



Annual report 2010

Voting Behaviour in the New European Parliament: the First Year

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Voting Behaviour in the New European Parliament: the First Year

Introduction

This is the first VoteWatch annual report, which investigates the activities of the 2009-14 European Parliament: the first year of the seventh directly-elected European Parliament. The report analyses the voting behaviour of the MEPs and political groups in all 792 recorded roll-call votes that took place between the first plenary session of the new parliament in July 2009 and the last plenary session in June 2010. The report focuses on three main patterns: (1) How often each of the political groups have been on the winning side in votes; (2) who votes with whom in the new Parliament; and (3) the 'voting cohesiveness' of the political groups. We look at average voting patterns as well as patterns by policy area. We also compare behaviour in the new Parliament to behaviour in the previous Parliament (2004-09). More detailed information is available on www.VoteWatch.eu.

The main findings are as follows:

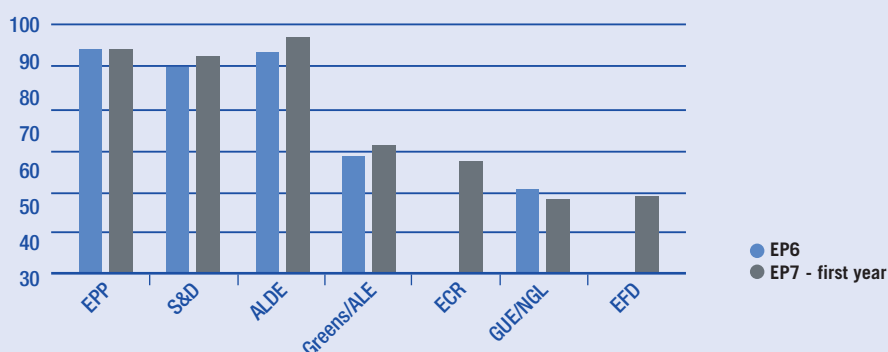
- In the current European Parliament, as in the previous Parliament, MEPs vote primarily along transnational party lines rather than along national lines.
- The European political groups have increased their internal cohesion, when compared to the previous term, as well as their attendance rates;
- The European People's Party (EPP), which is the largest group in the Parliament and which is slightly bigger in relative terms than it was in the previous Parliament, is nonetheless on the winning side less often than before;
- Increased competition between groups on the centre-left and groups on the centre-right is noticeable in particular policy areas, such as *economics, industry, development, budget, environment and civil liberties*.
- When the Parliament splits along left-right lines, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats in Europe (ALDE) are the 'kingmakers'.

Votewatch.eu is an independent website set up to promote better debates and greater transparency in EU decision-making by providing easy access to, and analysis of, the decisions and activities of EU politicians. **Votewatch.eu** uses the European Parliament's own attendance, voting and activity data to give a full overview of MEP activities, broken down by nationality, national political party and European party grouping.

Who is on the Winning Side?

In this section we look at the percentage of times the majority of each political group has been on the winning side – voting Yes if the majority of the Parliament voted Yes, or No if the majority voted No – in all 792 roll-call votes in the first year of the new Parliament, and in the sub-sets of votes by policy area.

