



Third report

# **Voting in the 2009-2014 European Parliament: How do MEPs Vote after Lisbon?**

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## Introduction

Welcome to the third six-monthly VoteWatch report, looking at the activities of the 2009-14 European Parliament. The report analyses the voting behaviour of MEPs and the political groups from the first plenary session of the new parliament (in July 2009) up to and including the December 2010 plenary session.

A total of 1351 recorded ('roll-call') votes were cast during this period, and are all included in the statistics presented here. The report focuses on three main questions:

- How often is each of the political groups on the winning side in votes?
- Who votes with whom in the new Parliament?
- What is 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).

In this report, 'EP6' is used as a shorthand for the sixth European Parliament (2004-09) and 'EP7' for the current, seventh European Parliament (2009-14).

More detailed information is available on [www.VoteWatch.eu](http://www.VoteWatch.eu).

### Main findings

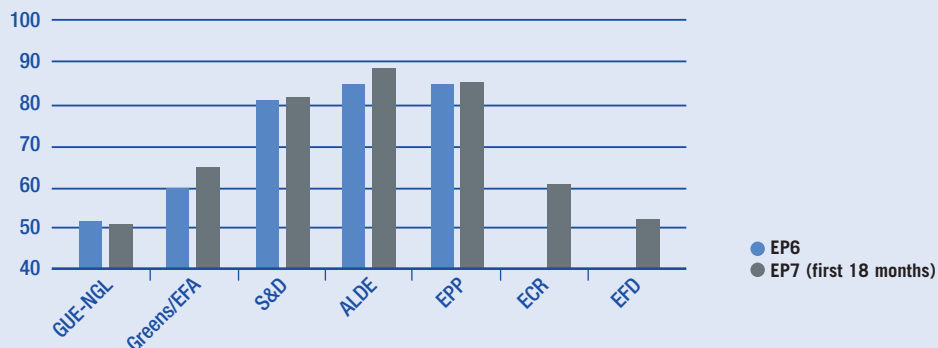
- In the 2009-2014 European Parliament, as in the previous Parliament, MEPs vote primarily along transnational party lines rather than along national lines.
- The European political groups have increased their internal cohesion in comparison to the previous term. The rate of participation of MEPs reached its highest level since 2004 in the first six months of the current term, but has since declined to values comparable to those from the previous term.
- The European People's Party (EPP), which is the largest group in the Parliament, dominates the votes on most of the policy issues, but not all of them.
- Increased competition between groups on the centre-left and groups on the centre-right is particularly noticeable in some policy areas, such as civil liberties, the environment, development and gender equality.
- When the Parliament splits along left-right lines, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats in Europe (ALDE) usually hold the balance of power. However, the EPP has been able to win a number of votes against a Socialists and Democrats (S&D) + ALDE coalition, notably when the EPP's cohesion rate was high and when it benefited from defections from the socialists and liberals.

**Votewatch.eu** is an independent NGO 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](http://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?

Figure 1 shows how often 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 1351 roll-call votes that took place in the first 18 months of the new Parliament:

Figure 1: percentage of votes when a political group is in the winning majority



The main conclusions from Figure 1 are that:

- **The European People's Party's (EPP)** is the largest group in the Parliament, but comes only second in terms of 'being on the winning side'. In this respect, the EPP does better in some policy areas. They are on the winning side:
  - 100% of the time on *economic and monetary affairs*;
  - 100% on *transport and tourism*;
  - 97% on *constitutional and inter-institutional affairs*; and
  - 92% on *foreign and security issues*.

The EPP's record of success on *employment and social affairs* has improved significantly in this Parliament compared to the last (from 74% in EP6 to 92% so far in EP7). Conversely, its record is poorer, and getting worse, on *development, the environment and public health, and gender equality*.

- **The Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D)** come third overall. It has improved its winning record most significantly on:
  - *constitutional and inter-institutional affairs* (+15 percentage points between EP6 and EP7);
  - *foreign and security policy* (up seven points); and
  - *budgetary control* (up five points), due principally to being part of a 'grand coalition' (S&D+ALDE+EPP) on many votes.

Conversely, the S&D Group's record is getting worse between EP6 and EP7 on *development* (-18pts), *civil liberties* (-9pts) and *industry, research and energy* (-6pts), due to increased left-right party competition on these issues.

- **The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)** has been on the winning side most often (in 88.3% of votes) in the first 18 months of EP7 (the EPP had been the most frequent 'winner' in EP6). ALDE's record is particularly strong on:
  - *international trade* (97% of votes);
  - *employment* (92%);
  - *civil liberties* (92%); and
  - *foreign affairs* (90%).

The policy areas where ALDE has the poorest winning record are *fisheries* (77.5%) and *agriculture* (79%), which are the two topics where a coalition of EPP+S&D against ALDE is most frequent.

- **The Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA)** has increased the number of occasions on which it is on the 'winning side' in EP7 on the *budget* (up 14 points compared to EP6) as it has voted more often with the 'grand coalition' (S&D+ALDE+EPP) on this issue than in EP6. For the same reason, the Greens/EFA has a better winning record on *economic and monetary affairs* (up 11 points compared to EP6). However, the Greens/EFA has been on the winning side in only half the number of votes on *constitutional and inter-institutional affairs*, due to their regular opposition to the 'grand coalition'.
- **The European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)** have been on the winning side 62% of the time. They have been part of the minority particularly on *budgetary control* (on the winning side in only 21% of votes), *civil liberties* (53%) and *constitutional affairs* (47%). However, the ECR Group has a relatively good record of success on the *environment and public health* (80%, second only to ALDE) and *agriculture* (79%).
- **The European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL)** has been on the winning side in half of the votes (50%). The GUE/NGL Group has voted against the majority particularly on *budgetary control* (29% of votes won), *constitutional affairs* (30%) and *economic and monetary affairs* (33%). The GUE/NGL Group's best winning record is on *gender equality* issues (81%), where it has won a greater share of votes than the largest group, the EPP.
- **Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD)** is the smallest group and has been on the winning side 52% of the time. They have been in the minority particularly on votes on *gender equality* (35% of votes won), *civil liberties* (36%) and the *budget* (37%).

