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Beyond the revolving door: professional paths of accredited parliamentary assistants after the European parliament

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ABSTRACT

Based on the study of the professional careers of 439 parliamentary assistants of the 7th parliamentary term (2009–2014), we identify their different career patterns, especially after leaving the European parliament. We show which factors (social, biographical) influence mobility within the field of Eurocracy. We assess the importance of public/private circulation. Beyond the notorious ‘revolving doors’ and the question of the transfer of information from EU institutions to private interests, we show that parliamentary assistants form a group of specialised intermediaries of EU affairs who, after having acquired specific knowledge and know-how at the heart of European policymaking, are able to convert these assets in different sectors (public bureaucracies, private companies, or NGOs), at the EU level or in the member states. Such mobility illustrates the blurring of the public/private divide, and the hybridisation of EU governance. We thus shed new light on the structuring of the field of Eurocracy and the circulation of professionals within it.

KEYWORDS

European parliament; parliamentary assistants; revolving doors; field of Eurocracy; EU professionals

Revolving doors, understood as the move from a position of regulator to a position of regulated in the market sector, are usually illustrated in the European Union (EU) by the cases of former Members of European Parliament (MEPs) and Commissioners. The case of José Manuel Barroso, who joined Goldman Sachs International less than two years after leaving the European Commission after ten years as President, has been widely commented on.

Despite the adoption of codes of conduct for EU Commissioners and MEPs, EU institutions have been criticised by NGOs such as Corporate Europe Observatory for failing to regulate the revolving door phenomenon.

Beyond the usually polemical media coverage of former EU politicians or top bureaucrats ‘switching teams’ to serve private (i.e. economic) interests, studies of MEPs have shown that they rarely use the revolving doors: only 6 per cent of the MEPs who were not re-elected after the 2014 European elections joined the representation of economic interests in the five years following the election. They became advisors in consultancies specialising in financial regulation, European project management, representing the interests of policy sectors such as health, energy or the agri-food industry, or they joined private companies directly (Lepaux et al., 2020; Michel & Lepaux, 2018).

The movement of elites from political to lobbying positions is often commented on in the public sphere, but there is still a lack of empirical studies dealing with this phenomenon. Beyond well-known figures, this article focuses on second-tier agents in the political field, i.e. political assistants. Taking the case of the accredited parliamentary assistants (APAs) in the European parliament as an example, we take a step back by shifting the focus from the people who are known and present in the media scene, to the close collaborators of MEPs who contribute behind the scenes to the routine work of the European parliament.

Initially overlooked by both political commentators and academic research, APAs have become a focus of interest in recent years, not least as a result of media-hyped scandals.¹ Their role in the fabric of EU policies and in the field of Eurocracy has also been better identified in the academic literature (Michon, 2014).

The increasing role of APAs is thus evidence of the strengthening of staff support and of the bureaucratisation of the European parliament (Pegan, 2022). Like staff in the US Congress, (DeGregorio, 1988, 1994; Romzek & Utter, 1996), they play an important role in policymaking (Egeberg et al., 2014; Pegan, 2017).

In this paper, we ask about the professional trajectories of APAs after leaving the European Parliament. We seek to situate movements towards the private sector in the general context of trajectories within the field of Eurocracy (Georgakakis & Rowell, 2013), and to question different processes of specialisation: on the EU (what about movements from the EU to the national level?); on political spaces (do former parliamentary assistants remain confined to positions of political aids?); and on policy sectors (does professional activity on environmental issues in the EP lead to a career linked to public policy on environmental issues?).

We show that there is a diversity of career trajectories, partly due to our hand-coding, which distinguishes between places of work (Brussels vs. members states), and between sectors of employment (private sector, NGOs, local authorities, positions of political assistants). This hand-coding allows us to take into account the multiplicity of career paths of professionals contributing to European policy, in different institutional structures, in line with this special issue's analytical framework. Using indicators such as length of career and mobility, we seek to objectify the conditions of access to European posts and positions (Georgakakis & Westlake, 2024).

The remainder of this article is divided into five sections. The first one presents our theory and hypotheses in relation to the academic literature on revolving doors and lobbying, particularly from the perspective of parliaments and parliamentary assistants. The second section presents our data and methodology. The next two sections present our main findings. The final and fifth section is devoted to a general discussion of our findings.

1. Theory and hypotheses

Lobbying in the European Parliament has been studied extensively, but the social background and professional careers of agents have rarely been considered. Rather, the institutional dimension, the structural relationships between political parties and interest groups, as well as the alignment between political parties and lobbies, have been emphasised (Beyers et al., 2015; Kluger Dionigi, 2017; Klüver et al., 2015; Marshall, 2015; Rasmussen, 2015).

Scholarship on revolving doors tends to take a static view, looking at entrances or exits, but rarely at both. Chalmers and his co-authors have analysed the ‘in and out’ of revolving doors in EU financial regulation. They showed that the agents making multiple moves are not specialists in the financial industry, but rather have careers on both sides of the revolving doors (public and private, regulator and regulated) focused on law, policy and government affairs (Chalmers et al., 2022). Our own findings support a similar argument about the generalist profile of APAs who go on to careers as lobbyists.

Coen and Vannoni (2016) take a peculiar angle, looking at the previous professional experience of EU affairs managers. Using sequence analysis, they identify three different ideal types of managers. This leads them to conclude that instead of ‘revolving doors’, the career paths of EU affairs managers are better described as ‘sliding doors’: i.e. there would be a neat separation of careers, not only between the public and private sectors, but also between the EU and national levels.

