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eup.sagepub.com**Simon Otjes**

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Abstract

There is a broad consensus that the left-right dimension has been the dominant line of conflict in the European Parliament since 1979. A pro-/anti-EU dimension is found to be of secondary importance, which is attributed to the fact that decision-making over the competences of the European Union is the realm of intergovernmental negotiations. In this article, we show that the seventh EP witnessed a transformational moment in the history of the EU. The Eurozone crisis amplified the importance of the pro-/anti-EU dimension and increasingly shapes the voting behaviour of Members of the EP. This change is particularly pronounced for voting on economic issues. To demonstrate this transformation, we employ a novel deductive method that allows us to predict the relative importance of two dimensions structuring MEP voting behaviour. Our results contradict established wisdom about the strength of the left-right divide in EP politics.

Keywords

Economic left/right, European Union integration dimension, European Parliament, Eurozone crisis, Parliamentary voting

Introduction

During the 2009–2014 term of the European Parliament (EP), the European Union (EU) underwent one of its most serious crises. The economic turmoil that started out in the United States turned into a sovereign debt crisis in the Eurozone. At a time when European integration was challenged from both the left and the right, integration of the

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macro-economic policy of member states was presented as the solution to the Eurozone crisis. In order to prevent future debt crises, the European Commission (EC) expanded its budgetary oversight powers (Bauer and Becker, 2014). The seventh EP (2009–2014) thus witnessed a transformational moment in European history. However, the effects of the Eurozone crisis on the patterns of decision-making in the EP have not been studied extensively (Braghiroli, 2014). This article seeks to determine how these events have affected the political dynamics in the EP.

A key question in the study of the EP has been which dimensions structure decision-making. Ever since Kreppel and Tsebelis (1999), political scientists have aimed to map the political space of the EP. From these works, it is clear that, since its first directly elected term, the dominant dimension shaping the voting behaviour of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) is the left-right dimension. This finding is attributed to the fact that the competences of the EU and thus the issues voted upon in the Parliament are primarily economic in nature. Additionally, the extant literature points to the dimension of the EU integration as the second line of conflict structuring the MEPs voting behaviour. This line of conflict matters less than the left-right because competences of the national governments and the EU are negotiated in treaties between governments and not in the EP itself (Mair, 2003).

The question we seek to answer in this article is to what extent the dimensionality of voting in the EP has changed between 2004 and 2014. On the one hand, the financial crisis may have intensified the conflict between the economic left and right, as politicians from these two sides offer different ways to get out of the crisis. Therefore we might find a stronger left-right dimension than before. On the other hand, we see an unprecedented move of competences to the European level. This raises the question whether these issues should be the responsibility of the EU or rather those of the member states. This may express itself in a stronger division between pro-European and Eurosceptic MEPs in the seventh EP term compared to the sixth, even when economic issues are on the table.

In addition to a substantive contribution to the study of EU politics, this study offers several methodological improvements. First, it proposes a novel methodology of studying what types of votes (e.g. the substantive issue voted upon) contribute to which dimension. Second, whereas earlier studies on EP voting focussed on macro-level patterns (with the exception of Høyland, 2010), our method allows for determining to what extent particular votes are structured by particular political dimensions. Studies have tended to assume that, for example, votes about economic issues contribute to the left-right dimension (Hix et al., 2003; Kreppel and Tsebelis, 1999). This article provides a methodology that empirically establishes this influence by using regression analysis techniques, rather than the commonly used dimension reduction methods.

Theory and expectations

The question which dimensions structure political contestation at the European level is central to the study of European politics in general and that of the EP in

particular. Marks and Steenbergen (2002) propose that there are three theoretical models of such political contestation: the international relations model, the regulation model, and finally the Hix–Lord model.

International relations model. This model views EU politics as being concerned with a single question: which powers should be delegated to the EU (Gabel and Hix, 2002)? The political conflict therefore focuses on the nature and speed of the integration process (Hix, 2001) and concerns the division of power and competences between national states and the supranational EU. In this model, a European integration dimension dominates, differentiating between pro-European and Eurosceptic parties. What ‘Eurosceptic’ exactly means has been subject to considerable debate (Mudde, 2012). Mudde (2012) distinguishes two schools. The first school is exemplified by Szczerbiak and Taggart (2008), who differentiate between hard and soft Euroscepticism: hard Eurosceptics believe that their country should leave the EU, while soft Eurosceptics oppose ‘the EU’s current or future planned trajectory based on the further extension of competencies that the EU is planning to make’ (Szczerbiak and Taggart, 2008: 248). This is a key qualitative difference for Szczerbiak and Taggart: if the EU’s course would change, the soft Eurosceptics could come aboard, but the hard Eurosceptics would not. The second school centres around the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) (Bakker et al., 2012; Ray, 1999; Steenbergen and Marks, 2007). These surveys examine the overall orientation of party leaders towards EU integration, ranging from ‘strongly opposed’ to ‘strongly in favour’. The difference between the two schools should not be overstated: Ray (2007) notes that those who are ‘extremely opposed’ to European integration in the surveys tend to fall in the ‘hard Eurosceptic’ category.

Regulation model. In this model, too, EU politics is concerned with a single question: should the EU employ market-based solutions to social problems or opt for government regulation? The model conceives the EU as an institution that can either leave markets free or regulate them. This traditional left-right dimension forms the dominant line of conflict in European politics (Tsebelis and Garrett 2000).