% of time of the Winning Side



- **The European People's Party's (EPP)** is the largest group in the Parliament but only comes second in terms of 'winning' in voting situations (ALDE is leading). The EPP do better in some policy areas: being on the winning side 100% of the time on economics, 96% on constitutional and inter-institutional affairs, and 92% on foreign and security issues. Its record is particularly poor in budget votes, where it has been on the losing side 15% of the time. The EPP is also doing worse than in EP6 on civil liberties, winning only 68% of votes in the first year.
- **The Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D)** has improved its winning record most significantly on budget votes (93% in EP7 so far, compared to only 82% on average during EP6), but also on agriculture and civil liberties. However, the S&D has a low winning record on economic issues (51%).
- **The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)** has in the first year of EP7 been on the winning side most frequently of all the political groups (89%), replacing EPP as the previous 'winner' in voting situations in EP6. ALDE's record is particularly high on budget (99%), civil liberties (94%) and internal market (94%). The policy areas where ALDE has the lowest winning record are fisheries (72%) and agriculture (77%).
- **Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA)** group has improved its % of votes on the "winning side" on budget and civil liberties issues (due to the formation of a centre-left coalition in these areas), but has lost ground on agriculture and foreign and security policy. The Greens/EFA group has slightly improved its winning record on environment, from 56% in EP6 to 60% in the current term.
- **European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)** group has been on the winning side 59% of times. It has been in minority particularly on budgetary control (winning on only 19% of votes), civil liberties (35%) and constitutional affairs (38%). On the other hand, the ECR has a relatively good winning record on agriculture, having won 80% of votes.
- **European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL)** has been on the winning side just over half of the times 51% of votes. It has been in a minority particularly on budgetary control (25% of votes won), constitutional affairs (25%) and economics (31%).
- **Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD)** is the smallest group in the European Parliament and has been part of the winning majority least among all political groups: (49%). It has been in minority particularly on votes on gender equality (40% of votes won), civil liberties (26%) and budget (26%).

Coalition Patterns Between the Groups: Who Votes With Whom?

This table shows the percentage of times the majority of a political group voted the same way as the majority of another group in all votes in the first year of EP7 compared to the full term of EP6. The two biggest groups voted the same way 70% of the time in both periods. However, the ALDE vote more often with S&D in the current Parliament than they did in the previous Parliament, and much more often with S&D than with EPP. Also, the new ECR group is much less likely to vote with the EPP than the old UEN group from the previous Parliament: 64% compared to 81%.

Voting coalitions in the 2004-2009 European Parliament							Voting coalitions in the 2009-2014 European Parliament (1st year)						
All roll-call votes (6,149 votes)							All roll call votes July 2009 – June 2010 (792 votes)						
	GUE/NGL	G/EFA	SOC	ALDE	EPP	UEN		GUE/NGL	G/EFA	S&D	ALDE	EPP	ECR
GUE/NGL							GUE/NGL						
G/EFA	74%						G/EFA	75%					
SOC	62%	70%					S&D	60%	73%				
ALDE	52%	62%	75%				ALDE	52%	67%	79%			
EPP-ED	41%	50%	70%	77%			EPP	37%	48%	69%	76%		
UEN	45%	49%	63%	71%	81%		ECR	38%	39%	47%	59%	64%	
IND/DEM	41%	39%	40%	45%	51%	54%	EFD	34%	35%	42%	48%	55%	55%

Looking more generally at the type of coalitions that form in votes, the key contrast is between a grand coalition, where the EPP, ALDE and S&D vote together, and left-right politics, where the EPP and S&D vote against each other. The frequency of a grand coalition (EPP+S&D) is roughly the same in the first year of EP7 as in the previous term. In terms of left-right splits, though, in EP7, ALDE has voted more to the left: the per cent of times a coalition of S&D+ALDE voted against the EPP increased from 14% to 17%, while a centre-right coalition (EPP+ALDE against S&D) declined from 16% in the previous term to 13% in the current one.

However, these are aggregate coalition patterns. When we look at the type of coalitions that form in particular policy areas, three different types of coalition patterns are evident in EP7, as follows:

A WINNING CENTRE-RIGHT COALITION

- **Economics** (35 votes): a stable coalition between EPP and ALDE groups dominates votes in this policy area, against the background of a clearer left-right split (compared to EP6). ALDE voted 91% of times together with the EPP, but only 51% of times with S&D. This centre-right coalition (EPP+ALDE) is sometimes joined by the ECR, while the 3 groups on the left (S&D, Greens/EFA, GUE/NGL) have found themselves in opposition: on the losing side more than half of the time. Notably, the EPP group has had a perfect record on economics in EP7, winning every single vote.
- **Industry, research & energy** (42 votes): the EPP, ALDE and ECR have been on the winning side over 80% of times in this area, whereas the further any of the other parties are to the left, the more they have been on the losing side.
- **Development** (29 votes): in this area the balance of power has shifted slightly from a centre-left majority in EP6 to a more centre-right in EP7, due to the fact that in the current term ALDE has formed coalitions somewhat more with groups on the right (EPP, ECR, EFD). Remarkably, in this policy area the two largest groups (EPP and S&D) have voted together only 37% of the time, which makes development one of the most disputed areas of left-right politics in the Parliament.
- **International trade** (21 votes): ALDE has a perfect record, having won all 21 votes in this policy area, forming a centre-right majority in most of these votes (ALDE+EPP+ECR).

