

ASSESSING THE CYPRIOT MEP's PERFORMANCE: 2009-2011

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ABSTRACT

The visibility of what the Members of the Parliaments do has serious consequences for accountability and democratic legitimacy. The Members of the European Parliament from various countries conduct their affairs without much visibility as a consequence of limited media focus on the European Parliament. Among these countries one can name the Republic of Cyprus. By relying on the number of reports, opinions, speeches, amendments, questions, motions for resolutions, written declarations, and attendance, this study aims to provide an assessment of Cypriot MEPs' performance so far. It also reports on the rate of activities motivated by national interest and looks at the voting behaviour to analyze loyalties. The paper includes a comparison between the Cypriot MEPs as well as a comparison of performance between the Cypriot MEPs and other MEPs.

Keywords: Accountability, Cypriot MEPs, Democratic Deficit, MEP Performance, National Interest, MEP Loyalties.

ÖZET

Milletvekillerinin ne yaptıkları izlenebilirlik ve demokratik meşruluk gibi kavramlarla doğrudan ilgilidir. Sınırlı medya odağı olmasından dolayı çeşitli ülkelerdeki Avrupa Parlamentosu milletvekili üyeleri görevlerini yeterli görünürlük olmadan yürütmektedirler. Bu durum Kıbrıs Cumhuriyeti milletvekilleri içinde geçerlidir. Raporlar, görüşler, konuşmalar, düzeltmeler, sorular, değişiklik teklifleri, yazılı beyanlar ve katılım oranlarını hesaplayan bu çalışma, Kıbrıslı Avrupa Birliği milletvekillerinin performansını ölçmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bunun yanında bu çalışmada milli çıkar odaklı aktivitelerin oranı ve milletvekillerinin bağlılıkları oy pusulasına bakarak değerlendirilmiştir. Bu makale Kıbrıslı milletvekillerinin performansını kendi aralarında karşılaştırmanın yanında diğer Avrupa ülkelerinden gelen milletvekilleri ile de karşılaştırmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İzlenebilirlik, Kıbrıslı Avrupa Parlamentosu Milletvekili Üyeleri, Demokrasi Eksikliği, Avrupa Parlamentosu Milletvekillerinin Performansları, Milli Çıkar, Avrupa Parlamentosu Milletvekillerinin Bağlılıkları.

1) Introduction

Accountability is a keyword for democracy. In representative democracies, we try to follow what the elected Members of the Parliament do mainly through the media and 'throw the rascals out' in the next elections. It is needless to say

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that accountability mechanisms do not always work perfectly. In the European Parliament, the visibility of what the representatives do is more limited due to the second order nature of the European elections (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). There is restricted media attention on European elections and the European Parliament (Maier and Tenschler, 2006) especially in the new member states (de Vreese et al., 2006). This contributes to the European Union's head aching legitimacy deficit, and obliges us to concentrate our attention on the communication deficit of the EU (de Vreese et al., 2006) and (Meyer, 1999).

This study tries to give an assessment of what the current Cypriot Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) have been up to so far. The first part of the paper presents the current state of the democratic deficit of the EU and argues that having more information about the MEPs' performance can to an extent help the EU to overcome this deficit. The second part gives a short description of how the European Parliament works and what the MEPs' chances are to have an impact on European policies. The third part of this study presents the data collected from the European Parliament's website and Vote Watch. Cypriot MEPs' performance, voting behavior, and motivation for action are compared to each other and their performance is compared collectively to that of the MEPs' from other European countries.

2) Democratic Deficit of the EU

The democratic deficit of the EU has been studied for a long time by scholars but there is not yet any consensus on how to overcome the democratic problem of the EU. Apart from a few authors such as Majone (1998) and Moravcsik (2002) and (2004) who argue that we should not be concerned with the democratic quality of the EU, most of the researchers working on democracy in the EU points to an important problem.

