

TRIBUNES VERSUS EXPERTS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE ROMANIAN MEPs' QUESTIONS

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Abstract

The article proposes an original framework for analyzing all the questions addressed to the European Council and Commission by the thirty-three Romanian Members of the European Parliament (EP) in the first year of their European mandate. We rely on a complex dataset that includes the parliamentarians' age, gender, previous experience in the European legislature, position on the party list, when elected and the party national status (in opposition or government). The nearly 400 interpellations are content-analyzed and then multivariate statistical techniques are applied in order to explain first, the questions' frequency and second, their connections to topics related either to Romania or to the MEPs' committee work. Our results reflect the Romanian MEPs' adaptation to the major patterns of interpellation in the EP, while at the same time emphasizing the importance of re-election seeking motivations, as well as a rather novel gender-related difference in parliamentary behaviour.

Keywords: parliamentary questions; Romanian MEPs; committee work; gender.

1. Introduction

The analysis of parliamentary questions was and still is a rather understudied topic in legislative studies, be it focused on national

parliaments¹, or the European Parliament². Although the subject is not marginal in itself, considering the time and energy spent by MPs everywhere to address questions to various executive bodies, there is a major lack of both comparative studies and theorization, only poorly compensated by the few existing empirical studies.

The causes are extremely varied: from the lack of drama (except the famous "Question Time" in the UK and other Westminster systems) which explains the media and, consequently, public disinterest in parliamentary questions, to the low-level impact such questions have on public policies. However, the impressive functionality of parliamentary questions, as well as the very low costs involved made them sufficiently attractive in the eyes of national or European legislators.

The literature has identified seven different functions for parliamentary interpellations: 1) to ask for (technical) information; 2) to attack the government or a minister; 3) to ask for an explanation; 4) to pressure the government to act in a certain manner; 5) to gain popularity³; 6) to protect or promote certain special interests or those of their own constituency; 6) to pressure the government to take up a certain official position on a certain issue or 7) to inform the policy-makers of certain problems unknown to them at the time⁴. Furthermore, there are

1 Mark Franklin and Philip Norton, eds.. *Parliamentary questions*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Matti Wiberg, 'Parliamentary questioning: Control by communication?' in Herbert Doring (ed.), *Parliaments and majority rule in Western Europe*. (New York: St. Martins Press, 1995). Rob Salmond, *Parliamentary Question Times: How Legislative Accountability Mechanisms Affect Mass Political Engagement*, working paper, (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2009).

2 Shaun Bowler and David M. Farrell, 'The Organizing of the European Parliament: Committees, Specialization and Co-ordination', *British Journal of Political Science*, 25 (1995): 219 – 243; Tapio Raunio, 'Parliamentary questions in the European parliament: Representation, information and control', *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 2, 4, (1996): 356 – 382; Julien Navarro, 'Questions in the European Parliament: What for? Preliminary Findings', paper presented at The Second ECPR Conference on Parliamentary Accountability, (Paris, March 12-14 2009); Sven-Oliver Proksch and Jonathan B. Slapin, 'Parliamentary questions and oversight in the European Union', *European Journal of Political Research*, (online preview March 2010).

3 Matti Wiberg, 'Parliamentary questioning', 181.

4 Tapio Raunio, 'Parliamentary questions', 357-358.

few institutional or procedural impediments while the research effort is infinitely less compared to that necessary for legislative proposals, reports or various amendments. Consequently, the main point would be that there are extremely low costs for making use of this legislative mechanism.

The questions session in the European Parliament (EP) constitute a relatively new, but important topic not only for the politicians, but for the European citizens at large seeing that MEPs can use this mechanism to offer feedback from and about their constituencies, be they local, national or regional. Therefore, the present case study aims at improving the general understanding of the topic by providing a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the questions addressed to both the Commission and the Council by the Romanian MEPs who are in their first year of mandate in the 7th European legislature: July 2009-July 2010.