A WINNING CENTRE-LEFT COALITION

- **Budget** (71 votes): an S&D+ALDE coalition, usually joined by Greens/EFA, has become more frequent than in EP6: with S&D+ALDE opposed EPP in EP6 only 10% of the time, while this share has increased to 17% during this current parliament. EPP look to have reacted to this new balance of power by increasing their internal discipline on budgetary issues: up from 88% in EP6 to 98% in EP7. Also, the internal cohesion of all three groups, S&D, ALDE and Greens/EFA has increased several percentage points in EP7, which has made them stronger.
- **Civil liberties** (88 votes): this area shows a clear left-right split, with stable centre-left majority (ALDE+S&D+Greens/EFA+GUE/NGL). ALDE and all groups to its left have won significantly more votes than the groups to the right of ALDE. Notably, GUE/NGL, which is on the radical left and only sixth largest in the EP, has won more votes on these issues than the EPP.
- **Environment** (102 votes): a clear left-right voting pattern has emerged in EP7, with the balance of power tilting to the left. ALDE has won the greatest number of votes, followed closely by S&D and then ECR. The largest group, EPP, holds only the fourth best winning record in this policy area, due to the fact that ALDE has voted significantly more with the groups to its left (ALDE only voted with EPP in this area 59% of the time).
- **Gender equality** (37 votes): a clear centre-left coalition continues to dominate in EP7, as in EP6, with ALDE winning 97% of votes, while the groups to its left (S&D, Greens/EFA, GUE/NGL) having the same record of won votes so far, 86%, thus placing the EPP, ECR and EFD groups in minority.

A WINNING CENTRIST (GRAND) COALITION

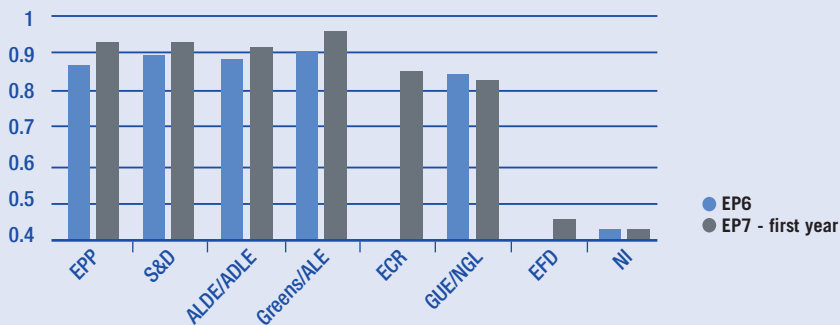
- **Agriculture** (45 votes): EPP and S&D have voted together 81% of the time and most of the times they are were joined by ECR. The EPP-S&D coalition is opposed for the most part by the Greens, who have voted against this coalition almost 50% of the time.
- **Fisheries** (32 votes): the votes have been decided most of the time by a 'grand coalition' between the two largest groups (EPP+S&D). This coalition was joined in 75% of votes by the ALDE group, while the rest of groups have been in the opposition most of the times.
- **Constitutional and inter-institutional affairs** (30 votes): this area sees a clear split along what can be interpreted as a pro-European 'governing parties' majority against more critical 'small parties' coalition. A 'grand coalition' made up of the three main groups in the centre (EPP+ALDE+S&D) is frequently opposed by the other groups. Concretely, a coalition of EPP+S&D is only 6% of times opposed by the ALDE group, while the rest of the groups vote against this coalition more than half of the time: Greens/EFA 40%, ECR 50%, EFD 56%, and GUE/NGL 66%.
- **Foreign and security policy** (125 votes): a 'grand coalition' (EPP+ALDE+S&D) has become more prominent than in the previous legislature, with EPP holding the best winning record (92% of votes). The four smaller groups (ECR, Greens/EFA, GUE/NGL, EFD) have found themselves in a minority about 50% of the time.
- **Internal market** (17 votes): ALDE emerges as the most frequent winner (94% of votes), usually supported by both S&D and EPP. The three groups at the centre (EPP, ALDE, S&D) are sometimes joined in their coalition by the ECR, whereas the Greens/EFA, GUE/NGL and EFD groups are in a minority most of the time.
- **Budgetary control** (which refers to the votes on budget discharge of the EU institutions, 55 votes): in this policy area, one sees the radicalization of the GUE/NGL and ECR groups, who have voted against the majority 75% and 82% of times, respectively.

