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Representation without Participation in the European Parliament: Mapping the Impact of Differentiated Integration in the EMU on the EP and its Democratic Representation Capacity – Insights from an Internal Survey

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About the author

Michele Pimpinicchio is a graduate of the College of Europe, where he completed the European Political and Governance Studies curriculum with a master's thesis on the effects of differentiated integration on the European Parliament. He previously studied International Relations and Diplomatic Affairs at University of Bologna. Moreover, he worked as a Trainee at EUREGHA and collaborated with Punto Europa (EDC) in Forlì, contributing to a series of initiatives to promote knowledge of the EU among citizens and students.

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Abstract

The European Parliament (EP) is composed of approximately 25 per cent of members (MEPs) elected in non-euro area member states. Formally, this is not reflected in the functioning of the EP, which, on the grounds of the principles of institutional unity and of the generality of its mandate, always decides in its full composition. This study investigates the extent to which internal differentiation in the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) affects the work of the EP and challenges its democratic representation capacity. Through semi-structured interviews conducted within the Assembly, the research concludes: first, internal differentiation in the context of the EMU does not produce substantial effects on MEPs' behaviour; second, MEPs elected in non-euro area countries do not face concrete limitations in the exercise of their mandate; third, the principles of autonomy, accountability and political equality inside the EP do not seem to be concretely challenged by the effects of internal differentiation within the EMU.

INTRODUCTION

On 14 November 1977, in a debate in the House of Commons on the Scotland Bill on devolution, the Labour member of Parliament (MP) for West Lothian, Tam Dalyell, posed a question that would be at the heart of a debate that has become pivotal in the British political system, and that has been framed as the West Lothian Question.¹

For how long will English constituencies and English hon. Members tolerate not just 71 Scots, 36 Welsh and a number of Ulstermen but at least 119 hon. Members from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland exercising an important, and probably often decisive, effect on English politics while they themselves have no say in the same matters in Scotland, Wales and Ireland?²

The West Lothian Question refers to the concern that, following devolution, the MPs from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland would be able to vote on measures distinctively related to England, while English MPs would not be able to do the same for devolution matters.

Although with different nuances, that same question can also be found to a certain extent within the EU's democratic representation system because of the effects of differentiated integration (DI). DI, or more precisely its internal dimension, refers to the fact that EU rules “are not uniformly valid across” the EU³ and that some member states for a variety of reasons do not participate in certain EU policies. While this integrative model has many advantages, it can also raise important issues, including in terms of democracy and legitimacy of a political system⁴. Among other things, in the EU, DI poses challenges to the institutional architecture, and it is precisely in this sense that the affinity with the West Lothian

¹ “Context: Devolution, the West Lothian Question and English Votes for English Laws”, *UK Parliament*, 2016, accessed 30 April 2023, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmselect/cmpubadm/523/52304.htm>

² Tam Dalyell, intervention in a debate in the House of Common, “Scotland Bill”, 14 November 1977, HC Deb 14 November 1977, vol 939, cc51-213, accessed 30 April 2023, https://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1977/nov/14/scotland-bill#column_123

³ Frank Schimmelfennig and Thomas Winzen, *Ever Looser Union? Differentiated European Integration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 15.

⁴ Sandra Kröger and Markus Patberg, “Introduction: Democratic Challenges of Differentiated (Dis)Integration”, *Swiss Political Science Review* 27, no. 3 (2021), pp. 539-545.

Question emerges: today, in fact, the European Parliament (EP) is also composed of MEPs elected in member states that do not participate in certain policies and/or are not subject to certain rules. The most striking case in this respect is that of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), where, to date, as many as 179 MEPs out of a total of 705, i.e. 25.39 per cent, are elected in non-euro area member states (NE-MEPs). Moreover, this figure has definitely dropped in the last few years: one need only to consider that before Croatia's adoption of the euro on 1 January 2023 and before Brexit, this figure reached 35.15 per cent. Despite the increasing relevance of DI, unlike other institutions, such as the Council, the EP does not reflect this phenomenon in any way: in fact, it always debates and decides in its full composition, allowing MEPs elected in non-participating Member States to take part at all levels and stages.

On these bases, this work aims to investigate the extent to which internal differentiation in the EMU affects the work of the EP and its members and challenges its democratic representation capacity. To reply to this question the research will be guided by the following hypotheses:

H1: while the EP has not institutionalised the internal differentiation in the EMU, the latter *de facto* affects the internal functioning of the former.

H1.1: internal differentiation in the EMU affects the behaviour of NE-MEPs when the EP is discussing on the matter.

H1.2: internal differentiation in the EMU poses challenges and limitations to the work of NE-MEPs.

H2: internal differentiation in the EMU negatively affects the democratic representation capacity of the EP, concretely undermining the principles of autonomy, accountability and political equality.

To test these assumptions, specific variables and concepts were identified and measured exploiting some tools of qualitative research.

In the first section, a focus is devoted to the forms assumed by DI in the context of the EMU to explain the pertinence of this case study. Subsequently, light is shed on the academic

debate on the link between DI and the EP. In the third section, the employed research methods and the theoretical tools to frame the democratic representation capacity of the EP are outlined. In the fourth section, the hypotheses are tested and discussed. In the fifth section, a perspective on the need to differentiate the EP according to MEPs is given. Finally, the last section concludes the analysis.

1. INTERNAL DIFFERENTIATION IN THE EMU: A RELEVANT CASE STUDY

When it comes to DI, EMU is always in the spotlight. Here, with reference to the adoption of the euro, differentiation has the connotations of a mixed strategy. On the one hand, it represents a classic example of Multi-Speed Europe, since (almost) all EU member states are legally obliged sooner or later to join the eurozone, and differentiation is in this sense conceived as something strictly temporary. On the other hand, however, this model is combined with instances of *Europe à la carte*, and potentially permanent DI, as witnessed by the presence of Denmark's opt-out. Similarly, EMU includes both involuntary and voluntary differentiation, with states that are excluded for not fulfilling the Maastricht criteria and others that choose not to take part. Precisely in this regard, the picture becomes even more complex: while the treaties impose an obligation to eventually join the eurozone, the strength of this imposition together with the temporary nature of the corresponding differentiation has increasingly faded. Sweden, on the eve of the third stage of the monetary union, *de facto* chose to exclude itself from the single currency by not complying with the Maastricht criteria;⁵ since that time, Sweden is commonly recognised to have a *de facto* opt-out.⁶ This, however, is not the only case, and other examples suggest how internal differentiation within the EMU can increasingly take on the features of voluntary differentiation: one can just look at the recent statements by

⁵ Michele Chang, *Economic and Monetary Union* (London-New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 20.