Hix–Lord model. This model integrates the two models discussed above and understands EU politics as two-dimensional. In this view, there is *both* a European integration and a left-right dimension in EU politics. These dimensions are independent from each other (Gabel and Hix, 2002; Hooghe et al., 2002; Raunio, 2007).

The Hix–Lord model received the most empirical support (Hix et al., 2014) although there are some indications that a unidimensional left-right model might suffice for specific parliamentary terms and under specific conditions (Hix, 2001; Kreppel and Tsebelis, 1999). Of the two dimensions, the left-right one is considered dominant (Hix and Noury, 2009). The dominance of the left-right dimension in the EP is understandable, since decision-making in the EP focuses primarily on economic issues. The EU is in the first place a single market, in which the Parliament adopts laws on trade standards. Furthermore, this left-right dimension does not

only encompass purely economic issues, but also taps into environmental and law-and-order policies (Hix, 2001; Hix et al., 2014).

The second dimension uncovered by the empirical evidence is neither as important, nor as stable and consistent as the left-right dimension (Hix et al., 2014). On this dimension, the large established European party groups of pro-European government parties and the Eurosceptic groups stand on opposite ends of the spectrum. Both the European People's Party (EPP) and the Party of European Socialists (PES) share a pro-European outlook and favour moving competences from national governments to the European level (Hix et al., 2003).¹ In this sense, the question of *more or less* Europe stands perpendicular on the question of *what kind of* Europe. Moreover, these two groups always had a majority together: the two parties operate as a majority coalition in a parliamentary system and have been dubbed the 'Grand Coalition' akin to the Christian- and social-democratic coalitions in Germany and Austria (Kreppel and Tsebelis, 1999; Kreppel and Hix, 2003).

As noted, the dimensions of European Parliamentary politics are well established, yet we know little about the conditions under which these dimensions are formed. As Kreppel and Tsebelis (1999) show, voting coalitions in the EP are not always stable. Under different conditions, such as earlier or later stages of European decision-making, the left-right dimension or the Grand Coalition may become more prominent. This article seeks to move the discussion on legislative behaviour of the EP from *how* MEPs vote to *under what conditions* MEPs vote in a particular way. The next section therefore outlines our theory and expectations.

Economic issues and the dimensionality in the EP

One of the conditions affecting the relevance of a particular dimension to a vote is its substance. The strength of the dimension may vary depending on the committees involved. Here, evidence is inconsistent and theory on the subject is underdeveloped. Two things are well established. First, on economic matters, left-right voting is strongest and the Grand Coalition is weakest (Kreppel and Tsebelis, 1999). Whereas Kreppel and Tsebelis (1999) show the dominance of the Grand Coalition on environmental and legal affairs, they find evidence for a left-right pattern on social affairs and energy (Kreppel and Tsebelis, 1999). Hix (2001) finds left-right voting on social, environmental and budgetary policies, and a Grand Coalition on votes concerning foreign and foreign trade policies. Hix et al. (2003) find evidence for strong differences between the PES and the EPP on environmental, economic and social issues. For this article, we will look at the basic distinction economic and non-economic issues. We want to test whether economic issues indeed contribute more to left-right voting than other issues.

H1 (Economic Issues Left-Right Hypothesis): Votes on economic issues follow the division between Left and Right more than votes on other issues.

The Eurozone Crisis

The political circumstances surrounding the vote may affect the patterns of voting in the EP. The Eurozone crisis may influence the strength of the European integration dimension on the one hand, and the strength of the left-right dimension on the other.

The Eurozone crisis had its roots in the banking crisis that started in 2008 in the United States. The sudden drop of trust in the financial markets led to a worldwide economic contraction. In response, national governments increased their spending in order to prevent further economic decline. Member states believed that they had to nationalise significant parts of the banking industry. The costs of these bailouts were added to the already unbalanced state budgets which quickly resulted in sizeable budget deficits, much larger than the Stability and Growth Pact, which regulated Eurozone government spending, allowed. With the adoption of a single currency, states lacked many of the usual fiscal instruments except for the option of increasing their national budget (Krugman, 2012; Mundell, 1961). The trust of financial markets in the ability of some Eurozone states, such as Greece, to meet their financial obligations decreased. Unable to borrow money on the financial markets, these countries consequently had to be bailed out by the international community. The EU set up its own European Stability Mechanism (ESM) to bail out Eurozone countries. This constituted an expansion of EU competences. In order to ensure that in the future member states could not overspend, the member states expanded the budgetary oversight powers of the EC (Bauer and Becker, 2014). This resulted in the Fiscal Compact, which gave the EC the power to enforce the budget deficit rules. The timeline of these events (see the Online Appendix) shows that the most important anti-crisis measures and the agreements to strengthen European control over budgetary decision-making were decided on in the period 2010–2014. The change from the sixth to the seventh EP occurred just months before the economic crisis became a sovereign debt crisis, as the economic crisis started in 2008 but only turned into a sovereign debt crisis in 2010.