Voting Cohesion Inside the Groups

'Cohesion' measures the extent to which the members of a political group vote together as a block. The higher the score, the more cohesive a group is. Cohesion rates are calculated by comparing the voting decisions of individual MEPs within. Our cohesion scale ranges from a minimum of 0 (if a group is split down the middle in every vote) to a maximum of 1 (if all the members of a group vote the same way in every single vote).

The cohesion (internal discipline) of the political groups has increased in the first year of EP7 compared to the average for the whole of EP6.

Cohesion patterns of European political groups



IDEOLOGY OR NATIONALITY?

In the current European Parliament, MEPs vote primarily along transnational political lines rather than along national lines, as in EP6. Proof of this is the fact that cohesion rates of the four largest political groups (EPP, S&D, ALDE, and G/EFA) are growing and are higher than the cohesion scores of member states' delegations of MEPs. The only policy area where this does not hold is on agriculture: here, the European political groups are less cohesive than on other policy issues and some national delegations (particularly the French and the Scandinavians) vote independently from their group colleagues.

- **European People's Party's (EPP):** the overall cohesion of the group has increased considerably from 0.88 in EP6 to 0.93 in EP7. This may be explained by two factors: a) the departure of the British and Czech conservatives; and b) the need for higher discipline as a result of increasing competition among the political groups in the Parliament.

Behaviour of national parties: the parties that have been in opposition with the rest of the group most often are the Swedish Moderata Samlingspartiet, Belgian Christen-Democratisch & Vlaams and the Greek Nea Dimokratia, whereas the political lines of the Italian Il Popolo della Libertà and the German Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands match almost perfectly (99%) with that of the EPP as a whole. The most disputed votes inside the group were on agriculture, where large delegations such as Spanish Partido Popular, Hungarian Fidesz-Magyar Polgári Szövetség-Keresztény Demokrata Néppárt, Portuguese Partido Social Democrata and French Union pour un Mouvement Populaire voted against the group a number of times. In other areas, the Hungarian Fidesz party has a relatively low 'loyalty' score on environment (83%), while on economics this is the case for the Greek Nea Dimokratia (75%) and the Austrian Österreichische Volkspartei (78%). The Greek delegation has also the lowest loyalty score on foreign affairs (86%).

- **Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D):** the overall cohesion of the group has increased from 0.91 in EP6 to 0.93 in the current term. The internal discipline of the group has been strengthened significantly in internal market & consumer protection (+0.09), but also on constitutional and inter-institutional affairs (+0.07) and economics (+0.06). The cohesion of S&D has decreased slightly in only two policy areas: development (-0.02) and environment and public health (-0.05). Notably, cohesion on one of the most disputed policy areas, agriculture, has somewhat increased from 0.83 in EP6 to 0.85 in EP7.

Behaviour of national parties: the parties that have voted against the rest of the S&D group most often are the delegations from Sweden, Denmark and the United Kingdom, whereas the German, Romanian, Czech and Slovakian delegations have almost always been in line with the majority of the group (99% of votes). The most disputed policy area internally has been agriculture, where a number of national parties have recorded low loyalty scores: the Danish Socialdemokratiet (69%), British Labour Party (74%) and French Parti Socialiste (76%). A similar situation is noticeable on constitutional and inter-institutional affairs, where the delegations from France (loyalty score of 83%), Great Britain (83%) and Denmark (86%) have voted against the group a number of times.

