

Profiles of the European Political Groups

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Introduction

Many of the members of the European Parliament are affiliated to a European political group. According to Schmitt and Thomassen (2009) "The proportion of unaffiliated members has increased due to the fact, that a good number of Eastern members did not join one of the traditional political groups". It seems that this is not a permanent characteristic. Maybe as a member – state gets older in the European Union its MEPs find it easier to join a political group. At least this is what the evidence of the seventh European Parliament suggests. Out of 27 non attached MEPs only three have been elected in one of the eight Eastern member –states that have participated in the elections of 2004. Two have been elected in Bulgaria and three have been elected in Romania, i.e. the newest EU member states.

The vote share of European political groups varies from country to country. There are European Political Groups demonstrating significant power in almost every member state (i.e. the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats [S&D]). On the other hand, there are political groups in the European Parliament which include members from a limited number of European Union member-states. For instance, the European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR) includes representatives from only 8 EU member-states. More than 90% of the MEPs of this political group have been elected in only 3 states. Another example is the Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD) with members from only 9 EU member-states.

McElroy and Benoit (2007) based on expert surveys conclude that party groups of the European Parliament compete on two orthogonal dimensions: one is the classic left–right dimension, and the other is related to the powers and scope of EU institutions. This is in agreement with Hix (2002) findings which are based on a survey of MEPs. Hix also argues that there are two main ideological dimensions in European Union politics: the left-right and the pro/anti-Europe (see also (Hix and Noury, 2006)).

In the following sections, using correspondence analysis to the results of the 2004 and 2009 elections for the European Parliament in all European Union member states we analyze the profiles of the European Political Groups and the profiles of the member states of EU. This analysis reveals the dimensions of political competition in the European Parliament and it leads to the identification of similarities between member states based on the power of the European political groups in them.

Correspondence analysis

Using correspondence analysis on the two-way table with the seats by political group in each Member State¹ we end up with two axes (dimensions) of political competition according to the political groups of the MEPs of the EU member-states. The first axis is formed by the political competition between the political Groups ECR and EFD on the one side and all the other political groups on the other side of the axis. Both ECR and EFD include MEPs who are associated with criticism of the European Union (EU), and opposition to the process of European integration. Thus, the first axis could

¹ Source: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/seats_by_group_en.html

be seen as the dimension of Euroscepticism. The second axis is formed by the political competition between ECR, GUE/NGL, EPP and S&D political groups on the one side and EFD, Greens/EFA, ALDE political groups and non attached MEPs on the other side of the axis. The political groups near the bottom end of the second axis deal more with post-materialist issues, i.e. with issues concerning autonomy, self-expression and the quality of life (Inglehart, 2008). Thus, this axis could be called the post-materialism dimension. The first axis explains almost 40% of the variation (inertia) in the electoral results and the second axis explains almost 20% of the total inertia.