The literature on the effects of the Eurozone crisis on the political spaces is scarce, and for as far as literature is available, it deals with specific countries that were deeply affected by the crisis such as Greece (Katsanidou and Otjes, 2016). Fortunately, we can borrow from more general political science literature on the effects of European integration on national political spaces. Kriesi et al. (2008, 2012) describe the formation of a new structural conflict in Europe separating winners and losers of globalisation. Globalisation affects the political space in West European countries through an economic logic and a cultural logic. Kriesi et al. (2008) argue that the economic globalisation ‘reinforce[s] the classic opposition between a pro-state and a pro-market position’. Some citizens favour further integration into a globalised world market while others favour a clear demarcation of national borders and economic protectionism from the world economy. Furthermore, Kriesi et al. (2008) argue that a new dimension has emerged that is independent of the economic dimension. It concerns questions of national

identity, such as immigration and political integration into the EU. The authors see these two logics as separate: there is an effect of globalization in the economic realm (namely left-right polarisation), and one in the cultural realm (namely a new integration-demarkation dimension). The underlying argument of Kriesi et al. (2008) is based on the globalisation, rather than the Eurozone crisis. These patterns may not necessarily be distinct: globalisation and the move of competences to the EU-level during the Eurozone crisis are part of the same development: they both involve a move of power from the national level towards a supranational level. From Kriesi et al.'s (2008) perspective, decision-making on economic issues during the Eurozone crisis is likely to be contested along the left-right dimension. In their logic the events of the crisis may strengthen feelings of nationalism and therefore foster increased political competition along the cultural dimension, but this dimension explicitly does not apply to the economic realm.

However, evidence from Greece indicates another dynamic. For Greece, scholars observe a fundamental change in the dimensionality of the political system (Katsanidou, 2013; Katsanidou and Otjes, 2016; Teperoglou and Tsatsanis, 2014). When Greece was no longer able to meet its financial obligations because of the economic crisis it was forced to borrow money from the EC, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund. These loans were made conditional upon reforms, austerity measures and privatisations. This direct influence of the EU on economic issues spurred a change in the national political space. Many economic issues in Greece are no longer structured by the left-right line of conflict, but rather by the European integration dimension that represents the extent to which parties accept European control over economic decision-making. The established parties of the centre-left and centre-right accepted European influence over budgetary decision-making, while the Eurosceptic parties of the left and right contested this shift of competences. This means that for the economic realm, the EU integration dimension became more important, while the left-right dimension waned.

The underlying logic for the Greek case is that at the national level there has been a hollowing out of national party competition. This development follows Mair's (2008) description of EU integration. The EU has put more and more constraints on domestic decision-making. Government parties can only pick from a predefined stock of available policies that is determined by the EU (Mair, 2008). At first this only concerned the level of government regulation, now it also applies to the budgetary process. EU integration and economic policy became intertwined. In the new regime, parties can no longer offer alternative budgetary policies without contesting Eurozone membership. Therefore only Eurosceptic parties can offer alternative, expansionary budgetary policies.

The case of Greece shows that the European dimension can play a major role in the economic realm, in national parliaments and possibly also in the EP. It can very well be that the European integration dimension became more important in the EP even on economic issues. The stronger enforcement of fiscal responsibility by the EC constrains the ability of parties in Eurozone member states to pursue particular

economic policies *without* raising the issue of Eurozone membership. In Eurozone countries, budgetary policies, a crucial element in a country's economic policies, are co-determined by the EU. Since Eurozone countries are all members of the Stability and Growth Pact, their budget deficit is limited to three per cent of their gross national products. After the EU intervened in Greece, but also in Cyprus, Ireland, Portugal and Spain, a Fiscal Compact between most EU member states expanded the power of the EC in the realm of budgetary decision-making. This agreement enlarged the ability of the Commission to force countries to follow the limits on budget deficits in the Stability and Growth Pact. Eurosceptic parties of both the left and right had the opportunity to develop a shared economic agenda in response, claiming to defend the welfare state against the growing influence of EU institutions. These EU institutions are seen as forcing austerity measures upon the member states. This shared rhetoric comes despite the fact that left-wing Eurosceptic parties tend to be more soft-Eurosceptic, compared to the right-wing hard Eurosceptic parties. Most of the left-wing Eurosceptics oppose the creation of a European budgetary oversight mechanism. They do, however, still offer *European* rather than national solutions to the crisis, such as expanding the loans by the European Investment Bank.

The dynamic which can be observed in Greece may also have occurred in the EP. Here, the constraints on national policy freedom are actually voted upon. If there would be a possibility to contest these choices along the left-right dimension, the EP would be the correct place. Evidence from interviews with the MEPs involved in the negotiations for the Two Pack, a legislative package that moved budgetary responsibilities to the EC, shows that pro-European groups of the left and right were willing to put away their policy differences on the left-right dimension to take the measures that in their view were necessary to stabilise the Eurozone (Roger, 2014). The Eurosceptic parties that were less committed to the European project were less willing to compromise, while the pro-European parties prioritised stability over policy and therefore accepted a transfer of sovereignty.

What may also have contributed to this change of dimensionality is the fact that the Treaty of Lisbon expanded the legislative powers of the EP, involving it in what previously was the exclusive realm of intergovernmental decision-making. The voting patterns may also have changed because the nature of economic issues that the EP voted on was markedly different than before. Instead of being offered a choice between left-wing interventionist and right-wing market-based solutions, the EP was faced with a choice between keeping budgetary decision-making powers at the national level or allowing the EC to co-determine budgetary policy in the Eurozone. The pro-European parties were willing to transfer sovereignty because it was seen, by these parties, as a necessary step to stabilise the Eurozone.