The reasons for which the Romanian MEPs were chosen as a unit of analysis for this research are twofold. Firstly, Romania is a new member of the European Union, having held its first EP elections for a full mandate in 2009⁵. Secondly, Romania uses a closed list system for the EP elections, a fact which, as we shall develop in the following sections, influences the intensity of parliamentary activity. Consequently, such an examination can only enhance the available information regarding the adaptability capacity and activity level of rookie MEPs, aspects which are significant not only for the national parties, but for the European citizens whom they represent in Strasbourg and Brussels.

The research questions we shall examine are the following: 1) what are the determining factors for the number of questions asked by the Romanian MEPs? And 2) what do the questions focus on: specialization regarding the activity conducted in the parliamentary committees or constituency service/ promoting the interests of the Romanian citizens?

5 The Romanian MEPs have a maximum of two years and 6 months experience inside the European legislative body, i.e. the ones who held a previous mandate from January 1st 2007.

This analysis has a double relevance, that is not only at a theoretical but also at an empirical level. At the theoretical level, we contribute to filling a gap in the literature by focusing on both the determining factors and the content of the questions posed by the Romanian MEPs. Up to the present moment, few studies have been made from this dual perspective and the recent analysis of the activity of MEPs coming from the new Member States did not take into consideration the questions. The theoretical importance for the legislative studies literature is enhanced by a systematic analysis of an original dataset compiled by the authors. Therefore, the present study represents an effort to decrease the scarcity of information regarding the MEPs coming from the former communist states and the data can later be used for comparative studies inspired by the convergence thesis⁶. In addition, the statistical models are easily replicable and can constitute a reference point for subsequent analyses and comparisons in the study of EP questioning.

The structure of the article is the following: the first section reviews the rules and the ways in which one can address questions in the EP system. The second section presents the working hypotheses which result from the literature about both the MEPs in general and the Romanian deputies in particular. The third section deals with the methodology, discussing the cases under analysis, the chosen variables and the methods deployed. The fourth section contains some of the general characteristics of the Romanian MEPs and of their questions both at the level of the party delegations and overall, while the last section discusses the results of the statistical models. The conclusion points out the most important results and implications of the analysis, its limitations and presents the possible future research avenues regarding this topic.

6 The convergence thesis is based on the idea that we are witnessing the creation of a new supranational elite which shares similar values and career paths and, at the same time, it assumes for itself multiple representation roles. See: Luca Verzichelli & Michael Edinger, 'A Critical Juncture? The 2004 European Elections and the Making of a Supranational Elite', *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 11, 2 (2005): 256-258.

2. Questions in the European Parliament – a taxonomy

The questions addressed by the MEPs have usually been classified according to two criteria: the addressee and the method. MEPs can question the Commission – a right established in the Treaty of Rome –, the Council and, since 2002, the European Central Bank⁷.

The taxonomy of the methods of questioning is more complex. MEPs can choose between written questions, oral questions followed by a debate or to put themselves on a questioning list during the questioning session (Question Time). The written questions are the simplest – any MEP can ask any question without any procedural constraint. This explains the popularity and the quasi-absolute dominance of written questions in contrast to the other types of questions⁸. Every MEP has the right to one priority written question once a month, to which either the Commission or the Council should answer in three weeks. The other questions should get an answer in a maximum of six weeks. The time constraints were imposed unilaterally by the EP in 1994⁹.

The oral questions followed by a debate can be initiated only by a parliamentary committee, a parliamentary group or by any group of 40 MEPs. In the past, the minimum number of MEPs necessary to initiate this mechanism was 29¹⁰. Moreover, until 1993 there was also the possibility to have oral questions without a debate. A question time after each parliamentary sitting was introduced in 1973 following the British example.¹¹ The President of the session

7 Julien Navarro, 'Questions in the European Parliament', 4.

8 Tapio Raunio, 'Parliamentary questions', 359; Julien Navarro, 'Questions in the European Parliament', 8.

9 Tapio Raunio, 'Parliamentary questions', 360; Julien Navarro, 'Questions in the European Parliament', 5.

10 Simon Hix et al, 'An Institutional Theory of Behaviour in the European Parliament', EPRG Working Paper presented at the ECPR Joint Sessions, (Mannheim: March 31st, 1999): 23. Tapio Raunio, 'Parliamentary questions', 359.