Democracy is about popular control and political equality (Beetham, 1994: 4-5). Accountability is a necessity for both of these concepts. It is the central element in modern democracy: *"Modern political democracy is a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives"* (Schmitter and Karl, 1991: 76). Gustavsson et al. defines accountability in the following way: *"By accountability, we have in mind a relationship between two actors (X and Y) wherein X has the right to: 1) monitor the actions of Y 2) evaluate the actions of Y, and 3) impose sanctions on*

Y” (Gustavsson et al., 2009: 4). This definition implies that the existence of accountability first and foremost presupposes the existence of transparency (Persson, 2009: 144). Transparency allows the citizens to have the required information and understanding of the political issues and process (enlightened understanding) so that they can make an informed decision when they have the chance to hold the MEPs accountable to their actions (Dahl, 1991). A democratic audit of the EU points to limited accountability in the EU (Lord 2004). Mény states that the accountability deficit applies to the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the Council of Ministers (Mény, 2002: 11).

Due to limited media coverage, the citizens of the EU are less likely to be fully informed about their Parliamentary representatives’ actions in Brussels than in nation-states. This prevents the voters to assess what the MEPs accomplish and judge their performance both in terms of ideological compatibility with their own views and their ability to make sound judgments on valence issues. Hence, one can argue that the democratic deficit of the EU can up to some extent be cured by having a more informative and transparent insight of their performance.

3) Working Structure of the European Parliament

Once created as a consultative assembly, the European Parliament has over the years acquired considerable powers and become a crucial institution in the decision-making structure of the EU. Its powers are now comparable to that of the Council of Ministers. It has power to influence decision-making in nearly all policy sectors of the European Union under the codecision procedure. Direct elections to the European Parliament have been taking place since as early as 1979. Elections take place every 5 years but the election campaign takes place not as competition at the EU level but at the national level where political parties fight to get their representatives to the European Parliament by campaigning mainly on national issues. This is because there are not yet European parties but only political groups and MEPs elected from certain national political parties become part of these political groups. After the entry of Romania and Bulgaria into the EU in 2007, the number of parliamentary seats has been raised to 736.

MEPs’ duties mainly comprise of committee and plenary related work. Committees are responsible for giving Parliament’s opinion to the European Commission and also helping the latter to initiate legislation. They do this by producing reports, amendments, and opinions. In the committees, MEPs prepare reports to be presented at the plenary. Drafting reports means writing up of the

view of the committee as a consequence of the discussions held on a legislative or a non-legislative issue. The person who is responsible for drafting the report is the rapporteur. The report is considered as a draft report until the final vote is taken upon it in the committee. This report is then presented in the plenary. Drafting opinions entails preparing amendments to reports written by a committee or suggestions for amendments to parts of a non-legislative text. Draft opinions are voted upon by the committee and if the vote is successful, it then becomes an opinion which goes to the committee responsible for drafting the report. Amendments are submitted by the MEPs after a draft report or a draft opinion is submitted to the committee. Amendments proposed by the MEPs are voted upon in the committee meetings. If successful, changes are made to the document.

After all the work is done in the committees and among the political groups, plenary sittings take place where MEPs are able to give opinions, ask questions, debate, adopt amendments and of course make legislation by voting. Plenary sittings take place every month in Strasbourg except August with complementary six mini-plenaries in Brussels per year. Plenary questions are asked towards the European Commission or the Council of the European Union in order to enquire or criticize about an issue. Motions for resolutions are aimed towards influencing the Parliament to take a stance on an issue. Speeches in the plenary sessions offers a way to debate in the Parliament where MEPs intervene by asking questions to each other and engage in discussion. Written declarations like motions for resolutions are a way to have an impact on the Parliament's position on a matter. An opinion take form as a suggestion directed toward the rapporteur of the text in discussion. Reports amended by an MEP show the number of documents that an MEP has taken action to modify it so that his/her proposal for amendments can be voted in the European Parliament. Attendance refers to the rate of attendance of the MEPs to the plenary sessions.

Voting can take place in three forms; by raising hands, by voting electronically if the outcome of voting is not clear after raising hands, and by roll-call voting, which is calling MEPs by name and asking their opinions directly. Looking at roll-call votes, one can also give an estimation of how often an MEP votes with the majority of the MEPs from his political group, from his national party, and from his country majority. Finally, context analysis makes it possible to measure the rate of initiations that are motivated mainly by national interest in contrast to general interest of the Europeans.

