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Ticket to Brussels. One-way or Return? Profiles and typology of Greek MEPs,  
1981-2019

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ABSTRACT

*This article analyses the socio-demographic characteristics of all Greek MEPs elected to the European Parliament in the nine European elections from 1981 to 2019. We present new data on Greek MEPs and explore whether the demographic characteristics of those elected after 2014 (when the method of selecting candidates changed) and their social and political capital are different from the attributes of the previous Greek political class. We then move on to explore the relationship between the national and the European parliaments, questioning the extent to which the European Parliament functions as a starting point for political careers in the national arena, and whether it serves as a field for the emergence of a 'supranational elite', with distinct characteristics from those of the domestic elite, or whether it is a form of golden retirement for the domestic elite. Based on the available data, we propose a typology of Greek MEPs and analyze the specific characteristics of each type.*

**Keywords:** *European Parliament, career paths, Greek MEPs*

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Μια θέση για Βρυξέλλες: Απλή μετάβαση ή με επιστροφή; Προφίλ και τυπολογία των  
Ελλήνων Ευρωβουλευτών, 1981-2019

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Στο άρθρο αναλύονται κοινωνικό-δημογραφικά χαρακτηριστικά των Ελλήνων/Ελληνίδων ευρωβουλευτών που εξελέγησαν στο Ευρωπαϊκό Κοινοβούλιο στις εννέα εκλογικές αναμετρήσεις από το 1981 έως το 2019. Εξετάζεται εάν μετά το 2014, όταν άλλαξε η μέθοδος επιλογής των υποψηφίων με την εισαγωγή του σταυρού προτίμησης, τα δημογραφικά χαρακτηριστικά των εκλεγμένων και το κοινωνικό και πολιτικό τους κεφαλαίο διαφέρουν σε σχέση με αυτά των ευρωβουλευτών/τριών που είχαν εκλεγεί τα προηγούμενα χρόνια. Εξετάζεται, επίσης, η σχέση ανάμεσα στο Εθνικό και το Ευρωπαϊκό Κοινοβούλιο και, ειδικότερα, α) σε ποιο βαθμό το Ευρωπαϊκό Κοινοβούλιο λειτουργεί ως σημείο εκκίνησης για την πολιτική σταδιοδρομία των ευρωβουλευτών/τριών στην εθνική πολιτική σκηνή, β) εάν χρησιμεύει ως πεδίο για την εμφάνιση "υπερεθνικών ελίτ" με διακριτά χαρακτηριστικά από εκείνα των εγχώριων ελίτ ή γ) εάν είναι μια μορφή πολιτικής αποστρατείας για τις εθνικές ελίτ. Με βάση τα διαθέσιμα δεδομένα, προτείνεται μια τυπολογία της καριέρας προς το/στο Ευρωκοινοβούλιο και αναλύονται τα ιδιαίτερα χαρακτηριστικά κάθε επιμέρους τύπου.

Λέξεις κλειδιά: Ευρωπαϊκό Κοινοβούλιο, Έλληνες Ευρωβουλευτές, πολιτικές καριέρες, πολιτικό σύστημα, κομματικός ανταγωνισμός

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This article examines the paths and the profiles of the political personnel who gained seats in the European Parliament (EP) from 1981 to 2019. In particular, the demographic and party profiles of politicians who moved to passed through or ended their careers in the EP are mapped to detect trends, dynamics, and developments in the domestic political system. The process for selecting this political personnel as candidates for the EP and the way this changed over time, the social and political capital of the candidates, their trajectories, and their relationship with the national parliament in general, are crucial aspects and functions of the political system.

The examination of both the political trajectory and the paths of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) allows us to distinguish certain patterns. These patterns reflect the different strategic choices of the political actors, that is, the different ‘utilizations’ of the EP during a political career. In some cases, election to the EP paves the way for entry into the national parliament, by providing strong symbolic, cognitive, and political resources. In others, a term in the EP signals the entry into a European or supranational political elite that operates with an inner logic beyond – or with relative autonomy from – the national political competition. In yet others, it is a temporary solution to serve party needs in a given situation or on retirement and exit from (domestic) politics.

The study of the complex routes of political personnel towards or through the EP allows us to formulate a typology. The proposed typology functions as a tool for further analysis and does not result from the exhaustive examination of a large amount of empirical data. On the one hand, the available data do not allow for the formulation of a typology with strong empirical verification that is capable of being generalized. On the other hand, the paths of political personnel are determined by multiple factors, a condition that is only partially addressed in the present work. As has already been noted, the main point of reference is the term of office of the political personnel in the EP. However, these limitations do not diminish the importance of the proposed typology, which follows the concept formation approach in which the concept is first built and then measured (Sartori, 1970).

Further, this paper aims to contribute to the significant and growing research on the profiles and career patterns of members of European elites (Cotta, 2018, pp. 650-651) by presenting a comprehensive analysis of the profiles and circulation patterns of Greek MEPs in the last four decades. It follows the socio-demographic approach to the study of elites (Gaxie, 2018), which originates from the classic notion of descriptive representation (Pitkin, 1967), and it uses an approach that combines the analysis of the micro-level (political trajectory and careers of MEPs) with that of the macro-level (the structure and dynamics of the national political system). First, the main socio-demographic characteristics of all Greek MEPs ever elected to the European Parliament are presented. Second, their entry and exit paths are analyzed, with an emphasis on the specific socio-demographic and ideological characteristics that accompany each path.

