

Voting behaviour in the new European Parliament: the first six months

EP7, 1st Semester: July-December 2009

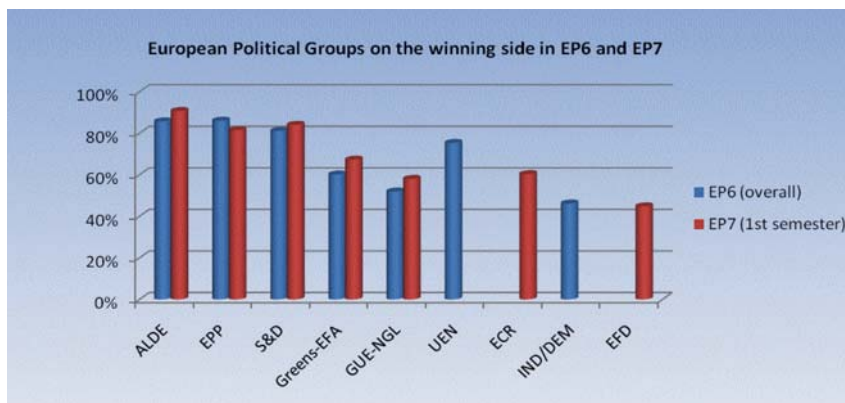
This is the first of VoteWatch's newly launched six-monthly reports on voting in the 7th directly-elected European Parliament (2009-14). The report focuses on three voting patterns: (1) How often political groups are on the winning side when voting; (2) Who forms coalitions with whom in the new Parliament; and (3) The cohesiveness of each of the political groups. We look at average patterns as well as by policy area, where possible¹. We compare the voting patterns in the new Parliament to the average patterns in EP6 (the 2004-09 Parliament). More detailed information is, of course, available on our website: www.VoteWatch.eu. The data so far shows that:

- In the current European Parliament, MEPs vote primarily along transnational political lines rather than along national lines, as in EP6;
- Although, following the 2009 elections the group of the European People's Party (EPP) has increased its share of MEPs, it finds it slightly harder to gain a winning majority during votes;
- Increased left-right competition is noticeable on particular policy areas such as environment and civil liberties.



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 political decisions and activities of the European Parliament and the EU Council of Ministers. **Votewatch.eu** uses the European Parliament's own attendance, voting and activity data - available through the Parliament's official documents - to give a full overview of MEP activities, broken down by nationality, national political party and European party grouping.

1. Who is on the winning side?

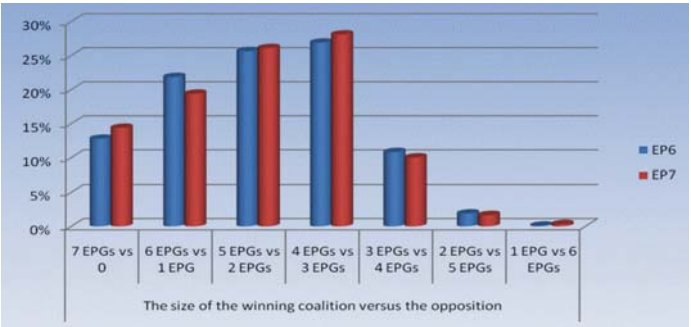


¹ There are only five policy areas so far where there have been a sufficient number of Roll Call Votes (15) for us to be able to calculate policy-specific voting patterns: agriculture, budget, civil liberties, environment and foreign and security policy.