In short, we now have two contrasting interpretations, offering different expectations. In the first scenario, the left-right dimension grew in importance in the EP as parties of the left and the right offered radically different solutions to the economic crisis, and the EP was the place where these policies were actually determined. The crisis is then expected to reinforce the traditional left-right conflict, akin

to the argument made by Kriesi et al. (2008). In the second scenario, the European integration dimension becomes more important on economic issues. The reason for this is that the political conflict does not just concern the economic solutions but rather the shift of competences from the national to the European level. We summarise these expectations in the following hypotheses:

H2 (Eurozone Crisis Left-Right Hypothesis): Votes on economic issues after the onset of the sovereign debt crisis follow the division between left and right more than economic votes before the onset of the crisis.

H3 (Eurozone Crisis European Integration Dimension Hypothesis): Votes on economic issues after the onset of the sovereign debt crisis follow the European integration division more than economic votes before the onset of the crisis.

Kreppel (2000) emphasises the importance of the Grand Coalition in the EP, but notes that it waxes and wanes during different phases of the legislative process. The European legislative process is one of negotiation between MEPs and representatives of national states in the Council of Ministers. Kreppel (2000) argues that the Grand Coalition between EPP and PES is stronger in some phases than in others, because the EP sometimes needs to create a united front vis-a-vis the Council of Ministers (for details see the Online Appendix).

Methods

Data collection

We look at all documented European parliamentary roll-call votes for the sixth and seventh parliamentary terms. We obtained the data from Hix and Noury (2009) for the sixth EP, and from VoteWatch (2014) for the seventh EP. We have a total of 7,518,310 voting decisions.² While voting in the EP is not restricted to roll-call votes, only roll-calls are documented per MEP.³

Following Hix et al. (2001, 2014) we compare voting patterns to party positions as measured by expert surveys. We chose expert surveys over manifesto-based measurements because these expert surveys reflect the scholarly consensus of where these parties stand in general and not just where they stand in the pre-election period. We obtain national party positions from the CHES 2002, 2006 and 2010 data sets (Bakker et al., 2012; Steenbergen and Marks, 2007). We chose the CHES not only because of its comprehensiveness, but also because it offers an elegant single measure of party's positions on Europe (compared to having a hard and a soft Eurosceptic measure). We use the closest available CHES to the date of the vote, where preference is given to CHES observations *before* the date of the vote, when available, or the earliest available CHES observation after the vote. Since the CHES positions concern national parties, we linked the national parties to MEPs based on the information available on the website of the EP (EP, 2015)

and via the ParlGov data set (Döring and Manow, 2012). When we combine this data with our data, we have 1,016,878 missing cases (11%), because the CHES had no estimates for some of the national parties' positions. We use the general left-right and the European integration dimensions from the CHES. We prefer the general left-right dimension over the economic left-right dimension, because the dimension that is uncovered using dimension reduction techniques of parliamentary votes does not just capture economic issues but also environmental and law-and-order issues (Hix, 2001; Hix et al., 2014).

Furthermore, we construct a variable which reflects the European political affiliation of the MEPs as derived from the EP website (EP, 2015). In order to test the role of the Grand Coalition, we look at whether the MEPs are member of the EPP or PES. We take into account changes in party affiliation (and CHES position) by using party membership on the date of the vote, for each vote.

We also include a number of characteristics per vote, which were drawn from Hix and Noury (2009) and VoteWatch (2014). The first variable is the *parliamentary term*. The second is *policy area*. Votes are categorised by committee, which we use as proxies for policy areas. To test our hypotheses, we categorized votes as economic or non-economic. We define economic issues as those addressed in the committees that were closely involved with decision-making during the economic crisis (namely, the Economic and Monetary Affairs, and the Employment and Social Affairs Committees).

We also include a number of control variables, discussed in greater detail in the Online Appendix. The first of these measures whether the vote falls within the ordinary legislative procedure. The second control variable indicates whether the vote concerns a final vote on a subject, or whether it is an amendment. We also control for the stage in which the voting took place: in the second reading or the conciliation phase of the ordinary legislative procedure. Finally, we also constructed a variable, which measured whether the legislation that was voted on was a new proposal or amended existing legislation. This data is not available directly, so we had to obtain vote descriptions from the EUR-Lex website (EUR-Lex, 2014) through the use of regular expression software. The Online Appendix provides the detailed description of all control variables.⁴

Data analysis

Undeniably, spatial modelling methods, such as NOMINATE (Hix and Noury, 2009; Poole, 2005) but also alternative methods (Braghiroli, 2014; Han, 2007; Kreppel and Tsebelis, 1999), have provided a great insight into EP voting patterns. However, inductive methods have limitations. A spatial model is a creation by the researcher (Coombs, 1960); there is no true dimensionality to uncover by the researchers but rather they can decide that a dimension represents a particular space (Benoit and Laver, 2006). In the study of parliamentary voting, the only indicator of growing or decreasing importance of the different dimensions is the increase or the decrease in the number of errors made by the model by adding additional dimensions (Hix and

Noury, 2009). Methods like NOMINATE lack clear threshold levels of error. The choice for a particular number of dimensions cannot be determined objectively.