Professional transitions from government or parliamentary positions to the business world are more common in the US (Lazarus et al., 2016) than in most European countries (Claessen et al., 2021; Dalibert, 2021; Lazarus et al., 2016; Ørsten et al., 2017; Yates & Cardin-Trudeau, 2021), although the proportions are not insignificant (Rasmussen et al., 2021). In the EU, on the one hand, there is life after the Commission: Vaubel et al. (2012) find that one in four former EU Commissioners goes into private interest representation. More recently, Luechinger and Moser (2020) confirm corporate appointments of former Commissioners from the Delors to Barroso Commissions. On the other hand, former MEPs rarely become lobbyists after the end of their parliamentary term (Beauvallet et al., forthcoming; Lepaux et al., 2020; Michel & Lepaux, 2018).

However, a focus on political elites obscures the more frequent conversions of former political aides who go on to become lobbyists. Studies on US congressional staff show the value of shifting the focus to the people around members of parliament (Blanes i Vidal et al., 2012; McCrain, 2018; Santos, 2006; Strickland, 2020). Studies on the future trajectory of political advisers to ministers in several European countries – Britain (Orchard et al., 2024), Denmark (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2020), Norway (Askim et al., 2021), or France (Alam et al., 2015) – confirm the important flows from staffers to public relations positions.

Therefore, in this paper we propose a systematic analysis of the post-parliamentary careers of APAs, especially those who pursue a career as lobbyists, regardless of the type of interest they represent (public or private) and regardless of the nature of their employer (be it a consultancy, a private firm, an NGO or a public authority).

Around 4000 parliamentary assistants work with MEPs, who recruit ‘local’ assistants based in their constituency in a Member State, and accredited parliamentary assistants (APAs) recruited in Brussels (or Luxembourg, or Strasbourg). APAs report directly to the Parliament’s administration. Each MEP receives a monthly allowance to recruit his/her assistants. This allowance has been gradually increased from 9 765 euros per month in 2000, to 26 734 in 2022. It has facilitated the recruitment of an ever-increasing number of parliamentary assistants: from one or two assistants in the 1980s and 1990s, the average number of assistants per MEP was around five in 2012.² MEPs can employ up to three accredited assistants. At least one quarter of the total budget must be allocated to the employment of APAs. In addition to the employment of accredited and local assistants, up to a quarter of the total budget available may also be used to finance services (e.g. expert studies) provided by subcontractors chosen by the MEP.

Accredited parliamentary assistants (APAs) are often temporary positions filled by relatively young staff who are likely to move on to other professional positions after acquiring knowledge, skills and expertise while working for elected representatives. Their working conditions have changed radically following the creation of a legal status for APAs in 2009, making the job more attractive.

While the work of APAs is now better understood, we still know little about their career paths after leaving the EP. Michon (2014) points out that the former APAs he interviewed in the 2000s either stayed in Brussels as advisors to a political group in the EP, as civil servants in the European Commission after passing a concours, or as lobbyists, or they returned to the national level to work as political assistants, lobbyists, or in a job not directly related to EU affairs. Indeed, APAs' first-hand knowledge of EU policy-making is of interest to a wide range of private interests, and APAs' work in the EP offers many opportunities to network with stakeholders from EU institutions, member states and civil society. Although there is a great deal of porosity between the positions of APAs and those of lobbyists, professional conversion to an interest group is often a last resort, in the absence of anything better.

There are therefore two main reasons for considering the future career of an APA: (1) APA is very often an early career job, which is attractive to young graduates willing to work in Brussels as it offers relatively good working conditions (especially a high salary) and a privileged position within the legislative machinery. (2) APA is often a temporary position. Indeed, the renewal rate of MEPs is particularly high: slightly less than half (48 per cent) of the 751 MEPs elected in 2014 had sat in the previous legislature (Beauvallet-Haddad et al., 2016). As a result, assistants are often forced to move: either to another MEP or to another position outside the EP, notably in lobbying.

Research on the career trajectories of lobbyists has emphasised that interest representation is not synonymous with private (economic) interests. The bureaucratic logic of policymaking at EU level implies the inclusion of civil society and interest groups in the process, with no specific distinction between private companies, NGOs, member states or regions. Courty and Michel thus emphasize the heterogeneity of organizations and interests, to conclude that 'the "world of lobbying" is not limited to consulting firms, and "civil society" does not only consist of non-profit organizations' (Courty & Michel, 2013, p. 177). Lahusen makes a similar argument, by noting 'an apparent paradox between the heterogenization of the field of interest groups and the homogenisation of the field of professional activity' (Lahusen, 2023, p. 1). Indeed, 'lobbyists tend to employ similar repertoires of action and develop similar professional skills', and the same holds true for 'civic groups, grassroots initiatives, and social movement organisations' when it comes to their advocacy activities in Brussels (Lahusen, 2023, p. 2). Pointing at 'the structural entanglement of the sphere of business representation with that of Commission officials', Laurens insists on the appropriation of bureaucratic capital by private interests, which he sees as a structural dimension of EU governance (Laurens, 2019, p. 12). According to the scholarship that has developed around the Eurocracy perspective, this field should not be seen as limited to the EU institutions, although it is related to them. Moreover, lobbyists should be considered 'as an integral part of this field, with many of them being permanent eurocrats' (Courty & Michel, 2013, p. 167).

We hypothesise that the European parliament is not necessarily a springboard for lobbying in the market sector (H1), because assistants tend to stay longer in the EP since the

introduction of a secure status in 2009 (H1a), and experience at the EP can also lead to other positions (H1b), not only in the private sector, and not only in Brussels.