⁶ Nicole Koenig, "A differentiated view of Differentiated Integration", *Jacques Delors Institute*, Policy Paper 140, July 23, 2015, p. 9.

the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, which, according to him “has no plan to adopt the euro anytime soon”.⁷

These particularities make the EMU and the euro an extremely interesting case. Some other considerations must be added: firstly, it appears to be of interest because of the number of countries that are excluded from the eurozone, i.e., no less than seven out of 27, an element that gives a systemic character to this case study; secondly, monetary policy is closely linked to the sovereignty of a state, hence being politically salient; thirdly, differentiation within the EMU has led to more or less formal institutional implications, as shown by the creation of the Eurogroup and the Euro summit; fourth, today the EP is composed of around 25 per cent of NE-MEPs; fifth and finally, DI in the case of EMU has given rise to an academic debate on whether differentiation within (or outside) the EP should be reflected or not.

2. DOES THE EU NEED A DIFFERENTIATED PARLIAMENT? AN ACADEMIC DEBATE

While DI has been widely discussed, until recent years there were few works on its effects on EU institutions, and not much has been produced on the actual implications for the EP. Nevertheless, several studies exist which attempt to address the question on whether the EP should rearrange its institutional architecture to fit with a reality of a political system deeply characterized by DI.

One of the first contributions in this regard is that of Ehlermann, who in 1995 discussed how the principle of institutional unity can be challenged by DI. Interestingly, the author starts from the assumption that “those who opt out should (...) have less than full rights in the

⁷ Aneta Zachová, “Czechia will not adopt euro anytime soon, says PM”, *Euractiv*, 2022, accessed 27 April 2023, https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/czechia-will-not-adopt-euro-anytime-soon-says-pm/

institutions in relation to the business in which they do not intend to participate”.⁸ With reference to the Council, the author makes an important distinction between those member states that do not participate in certain policies by choice, which should be excluded from voting rights for those specific matters, and those states that are “unable, but (...) willing”, which should be allowed to “take part in the deliberations preceding the adoption of decisions”.⁹ Along the same line of thought, the author argues that in the EP, although MEPs do not represent a government, they do represent the interests of citizens of their country, and that, therefore, those members “elected in a country which does not participate in a certain policy or which is not bound by certain decisions, should not take part in the voting process”. However, he affirms their fundamental right to participate in the debates.¹⁰

This institutional dilemma has also been highlighted by von Ondarza, who notes how the fact that parliamentarians from non-participating countries have the same right to vote may undermine the legitimacy of the EP.¹¹ The author first focuses on the case of enhanced cooperation, in which a role of the EP is ensured in the activation stage through the consent procedure;¹² furthermore, unlike the Council where only the representatives of the member states are allowed to vote,¹³ the composition of the EP is not altered at all, and this appears relevant since most of the decisions in enhanced cooperation are taken under co-decision.¹⁴

The burden of the EP's institutional non-differentiation on its legitimacy becomes even more evident if one takes the example of the EMU, where the high number of NE-MEPs can

⁸ Peter Ludlow and Niels Ersbøll, “Towards 1996: The Agenda of the Intergovernmental Conference”, (Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), 1995) quoted in: Claude-Dieter Ehlermann, “Increased Differentiation or Stronger Uniformity” (Florence: European University Institute (EUI), 1995), 29, working paper, no. 1995/21, accessed 30 April 2023, <https://hdl.handle.net/1814/1396>

⁹ Ehlermann, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹¹ Nicolai von Ondarza, “Auf dem Weg zur Union in der Union. Institutionelle Auswirkungen der differenzierten Integration in der Eurozone auf die EU”, *Integration* 22, no. 1 (2013), pp. 29-33.

¹² European Union, “Consolidated Versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union of 13 December 2007”, Official Journal of the European Union, C115, 26 October 2012, art. 329 TFEU.

¹³ *Ibid.*, art. 330 TFEU.

¹⁴ Von Ondarza, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-33.

have a decisive influence on the final outcome of the vote. Von Ondarza suggests that the EP has developed informal mechanisms to cope with this problem, for example by assigning rapporteurship on eurozone files almost exclusively to eurozone MEPs (with the exception of British MEPs due to their large number).¹⁵

Other authors attempt to analyse the possible desirability of flexible arrangements within the EP on the basis of differentiation scenarios. On the one hand, Curtin and Fasone argue that “the avoidance or the limitation of a prospective differentiation in the EP’s representation enhances its overall institutional credibility”.¹⁶ The reasons are to be found in the nature of MEPs’ mandate, which is firstly free, and secondly non-national, and which ensures that the role of the EP is distinctive with respect to those of the Councils. In addition, one has to consider the indirect effects of exclusive eurozone measures on non-eurozone countries, the likely rejection of such institutional changes by countries such as Sweden or Denmark, or even the difficulty of determining “whether a certain procedure (...) only affects Eurozone countries”.¹⁷ However, if instances of DI are no longer to be postponed, these should only concern minor adjustments, such as the creation of a sub-committee for ECON, or restrictions on the possibility for NE-MEPs to obtain rapporteurships and the role of Chair in ECON.¹⁸

In contrast, Heermann and Leuffen maintain that the EP’s current institutional architecture undermines the principle of autonomy, “because MEPs from opt-out states and the voters they represent are not themselves bound by the decisions they make”, and of accountability “because MEPs from non-participating member states cannot be held

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Deirdre Curtin and Cristina Fasone, “Differentiated Representation: Is a Flexible European Parliament Desirable?”, in *Between Flexibility and Disintegration*, ed. Bruno de Witte, Andrea Ott, and Ellen Vos (Northampton: Edward Elgar, 2017), pp. 140-143.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

accountable by the voters who are directly subjected to their decisions”.¹⁹ The authors therefore advocate the adoption of a model based on the distinction between the deliberation phase, in which all MEPs should participate so as to ensure the process of policy learning and safeguard the principle of equality, and the voting phase, in which those elected in states not participating in differentiated policies should be excluded, so as to preserve the accountability and autonomy principles.²⁰

3. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH AND THEORETICAL TOOLS

This study is based on a qualitative research approach, with data being mainly gathered through semi-structured interviews. The Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs of the EP (ECON) has been identified as the primary (yet not exclusive) constituent where to collect the information. Two groups of people were interviewed: NE-MEPs in ECON, currently being 8 out of 61 members, including former NE-MEPs in ECON, and current and former MEPs elected in Eurozone countries. In addition, personnel of the EP and from the political groups were also interviewed. The main interlocutors in this respect were policy advisors, who were identified as being able to provide relevant information both on the general behaviour of parliamentarians in the groups, and vice versa of the groups *vis-à-vis* parliamentarians.