- **Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE):** the overall cohesion of ALDE has increased from 0.89 in EP6 to 0.91 in EP7. The most important positive changes have been in internal market (+0.11), civil liberties (+0.08), foreign affairs (+0.06) and gender equality (+0.07). Cohesion has slightly declined in three areas: economics (-0.03), development (-0.08) and environment and public health (-0.06).

Behaviour of the parties: the national delegations that have been in opposition with the rest of the ALDE group most often are the French and the Irish, while the delegation from Great Britain has almost always had the same line as that of the majority of the group (98% of votes). The loyalty score of the French Mouvement Démocrate is particularly low on agriculture (53%), development (62%) and constitutional and inter-institutional affairs (76%), while that of the Irish Fianna Fáil is low on civil liberties (79%). The German Freie Demokratische Partei on the other hand has recorded relatively low loyalty scores on environment and public health (80%) and budget (86%).

- **Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA)** group has increased its cohesion from 0.91 to 0.96, which makes it the most cohesive political group in the European Parliament. The statistics show a rise in the level of discipline on all policy areas, but most significantly on economics (+0.08), gender equality (+0.08) and constitutional and inter-institutional affairs (+0.08). On all 32 roll-call votes on gender equality, the Greens/ALE had a perfect score (1.00), meaning that not a single one of its MEPs voted differently from the rest of the group at any of these votes.

Behaviour of national parties: the only real internal opposition has occurred on agriculture, where a number of parties have low loyalty levels, such as Swedish Miljöpartiet de gröna (59%), Danish Socialistisk Folkeparti (60%) and Dutch GroenLinks (83%). The Swedish Miljöpartiet de gröna also has a low loyalty score on budget (84%) and civil liberties (87%), while the Danish Socialistisk Folkeparti scores low on development (85%).

- **European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR):** this new group has an overall cohesion rate of 0.86. The policy areas where it is most cohesive are internal market (0.97), international trade (0.97), economics (0.94), constitutional affairs (0.93), industry, research and energy (0.93). On the other hand, the group is less cohesive on budgetary control (0.59), gender equality (0.77), fisheries (0.74) and budget (0.76).

Behaviour of national parties: the British Conservative Party has been in a minority inside the ECR particularly on budgetary control votes: the voting line of the UK Conservatives has matched that of the rest of ECR only 58% of times. This is due to the fact that on a number of

discharge votes, the UK delegation voted against, while the Polish delegation and most of the remaining MEPs abstained. The reverse is valid for the Polish Prawo i Sprawiedliwość when it comes to budget: it voted along the ECR line only 68% of the time, the rest of the time it was in a minority inside the group.

- **European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL):** the overall cohesion has recorded a small decline, from 0.85 to 0.84. However, on a number of policy areas the group has lost cohesion when compared to the previous legislature: constitutional and inter-institutional affairs (-0.11), environment and public health (-0.08), industry, research and energy (-0.08) and international trade (-0.07). On the other hand, the group has grown more disciplined on fisheries (+0.12), agriculture (+0.06), budgetary control (+0.06) and economics (+0.05).

Behaviour of national parties: overall, the Greek Kommounistiko Komma Elladas party has been the least loyal to the group (only 65%). But, the French delegation disagreed most with the rest of the group on constitutional affairs (it voted along the GUE/NGL line only 64% of times), while the Czech delegation has been in a similar situation on industry, research and energy (loyalty score of 63%).

- **Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD):** this new group has been very cohesive only on votes regarding the internal regulations of the European Parliament (0.90). In the other policy areas, its cohesion score has been very low (when compared to the rest of political groups), ranging from a minimum of 0.38 on gender equality to a maximum of 0.59 on budgetary control.