This article uses a regression-based approach, inspired by Van Aelst and Louwerse (2013). Our unit of analysis is the individual voting decisions by MEPs. We try to predict whether MEPs' voting decisions are based on their policy preferences, and determine the dominant preference dimension for each vote. We include variables to see whether the strength of this relationship differs between parliamentary terms, between committees, and between different legislative procedures. We employ multi-level logistic regressions as we are looking at individual MEP vote decisions clustered in votes. The analysis consists of three main steps.

In the first step, we create three data sets: each data set has an independent variable (voting decision, i.e. *yea/nay* per MEP per vote), which we flip so that all proposals are in the same direction. As argued above, in order to compare the strength of the relationship between how parties vote and their positions on a range of issues, we need to make sure that all votes are comparable: if voting for one motion is an expression of a left-wing ideology and voting for another motion is an expression of a right-wing ideology, they cannot be compared directly. This means that for the left-right dependent variable data set, all votes that are positively coded express a left-wing ideology. In the EU integration dimension dependent variable data, all positively coded votes were votes that expressed a pro-European ideology, and for the Grand Coalition data set the votes are coded so that the EPP and PES vote in favour. These three data sets are identical except for the flipped dependent variable. The procedure for the construction of these data sets is as follows: first, we ran a logistic regression on the voting decisions as dependent and the ideology indicators as independent variables for each and every vote separately. This logistic regression is the same as conducted in the multi-level model. In other regression models all votes are combined and vote-level characteristics are added. For every vote decision we assessed whether the coefficient of the independent variable (left-right and EU integration positions, and Grand Coalition membership) was above or below zero. We then created three variables, which are used as dependent variables in the multi-level analysis that follows. If the coefficient for the specific independent variable was below zero, we flipped all voting decisions for just that vote (i.e. the positively coded vote decisions became negatively coded vote decisions and vice versa). We saved either the original voting decision or if necessary the flipped voting decision, for each of the three main independent variables, in three new variables (vote Left-Right, vote Pro-/Anti-EU, vote Grand Coalition). In this way, we created three variables of voting decisions where all positively coded variables expressed, respectively, left-wing, pro-European ideologies and affiliation with the Grand Coalition of EPP and PES. The method we use to do this is discussed in the Online Appendix.

The second step consists of running three separate multi-level logistic regressions for each of the flipped data sets. These regressions had the following structure: we predict the voting behaviour with the general left-right positions, pro-/anti-EU

positions, and the EPP-PES affiliation measuring Grand Coalition membership; and a number of interactions. First, we have interactions between these dimensions and the four vote characteristics (whether the vote is legislative, a final vote, whether the vote concerned amending legislation or was a late reading); this allows us to see whether, for instance, an affiliation to the Grand Coalition of EPP-PES has a stronger effect on the voting behaviour during the later decision-making stages compared to earlier stages. These are important as control variables. The main theoretical mechanism is tested using three-way interactions between the ideological dimensions, the EP term, and the issue area. In this way, we can see whether, for instance, the general left-right dimension matters more for economic issues during the sixth or rather the seventh EP. We ran these multi-level analyses using Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) simulations via the MLwiN programme (Rasbash et al., 2014). This procedure starts by estimating an iterative generalised least squares (IGLS) model via a linearisation method and is therefore explicitly suitable for use on a dichotomous dependent variable. For the linearisation we ran a second-order penalised quasi-likelihood (PQL2) procedure (Goldstein, 1995). The MCMC simulations that follow, improve model fit by reducing the bias in the estimates produced by the PQL2 linearisation method (Rasbash et al., 2014). We tried various numbers of iterations, for our case the Markov chain appears to be well-behaved after an adapting period between 1800 and 2200 iterations, a burn-in period of 1500 iterations and 2500 estimation iterations.

We use a multi-level approach to modelling the regression since we clearly have a data structure with two crosscutting levels (votes and MEPs) that violates the conditions of independence of observations. We expect that some votes are 'harder' than other votes: some issues are much more divisive in nature (like government subsidies for farmers) than other issues (such as votes on motions condemning human rights violations). Almost all MEPs can be expected to condemn human rights violations, while the groups that favour or oppose farmer subsidies are more likely to be balanced. Thus, votes are used as a level in the multi-level regression because we expect the cut-off point separating yeas from nays to vary by the divisiveness of the vote. We model this by allowing the intercept to vary by votes. Note that a vote contains multiple (a few hundred, typically) vote decisions by individual MEPs. However, this is not the only relevant level. Most MEPs take part in a large number of votes; meaning that the observations are not independent from each other. If we would not include this MEP level, we would underestimate our standard errors since the assumption of independence of observations would be violated.⁵ We confirm this expectation of a multi-level structure by running empty models for our three dependent variables. The results of these empty models suggest, indeed, that our observations are (cross-) clustered in votes and MEPs.⁶

The third step in the formal analysis is interpreting results. We do not compare the results directly but rather look at predicted probabilities.⁷ In this way, we can compare the effect of, for example, the left-right and pro-/anti-EU positions on the chances of voting in favour of a proposal. We compare the chances of voting in

favour of a proposal by calculating the chance of voting ‘in favour’ of the flipped proposal for the most extreme values (e.g. we compared the most left-wing position to the most right-wing position). By subtracting the expected values for the extremes, we calculate the extent to which the indicator under investigation (e.g. the left/right dimension) contributes to the chance of voting in favour. The statistical significance is determined by calculating the size of the standard error of this difference using standard error propagation formulas.⁸

In the end, we have a way of assessing the influence of ideology (left-right and pro-/anti-EU) and Grand Coalition membership on the chances of voting in favour of a proposal. Furthermore, we can control for a number of theoretically relevant factors.