A second set of assumptions is fuelled by research on political assistants. APAs have the task of helping their MEPs to position themselves in the parliamentary field and to participate in legislative activity. They contribute to the communication of their MEP's work to the press, parliament and other MEPs. They are a frequent source of assistance to MEPs compared to the other EP staff (Pegan, 2017). Parliamentary staff plays an important role in the process of policymaking, oversight and representation (Otjes, 2023): planner, scribe, compromise facilitator, information broker, advisor, advertiser. APAs are planner and scribe: they manage the agenda of MEPs, and they prepare the parliamentary work (amendments, reports, written questions, written statements, and speeches). Their role is also to coordinate and facilitate compromises with other MEPs and the EP administration. Equipped with technical and linguistic skills, positioned at the interface of various internal and external information flows (Busby & Belkacem, 2013), they translate amendments, parliamentary reports, discussions, and inform their MEP about institutional activities. They are present in the parliament on a daily basis, listening to what is said, what is done and what will be done. In particular, their role as an information broker is fundamental. They seek and receive information from a variety of interlocutors (citizens, interest groups, other MEPs, representatives of political groups, parliamentary committees, the European Commission) about a report, an amendment or a compromise. Their role is to process information and provide their MEP with the keys to understanding the issues. In this sense, they support the role of political advisors: which decisions, which reports to present, which amendments to table, which places to invest, what consequences, what political impact (Egeberg et al., 2014; Neuhold & Dobbels, 2015; Pegan, 2017).

We know that MEPs are involved differently in the European Parliament and in policymaking depending on their longevity, their political group, and the parliamentary committee in which they are involved. Indeed, MEPs with longevity have more chances to occupy leadership positions (Beauvallet & Michon, 2010; Hix et al., 2007; Whitaker, 2014). MEPs at the centre of the parliamentary space are more integrated than those from smaller EP groups, participate to build majorities (Hix et al., 2007; Salvati, 2016), and obtain more rapporteurships (Mamadouh & Raunio, 2003). Finally, MEPs who sit on committees with a large number of ordinary legislative procedure issues make a greater contribution to policy-making (Neuhold, 2001). Then, depending on the MEP's political group and parliamentary committee, APAs work more or less on topics under the ordinary legislative procedure and are more likely to get used to the routines of exercising Community power.

We hypothesise that post-parliamentary careers are not evenly distributed, but rather determined by a number of institutional factors related to the position of former APAs in the EP, such as the political group and the parliamentary committee in which they were involved (H2).

2. Data and methods

Our findings are based on quantitative data on the career paths of APAs from the 7th parliamentary term (2009-2014). This choice allows us to study a group of people who

were active in the EP after the introduction of the status of parliamentary assistant and who had the opportunity to take up other professional activities in the years following the end of the legislature. We have created a database that reconstructs the careers of a sample of 439 parliamentary assistants. In order to provide a variety of profiles and policy areas covered while working in the EP, we focused on assistants working for an MEP in the following six parliamentary committees: Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI); Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE); Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL); Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO); Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON); Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI). These six committees cover policy areas that are emblematic of situations of conflict of interest (as reported in the media), such as health and finance, but also areas where the EU has more or less significant prerogatives (IMCO and ECON vs. EMPL), and a more or less strong presence of lobbyists (ENVI and ECON vs. EMPL and AGRI) (Coen et al., 2021, p. 99).

The MEPs involved in the six parliamentary committees mentioned above were identified using the Directory of MEPs (Michon & Wiest, 2021). The lists of parliamentary assistants by MEP, published on the EP website, were then used to compile a list of parliamentary assistants who had worked in the EP during the period under study with a MEP serving on one of the six committees in question. Biographical and career indicators were adapted according to the available sources. Several sources were cross-referenced: the Directory of MEPs (available online) for information on MEPs; the list of parliamentary assistants during the 8th and 9th parliamentary terms, which provides information on the maintenance of a position in the EP; information available on the institutional websites; ParITrack; the online press, where available. First and foremost, we used online CVs on the professional social network LinkedIn. LinkedIn CVs are a particularly useful source for reconstructing assistants' careers. Although it is not a suitable source of information for all social and professional groups, it seems to be relevant for former EP parliamentary assistants. Indeed, most of them are included and their careers are often well documented. Although we encountered some difficulties in recording the fate of all former assistants, it was possible to collect satisfactory information for almost three quarters of them (439 out of 612). As we shall see below, our sample is diverse in terms of political groups, length of service in the EP, age and gender.

Each assistant was described by several indicators related to the MEP's employer (nationality, parliamentary committee, political group, longevity in the EP, holding of managerial positions) and to the assistant him/herself (gender, nationality, education, and professional career). We used sequence analysis, a statistical tool for the study of successions of states or events, such as professional careers and political trajectories (Beauvallet & Michon, 2016; Blanchard et al., 2014). We have thus hand-coded the professional career before, during and after the EP experience, year by year (13 different possible statuses, see Table 1) according to location (Brussels or Member State) and type of organisation. Using the hand-coded data, we were able to perform sequential analyses and construct a typology of careers, extracted using an optimal matching method and hierarchical clustering. It is based on the calculation of the distance between individual trajectories taken two by two according to their degree of similarity. The implementation of OM is based on the determination of substitution and insertion-deletion costs. We

Table 1. The 13 states (statuses) used for coding APAs' professional careers (before and after the EP).