11 Richard Corbett et al, *The European Parliament*, 5th edition, (London: John Harper 2003): 244.

is the one who decides if a question will or will not be asked (all questions must be sent to him/her in advance) as well as the order in which they are posed. Statistically and unsurprisingly, most questions being asked in such sessions are posed by MEPs coming from Member States with such a parliamentary tradition such as the UK, Ireland and Greece¹².

3. Literature and hypotheses

Up to the present, there have been published two reports on the activity of Romanian MEPs done by the Qvorum Institute¹³ and one academic analysis¹⁴. The latter tested the ability of variables, such as previous political experience, the length and type of mandate (elected/ appointed), but also a number of socio-demographics, to account for four indicators of activity in the EP. These were the following: the participation intensity, the number of oral interventions, the reports and the amendments made by the Romanian MEPs from January 2007 to March 2009. Since this first and sole exploratory study did not deal with parliamentary questions, the present article will fill this gap by also retesting some of the explanatory factors proposed by the two authors.

In the abovementioned article, Gherghina and Frăntescu showed that a longer mandate in the supranational legislative is correlated with a more intense activity for all the four legislative indicators outlined earlier¹⁵. The same relationship, but applied to questions (more days spent as an MEP – more questions asked), resulted from one of the statistical models used by Sven Proksh and Jonathan Slapin.¹⁶ The main assumption – inspired by

12 Sven-Oliver Proksch and Jonathan B. Slapin, 'Parliamentary questions and oversight', 18

13 Doru Frăntescu and Ruxandra Filoreanu, eds., Euro-parlamentarii la raport. Evaluarea activității euro-parlamentarilor români 2008-2009, (Bucharest: Institutul European pentru Democrație Participativă – Qvorum, 2009); Doru Frăntescu et al (eds.), Europarlamentarii la raport. Legislatura 2009-2014, Vol. 1, (Bucharest, Bruxelles: Institutul European pentru Democrație Participativă – Qvorum, 2010).

14 Sergiu Gherghina and Doru Frăntescu, 'Improving Rookies' Performance: An Assessment of the Romanian MEPs' Activity', *European Review*, 18, 2 (2010): 155-176.

15 Sergiu Gherghina and Doru Frăntescu, 'Improving Rookies', 167-172.

16 Sven-Oliver Proksch and Jonathan B. Slapin, 'Parliamentary questions and oversight', 17

socialization theories in the EP¹⁷ – behind those hypotheses was that more time spent in the EP leads to a better understanding of the procedures and adaptation to the legislative's workings¹⁸. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

Previous experience in the EP leads to more frequent questions.

There is almost universal consensus among those who study legislative behaviour concerning the most important objectives for a MP's career¹⁹ being re-election, influencing public policy and/or acquiring a top legislative position (committee chair, speaker of the Chamber, etc.). Obviously, re-election is in a position of lexicographical priority against the others.

Experts have mixed feelings about the usefulness of questions to the re-election of MEPs. On the one hand, some authors underline their lack of visibility for the electorate or the public opinion²⁰ in view of the low level of media attention for the supranational legislative²¹ and of the fact that the European elections are generally of secondary importance²². On the other hand, other

17 Mark Franklin and Susan Scarrow, 'Making Europeans? The socializing power of the European Parliament' in: R. Katz and B. Wessels, eds., *The European Parliament, the National Parliaments, and European Integration*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Amie Kreppel, *The European Parliament and Supranational Party System: a study in institutional development*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Roger Scully, *Becoming Europeans? Attitudes, Behavior and Socialization in the European Parliament*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

18 From the current Romanian MEPs, 18 had previous experience in the EP after being named by their parties at January 1st, 2007 or after the November 2007 elections or as replacements for some members who quit their mandate.