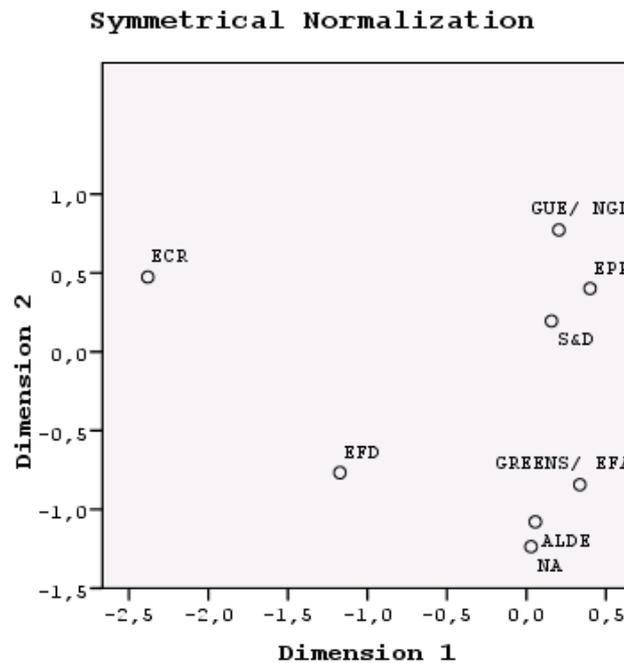


Diagram 1 Correspondence analysis output for 2009

The placement of the political groups in the factorial plane formed by the first and second axis (Diagram 1) leads to the formation of four groups defined in the four quarters of the factorial plane. GUE/NGL, EPP and S&D are placed in the upper right quadrant, Greens/EFA, ALDE and NA in the lower right quadrant, ECR in the upper left, EFD at the bottom left. Thus, from all the 7 political groups in the 2009 European Parliament and the group of MEPs who are not attached to a political group we have defined four distinct groups.

Comparison with 2004

Comparing the two diagrams we can conclude that as far as the political groups are concerned, there are a lot of similarities between the European Parliaments of 2004 and 2009. In 2004 the most important dimension was related to Euroscepticism and the second dimension was related to post-materialism just like 2009. One difference is that after in the sixth European Parliament (2004-2009) there were two political groups that do not exist in the seventh European Parliament: Union for Europe of the Nations (UEN) and Independence/Democracy (IND/DEM). UEN explains 76% of the variation in the first dimension. ELDR and IND/DEM together explain 78% of the variation in the second dimension. Another difference from 2004 to 2009 is related

with the distance of the EU member states: in 2004 the political group with the largest distance from the other political groups (UEN) was associated mostly with Ireland and Latvia. In 2009 the political group with the largest distance from the other political groups (ECR) is associated mostly with United Kingdom and Czech Republic.

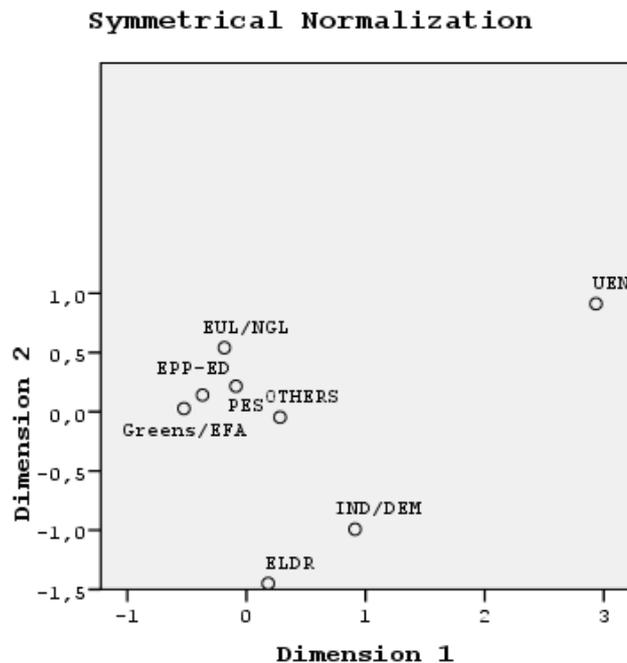


Diagram 2 Correspondence analysis output for 2004

Findings from Cluster Analysis

Using the same two-way table with the seats by political group in each Member State we can calculate the share of seats for each political group in each Member State. This share is calculated by dividing the number of seats that a political group has earned in a Member State by the total number of European Parliament seats of the corresponding state. As a result we have a dataset with 27 cases – rows and 8 variables. Each row corresponds to one of the EU Member States and the variables describe the share of seats in the Member States of the political groups in the European Parliament that were formed after the 2009 elections, i.e. EPP : Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats), S&D : Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, ALDE : Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, GREENS/ EFA : Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, ECR : European Conservatives and Reformists Group, GUE/ NGL : Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left, EFD : Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group and the share of seats that corresponds to the MEPs who are not attached (NA) to a political group.