So in EP7, ALDE is the group that has won the most votes. However, the EPP is in the ascendency, having won the most votes in the 3<sup>rd</sup> semester of the current term (the second half of 2010). This improvement in the performance of EPP is explained by the increasing number of votes on *economic and monetary affairs* (where EPP have won all votes), as well as by the effective mobilisation of EPP members: despite being a large and diverse group, the EPP has relatively high levels of cohesion and attendance compared to the other main groups.

More detailed information about 'who is on the winning side' can be accessed on the [VoteWatch website](http://VoteWatch website) – go to [votewatch.eu/cx\\_epg\\_coalitions.php](http://votewatch.eu/cx_epg_coalitions.php)

## Coalition patterns between the groups: who votes with whom?

Figure 2 shows the percentage of times that the majority of a political group votes in the same way as the majority of another group. It shows data for all votes in the first 18 months of EP7, as well as the full term of EP6:

Figure 2: the extent to which political groups vote with one another

Voting coalitions in the 2004-2009 European Parliament (full term)							Voting coalitions in the 2009-2014 European Parliament (first 18 months)						
All roll-call votes (6,149 votes)							All roll call votes July 2009 – December 2010 (1,351 votes)						
	GUE/NGL	G/EFA	SOC	ALDE	EPP-ED	UEN		GUE/NGL	G/EFA	S&D	ALDE	EPP	ECR
G/EFA	74%						G/EFA	74%					
SOC	62%	70%					S&D	61%	77%				
ALDE	52%	62%	75%				ALDE	52%	69%	78%			
EPP-ED	41%	50%	70%	77%			EPP	38%	53%	69%	77%		
UEN	45%	49%	63%	71%	81%		ECR	35%	40%	47%	59%	65%	
IND/DEM	41%	39%	40%	45%	51%	54%	EFD	34%	37%	44%	50%	57%	58%

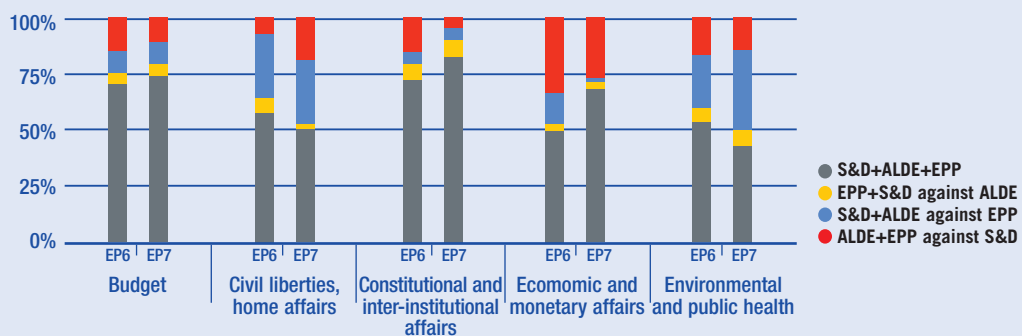


The main conclusion is that the two biggest groups (EPP and S&D) voted the same way in around 70% of votes in both EP6 and EP7. ALDE votes slightly more often with S&D in EP7 than it did in the 2004-09 Parliament and now votes to roughly the same extent with the S&D and EPP groups in the current Parliament. The new ECR group is much less likely to vote with the EPP in the current term than the old UEN group did in the previous Parliament: 65% compared to 81%.

Looking more generally at the type of coalitions that form in votes, the key contrast is between a 'grand coalition' (S&D+ALDE+EPP), and left-right politics, where the EPP and S&D vote against each other.

The frequency of a 'grand coalition' is roughly the same in the first part of EP7 (63%) as in the 2004-09 term (62%). However, when looking at the type of coalitions that form in particular policy areas, we notice certain variations in how often this 'grand coalition' forms, with a greater incidence of left-right politics in certain areas. **Figure 3** shows the variation in some of the policy areas in the current term:

**Figure 3: political coalition patterns by policy area (%)**



**A number of policy areas are worth looking at more closely:**

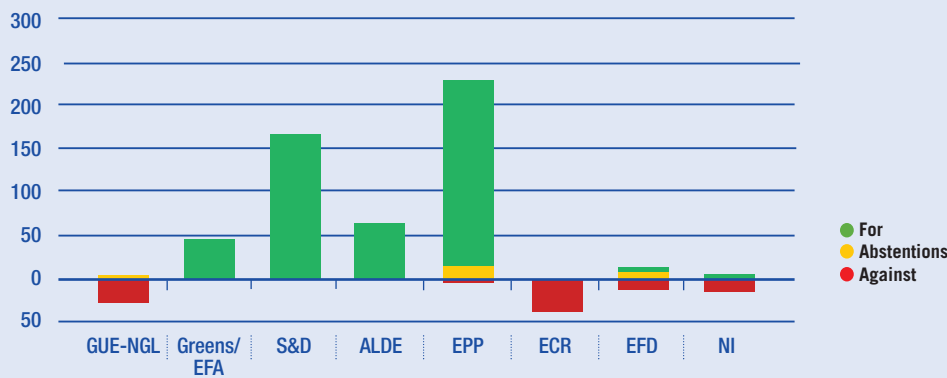
- Economy and monetary affairs** (97 votes in EP7): while in the first year of EP7 a stable coalition between the EPP and ALDE groups has dominated, the third semester (July to December 2010) saw a noticeable increase in the appearance of the 'grand coalition' on these issues (up to 81% of votes). This is the highest level reached in the 2004-2010 period (the period for which VoteWatch holds data). This evolution took place against the background of a series of votes related to European economic governance and measures to address the financial crisis, which deepened the split between proponents and opponents of the European integration (rather than between left and right). The EPP's main coalition partner in this policy area remains ALDE; however, a significant change is that the EPP's number two coalition partner has shifted from ECR (in the first year) to S&D (in the third semester). More details in the 'Coalitions' section of the website.
- Constitutional and inter-institutional affairs** (40 votes): this area sees a clear split between a pro-European 'governing parties' majority and a more critical 'small parties' coalition. A 'grand coalition' made up of the three main groups in the centre (S&D+ALDE+EPP) is frequently opposed by the other groups. Concretely, when the EPP and S&D vote together, ALDE opposes them only 7.5% of times, while the rest of the groups oppose them almost half of the time (Greens/EFA oppose on 40% of occasions, ECR 48%, EFD 45% and GUE/NGL 63%).