To test the hypotheses, some variables were identified. To identify potential effects on NE-MEPs’ behaviour (H.1.1), the measurement focused mainly on their interest in EMU files with eurozone specificities, the participation of these MEPs in discussions and voting on the same files, and their inclination to follow the Group's line. To find out whether DI may pose challenges to the work of NE-MEPs (H1.2), attention was instead paid to the expectations of

¹⁹ Max Heermann and Dirk Leuffen, “No Representation without Integration! Why Differentiated Integration Challenges the Composition of the European Parliament”, *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 58, no. 4 (2020), p. 1023.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 1026-1027.

euro area MEPs and groups *vis-à-vis* NE-MEPs' behaviour, and the latter's chances of obtaining certain positions in the EP in relation to the EMU, namely membership, rapporteurship and chairmanship in ECON.

On the other hand, an analysis of the potential consequences of DI on the EP's democratic representation capacity (H.2), requires the identification of some basic principles. When considering DI, Heermann and Leuffen identify as relevant three democratic principles.²¹ The first one is the principle of autonomy, whereby the individuals who are bound by laws should possess the authority to participate in their creation; otherwise, problems of incongruence arise and the freedom of those individuals, understood in terms of non-domination,²² is violated.²³ The second principle is that of accountability, which is "about [the possibility of] making an account and holding to account" the decision-makers and allows citizens to sanction and dismiss their representatives.²⁴ The third and last criterion is that of political equality in terms of non-discrimination, which within a multi-level political system such as the EU can be understood in terms of equal possibility to participate in the law-making as well as the equality among the member states.²⁵ As argued by the authors, these three core criteria of democracy, despite not being the only ones, are those that "do not conflict with one another" when talking of uniform integration, but that can be affected by DI.²⁶ Importantly, these principles will be conceived not only from an objective and legal point of view, i.e. on the existence or non-existence of certain institutional procedures, but also from the perspective of the behaviour and feelings of the MEPs. The principle of accountability towards European citizens, for instance, is deemed to be challenged if an MEP believes that he or she is

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1019-1021.

²² Philip Pettit, "Legitimate International Institutions: A Neo-republican Perspective" in *The Philosophy of International Law*, ed. Samantha Besson and John Tasioulas (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 139-160 quoted in *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ John Erik Fossum, "The structure of EU representation and the crisis" in *Political Representation in the European Union. Still democratic in times of crisis?*, ed. Sandra Kröger (London-New York: Routledge, 2014), p; 53.

²⁵ Heermann and Leuffen, *op. cit.*, pp. 1019-1021.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

accountable only to his or her national constituency; similarly, the principle of political equality is considered to be challenged in the presence of behaviours within the Assembly that call into question the ability of a particular group of parliamentarians to carry out their activities on an equal footing with other colleagues.

4. (HOW) DOES DI AFFECT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT?

4.1. Internal Differentiation in the EMU and the behaviour of NE-MEPs

ECON “is far from being a euro area Committee”: its portfolio includes measures that go beyond those related to the euro and finding measures that apply exclusively to eurozone countries is not so common; hence, many files discussed within the Committee are of interest to all MEPs.²⁷

The parliamentarians interviewed, when confronted with the question of whether their interest could potentially decrease if the EP discusses files that are most relevant for the eurozone, almost totally excluded that this is the case. In fact, if one of them stated that she had less focus on these files, she did exclude at the same time that they could be thought as less important.²⁸ Two parliamentarians from the Czech Republic also highlighted how the euro has the potential to have a huge impact on their country's national currency,²⁹ and one of them stated that this type of file could be even more important, as one has to make sure that indirect implications on one's own country are taken into account, as well as certain national specificities. As stated by the same MEP, what really makes a difference is the substance and

²⁷ Interview with Mr Leo Hoffmann-Axthelm, policy advisor (Greens/EFA, ECON Committee), mobile phone, March 27, 2023.

²⁸ Interview with Ms Kira Marie Peter-Hansen, MEP (Denmark, Greens/EFA, ECON Committee), Brussels, March 30, 2023.

²⁹ Interview with Mr Tomáš Zdechovský, MEP (Czechia, EPP), Brussels, March 29, 2023; Interview with Mr Ondřej Kovařík, MEP (Czechia, Renew, ECON Committee), Google Meet, March 28, 2023.

merit of a given measure, and while sometimes the focus on a certain file can be influenced by the euro/non-euro dimension, this is not the main dividing line.³⁰

The second variable considered is that of participation. As clarified by one MEP, it must first of all be considered that the level of participation may vary according to merit but also according to the role one plays with regard to a given file, with particular reference to the roles of rapporteur and shadow-rapporteur. Rapporteurship on a file excludes *a priori* the possibility an MEP may decide not to participate, since by definition this role indicates the member within the political group who is in charge of following the file and informing the rest of the group about it.³¹ This is all the more true in the EMU, where the high technicality that is sometimes required tends to emphasise the leading role of the rapporteur.³² In the context of this contribution, participation refers to a multitude of factors, such as the tendency to vote and/or participate in debates, as well as simply being present or not present. From the interviews with MEPs, what emerges is that in the vast majority of cases there does not seem to be a clear incidence of differentiation in the EMU on the level of participation as perceived by them. However, the picture is not perfectly linear, and in this regard it is interesting to note that the Danish MEP stated that having to discuss a file pertaining mainly to the eurozone countries could lead her to behave differently in the context of ECON (but not in the case of a plenary session), and in particular to decide to leave the vote to a substitute member in ECON.³³ Some effect of DI on the behaviour of NE-MEPs is confirmed by various policy advisors, according to whom, for example, “are a bit more on the background”,³⁴ invest less time in euro-related files and tend to be less inclined in seeking rapporteurships.³⁵ However, it should be pointed out that this factor is not as important as other elements, especially when

³⁰ Interview with Mr Kovařík, *op. cit.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Interview with Mr Zdechovský, *op. cit.*

³³ Interview with Ms Peter-Hansen, *op. cit.*

³⁴ Interview with ECR ECON policy advisor, Google Meet, March 31, 2023.