	Acronym	Place of work	Job or employer's description
1	PE	Brussels	Parliamentary assistant (APA or political group adviser)
2	Bconsult	Brussels	Brussels-based consultancy of law firm
3	bONG	Brussels	Brussels-based NGO or think tank (advocacy)
4	Brepint	Brussels	Brussels-based office of representation of (economic) interests (lobbying)
5	Bcollter	Brussels	Brussels-based representation of local authority
6	IE	Brussels	European institution (other than EP)
7	Collab	Member state	Political aid (working for a political party, a member of parliament, etc.)
8	collterr	Member state	Local/regional public authority (city, region, etc.)
9	consult	Member state	Consultancy or law firm
10	entrep	Member state	Private firm
11	instit	Member state	Public administration (national level)
12	ONG	Member state	NGO, think tank
13	repint	Member state	Office of representation of (economic) interests (lobbying)

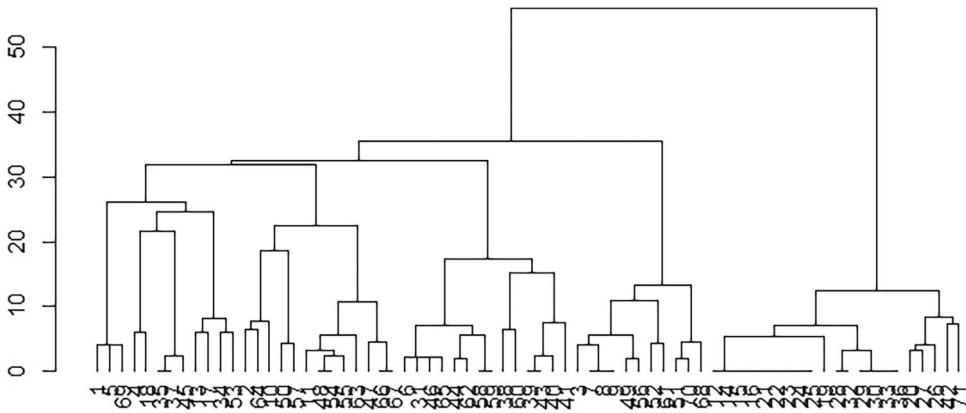


Figure 1. Dendrogram Sequence Analysis-Optimal matching (constant costs).

choose constant costs (whatever the change in sequence, the cost is the same): it is quite common to set the substitution cost to 2 and the insertion-deletion cost (indel) to 1.1. Reading the tree or dendrogram obtained after an ascending hierarchical classification invites us to maintain a division into 5 classes (Figure 1).

3. Findings: careers of experts of EU policymaking

3.1. APAs as specialists of EU affairs towards professionalisation

In terms of job description, the work of Michon (2014) brings several elements. The positions of APAs are characterised by a duality: they are (or can be) both political assistants and EU affairs professionals. Schematically, some APAs work mainly as ‘super-secretaries’, managing their MEP’s communication and agenda, with very little involvement in legislative activity. Others are experts on EU affairs, whose role is mainly devoted to monitoring committee work, drafting amendments, preparing voting lists, negotiating with other MEPs or their assistants and talking to lobbies. The extent to which assistants are involved in legislative activity depends in most cases on the involvement of their MEPs in the

parliamentary arena, whether in parliamentary committees, the political group or inter-groups, and ultimately on their ability to play the institutional game. Consequently, about half of the APAs have previous experience as political activists and/or party members. However, given the more technocratic dimension of their work in the EP, especially when it comes to legislative activity, they are most often recruited on the basis of their qualifications and previous work experience.

The APAs in our sample have profiles of public policy specialists. They hold a MA degree in law (21 per cent), political science (43 per cent) or economics and business (33 per cent). Part of their training is characterised by international mobility: 46 per cent of them have studied abroad, sometimes in several different countries. Finally, they have mastered several languages. English in all cases, but also French, German, Spanish, Italian, etc.

At least some of them are specialists in EU affairs. Indeed, the job of accredited parliamentary assistant is an attractive choice for young men and women (55 per cent of women in our sample) with public policy training and language skills, who also have the specific skills needed to work in the field of Eurocracy: general knowledge of the EU and the construction of the European political space, a good understanding of how the institutional triangle works, familiarity with European politics and policies, and knowledge of EU law.

They have acquired a range of specialised knowledge, know-how and ways of thinking before joining the EP. A third of them have studied in programmes specialised in EU affairs: EU law, European law, comparative or international law or, more often, European studies, European politics or European affairs. They have supplemented their knowledge with early professional experience. Almost a quarter of them worked in Brussels before joining the EP, either in another European institution (8 per cent), a private interest group (14 per cent), an NGO (4 per cent) or a local authority (3 per cent).

Accredited assistant positions can therefore be seen as early career jobs, but not necessarily as a route into the European political space. The average age of an APA in our sample is closer to 35 than 30, with some people in their 50s or even 60s. It is a first job (if we exclude internships) for only a third of them.

More than a short-term experience, the EP tends to be a significant stage in the careers of these young specialists in European affairs. On average, they have spent 7.9 years in the EP over their entire career. It has already been observed that since the introduction of a professional status in 2009, and attractive salary scales, assistants tend to stay in post longer than in the 2000s (Michon, 2014): in 2022, two thirds of the assistants in our sample (i.e. among those in post between 2009 and 2014) had spent more than 5 years in the EP (28 per cent more than 10 years).

The work of an APA allows one to develop a set of resources that are relevant on the European political job market: theoretical and practical knowledge of the European institutions (rules, procedures, options for action, parliamentary productions), know-how and interpersonal skills (ways of doing and being, culture of compromise, routines, interpretations of rules, unwritten hierarchies) and, finally, an address book of key people at the different levels of decision-making, in particular in the EP. Moreover, experience in the EP provides expertise on the dossiers dealt with and, more generally, on institutional and parliamentary procedures. It is thus a sign of recognition by various actors at the centre or periphery of the European political space.

Although some of the assistants in our sample experienced periods of unemployment (up to a few months) between jobs, all those who left the EP found new jobs. In most cases, they obtained more prestigious positions than those they could have aspired to before joining the EP. In this respect, the position of assistant in the EP represents a career boost, something that most assistants in post are aware of. The resources accumulated in the EP, which are particularly lucrative at European level, encourage assistants to consider continuing their careers mainly in Brussels.