**CASE STUDY 1:  
RESOLUTION ON EUROPEAN ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE**

*On 17 June 2010 the European Parliament voted on a resolution calling for economic coordination between member states according to the 'Community method' rather than the 'intergovernmental' method, and also proposing a European Monetary Fund. The resolution represented the Parliament's message to the June European Council meeting, and was supported by a pro-integration majority (S&D+Greens/EFA +ALDE+EPP) and opposed by the ECR, EFD and GUE/NGL groups.*

Figure 4 shows how the MEPs voted:

**Figure 4: Preparations for the European Council meeting on economic governance - votes**



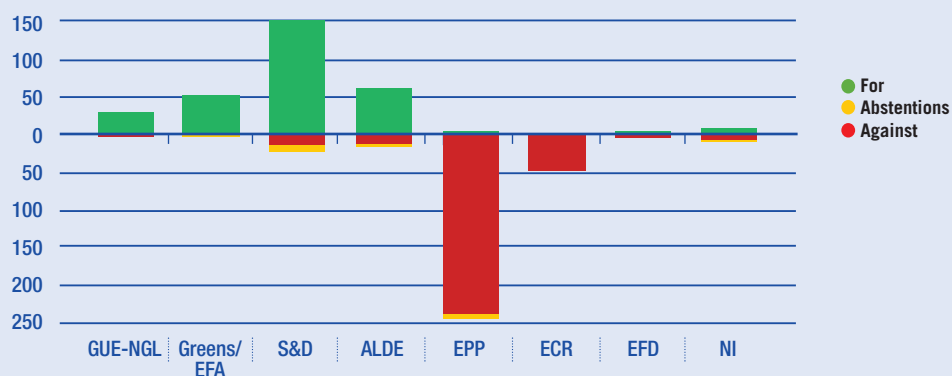
- **Development** (35 votes): this policy area has become more competitive in the current term, as the share of votes won by the 'grand coalition' declined from 61% in EP6 to 40% in EP7. The coalition pattern has shifted from a predominant centre-left majority in EP6 to more balanced competition, with ALDE voting in roughly equal proportions with EPP and S&D.
- **Civil liberties** (175 votes): a centre-left coalition (GUE/NGL+Greens/EFA+S&D+ALDE) has been predominant against the background of increasing left-right competition: the 3rd semester of EP7 saw the highest level of party competition in this policy area in the whole 2004-2010 period (the share of votes won by the 'grand coalition' reaching a record low of 40%). Although ALDE and the S&D won more votes overall than the EPP, the main centre-right group succeeded in winning a number of key votes, such as the final votes on the Resolutions on Freedom of Information in Europe (October 2009) and the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (November 2010). The EPP have been successful on these occasions due to a combination of strong mobilisation of its own members and defections from the other groups, particularly from ALDE.

**CASE STUDY 2:  
ANTI-COUNTERFEITING TRADE AGREEMENT**

*The European Parliament narrowly passed a Resolution on 24 November 2010 to back the Commission in its negotiated multilateral agreement that concerns specific measures to protect intellectual property against illegal downloading from the internet. The issue sparked a fierce debate between the centre-right and centre-left, with the centre-right winning out. However, to win on this issue, the EPP and ECR first had to reject the joint Motion for Resolution proposed by the centre-left. The EPP and ECR managed to win thanks to 11 defections from ALDE and 13 from S&D members (the entire British Labour delegation).*

Figure 5 shows how the MEPs voted:

**Figure 5: votes on ACTA (resolution proposed by the centre-left)**



- **Environment and public health** (156 votes): a clear left-right voting pattern has emerged in EP7, as the share of votes won by the 'grand coalition' diminished from 53% in EP6 to 43% in EP7. ALDE won the greatest number of votes in this policy area, followed closely by the ECR and S&D. Interestingly, the EPP is the political group that voted most frequently against the Greens/EFA group on issues related to the environment and public health: the two groups have voted against each other 70% of the time so far in the current term.
- **Gender equality** (65 votes): a clear centre-left coalition continues to dominate votes in this policy area in EP7, as in EP6, while the share of the votes won by the 'grand coalition' has fallen from 54% to 46%. Remarkably, the GUE/NGL Group, only sixth in terms of size, has won more votes on this policy area than the largest group, the EPP. The relatively poor performance of the EPP as a group is caused not only by the absence of a 'grand coalition' in this area, but also by its low internal voting cohesion on gender equality issues.