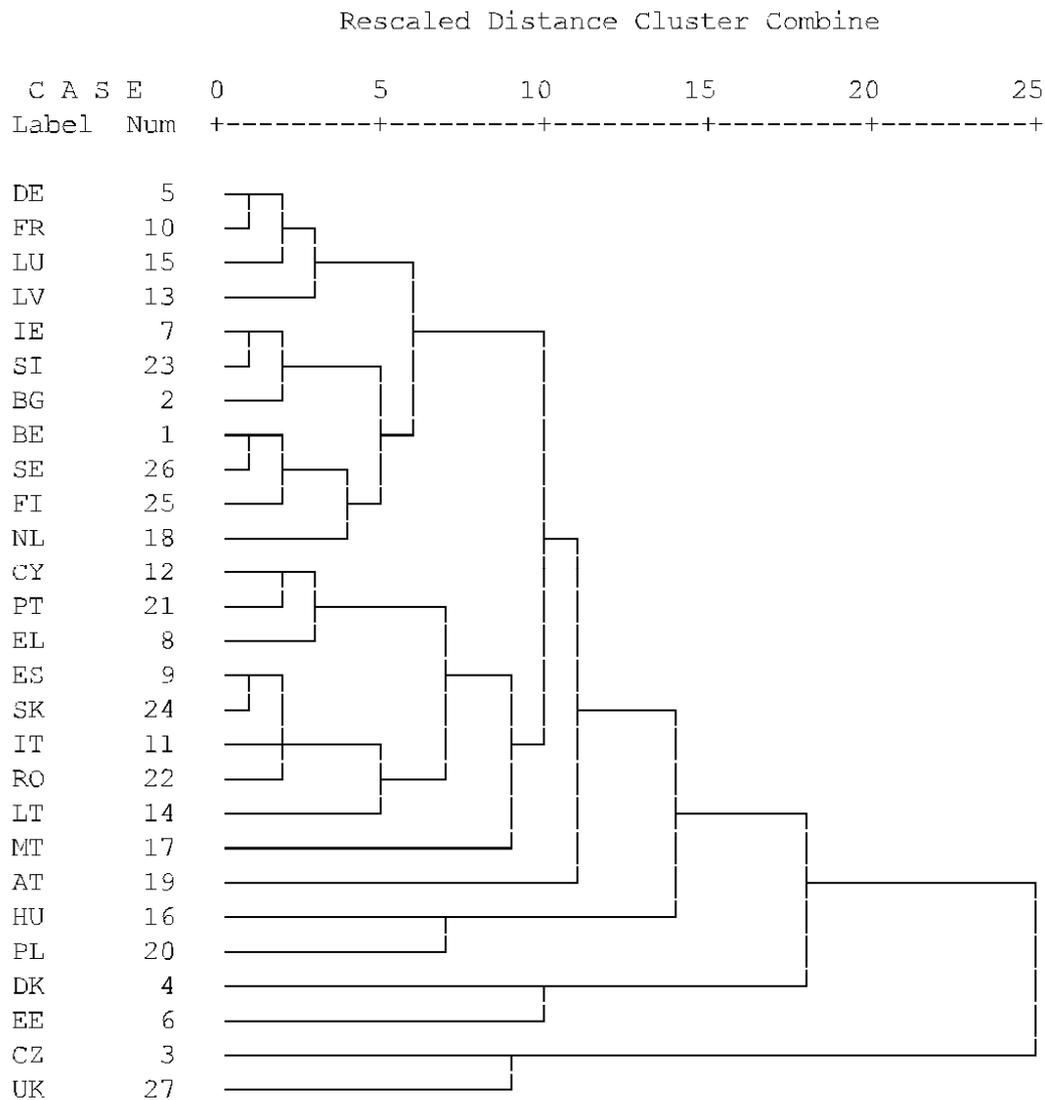


Diagram 3 Dendrogram using Average Linkage (Between Groups)

Applying hierarchical cluster analysis to the aforementioned dataset we end up with Diagram 3. In this Diagram we observe that the 27 Member States can be divided to four clusters. The last three clusters consist of 2 States i.e. cluster 2 pairs CZ with UK cluster 3 consists of DK and EE and cluster 4 keeps together HU and PL and the first cluster consists of the rest 21 states.