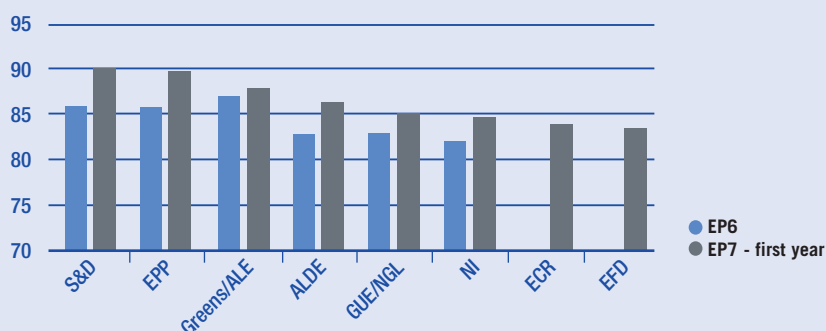
Other aspects of work in the European Parliament

In addition to collecting information about how the MEPs and the political groups vote, VoteWatch.eu also collects and analyses data on other aspects of work in the European Parliament, particularly: (a) attendance rate, referring to the proportion of times the individual MEPs, national parties, and political groups attend plenary sessions; (b) the number of questions asked of the Commission and the Council, which is a measure of how often MEPs and parties use their right to question the other EU institutions to scrutinise their behaviour; and (c) how many legislative reports each MEP, national party and political group writes.

ATTENDANCE AT PLENARY SESSIONS

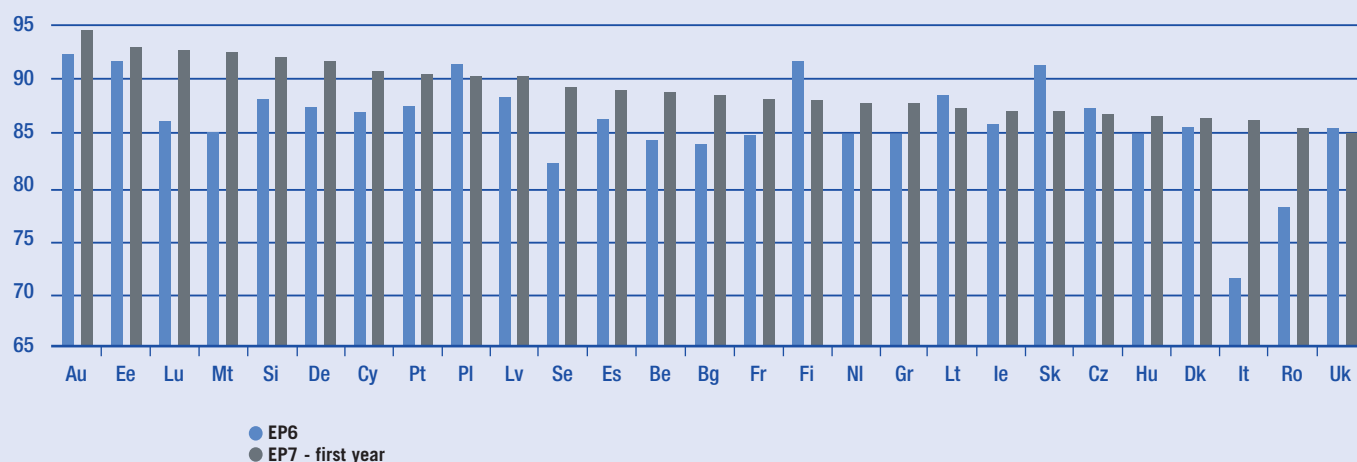
All European political groups have increased their average attendance rate. The S&D group has made the greatest improvement in this respect (+4.3%), followed closely by the EPP (+4.1%) and ALDE (+3.6%). The lowest average attendance rates among the political groups have been recorded for the two new groups, ECR (84.3%) and EFD (84.1%).

Average attendance rates of political groups



When looking at average attendance rates by national delegations, one finds that the Austrian MEPs have the highest attendance rates, as in the previous legislature. They are followed by MEPs from Luxembourg, Estonia and Malta. At the other end of the attendance scale are MEPs from a number of countries whose European parliamentarians have been involved in national election campaigns since the start of the new EP legislature (Greece, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, UK). MEPs from Italy and Denmark have also had relatively low attendance rates, while attendance rates for Italian MEPs is significantly higher in the current Parliament than in the previous one.