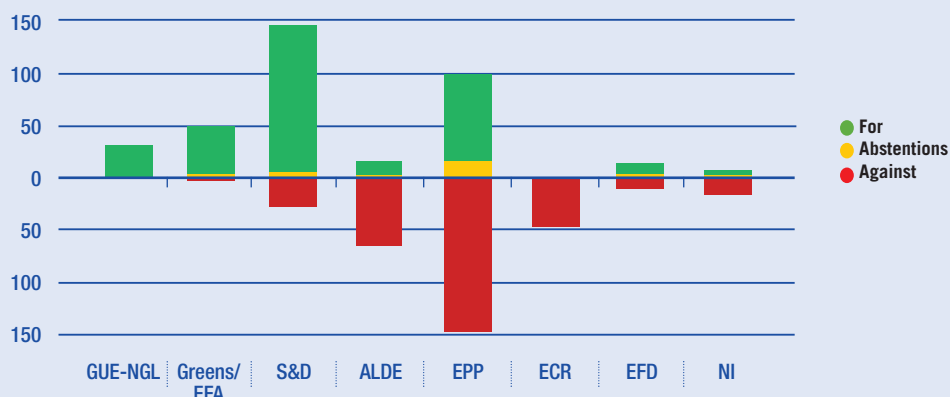


**CASE STUDY 3:  
MATERNITY LEAVE**

The new proposal for a Directive on maternity leave was adopted by a narrow majority on 20 October 2010. The amendment would extend maternity leave from 14 to 20 weeks on full pay and includes a number of other measures favourable to mothers and pregnant women, as well as strengthening paternity leave. The vote on amendment 12 (extension of maternity leave from 14 to 20 weeks) passed, with 327 votes for to 320 against<sup>1</sup>. A centre-left coalition (GUE/NGL+ Greens/EFA+S&D) managed to secure a majority due to 82 defections from the EPP position, primarily from Poland, Italy, Hungary and Lithuania.

Figure 6 shows how MEPs voted:

**Figure 6: Maternity Leave**



A real-time overview of the coalition formation patterns can be monitored on the [VoteWatch website](http://VoteWatch.eu/cx_epg_voting_together.php) – go to [votewatch.eu/cx\\_epg\\_voting\\_together.php](http://votewatch.eu/cx_epg_voting_together.php)

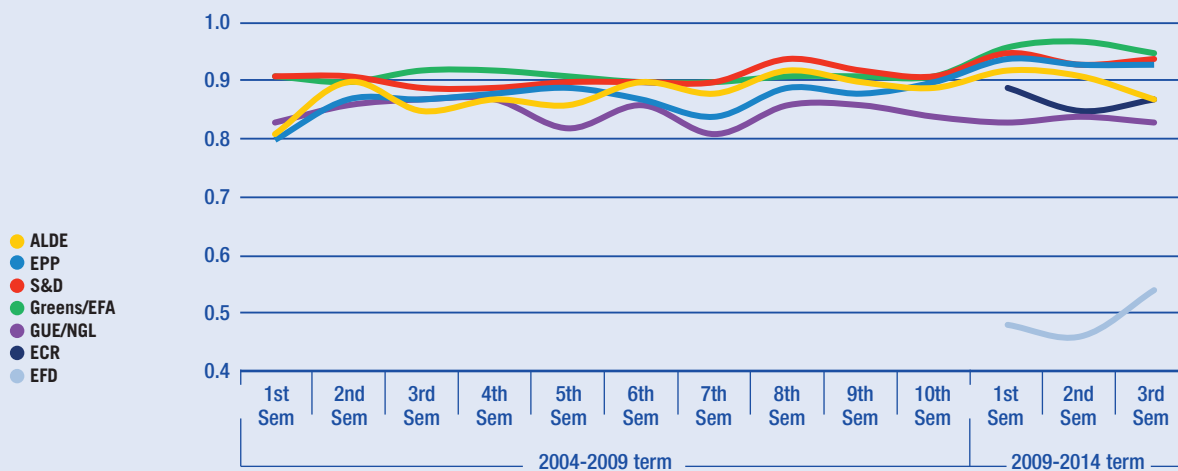
1. The score changed to 331 'for' to 316 'against' after several MEPs modified their initial votes while others added their votes at a later stage.

### Voting cohesion inside the groups

'Cohesion' measures the extent to which the members of a single 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 the group: the 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 vote).

The voting cohesion of the political groups has slightly increased in the first 18 months of EP7 compared to the average for the whole of EP6. In the first semester of the current term (July to December 2009), the average cohesion rate of political groups reached 0.90, a record high for the 2004-2010 period. In the second and third semesters (2010) it has fallen slightly, to 0.88. **Figure 7** compares the cohesion of the political groups.

Figure 7: Cohesion of European political groups 2004-2010



### 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 Greens/EFA) are growing and are higher than the cohesion scores of MEPs from a single country (regardless of party). The only policy area that bucks this trend is *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 along national lines, and independently from colleagues in their political groups.

Full cohesion rates broken down by policy area and political group can be accessed on the [VoteWatch website](http://votewatch.eu/cx_european_party_groups.php) at [votewatch.eu/cx\\_european\\_party\\_groups.php](http://votewatch.eu/cx_european_party_groups.php)

To see to what extent national political parties follow the political lines of their group, go to [votewatch.eu/cx\\_national\\_parties.php](http://votewatch.eu/cx_national_parties.php)