Table 1 Average share of seats per cluster

| Cluster | EPP | S&D | ALDE | GREENS/EFA | ECR | GUE/NGL | EFD | NA |
|---------|------|------|------|------------|------|---------|------|------|
| 1 | 0,38 | 0,28 | 0,14 | 0,07 | 0,01 | 0,06 | 0,03 | 0,04 |
| 2 | 0,05 | 0,25 | 0,08 | 0,03 | 0,38 | 0,10 | 0,09 | 0,03 |
| 3 | 0,12 | 0,24 | 0,37 | 0,16 | 0,00 | 0,04 | 0,08 | 0,00 |
| 4 | 0,60 | 0,16 | 0,00 | 0,00 | 0,17 | 0,00 | 0,00 | 0,07 |
| Total | 0,35 | 0,26 | 0,14 | 0,07 | 0,05 | 0,05 | 0,03 | 0,04 |

Table 1 shows the average share of seats per cluster. In cluster 1 the distribution of seats to the political groups is very similar to the total distribution of seats. Cluster 2 is characterized by the significantly raised share of ECR and the significant losses for

the EPP group. More than 1 out of 3 elected MEPs in the United Kingdom and more than 4 out of 10 elected MEPs in Czech Republic belong to the European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR). Denmark and Estonia that form Cluster 3 are distinguished from the rest member states of the European Union due to the high rate of MEPs who belong to ALDE and GREENS/EFA and the simultaneous low rate of MEPs who belong to EPP. Finally, Cluster 4 consists of Hungary and Poland, the two member states where EPP displays the largest share of EP parliament seats. Another common characteristic between these two member states is that both have MEPs in ECR.

Cluster 1 consists of 21 countries. If we move deeper into this branch of the dendrogram produced by cluster analysis, we will notice that there 3 sub-clusters. The distance between the member states in each of these three sub-clusters is much smaller, i.e. the distribution of seats to the political groups is very similar among the EU member-states that belong to the same sub-cluster.

The first sub-cluster consists of 11 member states: Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Finland, France, Ireland, Luxemburg, Latvia, Netherlands, Sweden and Slovenia. In these member states we observe that, like in Denmark and Estonia that belong in cluster 3, ALDE and/or GREENS/EFA groups have earned a significant part of the MEPs, but these member states are different from Denmark and Estonia because the EPP group remains strong with an average share of about 35% and a minimum share of 20% in the Netherlands.

The second sub-cluster consists of Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Spain, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Lithuania. In these 9 member states EPP and S&D groups strong and ALDE and Greens/EFA groups are week. The third sub-cluster is formed by only one EU member-state: Austria. The isolation of Austria in the dendrogram was produced mainly by the large share (29%) of Austrian seats in the European Parliament that were not attached to any of the political groups.

Table 2 Average share of seats per sub-cluster

| | EPP | S&D | ALDE | GREENS/ EFA | ECR | GUE/ NGL | EFD | NA |
|-----------------------------|------|------|------|----------------|------|-------------|------|------|
| 1 st sub-cluster | 0,35 | 0,21 | 0,22 | 0,11 | 0,02 | 0,04 | 0,01 | 0,04 |
| 2 nd sub-cluster | 0,41 | 0,37 | 0,06 | 0,01 | 0,01 | 0,08 | 0,05 | 0,01 |
| Austria | 0,35 | 0,24 | 0,00 | 0,12 | 0,00 | 0,00 | 0,00 | 0,29 |
| EU | 0,35 | 0,26 | 0,14 | 0,07 | 0,05 | 0,05 | 0,03 | 0,04 |

Findings from the 2004 European Election Studies

In this section we use data from the European Election Studies (EES²) of 2004. The European Election Study 2004 is a sample survey about the elections for the European Parliament which were conducted in June of 2004. It includes data from the electorates of all the member states of the European Union in 2004 except Malta. The previous section dealt with the members of the European Parliament and the political groups. This section deals with their voters. Thomassen and Schmitt (1997) who worked on data from voter and candidate surveys argue:" to some degree there is

² Data from surveys about electoral participation and voting behaviour in European Parliament elections, see: <http://www.ees-homepage.net/>

obvious congruence between the opinions of candidates and their voters". Thus we can estimate the positions of MEPs and their political groups by studying the views of their voters.