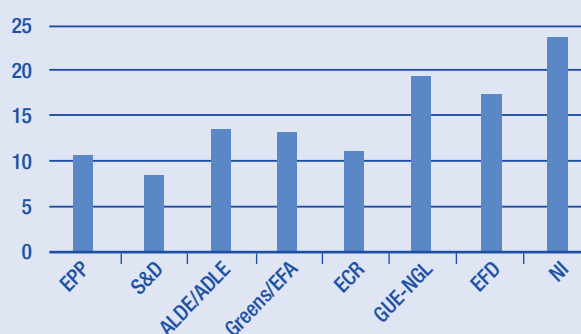
Average attendance scores of national delegations (at plenary sessions)



WHO QUESTIONS THE COMMISSION AND THE COUNCIL?

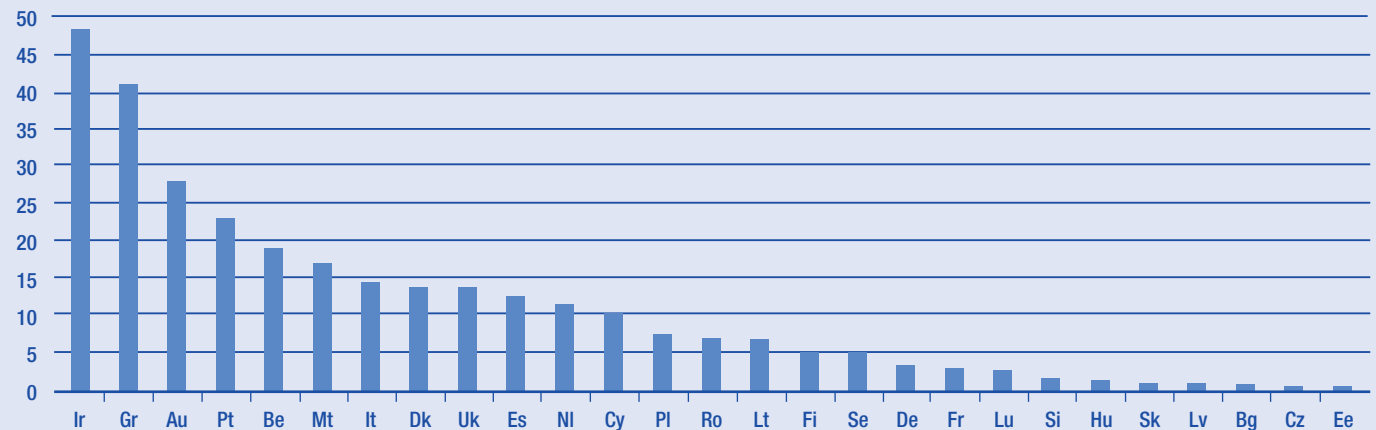
The non-attached members, and the members of the right-wing anti-European (EFD) and radical left group (GUE/NGL) have asked the most questions to the Commission and the Council, whereas the centrist parties have a lower average of questions per MEP.

Average number of questions / MEP



Looking at the member states, the greatest number of questions to the Commission and the Council has been asked (on average per MEP) by parliamentarians from Ireland, Greece and Austria, while the MEPs from Central and Eastern Europe have addressed fewest questions.

Average number of questions / MEP

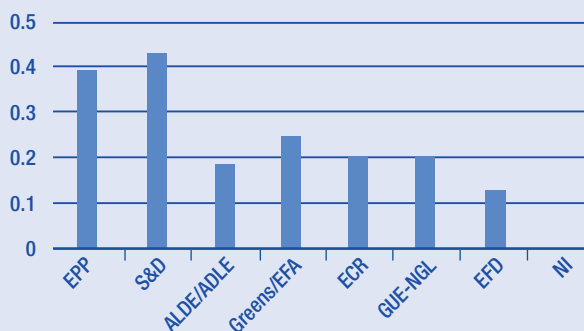


WHO WRITES MOST REPORTS?