## Other activities in the European Parliament

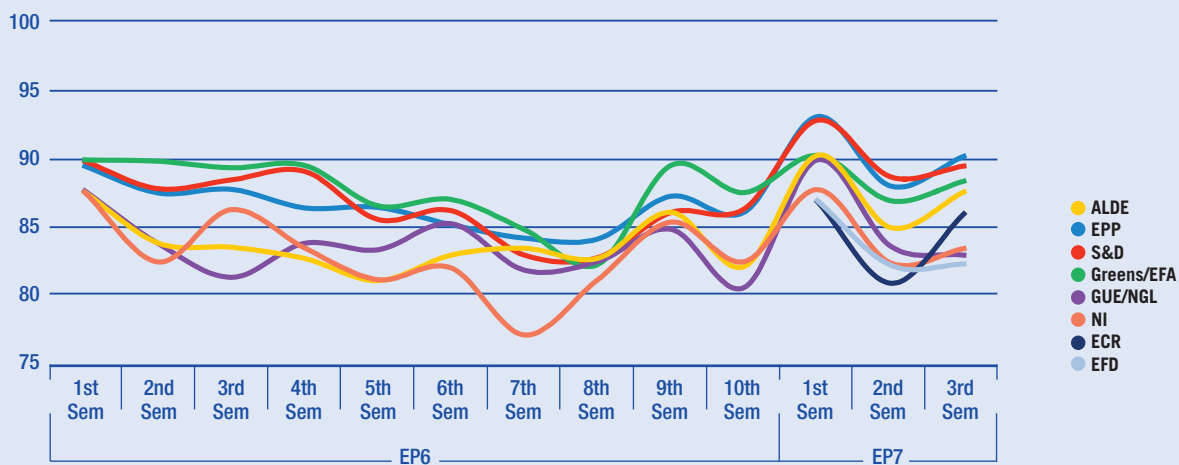
In addition to collecting information about how the MEPs and political groups vote, [VoteWatch.eu](http://VoteWatch.eu) also collects and analyses data on other activities in the European Parliament, and in particular:

- attendance rates, referring to how often MEPs attend plenary sessions (as well as attendance rates among political groups and national parties);
- the number of questions asked of the Commission and the Council, which can be used as a measure of how often MEPs and parties exercise their right to scrutinise the other EU institutions; and
- how many reports are written by each MEP, national party and political group.

### HOW DOES IDEOLOGY AFFECT ATTENDANCE RATES?

All European political groups have slightly increased their average attendance rates in comparison to the same period of the previous term. **Figure 8** shows how MEPs marked the start of the 2009-14 mandate with a record high average attendance rate of 90%, but then how attendance rates lowered to become comparable to those from the previous term.

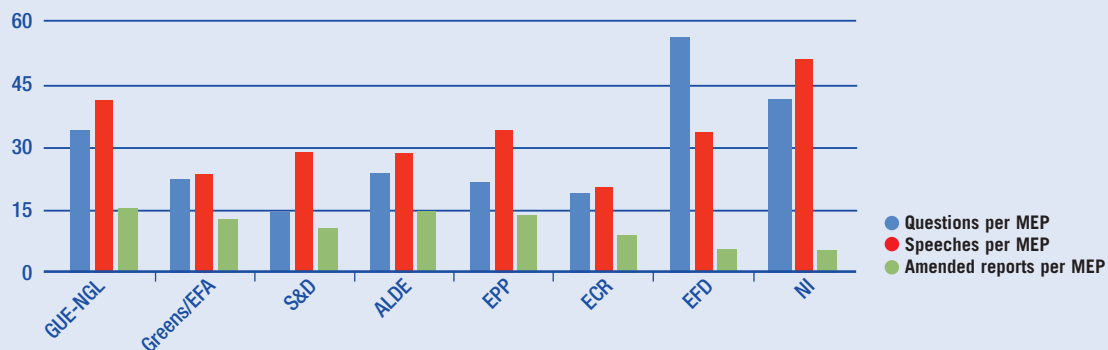
**Figure 8: Evolution of attendance of European political groups (2004-2010) - percentage**



### WHO ASKS THE MOST QUESTIONS?

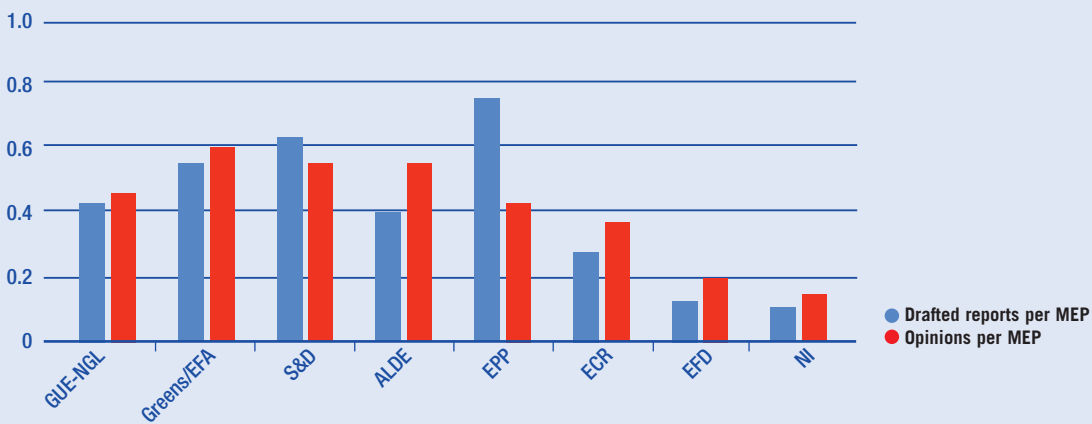
Figure 9 shows how many questions were asked by MEPs from each group, as well as the number of speeches and amended reports led by members of these groups.