From the total number of 28861 survey participants 10942 did not cast their vote in European Parliament elections of June 2004, and 314 have casted blank or non valid votes. 2174 have not given an answer to the question "Which party did you vote for?" There are 2236 in the sample who have voted for a party that did not manage to elect any of its candidates.

The rest 13195 people have voted for a party that has elected at least one of its candidates. The findings presented in the following parts of this section have been extracted by the analysis of this subset. The distribution of the voters of this subset according to which political group belong the MEPs they have elected is shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Distribution of votes

| Political Group in the European Parliament | N | % |
|--|--------------|-------------|
| European People's Party–European Democrats (EPP/ED) | 4278 | 32,4% |
| Socialist Group in the European Parliament (PES) | 3356 | 25,4% |
| Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) | 1829 | 13,9% |
| The Greens–European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA) | 1054 | 8,0% |
| Union for Europe of the Nations (UEN) | 738 | 5,6% |
| European United Left–Nordic Green Left (EUL/NGL) | 687 | 5,2% |
| Independence/Democracy (IND/DEM) | 335 | 2,5% |
| Other | 918 | 7,0% |
| Total | 13195 | 100% |

Left – Right self-placement

People who have participated in EES 2004 were asked to indicate their views on the left-right political dimension by selecting a number on a 10-point-scale, where 1 means "left" and 10 means "right". The most appropriate measure of the central tendency of left/right measurements is the median, i.e. the value that cuts data set in half. Useful are also the values of first or lower quartile (25th percentile) and the third or upper quartile (75th percentile). The interquartile range (the difference of the upper and lower quartiles) can be used as a measure of dispersion.

EPP/ED voters are self-positioned at point 7. The first quartile is found at 5 and the third quartile at 8. IND/DEM and ALDE appear with identical measures. Their voters are self-positioned at point 6 and they appear to be closer to the centre than EPP/ED voters. On the other hand, their first quartile is found at 5 and their third quartile at 8 and as a result they share the same interquartile range with the EPP/ED voters. UEN voters are self-positioned at point 7 i.e. they display a median value which is equal with the median value of EPP/ED voters. They also display the same lower quartile (5). On the other hand the upper quartile of UEN voters is 9, making UEN the European Political Group with the voter who are self –place closer to the right end of the left / right political spectrum.

On the left side of the left/right axis there are three European Political Groups. PES voters are self-positioned at point 4. The first quartile is found at 3 and the third quartile at 5. Greens/EFA voters display an image that is identical with the image of PES voters; they are self-positioned at point 4. The first quartile is found at 3 and the third quartile at 5. In addition, PES and Green/EFA groups are the groups with the smallest interquartile ranges (2). EUL/NGL voters are self-positioned at point 2. The first quartile is found at 1 and the third quartile at 4. Finally, other voters are self-positioned at point 5. The first quartile is found at 4 and the third quartile at 7.