Results

In the following sections we examine the relationship between party positions and parliamentary voting behaviour for the sixth and seventh EP terms. In the final section we will examine the control variable and examine an alternative explanation for the patterns found.

Regression models

First, we look at the left-right dimension to test two hypotheses: the first hypothesis, which holds that the left-right dimension has a stronger influence on EP voting on economic issues than on other issues, and the second hypothesis, which holds that the left-right dimension has become more important on economic issues after the crisis when compared to before. Figure 1 shows the relationship between the left-right dimension and voting for both economic and non-economic issues in the sixth and seventh EP. For the sixth EP (2004–2009), the probability of voting in favour of an economic proposal, *ceteris paribus*, ranged from 36% for the most left-wing MEPs and 70% for the most right wing MEPs. This is an increase of 34% (this percentage is shown in Figure 1). For the same parliamentary term, but now for non-economic proposals, the increase is 17%: the most left-wing MEP has a likelihood of 41% to vote in favour while the most right-wing MEP has a 58% likelihood to do so. When we take into account the standard errors, we find that the increase of the probability to vote in favour of a proposal when comparing the extremes on the left-right dimension is significantly larger for economic issues than for non-economic issues. This means that in the sixth EP, the left-right dimension has a stronger influence on voting for economic issues than for non-economic issues (*H1*).

In the seventh EP, we see an increase in the likelihood of voting in favour when moving from the extreme left to the extreme right of 29% (from 36% to 64%) for economic issues, while for non-economic issues this increase in probabilities is only 19% (from 39% to 59%). As in the sixth EP, the left-right dimension matters more for economic issues than for non-economic issues. The difference between the effect size of the left-right dimension between economic and non-economic issues is

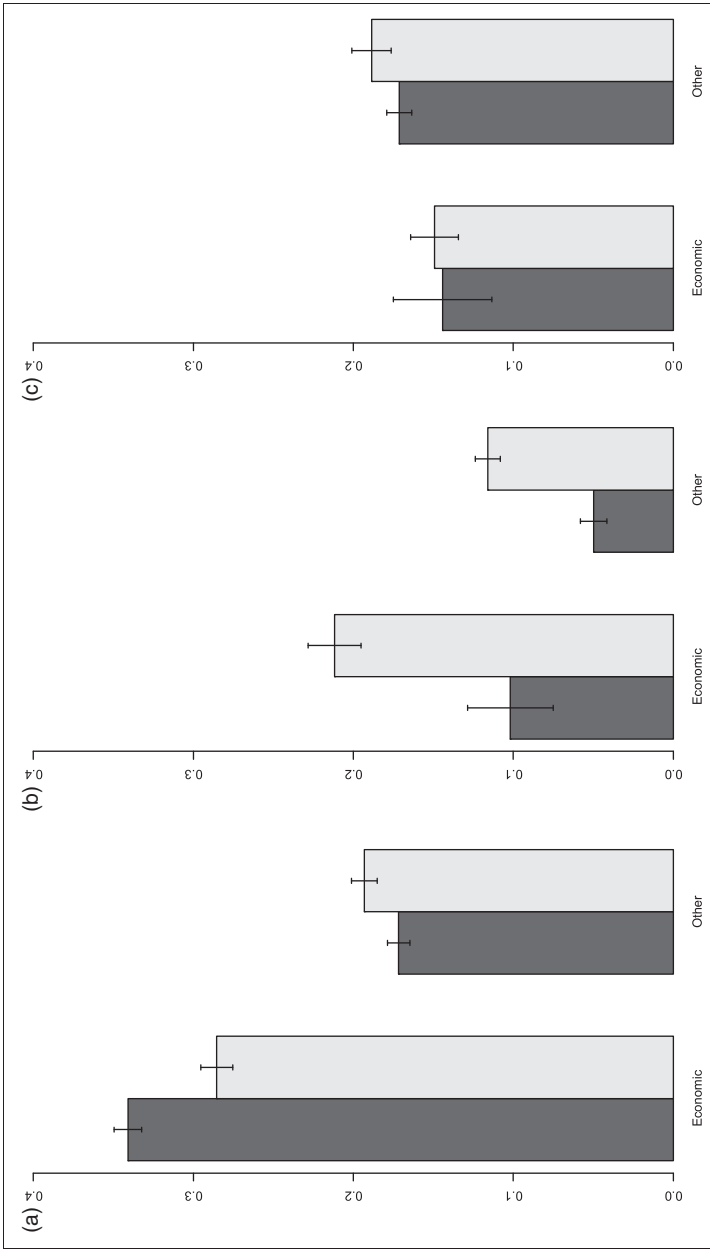


Figure 1. Relationship between party positions in European Parliament voting, economic issues and EP term. Note: The columns depict the difference between the expected chance of voting 'in favour' for flipped votes with 95% confidence intervals for different parliamentary periods and economic and non-economic issues. Chart A reflects the difference between the most left-wing MEPs and the most right-wing MEPs; chart B reflects the difference between the most pro-European integration and most anti-European integration MEPs; chart C finally reflects the difference between MEPs who are in the EPP and PES party groups on the one hand and those MEPs who are not on the other. Dark grey columns are period 2004–2009 and light grey columns the period 2009–2014.

stronger in the sixth EP than in the seventh EP (17% and 9%, respectively). Together, these results confirm the economic issues left-right hypothesis. If one compares the effect of the left-right dimension for economic issues in the sixth and the seventh EP, one can find a significant decrease (a decline from 34% to 29%). This decrease goes against our Eurozone crisis left-right hypothesis. This hypothesis actually predicted an *increase* in the left-right voting on economic issues. Therefore, we have to reject the Eurozone crisis left-right hypothesis (*H2*).