3.2. Post-parliament careers

At the end of the 7th parliamentary term (in 2014), a large majority of APAs in our sample remained in the EP as parliamentary assistants (62 per cent), either with their re-elected MEP (two thirds of them) or with another MEP (one third). A small proportion of them went on to become advisers to a political group (3 per cent). These are relatively rare and coveted positions. Materially and symbolically desirable for many assistants, they allow them to remain in the European Parliament, to benefit from interesting conditions and to carry out an activity which, from a technical point of view, is similar to that of an assistant, without certain disadvantages: the small, highly hierarchical parliamentary team dominated by the MEP.

Those who left the EP most often moved to a position in interest representation (lobbying) in Brussels or at national level (Table 2). Having been trained in European affairs during their academic and professional careers, those who continue their careers in European politics in Brussels join another European institution (13 per cent in the 8 years after the parliamentary term) or an interest group that is close to the institutions: a consulting firm in charge of representing various interests (3 per cent), an economic interest group (10 per cent), NGOs (4 per cent) or a local/regional authority (2 per cent).

Table 2. APA's occupation after 2014 (several options possible).

	Numbers	%
European Parliament	270	62
In Brussels		
European institution	55	13
Lawyer	1	0
Representation of local and regional authorities	7	2
Consultancy	15	3
Journalist	1	0
Representation of NGOs	19	4
Representation of private interests (business, trade, industry)	43	10
Think tank	2	0
In member states		
Lawyer	5	1
Political aide	42	10
Local and regional authorities	34	8
Consultancy	17	4
Private firm	44	10
Public institution	58	13
Journalist	4	1
NGO	21	5
Representation of private interests (business, trade, industry)	57	13
Total	439	100

Those who were less specialised in European affairs when they entered the EP move to the national level, to positions more or less linked to European policy or to the jobs of political assistants: in a local authority (city or region) (8 per cent), in a public institution (13 per cent), in consultancy (4 per cent), in a company (10 per cent), in the representation of economic interests (13 per cent) or as a political assistant (10 per cent). These are the most politicised profiles, continuing their careers at national level with a minister, an MP or a local elected representative.

In the next section, we focus on those of the former APAs in our sample who became interest representation professionals (lobbyists) after leaving the EP. Focusing on such a population allows us to examine the social motivations behind the transitions from legislative or regulatory positions to lobbying and consultancy, as well as the hybridisation of knowledge and know-how between the professions of APAs and lobbyists. Indeed, the experience of APAs in the EP is a key asset sought by private employers.

4. Findings: take the door to become a lobbyist

The former accredited assistants who are most characteristic of the revolving door are those who become representatives of economic interests or consultants in Brussels. In line with our remarks in the first section on the institutionalisation of consultation with civil society and stakeholders in EU governance, in this section we do not focus only on lobbyists in the economic sector. Instead, we consider all lobbyists, including those who have worked for NGOs or local authorities. Although career paths from a public institution to interest groups in Brussels are not surprising to many observers, they represent only a small part of our sample: 19 per cent if we include the categories 'private interest representation' (business, trade, industry), 'NGO representation', 'local and regional authority representation' and 'consultancy'. Such moves to lobbyist positions are almost as frequent at national level (13 per cent in the representation of private (economic) interests alone).

4.1. A phenomenon located in the parliamentary space

The revolving door phenomenon is relatively limited and localised within the population studied. Those who use the revolving door to become lobbyists have three specific characteristics compared to their former colleagues in the EP.

First, their background before the EP. Women are slightly over-represented (59 per cent compared to 55 per cent of the total sample). They are more likely to have studied law (27 per cent vs. 21 per cent) and European studies (52 per cent vs. 31 per cent). They have a more international profile: they have more often studied abroad (71 per cent vs. 56 per cent) and worked abroad, particularly in Brussels. They are slightly younger (70 per cent are under 30 years old in 2014 vs. 58 per cent) and their professional careers are shorter when they join the EP.

Secondly, their position in the EP, both from a political and a technical point of view. On the one hand, the MEP for whom they worked was more often on the right of the hemicycle (EPP, ADLE and ECR groups), although former assistants to Green MEPs are also over-represented. On the other hand, they were involved in a policy area where the EP is co-legislator. APAs characteristic of the revolving door

were more likely to have worked on dossiers discussed in ECON and even more so in ENVI committees.

Thirdly, their professional careers. Their experience in the EP is shorter than that of others (3.9 years in the EP before 2014 compared to 4.3 years): the EP represents 52 per cent of their professional time spent in Brussels (89 per cent otherwise).

Sequence analysis provides a method to capture career trajectories from one institutional position to another from a relational perspective (Georgakakis & Rowell, 2013, p. 5). By considering the time spent in the positions corresponding to the coded statuses, it allows us to distinguish revolving door APAs along the temporary vs. permanent divide in the field of Eurocracy, and thus to hypothesise that those who work longer in EU affairs are holders of ‘a specific form of European institutional capital’ which is ‘objectively

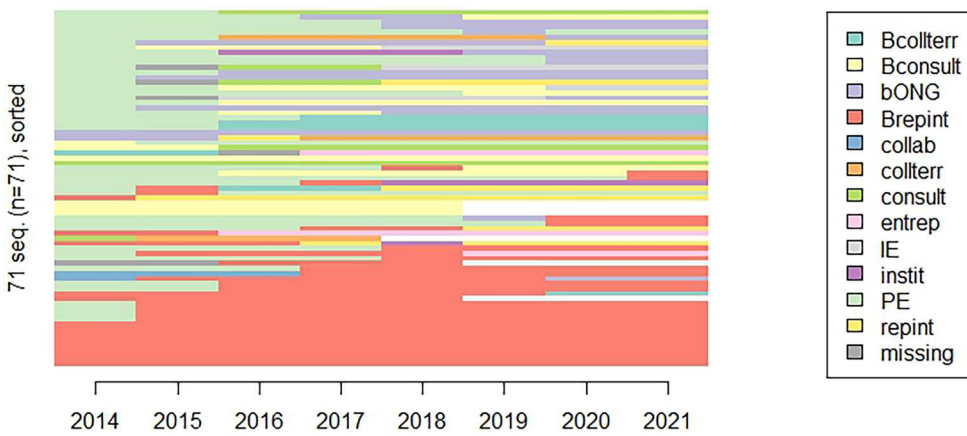


Figure 2. Chronogram of the careers of APAs who became professionals of the representation of interests (N = 71).