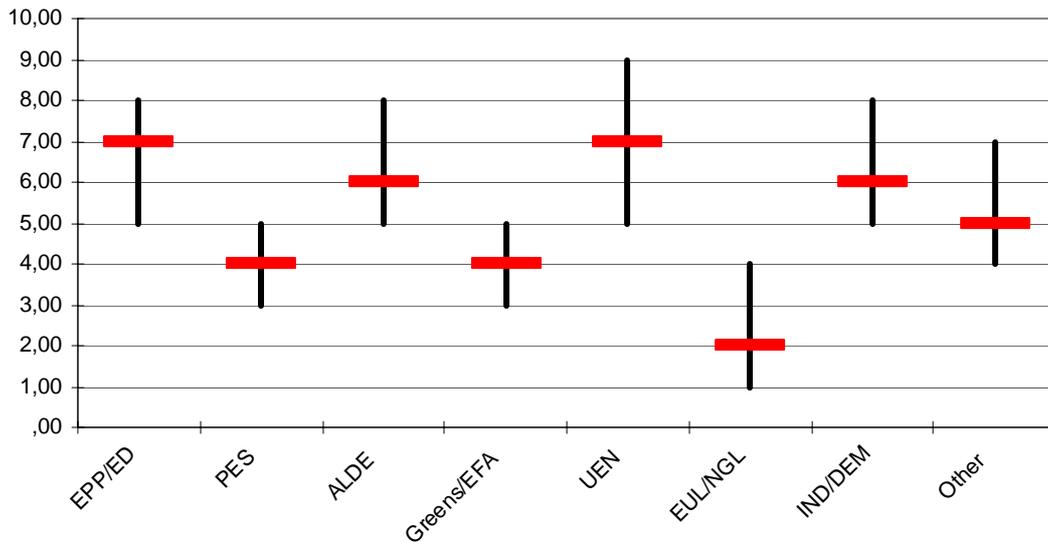


Diagram 4 Left/right self placement by political group

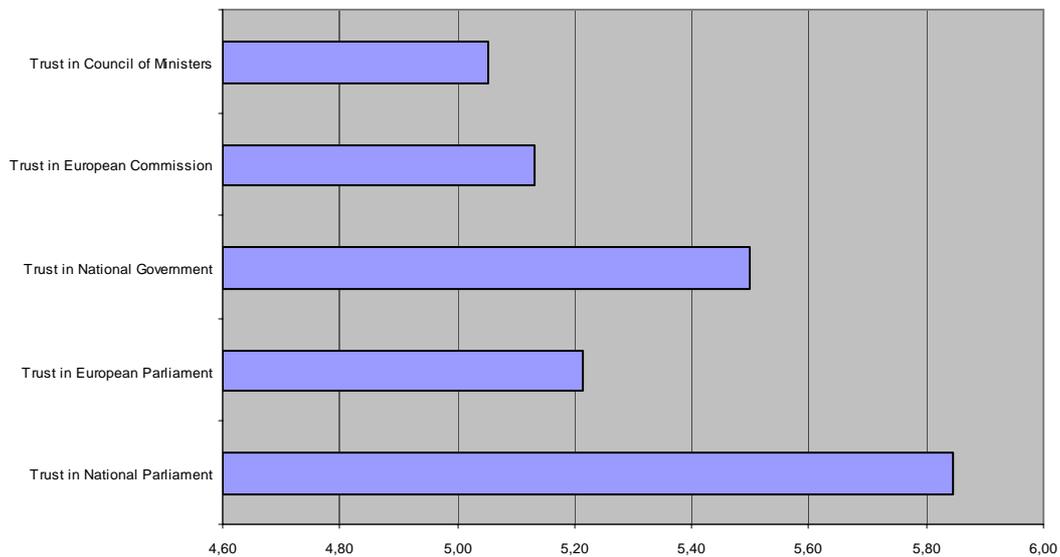


Diagram 5 Trust in Political Institutions

The average voter of the sample trusts more the national parliament and the national government than the European Parliament, the European Commission or the Council of Ministers (Diagram 5). Based on the average index of trust towards the two national and the three European political institutions we can divide the sample of

voters into three groups. The voters of ALDE EPP/ED PES and UEN display the largest trust (about 5.5) towards the political institutions. The second group consists of the voters of Greens/EFA and EUL/NGL with trust index 4.8-4.9. Finally there the voters who trust less the institutions (about 4.3) whose MEPs belong to IND/DEM or they do not belong to a political group.