19 Wolfgang C. Muller and Kaare Strom, *Policy, Office, or Votes? How Political Parties in Western Europe Make Hard Decisions*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Simon Hix et al, 'An Institutional Theory'

20 Julien Navarro, 'Questions in the European Parliament', 2; Sven-Oliver Proksch and Jonathan B. Slapin, 'Parliamentary questions and oversight', 8

21 Jochen Peter et al, 'EU politics on television news', *European Union Politics*, 4, 3, (2003): 305–327.

22 Karlheinz Reif and Hermann Schmitt, 'Nine Second-Order National Elections: A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of European Election Results', *European Journal of Political Research*, 8 (1980): 3–44.

authors emphasize that different electoral systems offer different stimuli for the MEPs to stand out in the EP. For instance, when there is a closed list system and thus the nomination equals election, a portfolio with a rich parliamentary activity can be a significant advantage in the eyes of the selection committees.²³ Considering that the closed list system is used in Romania as well, and that many of the politicians who headed the lists in 2009 are party leaders and, therefore, confident regarding their re-nomination, we shall test the following hypothesis:

The MEPs who found themselves on a lower position on the party lists at the moment of election will address more questions so as to increase their chances to climb up the list at the next elections

In a very recent study, it was demonstrated that parliamentary questions are the most important instrument to check the Commission for the national parties who are in opposition in the Member States.²⁴ These parties cannot check the Commission through the Council since they are not represented there and have only limited access to information about European affairs through the national parliaments.²⁵ The authors' statistical analysis, done on every possible pair of MEPs questioning and Commissioners questioned from 2004 to 2009 (almost 40 000 cases), confirmed the hypothesis that those coming from opposition parties are more active in addressing questions. Because of the fact that this hypothesis was valid also for the Romanian politicians present in the sixth European legislative, we wished to retest it for this first year of the new mandate. Therefore,

The MEPs coming from governing parties in Romania will ask fewer questions than their colleagues who are in opposition.

23 Simon Hix, 'Electoral institutions and legislative behavior: Explaining voting defection in the European parliament', *World Politics*, 56 (2004): 194–223. Sergiu Gherghina and Doru Frăntescu, 'Improving Rookies' Performance', 157; Sergiu Gherghina and Mihail Chiru, 'Practice and Payment: Determinants of Candidate List Position in European Parliament Elections', *European Union Politics*, forthcoming 11, 4 (2010).

24 Sven-Oliver Proksch and Jonathan B. Slapin, 'Parliamentary questions and oversight'

25 *Idem*, 2

The small number of researchers who studied the EP question time did not stop at analyzing the factors which determine the number of questions, but were on the other hand interested in their content. A series of interpretative patterns have been confirmed by subsequent studies. The most important is the informational model, based on the specialization logic: most questions are related to issues discussed in the specialized committees or have a direct connection with the agenda of those committees.²⁶

The second pattern concerns those questions addressed by the MEPs which signal to the Commission or Council local or national problems/ events taking place in their constituencies. This behaviour is constitutive part of what in legislative studies bears the name "casework" or "constituency work". Indeed, these types of questions represent ¼ of the sample studied by Navarro.²⁷ Even more interesting is the hypothesis launched by Bowler and Farrell²⁸ according to which most questions related to national/ local issues come from MEPs from the peripheral Member States, while their colleagues from the six founding members – except Italy – have posed questions related mostly to pan-European/ common problems. This hypothesis was later confirmed, but the discrepancy was not so wide.²⁹

4. Research Design: Cases, Methods and Data

The general analysis includes all the questions posed by the 33 Romanian MEPs from the start of their mandate (July 2009) until mid July 2010. Since they represent the whole universe of cases, and thus we do not use a representative sample, the level of

26 Shaun Bowler and David M. Farrell, 'The Organizing of the European Parliament', 235-236; Julien Navarro, 'Questions in the European Parliament', 19; Sven-Oliver Proksch and Jonathan B. Slapin, 'Parliamentary questions and oversight', 16-17

27 Julien Navarro, 'Questions in the European Parliament', 12.

28 Shaun Bowler and David M. Farrell, MEPs, Voters and Interest Groups: Representation at the European Level, Final Report to the European Community Commission, the General Directorate for Information, Culture and Communication (1992).

29 Tapio Raunio, 'Parliamentary questions', 371-372.

significance displayed by the statistical tests indicates the robustness of the relationship, rather than the confidence in generalizing upon them. Consequently, we will interpret a level close to 0.01 as indicating very small chances for the revealed relationship to be accidental.