## 2. PROFILES AND CAREERS AT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT:

### STATE OF THE ART

The European Parliament represents the will of the European people and plays a significant political role, especially after the 2004 enlargement, which was a 'critical juncture' for the EU institutions (Verzichelli and Edinger, 2005). These elements, together with the accumulated institutional experience of the European Parliament and its contribution to European integration, make the EP an attractive political destination, and this has a twofold effect. On the one hand, the EP intensifies the process of the professionalization of MEPs, because of the technocratic knowledge and know-how required. On the other hand, it contributes to the formation of supranational political elites that are connected with, but distinct from, individual national political elites (Salvati, 2016; Whitaker, 2014).

Most pieces of research on MEPs focus on their socio-demographic or political profiles, but some study the patterns of their recruitment and political careers, either before or after serving in the EP. Verzichelli and Edinger (2005) consider MEPs from a macroscopic perspective and detect different recruitment and career patterns. They identify trends and characteristics that mark out MEPs as a separate and relatively coherent political class, namely, as a supranational elite with features that go beyond the individual national framework. Examining the relationship between the terms of MEPs in

the EP and their prior or subsequent political careers, Scarrow (1997) distinguishes three types of political career patterns: a) a term in the European Parliament to facilitate a career at the national level; b) a term in the European Parliament as a form of ‘political dead-end’ for those who either retire or take a non-elective post at the end of their term; and c) a supranational elite, with a term in the European Parliament as an end in itself. Scarrow’s data from the first decade of the EP suggested that European careers might be on the rise. Edinger and Fiers (2007) connect the previous policy experience of MEPs (an objective dimension) with their ambitions and aspirations formed during their tenure (a subjective dimension) and offer a comprehensive typology. Although they do not test their typology with data, they distinguish between six ideal types, each one reflecting a different kind of career path.

Regarding the new Member States, evidence on MEPs from central Europe shows that ten years after the 2004 enlargement, experience at the national level remained relevant for most central European MEPs (Bíró-Nagy, 2019). Other researchers have linked political trajectories with how legislators cognitively conceive their roles (Bale and Taggart, 2006; Navarro, 2012). Bale and Taggart propose four types of MEPs, each with a different role orientation: a) the *European evangelists*, who are committed to the European idea and especially the European integration process; b) the *policy advocates*, who are dedicated to specific policies and the satisfaction that their implementation brings; c) the *constituency representatives*, who emphasize those whom they represent (constituents, party, interest group, etc.); and d) the *institutionalists*, who treat the European Parliament as having a value in itself. In a similar vein, Navarro (2012) also distinguishes four ideal types of MEP: a) the *specialists*, who place particular emphasis on the decision-making process and emphasize the technical and practical aspects of their work; b) the *animators*, who dedicate themselves to the cause of European integration; c) the *intermediaries*, who aim to develop ties between the EU and the voters; and d) the *outsiders*, who are not satisfied with the course and operation of the EU and express this dissatisfaction in all directions.

Although these typologies primarily rely on the role orientations at the supranational level, they do not overlook ties with national political and party systems. The research shows that, while the influence exercised on MEPs by national parties,

particularly those of small size, is decisive (Raunio, 2000), a group of supranational MEPs emerges, with specific career patterns. Two main analytical perspectives examine the link between national politics and MEPs. The first approach studies the individual political parties and their candidates, examining the control that the parties impose and the loyalty that the candidates show (Raunio, 2000). The second approach focuses on technical factors such as the electoral system, the individual weight of each Member State and the number of MEPs that it elects, and the time between national and EP elections; in sum, the structure of the opportunities presented for election (Daniel and Metzger, 2018; Farrell and Scully, 2007; Salvati, 2016).

Concerning the Greek case, the research so far either indicates the absence of available data (Raunio, 2000) or presents a static picture in time, with the examination of only single terms of the EP. Greek MEPs sometimes score highly on belonging to the group of *amateurs*, that is, they are political personnel with no longstanding relationship with the EP (Salvati, 2016), while others appear relatively more experienced (Beauvallet & Michon, 2010). Information on Greek MEPs in various comparative works is also rather superficial; whenever these works cover an extensive period, their findings tend to describe differences and similarities between different countries rather than providing a systematic and in-depth analysis of these changes over time (Beauvallet-Haddad et al., 2016).

In summary, the literature on MEPs stresses their complex relationship with the national parliaments and their changing role over time. Although MEPs constitute a separate political class with distinct characteristics, at the same time the importance of national ties and domestic party competition cannot be overlooked. Further, the literature emphasizes the changing relationship between national and European elections, and the impact of ‘critical junctures’ on the career patterns, profiles, and roles of MEPs.