³⁵ Interview with Mr Arman Basurto, policy advisor (Renew, ECON), Brussels, March 29, 2023.

it comes to the group line: in any case “you have the responsibility to show up and amplify that vote by being there and then voting along with your colleagues”.³⁶

This brings us to the third variable, namely the attitude towards the group line. The question that was investigated in this regard is whether, when ECON is discussing files that are distinctively relevant for the eurozone, NE-MEPs have a stronger or weaker incentive to follow the line of the political group. This has to do, evidently, with the cohesiveness of the groups within the EP. Cohesiveness, namely the tendency of parliamentarians in a group to vote in the same way in the EP, is certainly not a given, since political groups in the Assembly do not have the same leverage that national parties have in the domestic context.³⁷ In this sense, high levels of cohesiveness are supposedly more difficult to reach. While this is true in theory, in practice the Parliament experiences very high levels of cohesion “over time and across different policy areas”.³⁸ According to Costa and Brack, the main explanation for this phenomenon is to be found in the “extensive division of labour” within the EP, whereby MEPs are narrowly focused on the issues they follow very closely, while tending to rely on the indications of their group for all the rest.³⁹ The question, therefore, is whether the euro/non-euro dimension plays a role in this respect. Most respondents ruled out this possibility, especially when it comes to divergence from the position of the group.⁴⁰ The reason was well explained by a Renew policy advisor, who asserted that “non-euro area members, when voting files or reports dealing with EMU (...), don’t have a reason to be an outlier or to diverge”.⁴¹ On the other hand, more prone to the effects of DI is the Danish MEP, who stated that in the

³⁶ Interview with Mr Hoffmann-Axthelm, *op. cit.*

³⁷ Ariadna Ripoll Servent, *The European Parliament* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 190.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

³⁹ Olivier Costa and Nathalie Brack, *How the EU Really Works* (London-New York: Routledge, 2nd edn, 2019), p. 151.

⁴⁰ Interview with Mr Kovařík, *op. cit.*; Interview with Mr Zdechovský, *op. cit.*; Interview with Mr Gunnar Hökmark, former MEP (Sweden, EPP, ECON) and Chairman of Stockholm Free World Forum, mobile phone, April 16, 2023.

⁴¹ Interview with Mr Basurto, *op. cit.*

past, she diverged from the group's line in plenary for some areas where Denmark has specificities, while deciding to send her substitute in ECON.⁴²

Finally, the interviews sought to explore the possibility that NE-MEPs could organise some form of informal consultation, within or even across political groups, to discuss the indirect implications that specific eurozone measures might have on their countries to increase their influence. All interviewees denied that this kind of coordination ever existed.

To summarise, does internal differentiation in the EMU affect the behaviour of NE-MEPs when the EP is discussing on the matter? The information gathered renders a picture that is not perfectly linear. The hypothesis seems to be partially confirmed, insofar as differentiation in the EMU produces effects but is not an element capable of decisively influencing the behaviour of NE-MEPs. Other diving lines appear to be dominant, and measures that apply distinctively to euro-area member states are perceived by MEPs as part of European legislation like any other.⁴³ Likewise, DI does not seem to play a determinant role on the issue of participation, which appears to largely follow the logic of the political groups. It is worth noting, however, that effects produced by the presence in the EP of NE-MEPs do emerge. For instance, they frequently tend to be less vocal; nonetheless, this cannot be defined as general rule, as some national delegations are particularly active regardless of their status in the EMU.⁴⁴ A greater reluctance to serve as rapporteur for euro-related files is signalled, but not in a consistent way: NE-MEPs interviewed repeatedly stressed their non-reticence in dealing with files that do not directly or strictly involve their member states.⁴⁵ Only in the case of the Danish MEP, finally, the direct effects of the differentiation seem more pronounced, although they do not appear to take on a systemic dimension.

⁴² Interview with Ms Peter-Hansen, *op. cit.*

⁴³ Interview with Mr Hökmark, *op. cit.*

⁴⁴ Interview with Ms Pervenche Berès, former MEP (France, S&D, ECON Committee), Zoom, March 29, 2023.

⁴⁵ Interview with Ms Peter-Hansen, *op. cit.*; Interview with former MEP Mr Petr Ježek (Czechia, Renew, ECON Committee), Google Meet, March 30, 2023; Interview with Mr Hökmark, *op. cit.*; Interview with Mr Kovařík, *op. cit.*

4.2. Potential challenges and limitations for NE-MEPs

We focus now on situations to which NE-MEPs are exposed that could presumably constitute limitations or challenges, and thus prevent full freedom of action within the Assembly on an equal footing with other parliamentarians. To analyse whether this was the case, it was firstly sought to understand the attitude towards NE-MEPs, both from the standpoint of the latter's perception, but also from the perspectives of euro area MEPs. In general, NE-MEPs interviewed reported that they did not experience any particular limitations directly related to their work.⁴⁶ Interestingly, however, two of them identified as a kind of limitation the fact that in the Council their national colleagues are more side-lined in discussions strictly related to the euro; this causes what one of them described as a “knowledge gap”,⁴⁷ a general lack of information that indirectly affects their ability to be fully involved in the EP.⁴⁸

Moreover, NE-MEPs were then asked whether they had ever felt or experienced that MEPs from participating countries thought they were not entitled to have an equal say on some EMU files. Almost all of them argued that they had never noticed anything similar,⁴⁹ although two of them stated how at the beginning of their mandate, they had to explain to their colleagues why they were interested in files/activities concerning the euro or the banking union.⁵⁰ One former NE-MEP from Sweden did confirm instead that he perceived some discontent from this perspective in some euro area MEPs.⁵¹ Indeed, this was also confirmed by the former French MEP interviewed, who, when asked whether she had ever thought that her colleagues were less entitled to participate, replied “sometimes”, referring to the great deal

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*; Interview with Ms Peter-Hansen, *op. cit.*; Interview with Mr Ježek, *op. cit.*; Interview with Mr Hökmark, *op. cit.*

⁴⁷ Interview with Ms Peter-Hansen, *op. cit.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*; Interview with Mr Zdechovský, *op. cit.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*; Interview with Mr Kovařík, *op. cit.*; Interview with Ms Peter-Hansen, *op. cit.*; Interview with Mr Ježek.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*; Interview with Ms Peter-Hansen, *op. cit.*

⁵¹ Interview with Mr Hökmark, *op. cit.*

of difficulty in the negotiations between the eurozone countries, which was further complicated by the particularly active attitude in the assembly of some non-eurozone delegations; at the same time, in response to the same question, she added that “this is also the whole situation in EU integration (...). This is the charm of a larger union, united in diversity”.⁵² It should also be pointed out that the former Swedish parliamentarian himself made it clear that this attitude he perceived was certainly not a widespread feeling, and that most MEPs made no distinction.⁵³

A further element posing a potential challenge to NE-MEPs concerns the relationship with their political groups, and particularly whether, when the EP debates distinctively eurozone-related files, the groups would expect these MEPs to follow the instructions more strictly. Once again, this is related to cohesion, and all respondents rejected the hypothesis that the euro/non-euro dimension could play a role in this regard: even in these cases, the expectation of cohesion remains constant regardless of whether an MEP is part of the eurozone or not.