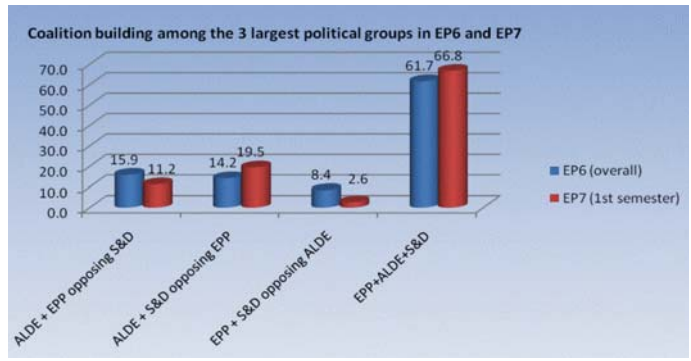
- **The European People's Party's (EPP)** is, as the largest group in the Parliament, a dominant actor in voting situations. However, the EPP does not always win the votes. Its record as a member of the winning coalition is particularly poor in budget votes, where it has been on the losing side in 21% of the votes during the current term. In EP6, in contrast, EPP lost in only 8.5% of budget votes. EPP is also doing worse than in EP6 on civil liberties, but continues to be on the winning side the most amongst the groups on foreign and security policy issues (87.5%).
- **The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)** has in the first semester of EP7 been on the winning side most frequently of all the political groups (90.7% of votes), replacing EPP as the previous 'winner' in voting situations in EP6. Compared to EP6, ALDE's results have improved on 4 out of the 5 policy areas (agriculture, budget, civil liberties and foreign affairs), the only exception being environment. However, on environment, all the groups are doing worse than in EP6, which shows that this policy issue has become more contentious.
- **The Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D)** has improved its winning record most significantly on budget votes (97% in EP7 so far, compared to only 82% on average during EP6), but also on agriculture and civil liberties, while on environment its winning rate is lower than in EP6.
- **The Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA) and European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL)** groups have improved their % of votes on the "winning side" on budget and civil liberties issues (due to the formation of a centre-left coalition on these subjects), but have lost ground on agriculture and foreign and security policy.
- **The two new groups, European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and the Europe of Freedom and Democracy group (EFD)**, are the ones that on average are least often on the winning side of a vote, although these groups do reasonably well on agriculture issues. ECR is also doing well on environment issues, where it is second (after ALDE). Conversely, ECR and EFD seem to be particularly isolated on civil liberties issues.

2. Coalition patterns between the groups: who votes with whom?

■ In terms of the overall size of winning coalitions in the new Parliament, the most common winning alliance comprised 4 or 5 European political groups (in various combinations of groups on the left or right). A coalition of 4 political groups won against the remaining 3 groups in 28.1% of votes, while in 26.1% of votes, 5 groups won against the remaining 2 groups. An overall consensus between all 7 political groups was reached in 14.4% of votes, while in 19.4% of votes there was only one group who opposed the majority.

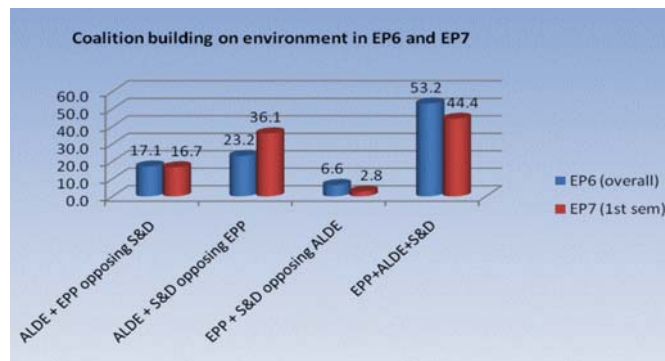


■ The frequency of grand coalitions (EPP+ALDE+S&D) has slightly increased during the first term of EP7 (from 61.7% in EP6 to 66.8% in EP7). Also, the % of votes where a coalition was made up solely by EPP+S&D (voting against the ALDE group) has decreased from 8.4% to 2.6%. With regard the left-right patterns, in EP7 ALDE votes more with the Left: the % of votes in which a coalition of S&D+ALDE voted against the EPP increased from 14.2% to 19.5%, while a center-right coalition (EPP+ALDE voting against S&D) was rarer, its weight dropping from 15.9% in the previous term to 11.2% in the current one.