Besides the hypothesized effects we controlled additionally for the impact that age and gender have on the frequency of the interpellations. In order to observe the common (additive) explanatory potential of these variables, we used the following OLS regression model:

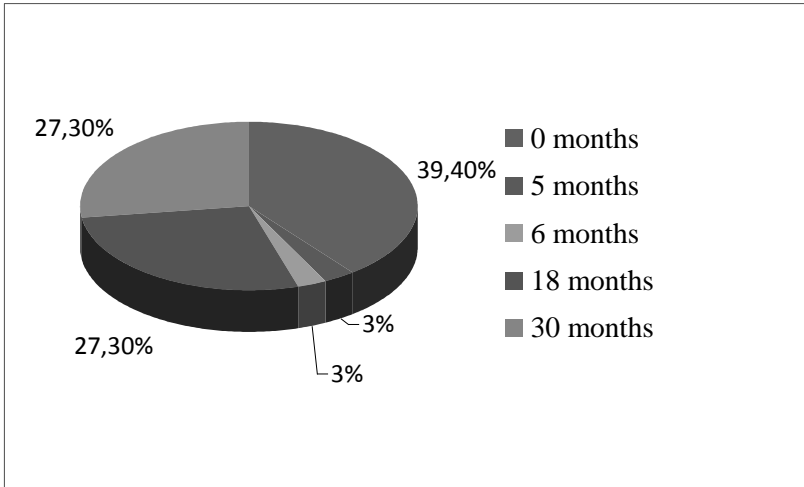
The number of questions = constant + β_1 list position + β_2 EP experience + β_3 opposition status + β_4 gender + β_5 age + μ .

Building on the abovementioned distinction of parliamentary questioning models, the next step was to analyze the content of the 373 interpellations initiated by the Romanian MEPs. This qualitative inquiry established which questions belonged to the MEP's committee agenda and which referred to Romania's or the Romanian Diaspora's interests. Moreover, we tested two parallel multivariate models, in order to see how well the same determinants emphasized earlier predict the frequency of interpellations following the specialization logic, or that of „constituency work” respectively. For the detailed operationalization of the variables see the codebook in the appendix.

5. General Characteristics

Starting with the gender distribution, we must say that out of the 33 MEPs, twelve were women and 21 were men. Furthermore, Figure 1 below illustrates the MEPs' previous experience in the supranational legislative. Nine politicians had the most activity (30 months) in the EP prior to the 2009 elections. Other nine MEPs were present in Brussels/ Strasbourg for 18 months. The list closes with two politicians having 6 and 5 months of experience respectively. Thirteen MEPs are absolute newcomers.

Figure 1. Previous EP experience



Thirty-eight out of the three hundred seventy-three questions posed by the Romanian MEPs were co-signed. They were taken into account individually for each Romanian MEP signing it: nineteen for the Democratic Liberal Party (PDL), eleven for the Social Democrats (PDL), six for the Liberals and two for the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR).

As it can be easily observed from Table 1, generally the PSD MEPs were the ones who questioned the Council and the Commission the most (183), with an average of 16.6 questions per parliamentarian. Coming in second were the PDL MEPs with an average of 13.2 interpellations.

Table 1. Question Distribution in Party Delegations

Party	Average	Std. Deviation	Min.	Max.	Total
PNL	6.8	5.0	2	14	34
PDL	13.2	16.3	0	46	147
PSD	16.6	13.8	2	45	183
UDMR	2.3	0.5	2	3	7
PRM	0.6	1.1	0	2	2

The large standard deviations indicate that actually a minority from each party delegation asked the majority of questions. Accordingly, Oana Antonescu and Rareş Niculescu are the initiators of 60% of the PDL questions, while Daciana Sârbu, Corina Creţu and Adriana Țicău have authored 57% of the Social Democrats' interpellations.

A similar uneven distribution of questions exists in the case of the PNL delegation, where Cristian Buşoi posed 40% of the questions. While the UDMR MEPs launched only seven interpellations, two out of the three deputies of the Greater Romania Party (PRM) never asked anything.³⁰

Table 2. Questions regarding Romania or Romanian citizens

Party	Average	Std. Deviation	Min.	Max.	Total
PNL	2,8	2,3	1	7	15
PDL	2,7	3,9	0	13	30
PSD	6,5	4,8	0	15	72
UDMR	1,6	0,5	1	2	4
PRM	0,3	0,5	0	1	1

Table 2 summarizes the distribution of interpellations related to Romania or the Romanian citizens' interests in the EU. Once again, in absolute terms, most of the questions came from the PSD (59%) and from the PDL. However, if we compare the means then the second place is taken by the PNL, followed closely by the PDL.