4) Accountability Watch: An Assessment of the Cypriot MEPs' Record so far

Thanks to the European Parliament's website and Vote Watch that give detailed information on how the MEPs vote and what they do in the committees and plenary sessions, it is possible to assess Cypriot MEPs' performance. Firstly, the analysis will be made as a comparison between the Cypriot MEPs and then between Cypriot MEPs and all MEPs. Before starting the analysis, this study provides brief information on the background of the current Cypriot MEPs.

4a) Background of the Cypriot MEPs

Under the current rules, Cyprus has six parliamentary seats in the European Union. In the last elections, these seats were divided among four political parties; Progressive Party for the Working People (AKEL), Democratic Party (DIKO), the Democratic Rally of Cyprus (DISI) and the Movement for Social Democracy (EDEK).

Takis Hadjigeorgiou started his mandate on 14.07.2009. He was born in Paphos on 11.12.1956. He is a member of AKEL. He was a member of the House of Representatives in the Republic of Cyprus from 1996 to 2006. In the European Parliament, he sits with the Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left (GUE-NGL). He is a member of the foreign affairs committee and a substitute for industry, research and energy committee.

Kyriacos Triantaphyllides is also an AKEL member and sits with GUE-NGL in the European Parliament. He was born on 03.09.1944. Throughout his career, he took part in various administrative jobs. He worked for the ministry of interior as Director-General from 2000 to 2004. He started his mandate on 20.07.2004, becoming one of the first six MEPs from the Republic of Cyprus. He is a member of the internal market and consumer protection committee and a substitute for civil liberties, justice and home affairs committee.

Kyriakos Mavronikolas is a member of EDEK. He was born on 25.01.1955 and first became an MEP on 14.07.2009. He was the minister of defense between 2003 and 2006. In the European Parliament, he sits with the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D). He holds the vice chairmanship for the security and defense committee. He is also a member of the foreign affairs committee and a substitute for environment, public health and food safety committee.

Antigoni Papadopoulou started her term in the European Parliament on 14.07.2009. She is a member of DIKO. Born on 08.07.1954, she has worked both in private and public sector. She was the vice chair of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on Economic Affairs. In the European Parliament, she sits with S&D. She is a member of civil liberties, justice and home affairs committee and substitutes both for employment and social affairs, and women's rights and gender equality committees.

Eleni Theocharous has been an MEP since 14.07.2009. She is a member of DISI. She was born on 24.06.1953 and she had parliamentary experience in the Republic of Cyprus from 2001 to 2009. She is a part of the European People's Party (EPP) group in the European Parliament. She is a member of committee responsible for development issues. She is a substitute for environment, public health and food safety, and women's rights and gender equality committees.

Ioannis Kasoulides is elected for the European Parliament for the second time as an MEP. He was born on 10.08.1948. He is a member of DISI and sits with the EPP in the European Parliament. He was the minister of foreign affairs from 1997 to 2003. He is a member of foreign affairs committee. He is a substitute both for employment and social affairs committee, and for policy challenges committee.

4b) Parliamentary Activities of the Cypriot MEPs

Most time and effort taking job an MEP can take on his/her shoulders is without a doubt being a rapporteur. Among the Cypriot MEPs only Eleni Theocharous drafted a report. This report was on poverty reduction and job creation in developing countries.

Apart from Kyriacos Triantaphyllides (3 written declarations), the Cypriot MEPs have not yet engaged in writing declarations to influence the position of the European Parliament on certain issues. This is not surprising as this form of initiation is not very common in the European Parliament. The average written declaration for all MEPs from 14.07.2009 to 02.06.2011 was only 0.66 %.

Speeches made in the plenary sessions take form as 'one-minute' speeches or interventions. It is one of the least time consuming ways of communicating messages across in the plenary sessions but at certain times, it can be a very effective way of doing so. Table 1 shows that Kyriacos Triantaphyllides is the

most active Cypriot MEP in this field by 35 speeches made in the Parliament. He is followed by Ioannis Kasoulides with 30 parliamentary speeches. With 11 speeches, Eleni Theocharous has the lowest number of speeches among the Cypriot MEPs.

Unlike written declarations, motions for resolutions are a more common way of trying to influence the European Parliament's opinion. We can say that Ioannis Kasoulides has clearly done much more in this field compared to his Cypriot colleagues even if we take into account the fact that 20 of these motions were created as a consequence of joint action with other MEPs. Compared with 45 motions for resolutions by Ioannis Kasoulides and 26 motions for resolutions by Kyriacos Triantaphyllides, one initiation by Kyriakos Mavronikolas and no initiation by Antigoni Papadopolou clearly show that they are lagging behind in this field.