A 'rapporteur' is an MEP nominated by a committee in the EP to prepare a report on behalf of the European Parliament on a legislative or non-legislative proposal. Reports are first distributed among the political groups who then designate one of their MEPs as the rapporteur.

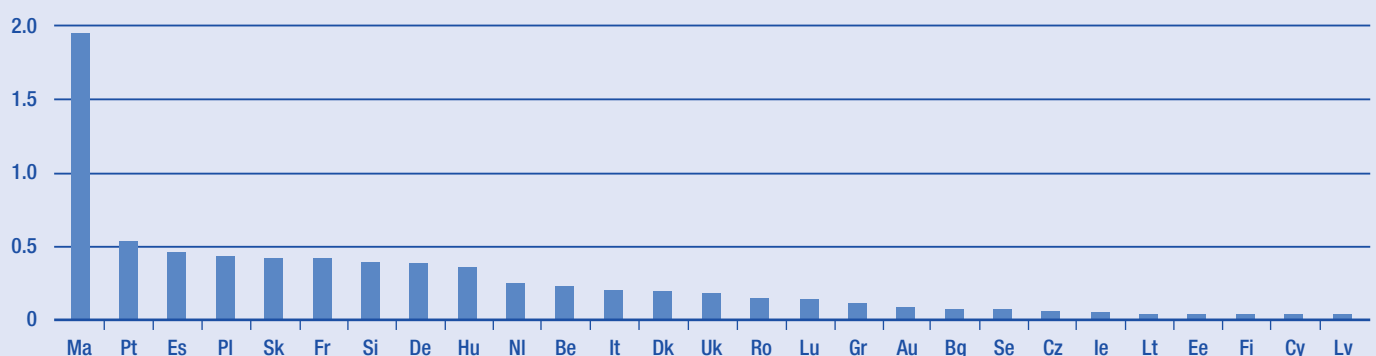
So far, it is MEPs from the two main political groups (EPP and S&D) who have drafted most reports on average, while those from the EFD have drafted fewest.

Average reports / MEP



When looking at the allocation of rapporteurship by national delegations, out of the 'new' member states, Poland, Slovenia and Hungary have a high average report-writing rate per MEP, whereas MEPs from Latvia, Cyprus, Estonia and Lithuania have not yet written any reports¹.

Average number of reports / MEP



¹ These data refer to the reports that have already reached the plenary stage (reports which are still at committee stage are not included in these statistics).

Conclusions

The June 2009 European Parliament elections have produced some changes in voting patterns in the European Parliament. Although the European People's Party is the largest group in the European Parliament (with 36% of the seats), it is not in a dominant position when it comes to winning on key votes. In fact, the EPP is on the winning side in votes slightly less in the new Parliament than it was in the old Parliament.

By contrast, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe is the 'kingmaker' in the new Parliament: able to choose to form a winning centre-right majority with the EPP (and sometimes the new ECR group) or a winning centre-left majority with the S&D and Greens/EFA (and sometimes GUE/NGL). As a result, so far in EP7, ALDE has won in more votes than the EPP, which was not the case in the previous Parliament.

The 'grand coalition' (of EPP+ALDE+S&D) remains at the core of most decisions on constitutional affairs, foreign policy, agriculture and fisheries. But, this coalition is increasingly opposed by the other political groups. Moreover, the new Parliament has seen more left-right splits in votes in a number of policy areas, such as budget, economics, environment and public health, civil liberties or industry, research and energy.

During the first year of the new Parliament, the political groups have increased their cohesion rates and improved the attendance records of their members. This, coupled with the increased powers granted to the European Parliament by the Treaty of Lisbon in several key policy areas (such as civil liberties, international trade, and agriculture), may lead to more party-based coalitions and voting patterns in the legislative process in Brussels.



VoteWatch.eu issues reports on political behaviour in the European Parliament every 6 months, and the work of individual MEPs and their political and national groups can be monitored continuously via the www.votewatch.eu website.

For further information, please visit our website at:

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