### 3. EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN GREECE

The European Parliament is made up of 705 members from the 27 EU Member States, elected by direct universal suffrage for five years. The distribution of seats between the Member States depends on the populations of the countries. The first European parliamentary elections were held in 1979, and Greece did not participate in these as it

joined the (then) EEC two years later (January 1981). At that time, the ruling New Democracy (ND) party decided to hold the European elections in Greece at the same time as the national elections (October 18, 1981). From January to October 1981, the national parliament appointed 24 MEPs to fill Greece's seats in the European Parliament. Since October 1981, the European elections have taken place every five years.<sup>1</sup> The number of seats distributed to Greece was initially 24; it rose to 25 in the 1990s, dropped down again after the 2004 enlargement to 22, and is currently 21 (Table 1).

From 1981 until 2009 MEPs gained a seat depending on their list position on the fixed party ballot, based on the total number of votes the party received. The entire country formed a single constituency, with an electoral threshold, after 1994, of 3% of the vote.<sup>2</sup> Although each political party followed different procedures for compiling this list, it is evident that the political leader had the last word. The candidate selection process changed before the 2014 EP elections when the ruling coalition introduced open lists with a personal preference vote.<sup>3</sup> Regardless of the deeper reasons behind this decision, there is no doubt that it was a tactical maneuver against SYRIZA. The main objective was to reduce the upcoming electoral losses by mobilizing voters through the personal preference system, which can lead to a higher turnout (Carey and Shugart, 1995). The parties introduced a personal preference list with twice the number of candidates (42) as the number of Greek seats in the European Parliament (21).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the electoral behaviour in the European elections in Greece, see Teperoglou (2016).

<sup>2</sup> The 3% electoral threshold was introduced for the 1994 European Parliament Elections with L 2196/1994.

<sup>3</sup> The two political leaders of the government coalition (Prime Minister A. Samaras from ND and Deputy Prime Minister E. Venizelos from PASOK) suddenly announced a different election system, the same as the one used for national elections in Greece. It was a strategic choice of the above parties in the context of the general socio-economic and political environment of that time. The decision was framed as an indication of pluralism and the democratization of the candidate selection, as party leaders no longer held the 'privilege' of personally picking the names and forming the list with their desired ranking (see <https://m.naftemporiki.gr/story/763685>). However, for the opposition party (SYRIZA), the change was viewed as an attempt to reverse the imminent electoral defeat of the ruling coalition parties and shift the public agenda regarding the political character and message of the European elections (see <https://www.syriza.gr/article/id/54685/Scholio-toy-Grafeioy-Typoy-toy-SYRIZA-schetika-me-th-schediazomenh-allagh-toy-nomoy-gia-tis-eyrwekloges.html>).

<sup>4</sup> This significant change had direct implications for both the structure of the ballot and the characteristics required for a candidate to be able to compete in the elections. The degree of personal appeal that a candidate now needs to get elected became evident from the fact that in the 2014 European elections, Manolis Glezos, the candidate with the highest number of votes (466,902), was voted for by one out of every three SYRIZA voters. Five years later, in the 2019 European elections, Stelios Kymbouropoulos held

Table 1: *Seats per party in the European Parliament 1981-2019*

	1981	1984	1989	1994	1999	2004	2009	2014	2019
PASOK	10	10	9	10	9	8	8	2*	2**
NEW DEMOCRACY	8	9	10	9	9	11	8	5	8
KKE	3	3		2	3	3	2	2	2
KKE ES.	1	1							
SYNASPISMOS/ SYRIZA			4	2	2	1	1	6	6
KODISO	1								
KOMMA PROODEYTIKON	1								
EPEN.		1							
DHANA			1						
POL.AN.				2					
DIKKI					2				
LAOS						1	2		
ECOLOGISTS GREENS							1		
GOLDEN DAWN								3	2
TO POTAMI								2	
AN.EL.								1	
ELLINIKI LISI									1
Number of seats in EP	24	24	24	25	25	24	22	21	21
Number of parties	6	5	4	5	5	5	6	7	6
Number of new MEPs	24	18	11	15	14	20	14	19	11
Participation in elections (%)	78.84	77.17	84.50	71.24	70.25	63.22	52.63	59.33	58.69
National elections in the same year	Same day		Same day			Before	Before		After
Candidate selection method	Closed List	Closed List	Closed List	Closed List	Closed List	Closed List	Closed List	Open List	Open List

\*MEPs of Elia \*\* MEPs of Kinima Allagis.

Regarding the electoral outcome of the European elections, they have often been dominated in Greece by the national context, with many serving as indicators for the

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the record number of 577,114 personal votes, attracting the personal votes of one in every three ND voters. See <https://ekloges.ypes.gr/>.



outcome of an upcoming national election (Teperoglou, 2016). The left-right divide that served as the main dividing line up until 2009 was partially substituted in 2014 with a pro-European/anti-European cleavage (ibid). As evident from Table 1, another significant change in 2014 was the fact that the ratio of seats per party dropped, as more parties gained one of the (fewer) EP seats. It is clear, therefore, that since European election results cannot be seen independently of the national context, MEPs' profiles and career patterns can also not be analyzed independently of the national context.