Opinions are not a very common type of activity to have an effect on the European Parliament. This is reflected in table 1. Antigoni Papadopolou has become the most diligent Cypriot MEP in this field by creating five opinions.

Like the speeches held in the European Parliament, parliamentary questions are also an undemanding, and if done right, an effective tool for having an impact on European policies. Kyriacos Triantaphyllides is the most active Cypriot MEP in this field since he posed 43 questions to the European Parliament.

Amendments enable the MEPs to improve policy devised by others. In this field, Kyriacos Triantaphyllides is again leading with amendments to 36 different texts, followed by 32 amendments by Antigoni Papadopolou. Eleni Theocharous proposed amendments to only nine different documents.

An important indicator for judging an MEPs' performance is without a doubt looking at his/her attendance rate at the plenary sessions. Showing a high correlation with what he has produced so far, Kyriacos Triantaphyllides is the Cypriot MEP who attended the plenary sessions the most. He was present in 92.72 percent of the plenary sessions. Kyriakos Mavronikolas was the least present Cypriot MEP. He attended 82.73 percent of the plenary meetings.

Table 1 – Parliamentary activity in the committees and plenary sessions in numbers (14.07.2009- 02.06.2011)

MEPs	Reports	Written Declarations	Speeches in the Plenary	Motions for Resolutions	Opinions	Parliamentar y Questions	Reports Amended	Attendance
Takis Hadjigeorgiou	0	0	22	12	0	33	19	90 %
Kyriacos Triantaphyllides	0	3	35	26	1	43	36	97.2 %
Kyriakos Mavronikolas	0	0	20	1	0	21	9	82.73 %
Antigoni Papadopoulou	0	0	20	0	5	33	32	85.05 %
Eleni Theocharous	1	0	11	5	0	14	9	84.55 %
Ioannis Kasoulides	0	0	30	42	0	32	18	91.82 %

Sources: European Parliament and Vote Watch

4c) Loyalties of the Cypriot MEPs

Vote Watch also gives us the opportunity to measure the loyalties (how often they vote with) of the MEPs by looking at their voting behavior. Table 2 shows that the GUE-NGL members were the most deviant MEPs with regards to loyalty to their political group in the European Parliament. Loyalty to national party numbers shows that there was perfect coordination between the MEPs coming from AKEL. The situation is the same for the MEPs coming from DISI background. It is open to interpretation if the votes are cast just as a consequence of a compromise between the MEPs belonging to same national parties, or if the national parties are directly involved in determining the positions of the MEPs. Votes showing loyalty to country majority hints us that the greatest political division is between the MEPs belonging to the GUE-NGL group and other MEPs.

Table 2 –Loyalties of the Cypriot MEPs (14.07.2009- 02.06.2011)

MEPs	Loyalty to Political Group	Loyalty to National Party	Loyalty to Country Majority
Takis Hadjigeorgiou	89.46 %	100 %	66.93 %
Kyriacos Triantaphyllides	88.92 %	100 %	66.81 %
Kyriakos Mavronikolas	95.4 %	-	95.36 %
Antigoni Papadopoulou	96.57 %	-	91.3 %
Eleni Theocharous	92.24 %	100 %	77.29 %
Ioannis Kasoulides	96.43 %	100 %	78.23 %

Source: Vote Watch

4d) National Issue Representation among the Cypriot MEPs

In theory, an MEPs' duty is to represent the European people rather than pursue his/her own national interest. Table 3 shows the percentage of actions taken by MEPs that were mainly motivated by national issues. Data was analyzed manually by the author. An initiative is accepted to be motivated by national interest if the main aim of an action was directly related with an issue concerning the Republic of Cyprus. Hence, activities related to issues such as Turkish occupation, economic situation in the Republic of Cyprus, and more equivocally, problems of small member-states etc. were all coded as issues of national interest. Of course this method can be biased depending on the committee an MEP participates. For instance, there are many matters related to Turkey in the foreign affairs committee and the Cypriot MEPs' deeds in these types of groups can always be interpreted as national interest. In order to control for this, this study only looked at parliamentary questions, motions for resolutions, speeches in the

plenary, and written declarations that are directed towards the whole Parliament rather than involving the specialized work done in the committees.