The nature of the inquiries was related to topics on the MEPs' committee agenda. This is synthesized in Table 3. The Social Democrats were the most active – with 11.4 questions on average – while the Democratic Liberals come second (10.9 interpellations on average). Once again, it becomes obvious when looking at the standard deviations that few MEPs were actually

³⁰ In the same situation were at the time of the analysis Theodor Stolojan and Traian Ungureanu, both PDL members. For the full ranking see Appendix 2.

responsible for the majority of questions, irrespective of the party delegation.

Table 3. Questions related to the MEP’s committee work

Party	Average	Std. Deviation	Min.	Max.	Total
PNL	5.4	4.7	1	11	27
PDL	10.9	12.6	0	37	120
PSD	11.4	10	1	33	126
UDMR	1.3	0.5	1	2	3
PRM	0	0	0	0	0

By comparing Tables 2 and 3, we can conclude that the Romanian MEPs use the questions mainly for problems encountered in their committee work, while the questions related to events or matters of national, regional or local interest remain of secondary interest.

6. What makes them question?

The general model explaining the frequency of all questions performs well. It accounts for almost 60% of the variance ($R^2=0.58$), a significant percentage if we keep in mind its parsimony (i.e., the small number of explanatory factors included). By far the most important predictors for the number of questions posed by the Romanian MEP’s are their gender and their position on the party ballot when elected at the 2009 elections.

The relationship between parliamentary questioning and list ranking takes place in the hypothesized direction and it is quite robust from a statistical point of view. In other words, being elected while on a lower list position, i.e. quite far from those occupying the top positions, makes the former MEPs more active than the latter when it comes to interpellations. The impressive gender coefficient indicates that the Romanian women MEPs tend to initiate, on average, more than eight questions in contrast to their male colleagues. The finding is surely unique, as no gender

related gap was ever documented in the literature on parliamentary questioning.

Previous experience in the EP is also a contributing factor for posing questions, but, although the relationship is statistically significant, its effect is several times smaller than that of the other two predictors previously discussed. Furthermore, being a member of an opposition party in the national legislature seems to increase the number of questions asked but the relationship is not significant from a statistical point of view. Regarding the age variable, in nine cases out of ten ($p=0.055$), younger MEPs pose more questions than those who are older.

Table 4. Determinants of interpellation frequency (OLS Regression)³¹

Model 1

Variables	B	Standard Error
List Position	1.904**	0,671
Experience in EP	0.296*	0,136
Opposition Member	-2.177	2,175
Gender	-7.822*	3,781
Age	-0.398	0,198
Constant	21.117	10,815
R ²	0.585	
N	33	

Notes: significance at * $p<.05$; ** $p<.01$; *** $p<.001$; Reported coefficients are un-standardized

As can be understood from Table 5, the explanatory factors proposed account slightly better for the MEPs' specialization through interpellations than for the questioning of European institutions on subjects related to their constituency. In the latter case, 50% of the variance is explained while the percentage rises to 60% for the former. Although for both models the position on the party list is an important predictor, the impact of the relationship is twice as big when it comes to questions on expertise/committee issues.

31 We checked for multicollinearity, autocorrelation and heteroscedasticity. None of these problems appeared.

The Romanian women MEPs are once again much more active than their male counterparts on topics related to their committees' agendas. The gender gap is much attenuated in the case of the Romania-focused questions, while the relationship itself lacks statistical robustness.

In contrast, the impact of previous experience in the EP appears to be the most important predictor only in relation to the questions regarding Romania. Therefore, having a second EP mandate makes the MEP slightly more likely to ask constituency-related questions. However, in neither model do the MEPs' age nor the status of being a member of the opposition produce any significant effect.