- On **agriculture**, there seems to be a higher degree of consensus between the 3 largest groups (EPP, S&D, ALDE) than in the previous term. On most votes (82.6% in EP7 compared to 60.7% in EP6), these 3 groups voted together.
- On **budget** votes, ALDE seems to lean towards the left in the new EP, as it votes significantly more with the S&D and less with the EPP. Thus, 77.3% of the budget votes were decided by a grand coalition (EPP+ALDE+S&D), while the remaining 22.7% were decided by a left-right struggle: (S&D+ALDE+others) against (EPP+others). Out of the 44 votes on budget so far in EP7, there hasn't been a single situation in which a center-right majority coalition (EPP+ALDE against S&D) was formed.

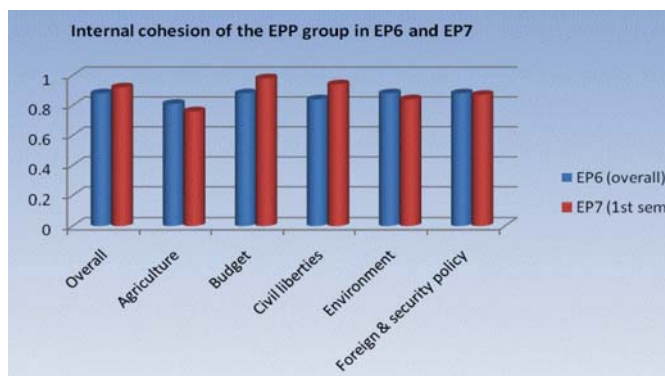
- On **civil liberties**, the frequency of the grand coalition (EPP+ALDE+S&D) has slightly decreased (from 57% to 55%), while the center-left coalition (S&D+ALDE against EPP) is more present than in the previous term (34.6% in EP7 compared to 28.4% in EP6).
- On **environment**, the rate of recurrence of the grand coalition (EPP+ALDE+S&D) has significantly declined (from 53.1% in EP6 to 44.4% in EP7), while the occurrence of center-left coalitions (ALDE+S&D against EPP) has increased from 23.1% in the previous term to 36.1% in the current term so far.
- In **foreign and security policy**, the trends from EP6 have continued, with 62% of the votes decided by a grand coalition (EPP+ALDE+S&D), while on the remaining issues a center-right (ALDE+EPP) coalition is more frequent than a center-left one.
- **ECR** voted the most with ALDE and S&D on agriculture, but with EPP on budget. Remarkably, the ECR has been very isolated on foreign policy and even on civil liberties where it had hardly any allies.
- **The Greens/ALE** allied mostly with **GUE/NGL**, and vice-versa, except for in foreign affairs where GUE/NGL found itself isolated at times (37.5% of votes).
- The best ally for **EFD** was the ECR group, the highest coalition rate between the two groups being on civil liberties (61.5%). However, EFD was isolated most of the time on the other policies under consideration.



3. Voting cohesion inside the groups

Cohesion measures the extent to which the members of a European Political Group vote as a block or not. The higher the score, the more cohesive a European group is. Cohesion rates are calculated by comparing the voting options of individual MEPs with those of the plurality of members belonging to a political group or national delegation (click [here](#) to find out more about VoteWatch.eu's methodology).

- EPP's cohesion is decreasing on agriculture (0.81 down to 0.76) and environment (0.88 down to 0.84), but increasing on budget (0.88 up to 0.98) and civil liberties (0.84 up to 0.94). There are a number of national parties which have separate opinions on agriculture, among which the most 'rebellious' (in terms of voting against the political group) are the Hungarian Fidesz, the Portuguese Partido Social Democrata and the Austrian Österreichische Volkspartei. When it comes to budget, the Belgian Christen-Democratisch & Vlaams and Dutch Christen Democratisch Appèl do not seem to toe the political line, while on environment, the most significant internal 'opposition' comes from the Spanish Partido Popular and the Polish Platforma Obywatelska.