The second dimension considered to test Hypothesis H1.2 and identify potential limitations posed by DI is whether or not NE-MEPs may be restricted in their ability to obtain relevant positions in ECON, notably the membership itself, the positions of chair and vice-chair, and the rapporteurship on files that are distinctively related to the eurozone. Generally, there are three factors that are taken into account in the allocation of these roles: proportionality, MEP preferences, and group dynamics.⁵⁴ The latter refers to the fact that, ultimately, political groups are those that decide Committees allocations, very often for the sake of maintaining a balance between national party delegations.⁵⁵ For the purposes of this

⁵² Interview with Ms Berès, *op. cit.*

⁵³ Interview with Mr Hökmark, *op. cit.*

⁵⁴ Richard Whitaker, *The European Parliament's Committees. National party influence and legislative empowerment* (London-New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 33.

⁵⁵ Ripoll Servent, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

work, it is precisely this third factor to which attention has been paid, to understand whether political groups are influenced by the fact that some are elected outside the eurozone.

Firstly, the membership in ECON currently consists of 61 members, including eight NE-MEPs. This represents about 13 per cent, a lower ratio than that resulting from the overall composition of the EP. Indeed, as Table 4.1 shows, this under-representation is also found in the two previous mandates.

| Parliamentary Term | MEPs in ECON | NE-MEPs in ECON | NE-MEPs in ECON (%) | NE-MEPs in the EP (%) |
|-------------------------------|--------------|-----------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 9 th (2019 – 2024) | 61 | 8 | 13% | 25% |
| 8 th (2014 – 2019) | 61 | 16 | 26% | 34% |
| 7 th (2009 – 2014) | 50 | 17 | 29% | |

Table 4.1: Percentage of NE-MEPs in ECON in the last three EP parliamentary terms (situation at the end of the term). Source: own elaboration based on data available on the website of the European Parliament⁵⁶ and on CVCE.eu.⁵⁷

Drawing on these data, it was therefore sought to determine whether the euro/non-euro dimension was relevant in this pattern. The answer given by all respondents was unanimous in denying any kind of influence. What can be detected according to some is, at most, a potential lower interest on the part of individual NE-MEPs. It is also necessary to consider the background of an MEP, insofar as an interest in economic and monetary issues would more or less naturally lead towards ECON. Furthermore, as stated by a policy advisor, ECON is among the committees having the highest number of files, a factor that allows an MEP to have

⁵⁶ “Committees – ECON - Members”, *European Parliament*, accessed 01 May 2023, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/econ/home/members>; “Committees – 8th parliamentary term – ECON - Members”, *European Parliament*, accessed 01 May 2023, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/archives/8/econ/members>; “Committees – 7th parliamentary term – ECON - Members”, *European Parliament*, accessed 01 May 2023, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/archives/7/econ/members>

⁵⁷ “Number and distribution of seats”, *CVCE*, accessed 01 May 2023, <https://www.cvce.eu/en/education/unit-content/-/unit/d5906df5-4f83-4603-85f7-0cab24b9fe1/ca7f13a3-ca17-4f05-875c-be9cfa994d6a>

a strong influence in the EP and thus determines a particular interest among MEPs, regardless of whether they were elected in euro countries or not.⁵⁸

As far as chair and vice-chair positions are concerned, the situation shown by the data seems to vary compared to the previous table. Indeed, Table 4.2 shows that in the last three parliamentary terms, non-euro area member states have always filled these roles. In fact, in every term there is at least one NE-MEP, in some cases even two or three, with the case of a chairmanship in the seventh term. Surely, however, the not-insignificant weight of the UK delegation within the EP must be considered in the seventh and eighth terms.

| Parliamentary Term | Position in ECON | MEP Nationality |
|-------------------------------|------------------|--|
| 9 th (2019 – 2024) | Chair | Italy |
| | Vice-chairs | Czechia , Spain, Netherlands, Portugal |
| 8 th (2014 – 2019) | Chair | Italy |
| | Vice-chairs | Ireland, Germany, United Kingdom , Czechia |
| 7 th (2009 – 2014) | Chair | United Kingdom |
| | Vice-chairs | Spain, United Kingdom , Romania , Malta |

Table 4.2: MEPs’ nationality holding chair and vice-chair positions in ECON in the last three parliamentary terms (situation at the end of the term). Source: own elaboration based on data available on the website of the European Parliament.⁵⁹

The minor weight that internal differentiation within the EMU seems to have according to these data was also reflected in the interviews, since all respondents denied that there might be any effect. As one former MEP pointed out, for example, in the midst of the eurozone crisis the position of chair in ECON was held by a UK MEP, which did not pose a problem.⁶⁰ Moreover, to date the position of first vice-chair is held by a Czech MEP, and as another former MEP argued, this position is more important than the other vice-chairs because it has more opportunities to chair the meetings, and it is in this respect a much more political role.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Interview with Mr Hoffmann-Axthelm, *op. cit.*

⁵⁹ “Committees – ECON - Members”, *European Parliament*, accessed 01 May 2023, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/econ/home/members>; “Committees – 8th parliamentary term – ECON - Members”, *European Parliament*, accessed 01 May 2023, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/archives/8/econ/members>; “Committees – 7th parliamentary term – ECON - Members”, *European Parliament*, accessed 01 May 2023, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/archives/7/econ/members>

⁶⁰ Interview with Ms Berès, *op. cit.*

⁶¹ Interview with Mr Ježek, *op. cit.*

Finally, there are rapporteurships. As already seen, von Ondarza finds that the EP has found an informal corrective mechanism for DI (table 4.3).⁶²

| Rapporteurs from euro area member states | Rapporteurs from non-euro area member states | Total |
|--|--|-------|
| 19 | 2 | 21 |

Table 4.3: Number of euro area and non-euro area rapporteurs on euro-related files compared (2009-2011). Source: von Ondarza, 2013.⁶³