Figure 9: Average number of parliamentary questions, speeches and amended reports per MEP by European political groups



The MEPs belonging to political groups that are more critical of European integration resort more often to questions (addressed to the Commission and the Council) and speeches in plenary. However, when it comes to drafting reports and opinions, the EPP and the S&D have the highest average so far, as demonstrated in Figure 10:

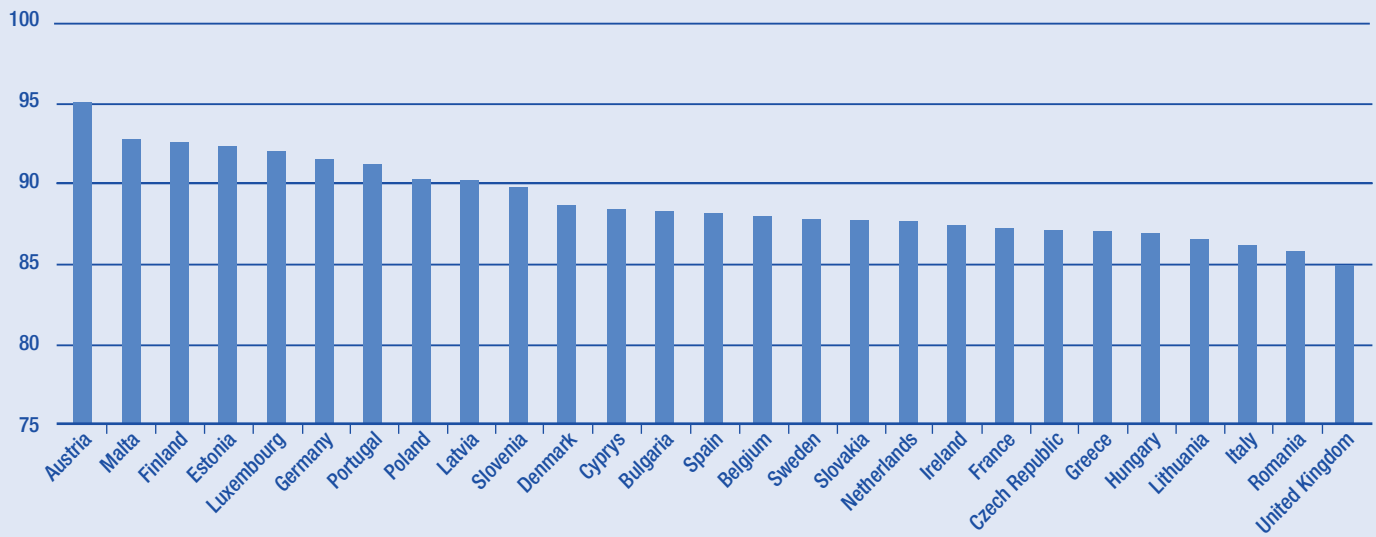
Figure 10: Average number of drafted reports and opinions per MEP by European political groups



### HOW DOES NATIONALITY INFLUENCE ACTIVITY?

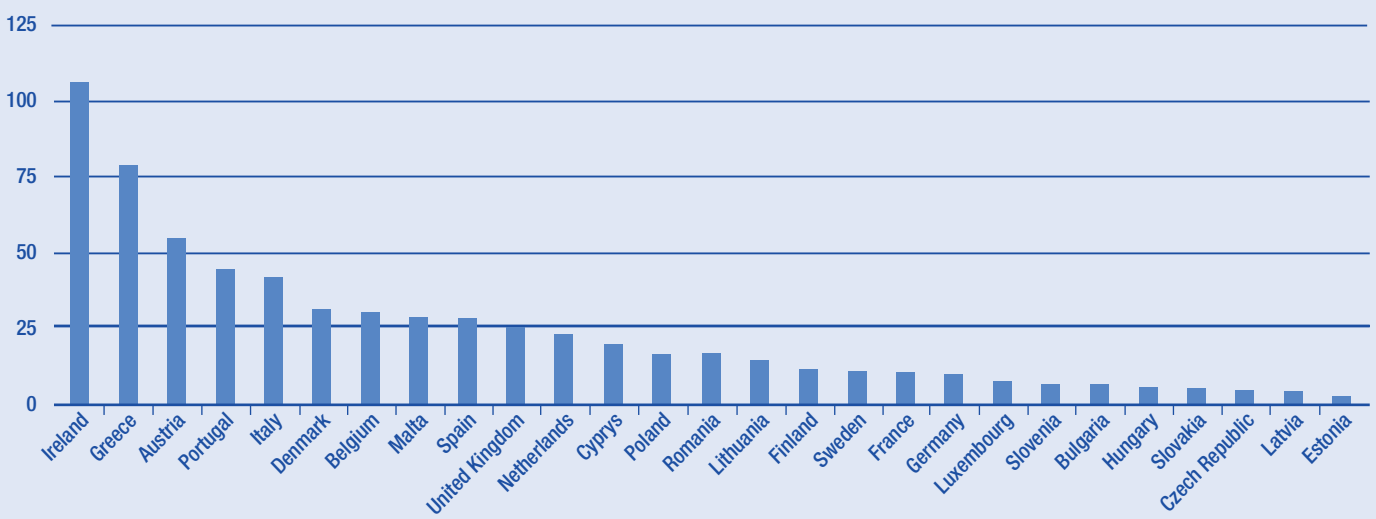
Average attendance rates by national delegation (**Figure 11**) show that Austrian MEPs have the highest attendance rates in EP7, as in the previous legislature. They are followed by MEPs from Malta, Finland and Estonia. At the other end of the attendance scale are MEPs from UK, Romania, Italy and Lithuania.