#### 4. DATA AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Our data contain information on certain socio-demographic and political variables for all Greek MEPs elected to the European Parliament in all nine European elections from 1981 until 2019 (Table 1). Our method of data collection followed the guidelines adopted for the Socioscope project.<sup>5</sup> The database contains 146 unique cases in the initial composition of the European Parliament and 210 MEPs in total, a number that includes all those elected for more than one term. Although a comparison between MEPs and MPs raises methodological considerations, in terms of both the actual N size and the different policy arena, whenever data are available and comparable we present them for both parliaments. In that way, we can compare the two populations when they had a different (1981–2009) and the same (2014–2019) method for selecting candidates. We check whether the observed trends are common to the two legislatures and, therefore, are suggestive of broader transformations in the profile of Greek political elites regardless of the political arena.

In the first part of the article, we present the socio-demographic variables (sex, education, profession) for MEPs across time. In the second part of the article, we propose a typology of the Greek MEPs based on their relationship with the national parliament and present the profile of each cohort.

Most specifically we address the following research questions:

1. If the *supranational elite* approach applies, then we expect Greek MEPs to constitute a distinctive European elite. They should have socio-demographic

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<sup>5</sup>For reference, see: <https://socioscope.gr/dataset/deputies/about>

attributes that differentiate them from the domestic elite and should pursue their careers exclusively in the EP.

2. If the *critical junctures* approach applies, then we expect changes in the socio-demographic attributes and career paths of Greek MEPs at times that are critical, either at the European level (such as the 2004 EP) or the national level (such as the 2014 EP).

Before presenting our data, we should be cautious with the way we interpret them. Bearing in mind that we have a small N, some changes over time may be the result of minor changes. We are aware of this caveat; however, we believe that it does not override the general trends observed.

## 5. THE SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF MEPS: CHANGES OVER TIME

### *Sex*

Between 1981 and 2019 (Table 2), out of the 146 unique individuals ever elected to the European Parliament, 24 were women (16.4%). In all those elected to the European Parliament (210, taking the initial composition of each period), the percentage is only slightly higher (17.1%). Given that the presence of women in politics in Greece is low, and, until the end of the 1980s, politics appeared to be ‘a male monopoly’ (Kakepaki, 2016, p. 114), it comes as no surprise that all 24 MEPs appointed in January 1981 under the ND government were men. The under-representation of women hardly changed in the first European elections in October 1981, which were held on the same day as the national elections. In these elections, Ms. Titina Pantazi, the first female Greek MEP in the history of the institution, was elected by taking the last electable position from the PASOK ballot. In each of the following two elections (1984 and 1989), Greece elected two women. From 1994 until 2009, the percentage of women in the European Parliament was higher than the percentage of female national MPs, and it reached a peak in 2009 when 31.8% of Greek MEPs were female. The difference between the national and the European Parliament suggests that a closed list may correct misrepresentation biases (Kakepaki, 2016, pp. 113-114). We can also assume that the European arena was a place for the leaders of the largest parties (PASOK and ND) to promote a more gender-

balanced image of their parties. If the leaders had provided predominantly male closed lists, this would have undermined their efforts to portray their parties as pro-European and in line with core European values.

With the adoption of personal preference voting in 2014, the percentages fall fully into line with those of the national parliament. This alignment leads to a significant drop in the proportion of women, from 31.8% in 2009 to 23.8% in 2014 and 2019. The literature suggests that when the entire electorate chooses candidates, it is much harder to coordinate and select candidates with the socio-demographic or ideological characteristics that are ‘desirable’ for each party (Hazan and Rahat, 2010). The findings from Greece confirm the hypothesis that the larger the ‘selectorate’, the less representative is the body that gets selected. Party leaders can now ‘blame the voters’ for the less gender-balanced outcome since the lists complied to the 1/3 gender quotas rule.