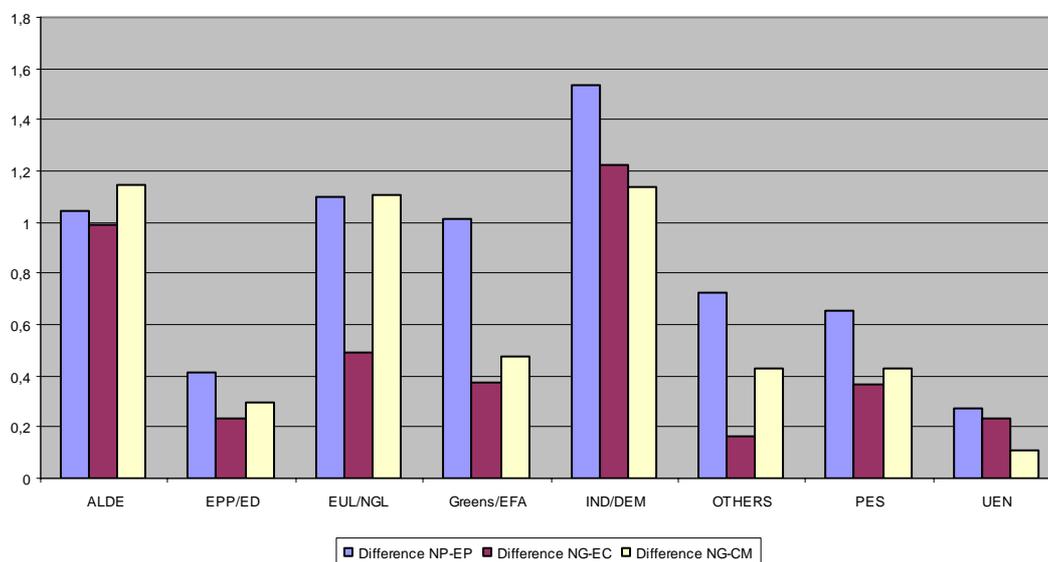


Diagram 6 Difference of trust in National and European Institutions

Diagram 6 show for the voters of each political group the difference of trust in National and European Institutions The largest difference of the trust index (1.5) is observed for IND/DEM voters between trust towards the national parliament and trust towards the European Parliament. The corresponding difference is large for EUL/NGL, Greens/EFA voters and ALDE voters. On average IND/DEM, ALDE and EUL/NGL voters are the groups with voters that trust significantly less the European political institutions in comparison with the corresponding national institutions.

In general, the majority of the voters seem to agree that when jobs are scarce, employers should give priority to the citizens of the member – state over citizens from other EU member-countries. More than three out of four voters of UEN, EPP/ED, OTHERS, IND/DEM agree. The strength of agreement is higher among the voters of OTHERS, and IND/DEM. In these groups the rate of people who agree very much with the aforementioned opinion is 46,8% and 47,9% respectively. Among the voters of EUL/NGL, PES, and ALDE there are two out of three people that agree. The lowest percentage is met in the Greens/EFA group where one out of two agrees with aforementioned opinion (Diagram 7).