**Figure 11: Average attendance of MEPs by member states - percentage**



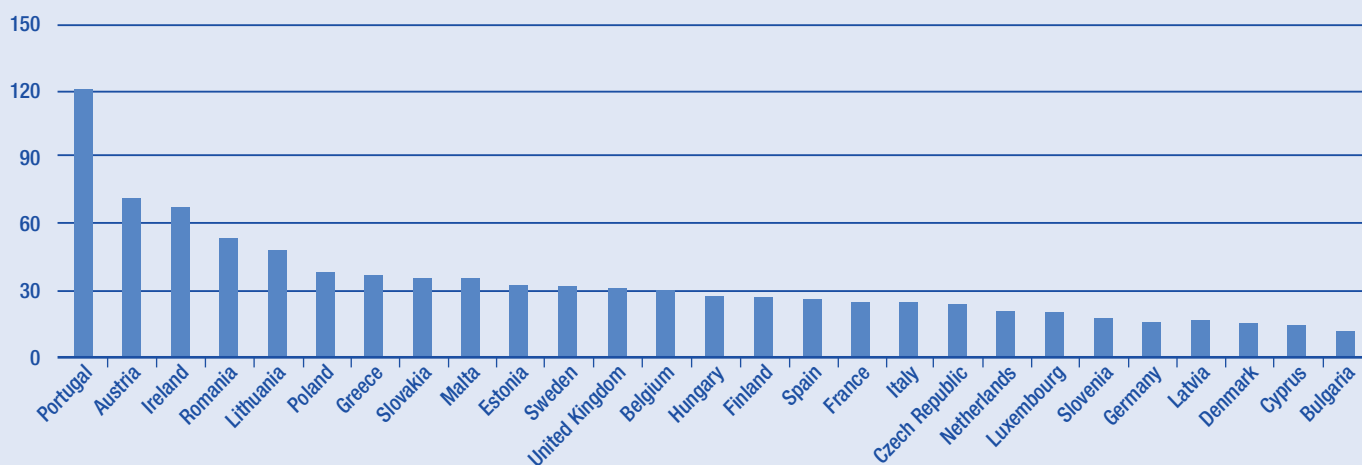
The greatest number of questions to the Commission and the Council come from MEPs representing the two EU member states most seriously affected by the economic crisis so far – Ireland and Greece. However, though the topics of these questions does vary greatly. **Figure 12** shows that MEPs from Mediterranean countries tend to ask more questions, while those from 'new' EU members, such as Estonia, Latvia, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, use this option less often.

**Figure 12: Average number of parliamentary questions per MEP by member state**



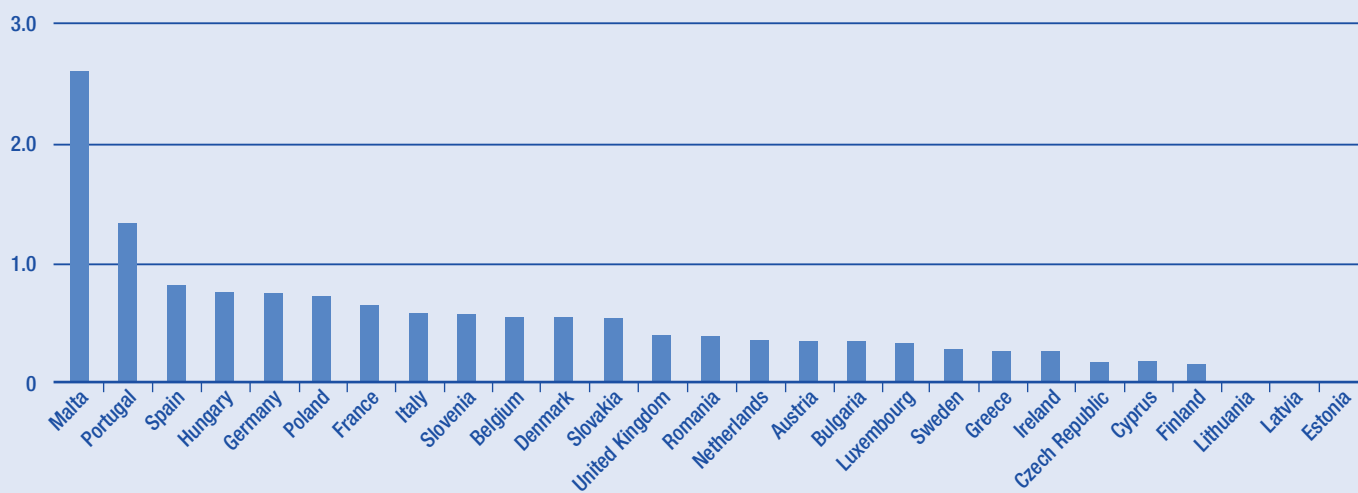
Interestingly, **Figure 13** shows that the MEPs from the largest member states speak less often in the plenary than their colleagues.

**Figure 13: Average number of speeches in the plenary per MEP by member state**



When looking at the allocation of rapporteurship by national delegations, **Figure 14** shows that out of the 'new' member states, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia have a high average report-writing rate per MEP, whereas the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) have the lowest rate<sup>2</sup>.

**Figure 14: Average number of drafted reports per MEP by member state**

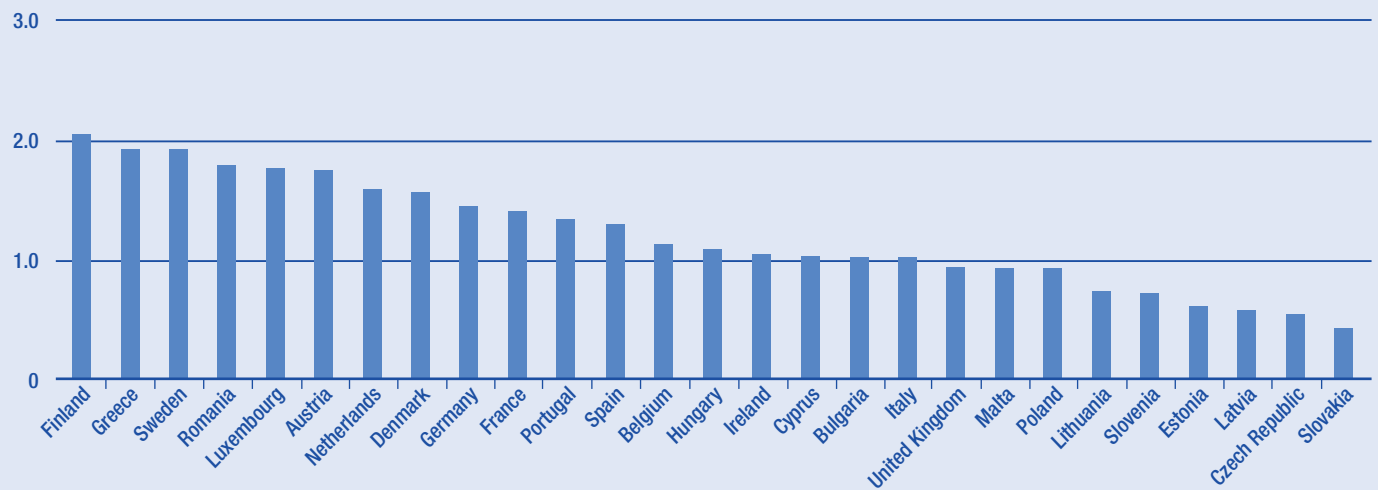


<sup>2</sup> These data refer to the reports that have already reached the plenary stage (reports which are still at committee stage are not included in current statistics).



