case of the Eurosceptics, research on UKIP reveals that if representation in the EP provides resources for these actors, it also poses awkward questions about the extent to which they should engage with the EU, leading to some variation in the way Eurosceptics approach their role (Lynch et al. 2012).

Role theory, in its motivational variant, was used in this chapter to understand Eurosceptics' strategies. This was particularly suited to understanding how Eurosceptic MEPs conceive of and carry out their representative mandate. It provides a comprehensive conceptual

framework that takes into account the subjective dimension of political representation and enables one to make sense of the behaviour of elected representatives. Through the use of role theory, this research will contribute to filling in the gap in the literature on Euroscepticism at the supranational level. More generally, through an in-depth analysis of Eurosceptic MEPs' strategies, it will provide a better understanding of representative democracy at the supranational level, by making sense of the behaviour of (a group of) representatives of the people.

## NOTES

1. There is an extensive literature on representation in comparative politics, EU studies, philosophy, political theory and sociology. This chapter will only concentrate on EU studies and comparative politics/legislative studies, and the reader is referred to these works for alternative perspectives: Mansbridge (2003), Przeworski et al. (1999), Rehfeld (2011), Saward (2010), Urbinati and Warren (2008).
2. On this issue, see Carrubba et al. (2006, 2008), Høyland (2010).
3. Some scholars also pointed out the tension between routine and strategy in the definition of the roles by the strategic approach. See Searing (2012).
4. For a similar approach, see Navarro (2009), Costa and Kerrouche (2007).
5. To test the robustness of the analysis, alternative explanatory factors such as seniority, the electoral system and MEPs' previous political experiences will also be tested.

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Opposing Europe in the European Parliament  
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Brack, N.

2018, XV, 213 p. 5 illus., 1 illus. in color., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-1-137-60199-5

A product of Palgrave Macmillan UK