When questioned on this issue, respondents showed more uncertain views. Several interviewees admitted the possibility that the euro/non-euro dimension may play a role in the distribution of files by the groups, but they also pointed out that the implications may mostly result from a self-restraint on the part of the MEPs themselves.⁶⁴ Interestingly, however, the former French S&D MEP stated that besides depending on the appetite of individual MEPs, the relevance of DI in this regard “will depend on who is the coordinator (...); when [she] was coordinator, there was no way that a non-euro member could have a dedicated eurozone files”. Nonetheless, she also specifies that, in general terms, “there was no basis for any kind of discrimination”.⁶⁵

To summarise, does internal differentiation in the EMU pose challenges and limitations to the work of NE-MEPs? Once again, the information gathered does not provide the elements for a yes-or-no answer. On the one hand, DI appears to have implications, but these are either not directly pertinent to the work of the MEPs interviewed, or not particularly relevant. The most significant challenge appears to be the attitude of some MEPs elected in eurozone countries questioning the legitimacy of NE-MEPs to participate equally on euro-related files (a sentiment that does not appear to be particularly widespread, though), and the

⁶² Von Ondarza, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32.

⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 32.

⁶⁴ Interview with Mr Hoffmann-Axthelm, *op. cit.*; Interview with Mr Basurto, *op. cit.*; Interview with policy advisor (S&D), Google Meet, March 30, 2023; Interview with Ms Cristina Sofia Dias, EU official, Google Meet, March 30, 2023; Interview with ECR ECON policy advisor, *op. cit.*; Interview with Ms Berès, *op. cit.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid*.

potential exclusion of NE-MEPs from salient euro-related files (which, however, emerges only from a single interview, in which the systemic nature of this dynamic is denied). Instead, both dimensions analysed, namely the behavioural one and that related to leadership positions in the EP, appear to be generally unaffected by DI. For these reasons, hypothesis H1.2, expecting differentiation to produce challenges or limitations for NE-MEPs in the execution of their functions, seems not to be corroborated. As suggested by one of the interviewees, this could largely be explained by the fact that in ECON, as in other Committees, “the remit of a given Committee does not overlap entirely with those policy areas where there is DI”.⁶⁶

Hypothesis H1 assumes that internal differentiation in the EMU de facto affects the internal functioning of the EP. As H1.1 has been found to be only partially and minimally true, and H1.2 has been rejected, hypothesis H1 is mostly falsified: DI does produce some implications inside the Assembly, but those seem generally not relevant enough to affect MEPs’ work and the activities, and, more broadly, the functioning of the EP.

4.3. Connecting the dots: DI and the democratic representation of the European Parliament

We now look at how DI affects the democratic capacity of the EP, and, in turn, the ability of MEPs to fulfil their mandate towards European citizens according to the concepts of autonomy, accountability and political equality. The purpose is to determine whether these principles are actually and concretely challenged within the EP (not necessarily in a deliberate way).

The principle of political equality can be interpreted here as the possibility for NE-MEPs to take part in the activities of the EP like all other MEPs and to perceive themselves as being on an equal footing with them. Firstly, the interviewees were questioned on the

⁶⁶ Interview with European Parliament official, mobile phone, March 30, 2023.

legitimacy of their participation in ECON as compared to all other MEPs. When asked to NE-MEPs whether they felt legitimised to sit in the committee, to take part in discussions, or to vote in the same way as other MEPs, they all firmly answered affirmatively.⁶⁷ On the other hand, however, it is worth mentioning that according to a former MEP, while it is crucial that NE-MEPs also find adequate representation despite not participating in the monetary union, the fact that there is no reflection of differentiation represents in some respects a weakness for the EP.⁶⁸ The same respondent argued, nonetheless, that it should also be considered the strong impact that measures relating to the eurozone can also have, even indirectly, on countries outside it, because this provides a very valid reason to justify their full participation.⁶⁹ An MEP from the Czech Republic and a former MEP from Sweden, in asserting their legitimacy in participating in ECON, justified their view on the basis of the legal obligation for all states (except Denmark) to adopt the euro, and in light of their support for their respective states to adopt the euro soon, questioning why, for example, a Eurosceptic member should be more entitled than them to participate.⁷⁰ Interestingly, a former MEP linked this to the current powers of the EP on monetary matters, stating that should these be extended in the future, it would be appropriate to at least open a discussion on the subject.⁷¹

The impressions expressed by NE-MEPs indicate that from their personal perspectives, their status in the EP does not seem to be affected in any way by the non-participation of their country in the eurozone. Therefore, the principle of political equality does not seem to be negatively affected by DI. This seems reinforced by the analysis conducted in the previous sections, and in particular by the rejection of hypothesis H1.2, indicating that within the Assembly there are no instances of discrimination against NE-MEPs; the latter are fully

⁶⁷ Interview with Mr Kovařík, *op. cit.*; Interview with Mr Hökmark, *op. cit.*; Interview with Mr Ježek, *op. cit.*; Interview with Ms Peter-Hansen, *op. cit.*

⁶⁸ Interview with Ms Berès, *op. cit.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Interview with Mr Hökmark, *op. cit.*; Interview with Mr Zdechovský, *op. cit.*

⁷¹ Interview with Mr Ježek, *op. cit.*

entitled to participate in EMU-related activities in the same way as their colleagues, they do not appear to be restricted from outside in the exercise of their functions, and they respond to the same internal political dynamics. This also seems consistent with what Heermann and Leuffen suggest, namely that from a legal and theoretical standpoint, the current institutional architecture of the EP is founded precisely on the preservation of this principle.⁷²

On the contrary, however, the same authors argue that keeping the EP “*une et indivisible*” violates the principles of accountability and autonomy.⁷³ With regard to the former, in the interviews conducted with NE-MEPs, it was firstly sought to test how responsible and accountable they felt to European citizens when the EP debates issues that apply distinctively to eurozone countries. This question stems from the conclusions reported in Heermann and Leuffen's work, that these MEPs during the euro crisis period would have been more likely to vote in favour of fiscal discipline measures.⁷⁴ When confronted with the question, NE-MEPs or former MEPs stated that they do feel equally responsible and accountable:⁷⁵

We are European legislators, so I am not only voting on behalf of my member state, but I am voting on behalf of European voters. That is how we are composed in the European Parliament. If an Italian citizen asks me how I voted on a specific issue (...) I should be able to explain.⁷⁶

In addition, most of them stated how the fact that their country is not part of the monetary union does not weaken their feeling of representing European citizens as a whole.⁷⁷ Only one respondent stated the opposite, but suggesting that this was due to his desire for his

⁷² Heermann and Leuffen, *op. cit.*, p. 1022.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Léa Roger, Simon Otjes and Harmen van der Veer, “The Financial Crisis and the European Parliament: An Analysis of the Two-pack Legislation”, *European Union Politics* 18, no. 4 (2017), pp. 560-580 quoted in Heermann and Leuffen, *op. cit.*, p. 1024.