Though MEPs from Finland have not written many reports so far, **Figure 15** shows that they are the first in terms of amending reports.

**Figure 15: Average number of reports amended per MEP by member state**



## APPENDIX

### SUMMARY OF VOTING PATTERNS IN EP7 (June 2009-December 2010)

	Winning Side		Coalition Formation		Voting Cohesion		
	% of votes won by EPP	EPP win minus S&D win <sup>3</sup>	Left-Right Split <sup>4</sup> %	ALDE vote with EPP vs. S&D <sup>5</sup> % pts	EPP	S&D	ALDE
Agriculture	91.0	+6.0	39	+6	0.82	0.84	0.83
Budget	91.0	+4.8	26	+1	0.97	0.95	0.86
Budgetary control	93.0	-1.8	19	-9	0.97	0.98	0.97
Civil liberties, justice and home affairs	73.7	-5.2	50	-10	0.96	0.96	0.92
Constitutional and inter-institutional affairs	97.1	+4.6	18	0	0.97	0.95	0.93
Development	71.4	0	60	-3	0.85	0.97	0.87
Economic and monetary affairs	100.0	+32	32	+25	0.96	0.97	0.92
Employment and social affairs	92.5	+13.2	32	+21	0.93	0.95	0.93
Environment and public health	73.1	-3.8	57	-21	0.90	0.89	0.83
Fisheries	95.0	+5	35	0	0.96	0.94	0.93
Foreign and security policy	92.3	+7.3	29	+6	0.90	0.94	0.95
Gender equality	66.2	-21.5	54	-9	0.74	0.96	0.87
Industry, research and energy	83.0	+3.8	43	-11	0.94	0.93	0.91
International trade	88.4	+4.7	28	0	0.95	0.96	0.92
All Votes <sup>6</sup>	<b>86.5</b>	<b>+4.5</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>-1.5</b>	<b>0.93</b>	<b>0.94</b>	<b>0.90</b>

3. Indicates how many more votes EPP won than S&D (in % points). A negative value indicates that S&D won more votes than EPP.

4. Indicates the per cent of times EPP and S&D voted against each other out of the total number of votes cast in each policy area.

5. Indicates how much more often ALDE has made a coalition with EPP against the S&D than the other way around. A negative value indicates that ALDE has made coalition more often with the S&D against EPP.

6. Please note that not all policy areas are included in this table, as there have not yet been cast a significant number of votes in some of them. However, 'all votes' refers to all 1351 votes cast in the first 18 months of the current term.

## Conclusions

The June 2009 European Parliament elections and the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty 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 always in a dominant position when it comes to winning votes, particularly in some of the most competitive areas.

The chances that the EPP wins a vote depend on a series of factors, such as the level of party competition, the coalition formation pattern (centre-left vs. centre-right), their own internal cohesion, and the behaviour of the other two main groups. The EPP win easily when ALDE vote with them, as in most votes on economic and monetary affairs. When ALDE vote with S&D against the EPP, the EPP can still win if it can maintain a high level of internal cohesion (compared to S&D and ALDE) and a high participation rate, as has been the case on some civil liberties and environment policy votes. On the other hand, when a centre-left coalition is formed and where the EPP suffers higher defections, the EPP tends to find itself on the losing side, as is often the case on gender equality issues and, to a lesser extent, on development issues.

Consequently, when there is a left-right split in votes, ALDE holds the balance of power. As a result, so far in EP7 ALDE have won in more votes than the EPP, which was not the case in the previous Parliament. However, the internal cohesion rate of the ALDE group is lower than that of the S&D and EPP and, moreover, has declined in the third semester of EP7 (July to December 2010), which diminishes the group's voting power.

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

Overall, during the first 18 months of the new Parliament, the political groups have slightly increased their cohesion rates and improved the attendance records of their members in comparison to EP6 (this was especially the case in the first six months of EP7, and less so in the following two semesters). This trend, coupled with the increased powers granted to the European Parliament by the Lisbon Treaty 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.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that not all important votes in the European Parliament are held by roll-call. For example, the vote to reject the SWIFT agreement on 11 February 2010 was not taken by roll-call. This was one of the most significant votes so far in EP7, as it was the first time that the Parliament rejected an international agreement of the EU. However, because it was not by roll-call, citizens, interest groups and the media could not look at how the MEPs and parties had voted. To increase the transparency and legitimacy of the European Parliament on such important issues VoteWatch calls for all legislative votes to be by roll-call (as is the case in the US Congress, for example).



VoteWatch.eu issues reports on political behaviour in the European Parliament every six months, and the work of individual MEPs and their political and national groups can be monitored continuously via the [VoteWatch.eu](http://www.VoteWatch.eu) website.

For further information, please visit our website at:

[www.VoteWatch.eu](http://www.VoteWatch.eu)

Votewatch, 1, Place du Congrès,  
Brussels, Belgium

Tel: +32 2 89 44 920 and +32 472 657 924

secretariat@votewatch.eu

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