Table 5. Specialization versus constituency work (OLS Regression)s³²

Variables	Specialization Model		Model Casework	
	B	Std. Error	B	Std. Error
List Position	1.443**	0.494	0.650**	0.230
Experience in EP	0.188	0.100	0.153**	0.047
Opposition Member	-2.229	1.601	0.264	0.747
Gender	-6.987*	2.783	-1.256	-1.299
Age	-0.253	0.146	-0.082	0.068
Constant	14.716	7.960	3.227	3.717
R ²	0.593		0.501	
N	33		33	

Notes: significance at * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001; Reported coefficients are un-standardized

7. Conclusion

This study represents the first systematic analysis of the interpellations initiated by the Romanian MEPs. Thus, we gathered and interpreted data on how the parliamentarians' previous experience in the EP, their list position when elected,

³² We checked for multicollinearity, autocorrelation and heteroscedasticity. None of these problems appeared.

their party status, plus the usual socio-demographic elements influence the frequency and the type of questions they addressed to the Commission and Council.

Besides corroborating already existing hypotheses, the results of our statistical models revealed interesting relationships about both the main effects and the control variables.

The first significant finding refers to the apathetic attitude of most MEPs, given that a minority from each party delegation has initiated more than half of the questions. Moreover, the majority of interpellations concerned topics from the MEPs' committee agendas.

The best predictors of parliamentary questioning proved to be the gender and the MEPs' ranking on the party ballot. Thus, interestingly enough the Romanian women MEPs tend to ask significantly more questions than their colleagues. As a safe re-nomination and subsequent re-election are the main objectives of any MP, it seems reasonable that those MEPs initially elected from lower list positions exhibited more substantial questioning activity.

With regards to the interpellations connected to the MEPs' committee work, the party ballot position and the gender are once more the most significant determinants. On the contrary, the frequency of the constituency-oriented questions is best predicted by the previous experience in the EP and by the list position.

The main limitation of the present study resides in the fact that the analyzed universe contains only 33 cases, that is only one of the national delegations of MEPs. This in turn makes the generalization of the findings to all the European parliamentarians rather inappropriate. However, our results are of high value for those interested in understanding the manner in which the adaptation and specialization of the newcomer MEPs occurs, irrespective of their national delegation or affiliation to a party group. Even more so as the period investigated – the first year of

mandate – is a critical one from the perspective of the accommodation with the rules and working procedures in the EP. A further possible direction of study could be to compare the interpellations of the MEPs from the new, CEE Member States with those of the Western MEPs so as to see if indeed the former are more active with respect to national/regional or local problems as opposed to pan-European issues, given their countries' rather peripheral status in the Union.

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Appendix 1. Variable Codebook

Variable	Operationalization
Age	Exact age at the moment of the 2009 elections
Gender	0 = woman, 1 = man
List Position	Number on the party ballot when elected
Experience in EP	Number of months acting as MEP before the 2009 elections
Opposition Member	-1 = politician from a party governing Romania for the whole analyzed period, 0 = politician from a party being in both situations, 1 = politician from an opposition party

Appendix 2. The Romanian MEPs' Questions Ranking

	Total	Romania	Specialization	Written Questions
Antonescu	46	6	37	36
Sârbu	45	15	33	33
Niculescu	43	13	31	36
Țicău	38	5	25	9
Cretu	22	14	14	14
Dăncilă	18	4	15	10
Luhan	17	2	14	14
Ivan	14	10	5	11
Plumb	14	9	12	2
Busoi	14	7	11	2
Cutat	11	3	8	6
Enciu	11	6	9	7
Weber	10	3	10	6
Preda	9	0	9	0
Băsescu	8	2	8	8
Marinescu	7	4	7	3
Matula	7	2	6	6
Pațcu	6	4	3	3
Vălean	5	2	3	2
Bodu	4	0	4	4
Macovei	4	1	4	3
Tokes	3	1	2	0
Nicolai	3	2	2	1
Bostinaru	2	2	1	1
Severin	2	0	1	1
Becali	2	1	1	1
Sogor	2	1	1	0

Winkler	2	1	1	0
Mănescu	2	1	1	1
Vadim Tudor	0	0	0	0
Tănăsescu	0	0	0	0
Stolojan	0	0	0	0
Ungureanu	0	0	0	0