Second, we look at the pro-/anti-EU dimension, which is shown in Figure 1 as well. We find that for economic issues during the sixth EP, the most Eurosceptic MEPs have a 50% likelihood of voting in favour of a proposal (again, dealing with flipped proposals) while the most pro-European MEPs have a 61% likelihood to do so: a 10% increase (this is the number presented in Figure 1). In the seventh EP and still for economic issues, the difference is 21% (from 44% to 65%). Thus, when comparing the importance of the pro-/anti-EU dimension between the sixth and seventh EP, we find that there is an 11% increase in the strength of the relationship between the pro-/anti-EU dimension and the chances of voting in favour of a proposal. This difference is significant and in line with the Eurozone crisis pro-/anti-EU hypothesis. We also see an increase in the strength of the relationship between voting and the pro-/anti-EU dimension for non-economic issues, however. The increase when moving from the most anti-European to the most pro-European MEP was 5% in the sixth EP (61–65%) and 12% (48–60%) in the seventh EP. This significant increase indicates that for non-economic issues the relationship between the pro-/anti-EU dimension and parliamentary voting is stronger in the seventh EP compared to the sixth term. However, the strength of this relationship is significantly lower for non-economic issues than for economic issues. We thus conclude that there is an overall increase in the influence of the pro-/anti-EU dimension on parliamentary voting, and specifically for economic issues this increase is exceptional. This finding yields support for the Eurozone Crisis Pro-/Anti-EU hypothesis (*H3*).

Control variables and alternative explanations

Finally, we will also briefly address the effects of the Grand Coalition variable. Moreover, we will examine an alternative explanation for the patterns found above.

First, we discuss the effect of Grand Coalition affiliation shown in Figure 1. This variable measures the extent to which being part of or being outside the Grand Coalition parties of EPP and PES determines parliamentary voting. If we look at economic issues for the sixth EP, MEPs from the EPP and PES have 68% chance of voting in favour of these (flipped) votes. Other MEPs have a 54% chance to do so. This is a difference of 14%. In the seventh EP and still for economic votes, this difference is 15% (from 46% to 61%). The difference between the sixth and seventh EP is not significant. For non-economic issues we see a significant difference between two parliaments: a 17% difference for the sixth EP (49–67%) and 19% in the seventh EP (46–64%). All in all, the importance of being in the Grand Coalition of EPP and PES increases over time for other issues, but stays the

Table 1. Distribution of seats at the start of parliamentary term.

Group	2004–2009	2009–2014
EPP	268	265
PES	200	184
ALDE	88	84
G/EFA	42	55
EUL/NGL	41	35
ID	37	–
UEN	27	–
(NI)	29	27
ECR	–	54
EFD	–	32
<i>Total</i>	732	736
Percentage Euroskeptics	18%	20%

Note: Eurosceptic party groups: EUL/NGL, ID, UEN, ECR, EFD and NI.

same for economic issues. The detailed overview of other control variables is provided in the Online Appendix.

Above we showed that in all votes in the EP and on economic votes in particular the EU integration dimension plays a larger role in the seventh parliament compared to the sixth. We proposed that the economic crisis, which led to a shift of competences towards the EC, explains this pattern. One could offer alternative explanations for the increasing importance of the European integration dimension: the composition of the EP may have changed with Eurosceptic parties winning more representation. Table 1 shows the distribution of seats in the sixth and seventh EP: despite the break-off of the British Conservatives and allies from the EPP group to the newly formed Eurosceptic ECR group, the total membership of Eurosceptic groups (EUL/NGL, Independence/Democracy (ID), Union for a Europe of Nations (UEN), ECR and EFD, and the ‘non-inscrits’) remain quite stable (increase of only 2%). This means that the change in the dimensionality between the two EP terms could be driven by the framing of the decision-making, rather than by the changing balance of power between Eurosceptic and non-Eurosceptic MEPs. The analysis included in the Online Appendix addresses the possibility that the changes in the issues voted upon cannot explain the general rise in pro/anti-EU voting.

Conclusion

This article shows that the economic crisis affected the way MEPs vote. The Eurozone crisis has transformed the structure of the EU as the EC began to co-determine national budgetary policies. This unprecedented move was a way to

combat the Eurozone crisis, but also increased the European integration division in the EP, at the expense of the left-right conflict line. With the onset of the European sovereign debt crisis after the 2009 EP elections, the importance of the pro-/anti-EU line of conflict grew specifically with respect to economic issues. During the Eurozone crisis, the EC increased its control over budgetary decision-making; the Eurosceptic parties of the left and the right opposed this move, while left-wing and right-wing pro-European parties were in favour. We show that the redistributive conflicts in the 2009–2014 EP are structured more strongly by the pro-/anti-EU dimension than before. The lines of conflict in the EP may now approach the ones of the Council of Ministers, where the political discussions tend to concern the question what competences the EU should have.