⁷⁵ Interview with Ms Peter-Hansen, *op. cit.*; Interview with Mr Zdechovský, *op. cit.*; Interview with Mr Hökmark, *op. cit.*; Interview with Mr Kovařík, *op. cit.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Interview with Ms Peter-Hansen, *op. cit.*; Interview with Mr Hökmark, *op. cit.*; Interview with Mr Kovařík, *op. cit.*

country to adopt the euro, and not for not considering himself a full European representative because of the non-participation in the euro.⁷⁸ Many interviewees also referred to the importance of taking into account the distinction between countries with a formal exemption, such as Denmark, and all other countries outside the eurozone that are legally obliged to adopt the euro. In this regard, it is interesting to mention the statement of one MEP who used the example of Croatia to explain how the general mandate of NE-MEPs towards European citizens cannot be perceived as less valid:

If you look at the European Union at a particular moment in time you see a [static] situation, where you have eurozone countries and non-eurozone countries. [But] if you look at them over time, you may also see dynamics between these two groups. If the particular moment in time is 2014, you would see Croatia out of the eurozone, (...) which has just entered, [while it] was a full member of the EU (...). I think it would not be fair to consider Croatians for 10 years having a less valid mandate, because they were not able to join (...).⁷⁹

Looking at the views expressed, therefore, NE-MEPs' feeling of accountability and responsibility towards European citizens, and thereby the perception of their general mandate towards the EU, does not seem to be affected in any way by their non-participation in the monetary union. While from a theoretical and legal point of view there is no doubt that DI poses at least some challenges to the principle of accountability, if only because to date there is no possibility for citizens of euro area states to hold accountable NE-MEPs,⁸⁰ a further dimension of this principle should not be overlooked: the perception of the representatives themselves of feeling accountable. The fact that this is the case is not only evident from the answers reported in this section, but also with respect to what has been discussed in connection with hypothesis H1.1, namely the fact that the behaviour of MEPs is not substantially modified by the effects of DI. Rather, it should be noted that one of the most visible effects, i.e., the observation that NE-MEPs would tend to be less keen on taking on the role of rapporteur for

⁷⁸ Interview with Mr Zdechovský, *op. cit.*

⁷⁹ Interview with Mr Kovařík, *op. cit.*

⁸⁰ Heermann and Leuffen, *op. cit.*, p. 1023.

files of particular importance for the eurozone, be it merely because of a reduced interest or because of “unwritten laws that everybody abides by without them having to be made explicit”,⁸¹ further limits the actual effects that those MEPs could have on eurozone citizens, thus mitigating accountability issues.

Finally, we consider the principle of autonomy, which has been associated here with the risk of DI “inserting domination into the system”.⁸² Admittedly, the large number of NE-MEPs can create a situation where their impact on distinctively euro-related measures proves decisive on the final outcome of a vote, insofar as their absence would have led to a different result. Indeed, a former French MEP stated that the problem was not new and that she had looked closely at this phenomenon during her experience in the EP, “especially on reports where [she] had a tight majority, [to try] to find out whether they made the balance or not”.⁸³ And, she continued, “it does happen. (...) But this is the game”.⁸⁴ It is precisely this last remark that makes all the difference, because while it is indeed true that the NE-MEPs may well have an impact, one must also consider how the political dynamics within the EP work. The EP is generally characterised by very high levels of cohesion, which means that most of the time MEPs follow the party line; this is even more so with monetary issues, which often require considerable technical knowledge. Consequently, while it is true that this 25 per cent of MEPs can make a difference, it is also true that their vote is consistent with that of all other MEPs in their group. Moreover, as shown, NE-MEPs generally do not tend to coordinate with each other, because the national interests of these MEPs, even if linked by their being outside the eurozone, can vary widely, as can the personal political views of each MEP.⁸⁵ Consequently, the assumption that NE-MEPs and the citizens they represent may result in a situation of domination over the rest of the EU seems largely unfounded. Lastly, in terms of autonomy and

⁸¹ Interview with policy advisor (S&D), *op. cit.*

⁸² Heermann and Leuffen, *op. cit.*, p. 1023.

⁸³ Interview with Ms Berès, *op. cit.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Interview with Mr Kovařík, *op. cit.*

non-dominance, the possibility of parliamentarians from non-participating countries being somewhat restricted in the exercise of their functions as an effect of internal differentiation within the EMU should also be taken into consideration. As already mentioned, however, this also seems to be groundless.

To conclude, the investigation carried out in this section reveals the absence of concrete and negative implications on the principles of autonomy, accountability and political equality from the point of view of the analysed effects of DI within the EP. Consequently, it can be said with a certain degree of certainty that the hypothesis H2 is rejected.

5. DOES THE EU NEED A DIFFERENTIATED PARLIAMENT? AND ANSWER FROM MEPs

The key objective of this study was to analyse how the EP is affected by DI. Having brought to a close the discussion of the hypotheses, it appears interesting to provide here a viewpoint of the interviewees' perspective on the academic debate previously illustrated. For this purpose, at the end of the interviews with MEPs or former MEPs, they were asked for their opinion on the institutional architecture of the European Parliament. In particular, MEPs were asked about the four scenarios described by the two authors: (1) “complete representation of all members of the European Parliament”;⁸⁶ (2) “insider representation through the creation of new, regime-specific assemblies”, e.g., “the creation of a new eurozone Parliament”;⁸⁷ (3) “partial representation without inclusive deliberative stages”;⁸⁸ (4) “partial representation with inclusive deliberative stages”, the option that appears to affect the least in a pareto-efficient manner the principles of autonomy, accountability and political equality.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Heermann and Leuffen, *op. cit.*, p. 1016.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1016, p. 1025.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1016.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1016, pp. 1026-1027.