Table 2: *Gender distribution of MEPs and MPs 1981–2019*

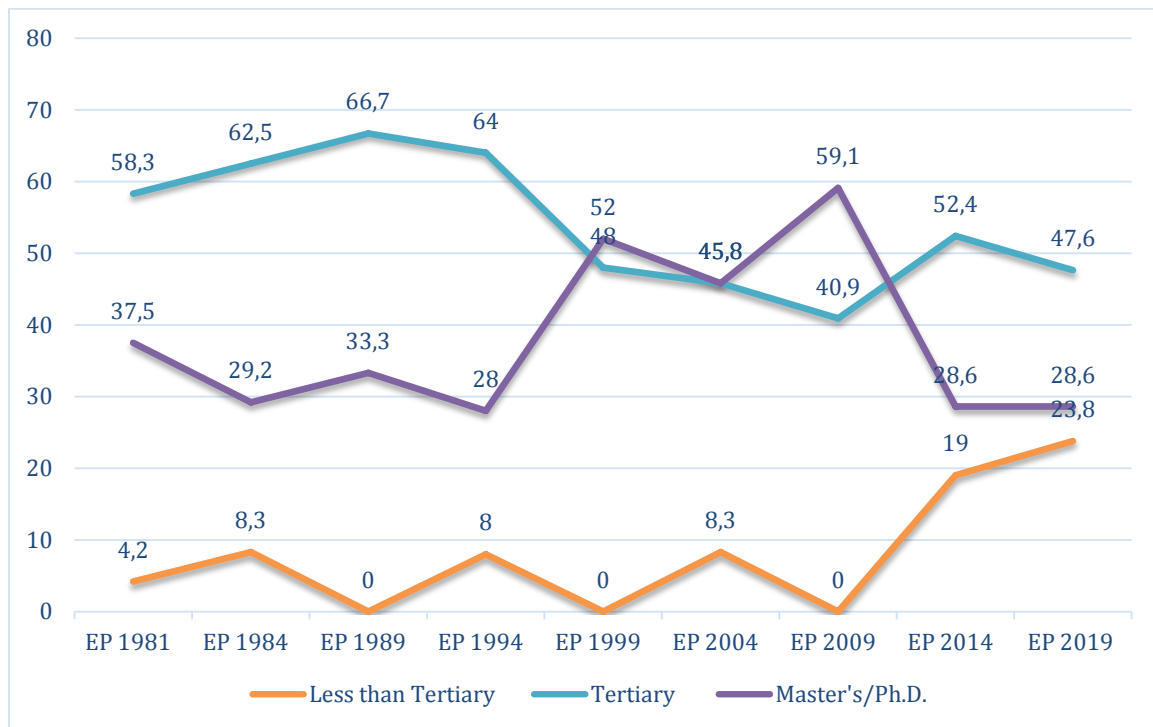
	Women (N)	Men (N)	Women in the European Parliament (%)	Women in the Greek Parliament*
Term 1 1981	1	23	4.2	4.3
Term 2 1984	2	22	8.3	4.3
Term 3 1989	1	23	4.2	4.0
Term 4 1994	4	21	16.0	6.2
Term 5 1999	4	21	16.0	10.5
Term 6 2004	7	17	29.2	14.1
Term 7 2009	7	15	31.8	19.1
Term 8 2014	5	16	23.8	23.2
Term 9 2019	5	16	23.8	21.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>17.1</b>	<b>11.9</b>

\* Whenever elections were not in the same year, the percentage refers to the nearest national elections (source: socioscope.gr and Drettakis, 1991).

## Education

All research on elites suggests that the level of education of political elites is much higher than that of the general adult population, and this is probably one of the most significant discrepancies in descriptive representation. In the European Parliament, this disproportionality is even higher than in the national parliaments (Bovens and Wille, 2017, p. 117). The increased complexity of the issues addressed at the supranational level requires competencies and expertise that are in line with advanced studies. At the same time, advanced education gives individual-specific life skills that are crucial in the EP (Daniel, 2015). It has been established that, in the Greek case, at least until 2009, members of the national parliament had high educational capital (Kountouri, 2016). Figure 1 shows the percentage of Greek MEPs who held a Master's degree or higher, those with a university degree, and those without a university degree.

Figure 1: *Level of Education of Greek MEPs 1981–2019*



From Figure 1, we can distinguish three periods in the distribution of the educational level of the Greek MEPs. The first period is from 1981 to 1994, when the percentage of those who held a university degree was about twice that of those who held

a master's degree or a PhD. The share of MEPs with less than tertiary education was low and, in some terms (1989, 1999, 2009), was zero.

The second period, from 1999 to 2009, is a period when the share of those with a master's degree or a PhD was equal to or exceeded the share of those with a university degree. The search for specialized expertise is fully compatible with the modernization rhetoric that dominated politics in this decade in Greece, under PASOK and in the person of K. Simitis, the chief inspirer and leader of the project. Both PASOK and ND, which was continually trying to reinforce its brand as the party that 'owned' and generally safeguarded Greece's European course and prospects, kept this issue high on the agenda during the 1990s (Karayiannis, 2007). Both parties emphasized the need for policies that would align Greece with the European average for social and economic wellbeing and would help to integrate the country further in Europe.

Finally, in the third and final period, 2014–2019, there was a drop in the educational status of the MEPs. The percentage of MEPs without a university degree more than doubled (to 19% in 2014 and 24% in 2019), and at the same time the percentage of holders of a master's degree or a PhD significantly declined. As will be made clear below, this was also a result of a change in the occupational characteristics of the MEPs. In sum, open lists and changes in the party system worked in favour of the expansion and inclusion of social groups (in this case, the less well-educated) who were underrepresented in all aspects of representation. Of course, these trends come from small changes in absolute numbers, so they are quite volatile and are possibly susceptible to change.

### *Professions*

The political profession is an area that has received extensive study, analysis, and classification, with an emphasis on developments at the macro-level (Best and Cotta, 2000) and on the latest developments and transformations (Gaxie, 2018). In the case of Greece, there is an empirically established link between parliamentary representatives and the traditional professions of politicians, such as lawyers, doctors, and economists, and later, the so-called 'mass audience and high public visibility' professions of

journalists, artists, and athletes (Kakepaki and Karayiannis, 2016). Figure 2 shows the occupations of those elected to the European Parliament.