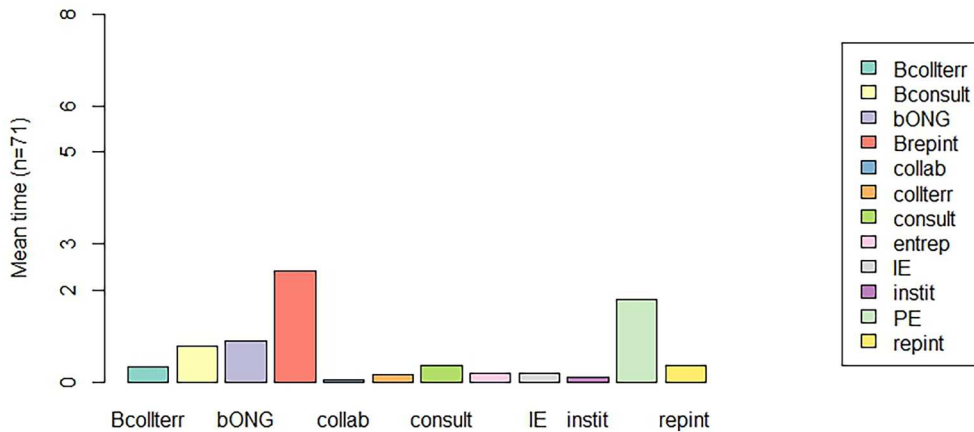


Figure 3. Mean time (in years) spent in all different statuses, for APAs who became professionals of the representation of interests (N = 71).

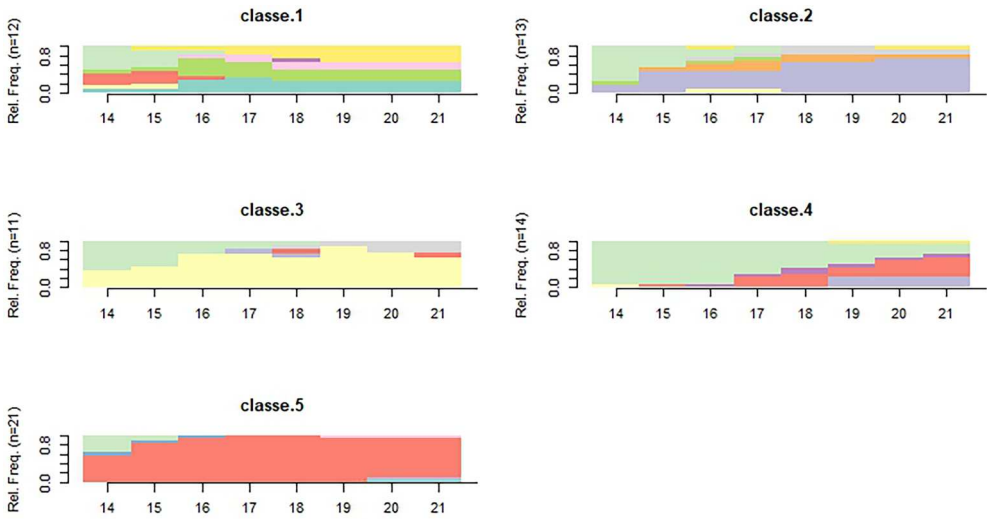


Figure 4. Clustering of careers extracted using optimal matching and hierarchical clustering (chronograms).

measurable in the analysis of the sociological characteristics and career paths' (Georgakakis & Rowell, 2013, p. 9).

Using optimal matching (constant costs) and hierarchical clustering, five types of careers (clusters) are thus constructed according to the dynamics of post-parliamentary careers. They illustrate the diversity of paths and a form of specialisation in EU affairs.

In the first type (cluster 1, n = 12), APAs work in interest groups in Brussels for only one or two years after leaving the EP (0.9 years in Brussels after the end of the parliamentary term). They then move to the national level and make a career in interest representation, public institutions or local authorities.

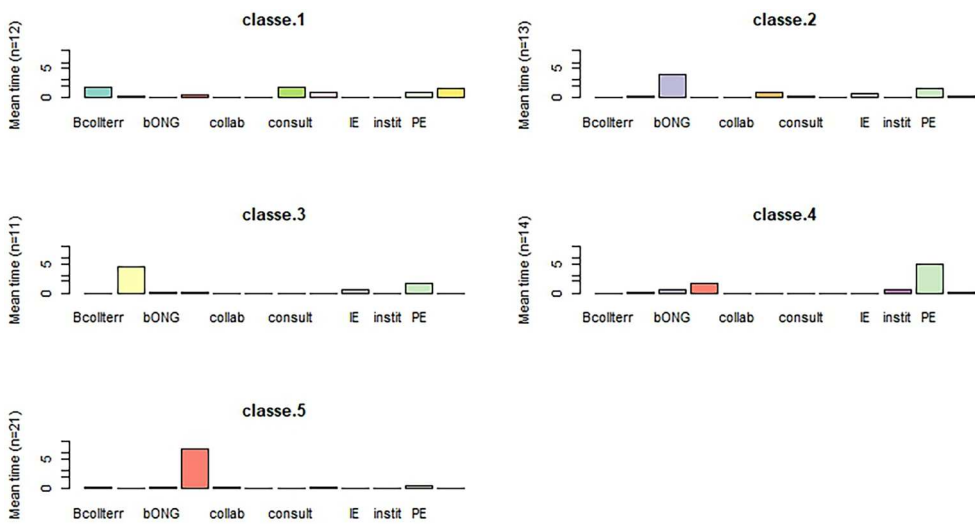


Figure 5. Mean time (in years) spent in all different statuses, according to clusters.