All interviewees, including the former MEPs who had expressed some reservations with respect to the equal participation of NE-MEPs, indicated the first scenario as being by far their preferred one.⁹⁰ One of the parliamentarians commented as follows:

The first one, by far. The new eurozone parliament, to be honest, I do not know what these people would do. If you look at the legislation, the majority of it would cover the entire EU. (...) Restricting deliberations and voting rights of every MEPs, I think, this is not definitely the way to follow, [because] this would have something with the democratic representation of citizens, and I am pretty sure that if you ask most of the MEPs to restrict deliberation of voting rights they will say no; it is just against the idea of the mandate which is given by the European citizens.⁹¹

The same view was also echoed by the Danish MEP: “apart from the first [scenario], the rest are undemocratic. (...) All legislation (...) affects member states in different ways”. Furthermore, she added how the importance of being included matters especially for those countries that are actually supposed to join and which do not have a formal opt-out as Denmark.⁹² Not surprisingly, the second and third scenarios were widely rejected and branded as violating democratic principles. The fourth scenario was often referred to as second choice,⁹³ but still not as desirable, because, like the others, it was perceived as contributing to a “differentiation of democracy”.⁹⁴

On a final note, if the West Lothian question referred to in the introduction has some similarities with the situation within the EP, there is one big difference standing out: in the European Parliament, this is simply not an issue. It is not surprising, therefore, that many

⁹⁰ Interview with Ms Berès, *op. cit.*; Interview with Mr Hökmark, *op. cit.*; Interview with Mr Ježek, *op. cit.*; Interview with Mr Kovařík, *op. cit.*; Interview with Ms Peter-Hansen, *op. cit.*; Interview with Mr Zdechovský, *op. cit.*

⁹¹ Interview with Mr Kovařík, *op. cit.*

⁹² Interview with Ms Peter-Hansen, *op. cit.*

⁹³ Interview with Mr Kovařík, *op. cit.*; Interview with Ms Berès, *op. cit.*; Interview with Mr Zdechovský, *op. cit.*; Interview with Mr Ježek, *op. cit.*

⁹⁴ Interview with Mr Hökmark, *op. cit.*

respondents were not even conscious that such a high percentage of parliamentarians were actually elected outside the eurozone.⁹⁵

CONCLUSION

Against the background of a European Union increasingly linked and intertwined with the concept of DI, this work aimed to investigate the possible institutional consequences this has on the EP. Using the case of internal differentiation in the field of the EMU and the euro, and building on the premise of a Parliament that does not reflect DI in any way in its formal organisation, and that has repeatedly reiterated its determination to safeguard the principles of institutional unity and of the generality of its mandate, the study aimed more precisely at investigating the extent to which internal differentiation in the EMU affects the work of the EP and its members, and challenge its democratic representation capacity.

The initial assumption underlying the analysis was that the EP might nevertheless be subject to what have been identified as *de facto* effects, i.e., implications that, although not formally recognised, impact the internal dynamics of the EP, on the actions of its members, and the ability of the Parliament to exercise its democratic representation function towards European citizens. However, the analysis did not confirm these hypotheses. Firstly, DI in the monetary union does not seem to produce systemic effects on MEPs' behaviour, and in any case not in a way that can be compared with the other political dynamics that guide their action inside the Assembly. Secondly, apart from limited exceptions, NE-MEPs do not seem to face any concrete limitations in the exercise of their mandate on an equal footing with their colleagues. Thirdly and lastly, the principles of autonomy, accountability and political equality used to define the democratic representation capacity of the EP in relation to the possible

⁹⁵ Interview with Mr Kovařík, *op. cit.*; Interview with Ms Peter-Hansen, *op. cit.*; Interview with Ms Bettina De Souza Guilherme, EP official, ECON Secretariat, Brussels, March 29, 2023.

effects of DI, although exposed to criticalities from a theoretical point of view, inside the EP do not seem to be substantially and concretely challenged by the effects of internal differentiation within the EMU.

The analysis provides significant results on what the possible implications of DI in the case of the EMU are, possibly going even beyond this specific case, on an institution like the EP. Indeed, the study succeeds in providing a fairly consistent picture of how the EP remains largely unaffected by the political dynamics resulting from DI. Drawing its conclusions on the basis of the perspectives expressed by the various figures who actually work or have worked in the Assembly (covering quite an extended time span, which also includes an extremely complicated and controversial period such as the eurozone crisis), and making sure to rely on the views of a variety of actors, both in terms of positions held and political views represented in the EP, the results seem to be grounded on solid foundations. This is also signalled by a certain consistency across interviews in denying the very existence within the Assembly of any distinction according to the euro/non-euro dimension. Furthermore, the EMU case, which concerns such an important element as currency, where the differentiation is well-established and also very extensive in terms of MEPs potentially affected, seems to render a rather generalisable picture.

The findings fall within the broader literature on DI. More specifically, however, they contribute to two specific streams of these studies, namely that on the democratic implications of DI and that focusing on the implications that it might have on European institutions. Lastly, the study also indirectly contributes to the political and academic debate on the need for the EP to reflect DI in its set-up: this necessity appears to be uncorroborated by the limited effects that have been evidenced in the EMU field and by the broad preference expressed by MEPs towards preserving the unitary nature of the EP.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the results, although valid, should probably be interpreted as preliminary and need to be confirmed by further studies. Firstly, despite a fairly consistent line of thought among the various respondents, the number of interviews among MEPs or former MEPs is not as extensive as it might seem necessary to establish with absolute certainty the general validity of the findings. In this regard, it should also be mentioned that it was not possible to reach all non-euro area member states and all political parties within the EP. Similarly, regarding the perspective of elected MEPs in the euro area, only one MEP made herself available for an interview. Secondly, the case of internal differentiation within the EMU has specific features, notably that of being in general a formally temporary and non-voluntary case of differentiation. The importance of this aspect emerged repeatedly during the interviews; this may challenge the replicability of these findings in other instances of differentiation. Third, differentiation within the EMU is not so clear-cut in the activities of parliamentarians. Fourth, the research relies extensively on qualitative analysis techniques, and due to lack of resources and time it was not possible to combine the resulting evidence with more systemic analyses of quantitative data.

Consequently, there is ample room for the development of future research. These could first of all try to build on this study to analyse in a more systemic way and with more data the impact of DI on MEPs in the EMU. In this regard, the inclusion of a larger sample of MEPs from the eurozone seems particularly interesting. Moreover, the case of enhanced cooperation offers intriguing perspectives: in contrast to the case of the euro, it is linked to a voluntary dimension of DI. Moreover, within the EP it creates a reverse dynamic from the one discussed in this work, since the member states involved in differentiation are those who are also subject to the will of the rest of the MEPs. Finally, to explore the democratic implications for the EP, the differences created by the instances of voluntary and involuntary DI could be addressed with greater focus, perhaps focusing on Danish and Swedish MEPs.

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