By looking at the roll-call votes, Hix, Noury and Roland (2007) asserted that one can see that the European Parliament is dominated by ideology and party politics. Looking at the MEPs' questions, speeches, motions, and written declarations in the plenary sessions may pose some serious challenge to this argument. This is the case, at least, when we only consider the Cypriot MEPs as table 3 shows. Majority of the actions taken by half of the Cypriot MEPs were motivated by national issues. This figure was as high as 70.4 % for Antigoni Papadopoulou and 59.5 % for Kyriakos Mavronikolas. On the other hand, Kyriacos Triantaphyllides and Ioannis Kasoulides' nationally motivated initiations were only 20.6 % and 22 % respectively. It is interesting to remind the reader that these two MEPs are the only ones serving their second terms in the European Parliament. Therefore, one should not rule out the possible effect of the socialization process as an important independent variable for explaining why some MEPs are more 'European' than the others.

Table 3 – National issue representation among the Cypriot MEPs (14.07.2009 - 02.06.2011)

MEPs	National Issue Representation
Takis Hadjigeorgiou	44.8 %
Kyriacos Triantaphyllides	20.6 %
Kyriakos Mavronikolas	59.5 %
Antigoni Papadopoulou	70.4 %
Eleni Theocharous	55.2 %
Ioannis Kasoulides	22 %

Source: Vote Watch

4e) Performance of the Cypriot MEPs compared to the Performance of the other European MEPs

Finally, we can also look at the performance of the Cypriot MEPs in relation to other MEPs. Table 4 shows that Cypriot MEPs are slightly lagging behind. The fields that the Cypriot MEPs did better than the rest of the MEPs were giving opinions to the Parliament, motions for resolutions and attendance rate.

Table 4 – Performance of the Cypriot MEPs in comparison to MEPs’ average (14.07.2009- 02.06.2011 for plenary related work and 14.07.2009-10.06.2011 for committee related work)

Cyprus/EP	Reports	Written Declarations	Speeches in the Plenary	Motions for Resolutions	Opinions	Parliamentary Questions	Reports Amended	Attendance
Cypriot Average	0.17	0.5	23	14.3	1	29.3	20.5	88.6 %
European Average	0.93	0.66	55.37	12.79	0.85	34.57	22.8	88.8 %

Sources: European Parliament and Vote Watch

5) Conclusion

Even if creating a completely reliable quantitative index for assessing the performance of the Cypriot MEPs is not likely, this paper presented what the MEPs have been up to so far and tried to show who is leading in certain types of initiations and who is lagging behind by making a quantitative assessment. In overall, one can argue that Kyriacos Triantaphyllides has been the hardest working Cypriot MEP followed by Ioannis Kasoulides. Takis Hadjigeorgiou’s and Antigoni Papadopoulou’s level of activity have been similar but their efforts have been concentrated in different forms of actions aimed to influence policy. Even though Eleni Theocharous was the only Cypriot MEP who drafted a report, she scores low in other fields of action. Thus, she registers her name at the bottom of the list together with Kyriakos Mavronikolas.

Roll-call votes show that MEPs that are part of the GUE-NGL group have been the most deviant both to their group and to the majority of the Cypriot MEPs. Coordination between the two MEPs coming from AKEL background was perfect. So was this the case for the MEPs coming from DISI background. When it comes to focusing activities on national issues, Antigoni Papadopulu was on the top of the list, followed by Kyriakos Mavronikolas, Eleni Theocharous, Takis Hadjigeorgiou, Ioannis Kasoulides and Kyriacos Triantaphyllides in order. Compared with other MEPs, Cypriot MEPs seem to be coming from behind although the difference of activities between the Cypriot MEPs' average and the EP average is not notable.

This study tried to give visibility to Cypriot MEPs' actions. It is plausible to argue that empirical assessments of this sort should be available in order to increase transparency and accountability in the EU, this can allow the European voters to have clear and reliable information of their representatives' performance and 'throw the rascals out' with an enlightened understanding. Such a study can be replicated for the MEPs of the other member-states creating a wider accountability project.

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