Table 3: *The professions of Greek MEPs, 1981–2019 (N)*

	EP 1981	EP 1984	EP 1989	EP 1994	EP 1999	EP 2004	EP 2009	EP 2014	EP 2019	Total
Journalists	4	7	5	6	3	3	2	3	4	37
Economists	6	2	6	5	7	3	4	1	3	37
Lawyers	9	5	4	4	1	4	3	3	2	35
Engineers	1	2	-	1	3	3	3	4	3	20
University Professors	1	2	2	2	4	2	2	1	-	16
Doctors	1	4	2	3	2	-	1	-	1	14
Managers/Top positions	-	1	1	1	1	3	2	-	1	10
Clerical Jobs	-	-	1	2	2	1	-	2	-	8
Artists/athletes	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	2	3	7
Teachers	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	-	-	4
Armed forces	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	3
Other	2	1	3	-	2	3	2	3	2	18

The first finding from Table 3 is that, in contrast to the national arena, the legal professions are not the leading profession after 1981. In contrast, journalists, economists, and other professionals became more widespread. The trend after 2000 for journalists to appear in the national legislature in higher numbers (Kakepaki and Karayiannis, 2016, p. 94) was already evident at the European level, and here the numbers only began to decline in 1999, at the same time that they started to increase on the domestic scene. One plausible explanation for the popularity of the journalistic profession is that journalists, by the nature of their occupation, are more aware of and knowledgeable about the EU. Also, the EP became an attractive professional destination when one considers the changes in the media environment in Greece from the 1990s onwards (Papathanassopoulos, 2004).

After 2014 the occupational characteristics of Greek MEPs changed, and in the following ways, they largely followed the characteristics of the political personnel in the Greek parliament (Kakepaki, 2018): the election of personalities from professional backgrounds with a broad appeal throughout the electorate, such as artists and athletes; the gradual disappearance of professions of high status and technocratic expertise but not necessarily broad appeal (such as university professors); and, finally, the election for the first time of retired armed forces personnel (linked to the entry to the EP of the far-right, ultranationalist, and neo-Nazi Golden Dawn).

## 6. TYPES OF CAREER IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND A PROPOSED TYPOLOGY

In the second part of this article, we test the relationship between the national and the European Parliament. By tracking the career paths of MEPs not only *before* they enter the European Parliament, as is usually done, but also *after* they exit the EP, we create a typology based on the relationship between the national and the European Parliament (Figure 2). It is based on the dynamic relationships between the domestic political system and the EU as these are imprinted in the trajectories of the careers of the political personnel. The proposed typology, like most typologies, it is not based on an exhaustive number of cases but seeks to record *relationships between and not properties of* the single cases to which it refers.

Figure 2: *Types of careers of Greek MEPs*

	Continue their career in national parliament after EP	Do not continue their career in national parliament after EP
Elected first to European Parliament	<i>Strategists</i>	<i>Careerists</i>
Elected first to national parliament	<i>Party Soldiers</i>	<i>Golden Parachutists</i>

The two variables under consideration create a typology with four groups of MEPs. The first group contains those who are first elected at the European level, without any prior experience at the national level, and who then proceed to have a career in the national parliament. We call these *Strategists*, and we assume that they use the symbolic political capital and expertise of the European arena strategically as a stepping-stone for their political career in the national arena. The second group consists of those who are first elected to the EP and who remain there, ending their political career with a background only in the European Parliament. We call these *Careerists*. The third group contains those who are elected first to the national parliament, then move to the European Parliament and then return and continue their political careers in Greece. We call these *Party Soldiers*, since they do not seem to favour one level of policymaking over the other, and move with relative ease from the national to the supranational level, depending on the party's needs. Finally, the fourth and last category is those who are first elected to the national parliament and who continue there and end their career in the European Parliament, since after leaving the EP they are not elected to another legislative body. These are members of the national political elite who use the European Parliament as a type of honorary retirement from their political career. We call them the *Golden Parachutists*. Table 3 shows the proportion of each category in all the EPs and the turnover rates for the EP. The general distribution of the types reveals that the dominant type of Greek MEP is the *Careerist*. Almost exactly half (50.5%) of all MEPs ever elected to the EP have had an exclusively European career. The second-largest type of MEP is the *Golden Parachutists* (27.1%), while *Strategists* are the third type (17.1%). The *Party Soldier* is a rather marginal type, with just 5.2% of all MEPs belonging to this group. Although this is the overall distribution, the relationship between the national and the European Parliament is not static and changes over time, as Table 4 further suggests.