The second type (cluster 2, $n = 13$) is characterised by former APAs who have reached positions of NGO representation in Brussels, sometimes after having experienced other jobs between the EP and NGOs.

The third type (cluster 3, $n = 11$) is the one of those who have a career in consultancy in Brussels.

In the fourth type (cluster 4, $n = 14$), APAs stayed longer in the EP (5 years on average after 2014) before they left. After leaving the EP, they stayed in Brussels and moved between different types of organisations. They are not particularly specialised in one type of interest and some of them joined another European institution.

The fifth type (cluster 5, $n = 21$) is that of the representatives of economic interests in Brussels. (Figures 2–5)

4.2. Social factors of differentiation

Far from being uniform, the distribution of APAs in the five clusters is differentiated according to their profiles (Table 3). Logically, the most internationalised profiles remain in Brussels. Gender differentiates careers. Women are more represented in national careers, NGO representation and intermittent interest representation. Men are more likely to have careers close to economic interests (consultants and economic interest representatives).

The position of the MEP in the hemicycle is also important for a career in lobbying.

First, in terms of political group. On the one hand, former assistants to MEPs from right-wing groups (EPP, ALDE, ECR) are more likely to have a career in consultancy and business lobbying or to return to national level (cluster 1). On the other hand, APAs from left-wing groups, especially the Greens, are over-represented in NGO interest groups (environmental NGO first).

Second, in terms of parliamentary committees. Former APAs working in committees largely involved in the ordinary legislative procedure (including IMCO, ENVI) are over-represented in economic interest groups. Consultants were more likely to have worked in ECON and ENVI. Former APAs working in ITRE and ENVI are more likely to join NGO representation. Furthermore, committees such as ENVI, ECON and IMCO tend to favour continuity, while AGRI and EMPL favours discontinuity.

Indeed, APAs working on specific issues in the ordinary legislative procedure have been able to specialise in a particular policy area, have acquired rather rare institutional capital and have been more exposed to lobbies, all factors that distinguish them from other candidates in the EU affairs labour market (Michon, 2014). Similarly, in the case of MEPs, it has been observed that the attainment of important parliamentary positions favours career success in the private sector (Claessen et al., 2021).

However, it is important to remember that the position of APA is a precarious one, subject to the goodwill of the MEP-employer and to electoral risks. It is part of a labour market in tension, especially after the European elections, when hundreds of former assistants become available and look for a job in Brussels. Our results must therefore be interpreted in the light of the unpredictability and risks of professional careers in EU affairs. As Courty and Michel point out, 'most interest representatives do not generally view their jobs as a vocation, but rather as an interim solution or a stop-gap job while waiting for a career in one of the EU institutions, a senior position in a company, to

Table 3. Distribution of social characteristics and EP experience according to clusters.

	Cluster 1 National (Temporary)	Cluster 2 NGO (Permanent)	Cluster 3 Consulting (Permanent)	Cluster 4 EP (Permanent)	Cluster 5 Economic interests (Permanent)	Total
Numbers	12	13	11	14	21	71
Share of Women	50	69	45	79	52	59
Committee						
AGRI	25	15	27	29	0	17
ITRE	33	38	9	29	24	27
EMPL	25	8	18	7	5	11
IMCO	8	8	0	14	24	13
ECON	17	8	27	21	14	17
ENVI	17	31	27	29	38	30
Political group						
ADLE	25	0	9	0	24	13
other	8	0	0	0	10	4
ECR	8	0	9	14	10	8
EPP	33	62	55	50	38	46
S&D	17	8	27	29	14	18
Greens	8	31	0	7	5	10
Age						
<26	17	8	13	38	11	17
26_30	42	69	50	46	58	54
30_35	42	15	38	0	26	23
>35	0	8	0	15	5	6
Cursus						
Law	33	38	27	21	19	27
Political science	33	46	55	43	33	41
Economy/ Business	17	15	36	36	38	30
European studies	25	54	55	57	62	52
Studies abroad	64	75	63	77	74	71

resume a career in politics or to move to an international position' (Courty & Michel, 2013, p. 180).

Given that the resources accumulated in the EP are most profitable at the European level and that the size of the EU bureaucracy is rather small, the worlds of lobbying, advocacy and consultancy represent the most likely option for those assistants who wish to continue their careers in Brussels and become permanent agents in the field of Eurocracy, possessing institutional capital specific to this field. Career orientations at national level remain essentially those of the most politicised assistants.

5. Discussion: An entry point to the study of the imbrications between public and private in the field of Eurocracy

In the introduction of this paper we put forward three hypotheses. Our first hypothesis (H1a) has been confirmed by our results: parliamentary assistants tend to stay longer in the EP since the introduction of secure status in 2009.

Our second hypothesis (H1b) is partly confirmed: experience in the EP can lead to professional positions outside Brussels for a significant part of our sample, and those former

APAs who become permanent agents of the field of Eurocracy join other European institutions to some extent. However, those former APAs who are most characteristic of the revolving door become above all lobbyists for private, economic interests (see [Table 2](#)).

Regarding our second hypothesis, institutional factors regarding the position of former APAs in the EP do indeed have a significant impact on post-parliamentary careers (H2), but so does the social background of APAs ([Table 3](#)).

Our findings contribute to the knowledge of the field of Eurocracy and its structuring in several ways.