What are the implications of these findings? The results provide an important assessment of the effects of the European sovereign debt crisis on the lines of conflict in European politics. Rather than reinforcing the importance of the left-right line of conflict for economic issues, as one would expect from previous studies on globalisation (Kriesi et al., 2008, 2012), this article shows that economic issues in the EP gained a European integration dimension. The pattern we found appears to be a result of the way that the EU chose to deal with the Eurozone crisis (by centralising decision-making power over budgetary issues).⁹ This means that after these decisions are made final, the importance of this dimension may wane again.

Only the future can tell whether the patterns found here are passing symptoms related to the specific circumstances of the Eurozone crisis, or whether they may persist in the long-term. Future research is necessary to determine the durability of the European dimension in the economic sphere. Currently, there are some first indications that the pattern found may be persistent as the Eurozone is still not completely stable and new political movements contest the course of the EC: after the 2014 EP elections, we have seen negotiations between the European institutions and the new Greek government led by SYRIZA, which has contested the move of budgetary competence to the European level. The SYRIZA government reflects the new lines of conflict in Greece where the European integration division is currently dominant (Katsanidou and Otjes, 2016). Greece is not the only country where parties are continuing to contest the policies of the EC: in many crisis-affected countries new Eurosceptic parties have gained momentum and representation in the EP. Consider the Italian Five Star Movement and the Spanish *Podemos* (Ivaldi and Zaslove, 2015). Even in Northern European countries, Eurosceptic parties of the left and right contested the solutions to the Eurozone crisis. This resulted in a new pro/anti-EU dimension in the economic realm (Otjes, 2015a, 2015b). It may very well be that these parties continue to challenge the new balance of power between the EC and the member states. Future research may want to determine to what extent and under what conditions the patterns found for the EP are present in other parliaments and political systems. It is likely that similar developments are taking place in countries severely affected by the crisis, such as Spain, Portugal, Italy, Ireland and Cyprus.

As a final point, we think that our article offers an important step forward in the methods to study European Parliamentary voting specifically and parliamentary voting in general. The method developed in this article can be applied to national political systems in order to determine to what extent the European sovereign debt crisis has affected parliamentary voting. This method can also be used more generally to investigate patterns of parliamentary voting. We propose to move the discussion away from purely the question of *what dimensions there are to the conditions under which specific dimensions matter*. Future research, therefore, might benefit from adopting this methodology for other research questions. It could examine other EP terms in order to develop a more precise understanding of importance of the left-right dimension, and capture its fluctuations throughout time. Additionally, it would allow one to trace with higher accuracy how the European integration dimension crystallised in the 1980s, as well as how the Grand Coalition waxed and waned. One may also want to look more precisely at voting patterns on non-economic issues, such as constitutional and post-materialist issues separately. Furthermore, the methodology can easily be applied to national parliaments to grasp under what conditions particular ideological dimensions and political divisions matter.

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Notes

1. In 2009 the PES parliamentary group changed its name to Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D). We will refer to it as the PES throughout the article. In 2009 the European People's Party-European Democrats parliamentary group changed its name to European People's Party. We will refer to this group as the EPP throughout the article.
2. In addition there are 3,119,011 vote/MP pairs because the MP did not vote, was not in parliament at the time of the vote or abstained.
3. Therefore, studies of EP legislative behaviour focus on roll calls. Høyland (2010: 597) shows that since the votes that are recorded as roll-call are not a representative sample of all votes, we should be cautious interpreting the results. That caution in particular concerns the fact that groups request roll-calls to emphasise conflicts within other groups.

- This means that this data is particular problematic when studying party cohesion and less so when studying voting patterns.
4. Braghiroli (2014) proposes that the European sovereign debt crisis led to more voting along national lines. We checked whether different operationalisations of nationality mattered for voting behaviour but found no strong, significant effects. The variables were not included in the final regression models presented here because the multi-level models did not reliably converge if this variable was included in addition to the other variables.
 5. One could add a third level to this (national parties), since some information on the MEPs is based on observations on that level. As a robustness check, we ran a three-level cross-classified multi-level model including national parties. We also ran multi-level regression analyses using only votes as a level. Both these results are presented in the Online Appendix. The substantive conclusions were unaffected in both operationalisations.
 6. For the left-right flipped votes, $\chi^2 = 643.765$; $df = 1$; $p < 0.001$, for the EU integration flipped votes, $\chi^2 = 628.817$; $df = 1$; $p < 0.001$, and finally for the Grand Coalition flipped votes, $\chi^2 = 634.839$; $df = 1$; $p < 0.001$.
 7. We present the full regression results in the Online Appendix.
 8. The Online Appendix provides the exact technical steps to conduct the full analysis.
 9. It is impossible to predict how the EP would have behaved if the EC would have pursued different solutions such as stimulating investments by letting European Investment Bank expand its loans, as GUE/NGL advocated. Such proposals could have led to different voting patterns, as some soft Eurosceptic parties would now vote in favour, while the hard Eurosceptic parties would continue to vote against. Our argument is that given the choice that the EP was given, the voting patterns changed as we saw.

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