Table 4: *Turnover in the European Parliament and types of careers of Greek MEPs, 1981–2019 (%)*

	Turnover	<i>Careerist</i>	<i>Golden Parachutist</i>	<i>Strategist</i>	<i>Party Soldier</i> <sup>6</sup>
EP 1981	100.0	25.0	62.5	12.5	0
EP 1984	85.7	33.3	41.7	20.8	4.2
EP 1989	45.8	45.8	29.2	25.0	0.0
EP 1994	62.5	64.0	16.0	16.0	4.0
EP 1999	58.3	64.0	16.0	20.0	0.0
EP 2004	83.3	45.8	8.3	29.2	16.7
EP 2009	63.3	54.5	18.2	22.7	4.5
EP 2014	90.5	66.7	19.0	4.8	9.5
EP 2019 <sup>7</sup>	52.4	57.1	33.3	-	9.5
<b>Total</b>		<b>50.5</b>	<b>27.1</b>	<b>17.1</b>	<b>5.2</b>

With a 100% turnover, the 1981 European Parliament is seen as the starting point for a new political class, since none of the 24 elected MEPs were among the 24 who had been appointed for the previous months. However, this new political class was novel only to the EU Parliament; the national parliament was the main pool, with 62.5% of those elected for the first time originating from there. In the first decade (1981–1989), the pattern that stands out is the declining supply of MEPs from the national parliament to the European Parliament. In 1989, 29.2% of MEPs had previously served in the national legislature, while 45.8% had served exclusively in the EP. At the same time, the *Strategists* were on the rise.

In the next decade (1994–1999), the relationship between the European Parliament and the national parliament changed. The percentage of MEPs with a previous term in the National Assembly fell to 16% for both terms, indicating a relative autonomy

<sup>6</sup> Because of the small number in the *Party Soldier* category (only 11 cases out of 210), the percentages can only be indicative of certain trends.

<sup>7</sup> Obviously, there is no way to guess the future status of a current MEP, so in another election they might belong to a different category, depending on their future career path. Therefore, the types for 2019 are suggestive and not final.

of the supranational political elite from the national one. In comparison, the percentage of *Strategists* also declined (to 16% and 20% respectively). It becomes clear that the 1990s was a period when a supranational elite, pursuing a career exclusively at the European Parliament, was gradually emerging, with 64% belonging to this type. During the same period, as noted in the previous section, we record the highest percentages for the educational capital of MEPs. This trend partly stopped in the next decade: in 2004, the rate of those coming from the national parliament remained low (8.3%), the percentage of *Strategists* more than doubled (29.2 %), while the percentage of *Careerists* fell to 45.8%.

The period after 2014 has two points worth stressing. First, the turnover in 2014 was the second-highest in the history of the European Parliament (90.5%), marking the starting point for a new generation of MEPs. Although the open lists may have worked in favour of the selection of completely different political personnel, we link this renewal to the reshaping of the party system after 2012, the decline of the traditional parties, and the rise of new parties, trends already evident in the national arena (Kakepaki, 2018, p. 103). Experience in the national parliament was again on the rise, as, especially in 2019 when 33.3% belonged to the *Golden Parachute* type. We can assume that this marks a setback in the autonomy of the supranational field to produce political elites, as is suggested by the need for prior recognition required by the open list system.

Moreover, members of the national elite may have found it harder to be re-elected to the national parliament due to changes in party competition, and therefore they were more willing to compete in the European arena. Finally, even without knowing the future positions for the 2019 cohort, we can see that the number of *Strategists* declined. We tentatively suggest that this might also reflect the de-legitimization of the EU and the rising unpopularity of EU-related personnel.

Finally, Table 5 shows the different socio-demographic characteristics of the three major MEP types. The most frequent profession for *Careerists* is journalism; *Careerists* have a higher educational level than *Golden Parachutists* but the same education level as the *Strategists*. They do not come from political families (only 9.7% have a family tradition). They are elected to Parliament for the first time at the average age of 54 years, while at the symbolic level, measured by whether they head the list (or, after 2014, whether they attract the highest number of personal preference votes), only 16.8% of

them occupy the first place. It is also interesting to note that, although they have never competed in the national arena, 9.7% of them have held extra-parliamentary ministerial positions. In terms of their distribution between the major European political groups,<sup>8</sup> *Careerists* mostly belong to the two largest political groups, the European People’s Party (EPP) and the Socialists and Democrats group (S&D).

Table 5: *Types of Greek MEPs, socio-demographic and political\* characteristics*

	<i>Careerist</i> (N= 72)	<i>Strategist</i> (N= 22)	<i>Golden Parachutist</i> (N= 43)
Most frequent occupation	Journalist	Economist/ Lawyer	Lawyer
Mean terms	1.4	1.6	1.3
Mean age at 1 <sup>st</sup> election	54	44	57
Women (%)	16.7	18.2	16.3
ISCED 7/8 (%)	43.1	43.5	37.2
Family tradition (%)	9.7	9.1	37.2
Ministerial position (%)	9.7	63.6	39.5
Top of the electoral list (%)	18.1	13.6	27.9
Belong to the S&D	33.3	54.5	37.2
Belong to the EPP	34.7	22.7	44.2
Belong to the GUE/NGL	15.3	22.7	9.3
<b>Total (%)</b>	<b>49.3</b>	<b>15.2</b>	<b>33.3</b>

\*The current names of the European political groups are used. Source:

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/about-parliament/en/in-the-past/previous-elections> (own calculations).