Focusing on APAs who have become lobbyists allows us to examine the hybridisation of public and private governance. Former parliamentary assistants have resources, knowledge and know-how that are relevant for both public and private activities. Their expertise on EU policy, in particular on its institutions, bureaucracy and social actors, is sought after by private interests that need this specific knowledge to develop their strategies for influencing policymaking. APAs turned lobbyists do not radically change their working habits: they continue to play the multi-tasking role of planner, scribe, compromise facilitator, information broker, advisor and advertiser. Of course, moving from the EP to representing private interests means changing teams.

However, as many former APAs acknowledge, the job looks pretty much the same: as lobbyists, they continue to play the role of mediator between different stakeholders, negotiating and advocating a position at the different stages and levels of the European decision-making process.

The skills of a good lobbyist are therefore similar to those of an APA. In this respect, experience in the EP has allowed many of them to learn the social skills of working and dealing with politicians, as well as setting up and coordinating meetings.

Moreover, as economic activities are regulated, private interests, whether companies or trade associations, have developed their own expertise in public affairs in order to master the regulation of their activities and have the opportunity to influence it (Laurens, 2019). Although conventional wisdom tends to pit public and private interests, or regulators and regulated, political expertise and institutional capital are sought after by companies and industries. Former political aides with law or political science degrees have accumulated political, bureaucratic and institutional resources that are relevant in this regard.

Moreover, trade associations or industry federations in Brussels are organised in a way that resembles parliamentary activity, in the sense that they are representative institutions in which divergent views are expressed before a compromise can be reached. Before even advocating a position in the EU legislative process, the role of lobbyists working for such conglomerates is to establish what the common position on a given policy or legislative issue will be. This requires the same kind of skills and know-how that former APAs developed in the EP while participating in intra-group negotiations, building coalitions and sometimes negotiating in trilogues.

As in the Parliament, former APAs turned lobbyists play the role of mediator between different stakeholders, public and private interests. Far from being limited to the representation of economic interests, this is also common for former APAs who stayed in Brussels to become lobbyists for NGOs.

To be effective, advocacy campaigns in Brussels require knowledge of the EU machinery that goes beyond its formal functioning. The on-the-ground knowledge of former APAs, not to mention the personal network they have built up after years of presence

in Brussels, is a key asset in this respect, as they know the Parliament and the decision-making process from the inside. They know that effective lobbying means reaching the MEPs who have been appointed to work on a particular piece of legislation in a parliamentary committee, i.e. the rapporteur and the members of the committee(s) concerned by the text. They know how to formulate their arguments, not in terms of general positions or principles, but in terms of technical considerations (rates, standards) and to present them directly in the form of amendments, in accordance with the logic of parliamentary work.

In this respect, the job of a lobbyist specialising in EU affairs is closest to that of a parliamentary assistant in the European Parliament. Being in charge of 'European affairs' in the rather small Brussels office of a large organisation implies a certain degree of autonomy and responsibility, with regular contact with high-level officials. Compared to a position as an EU civil servant, for example, a lobbyist's position offers more freedom and a career that can be faster. APAs who become lobbyists can thus experience a sense of power and belonging to an elite that they have already experienced in the EP.

However, a corollary of the proximity between the activities of lobbyists and those of parliamentary assistants is the professional routine that can develop, as interest representation activities are organised to follow the legislative calendar. For this reason, professional mobility is often inter-organisational and implies a widening of the field of specialisation, since upward mobility within the same organisation is often limited (Courty & Michel, 2013, pp. 182–183).

Finally, these Eurocracy professionals are better characterised as mediators or brokers between public administration (European institutions) and interest groups (private interests and civil society), i.e. political actors specialised in a form of quiet politics (Culpepper, 2010).

6. Conclusion

Considering accredited parliamentary assistants at the European Parliament as a situated sample of actors in the field of Eurocracy, we have carefully studied their career paths, which are not limited to the European Parliament, which is often an early career job. Based on quantitative data and sequential analysis, this sample allows us to understand the imbrications and circulations between different sub-spaces of Eurocracy: EU institutions, private interests, NGOs, as well as a number of organisations in the member states that have rarely been addressed in this paper. In doing so, we argue that the study of the subsequent professional trajectories of second-tier agents in the field of Eurocracy, such as parliamentary assistants, is a relevant entry point for the study of the imbrications between public and private in European policy-making. By highlighting the differentiated allocation of resources and the institutional structure that shape the collective process of European policy-making, but also its capture by a community of like-minded experts, it helps to 'see into the trees' of EU professionals' studies (Georgakakis & Westlake, 2024). It invites to consider both the participation of private interests in the elaboration of EU policies, but also the integration of policy expertise within private institutions (Laurens, 2019). Beyond the question of revolving doors and circulations between public and private interests *sensu stricto*, our data show the emergence of a professionalised group of intermediaries in EU affairs who can follow different

career paths and work for a variety of interest groups in a political system based on the association of interest groups. The added value of sequence analysis as a statistical tool for studying careers, and in particular their length and mobility, must be emphasised here. Further studies on other agents in the field of Eurocracy – again, especially second-tier agents who have been less studied so far – could benefit from the use of such methods. The relational perspective presented here allows us to deepen our knowledge of those who populate the field of Eurocracy, but also of the links they establish with a variety of political actors within this field.

Notes

1. In 2015, the then President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, referred a case to the European Anti-Fraud Office concerning the recruitment of assistants to Front National MEPs. The case concerns the remuneration of Front National officials with public money. This case has triggered legal proceedings at both EU and French level. Suspicions of illegal employment of parliamentary assistants of Modem MEPs have also triggered legal proceedings in France.
2. 5.5 on average in 2012, respectively 2.1 at the EP and 3.4 in local offices (Michon, 2014).

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