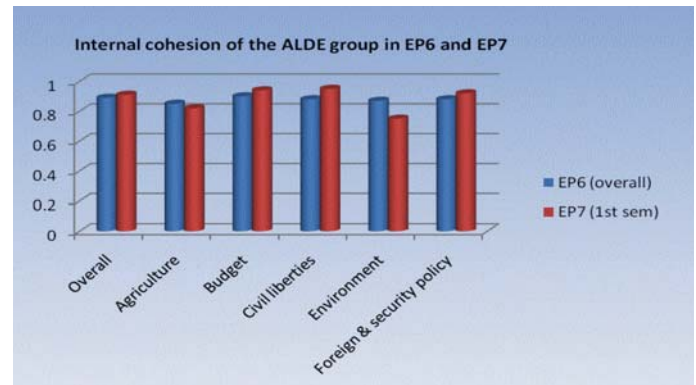


Ideology or nationality?

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 European political groups (EPP, S&D, ALDE, and G/EFA) are invariably 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 significantly less cohesive than on other policy issues and some national parties (particularly the French and the Scandinavians) vote independently of their group colleagues.

■ The cohesion of the S&D group is at the same levels as in the previous term on most policy areas, except for environment, where it is decreasing from 0.90 to 0.85. However, on agriculture there are a number of parties which hold this cohesion level low, particularly the French Parti Socialiste, Danish Socialdemokratiet, Belgian Parti Socialiste and Swedish Arbetarepartiet- Socialdemokraterna. On budget, the Maltese Partit Laburista frequently voices a different opinion to that of its European political group, while on environment, there are 3 parties coming from the new member states that have a noticeable level of 'disloyalty' vis-à-vis their European groups: Polish Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej - Unia Pracy, Romanian Partidul Social Democrat + Partidul Conservator and Hungarian Magyar Szocialista Párt.

■ ALDE's cohesion is decreasing on agriculture (0.85 down to 0.82) and environment (0.87 down to 0.75), but increasing on civil liberties (0.88 up to 0.95) and foreign and security policy (0.88 up to 0.92). Among its national parties, the French Mouvement Démocrate and the Danish Venstre, Danmarks Liberale Parti do not seem to toe the political line when it comes to agriculture, Irish Fianna Fáil Party when it comes to budget and civil liberties, while the German Freie Demokratische Partei and the Dutch Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie have separate opinions (from the rest of the group) on environment.



■ For the Greens/EFA the agriculture policy area is certainly a weak point, since a number of national parties have separate opinions, particularly the Danish Socialistisk Folkeparti and the Swedish Miljöpartiet de gröna who have voted against their European group more often than along its political line.

■ Within the ECR group, there is a notable split between the British Conservative Party and the Polish Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, which so far has been most visible on agriculture and environment and less visible in other policy areas.

■ For the GUE/NGL group, the main weaknesses arise from the votes cast by the Greek Kommounistiko Komma Elladas, the Cypriot Anorthotiko Komma Ergazomenou Laou - Aristera - Nees Dynameis and the Portuguese Coligação Democrática Unitária (PCP-PEV).

■ The EFD is by far the least cohesive. It reaches the lowest cohesion point on environment (0.38) and the highest (but still extremely low when compared to the other groups) on budget (0.52).

4. Conclusions

The June 2009 European elections have produced some changes in voting patterns in the European Parliament. Although the European People's Party has increased its share of MEPs, it finds it harder to make allies at the centre of the political spectrum and has lost slightly more votes (as a percentage) than in the previous legislature. The main beneficiary of this new situation is the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, which has increased its share of won votes. Though the 'grand coalition' (of EPP+ALDE+S&D) remains at the core of most decisions, during the current term we have seen increasing left-right competition on particular policy areas, such as environment and public health or civil liberties. During the first semester of the 7th EP term, the political groups have maintained their high 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, may lead to more party-based coalitions and voting patterns.

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