The second type, *Golden Parachutist*, displays all the archetypal characteristics of the domestic political elite. *Golden Parachutists* are predominantly lawyers; they are

<sup>8</sup> We use the European political group to which the MEPs belong; in the case of New Democracy MEPs this is the group of the European People’s Party. For PASOK/ELIA/KINAL/POTAMI MEPs this is the group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament. For SYRIZA/SYN/DHKKI and KKE (until 2009) MEPs this is the Left group in the European Parliament.

elected to the European Parliament, on average, at an older age than the other types (57 years), and remain there for the shortest time (1.3 terms). They disproportionately come from a political family (37.2%), with a past tenure as a minister (39.5%), and, since they are well-known political figures, they capitalize on this by being more likely than the others to head the list (27.7%). Their level of education is not as high as that of the other types, since their political capital stems from other factors. The majority in this group belong to the EPP (44.2%), with 37.2% belonging to the S&D and only 9.3% to the GUE/NGL group (the European United Left/Nordic Green Left).

The third type, *Strategists*, differs significantly from the previous one in the following: *Strategists* are elected to the European Parliament at a much younger age (mean age at the first election is 44 years) and remain for a longer period (on average for 1.6 terms). Their most common occupations are economists and legal professionals, while an exceptionally high percentage of this group (65.6%) occupy a ministerial position when returning to the national parliament. This is, in conclusion, a group of political figures for whom the European Parliament serves as a symbolic resource and a stepping-stone that is used on the way to the national political scene with a ministerial position. Finally, *Strategists* differ in their political affiliation, since they overwhelmingly belong to the S&D group (54.4%).

Interestingly, the one thing that remains relatively unchanged across the three groups is the share of women MEPs, which ranges from 16.3% (*Golden Parachutists*) to 18.2% (*Strategists*). We assume that, overall, the method of selection (closed lists), together with the particular emphasis on gender equality measures by the EP (e.g., quotas), made it difficult for parties to ignore women and promote men. Therefore, this made the European arena slightly more gender-equal than the national one.

On the other hand, when it comes to their political affiliation, there are notable variations across the party groups: ND uses less of the political capital of its MEPs in the national context since they are more likely either to finish their career in the EP (as a *Golden Parachutist*) or to stay exclusively there. On the contrary, for PASOK/KINAL/ELIA politicians a career in Europe is used strategically to enable a national career. MEPs from the smaller parties of the left (those belonging to the GUE/NGL group) make up most of the *Party Soldiers* category (figures not shown),

suggesting that, for them, election to the EP is dictated by internal party needs and does not serve a personal career path so strongly.

## 7. DISCUSSION

Our first question, regarding the ‘supranational elite’ approach, is partly verified by our data. Greek MEPs display certain socio-demographic attributes that differentiate them from the domestic elites. Greek MEPs have (a slightly) more balanced distribution than MPs in the core socio-demographic variable of gender, have a higher educational and professional status, and predominantly pursue careers exclusively at the EP since more than half of them belong to the *Strategist* type.

At the same time, these MEPs do not present a static image over time, suggesting that certain EP elections were critical. On the one hand, the *critical juncture* of the 2004 EP elections brought to the fore a new generation of MEPs with a more ‘technocratic’ profile, as expressed in their higher educational capital; there was a better gender balance among them, and they came from more diverse professions. At the same time, these MEPs returned in larger numbers to the national arena as *Strategists*, suggesting that the 2000s were a period in which, for the domestic party competition, a tenure in the EP was seen as an asset that would elevate one’s chance of election at a time when ‘project Europe’ was not a cause for major divisions.

The critical juncture of 2014, and the emerging pro-European/anti-European cleavage in the elections for the EP, also seems to have had an impact on the profile of elected MEPs. After 2014 the percentage of women decreased, while the numbers of MEPs from non-traditional political professions, and those with lower educational levels, increased. New parties entered the EP, whilst a different selection process produced different results in the field of representation. The adoption of open lists possibly signaled a setback to the autonomy of the supranational political elites. Election to the European Parliament requires either political visibility, through a past term in the national parliament, or public recognition through personal and professional traits. We assume that this development was also related to changes in the content of the electoral competition and the rise of anti-European sentiment.

Our findings suggest that the study of the MEPs remains an open research subject. The socio-demographic characteristics of the MEPs and their profiles over time reflect broader political procedures. The study indicates how the political forces perceive the EU and the country's role in it, and how the EU becomes a part of national political competition. The changes in the profiles of the MEPs also reflect a broader shift in western political systems, with the gradual dominance of communication mechanisms, and the media in general, in the political process. We can link these trends to the personalization of politics, that is, to the gradual predominance of the individual (politician) at the expense of the collective (political party, etc.) in the political process.

Finally, it is important to underline the need for further analysis of the complex paths of the careers of political personnel. The types of *Careerist*, *Party Soldier*, and *Strategist* indicate the complex relationships between the national parliament and the EP. In addition, the type of *Golden Parachutist* indicates that there are complex relationships between the elites, that is, the national elite and the European one. These complex relationships are dynamic rather than static. They reflect the changing attitudes towards the European Union and its role in national policy, and different strategic choices made by political personnel in the context of the particular historical juncture.

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