Attitudes towards Issues of European Unification

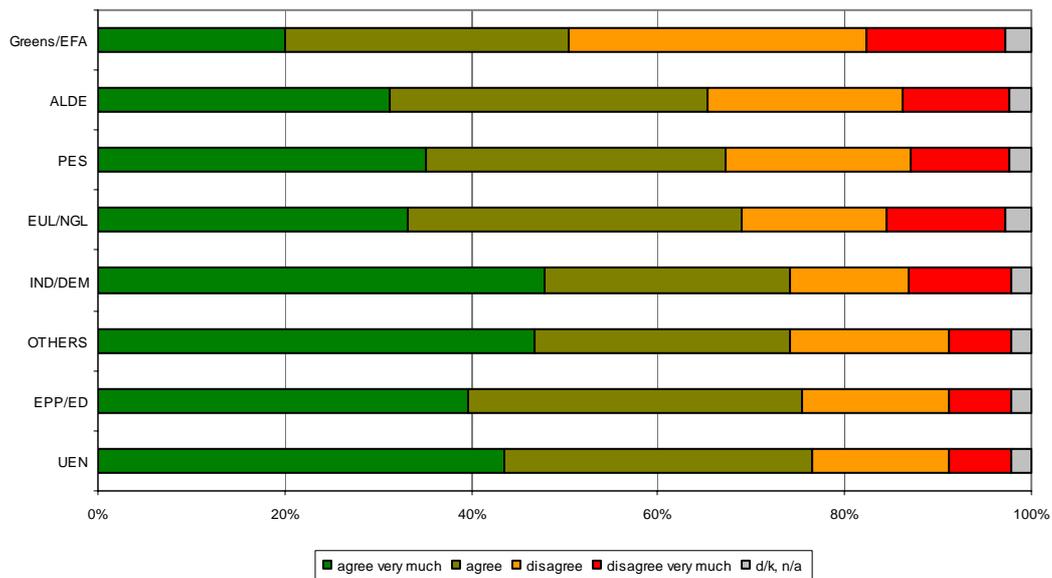


Diagram 7 For scarce jobs priority should be given to [country] citizens

Diagram 8 shows the levels of agreement per political group when European Union citizens face the following statement: "Citizens from other EU member-countries who live in [country] should be entitled to vote in local elections". The voters of Greens/EFA, PES, EUL/NGL, IND/DEM, ALDE political groups seem to agree more than the voters of EPP/ED, UEN, groups and the voters of MEPs who were not attached to a political group. In these three groups of voters the percentage of people with total agreement is less than 55% and the percentage of people with strong agreement is less than 20%.

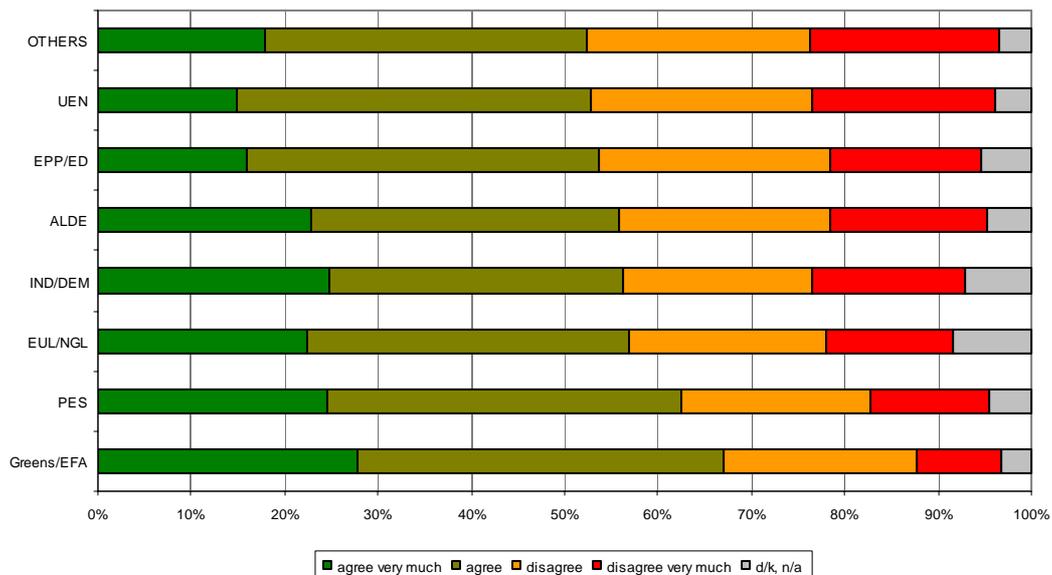


Diagram 8 Citizens of other EU countries should vote in local elections

Positions towards European Unification

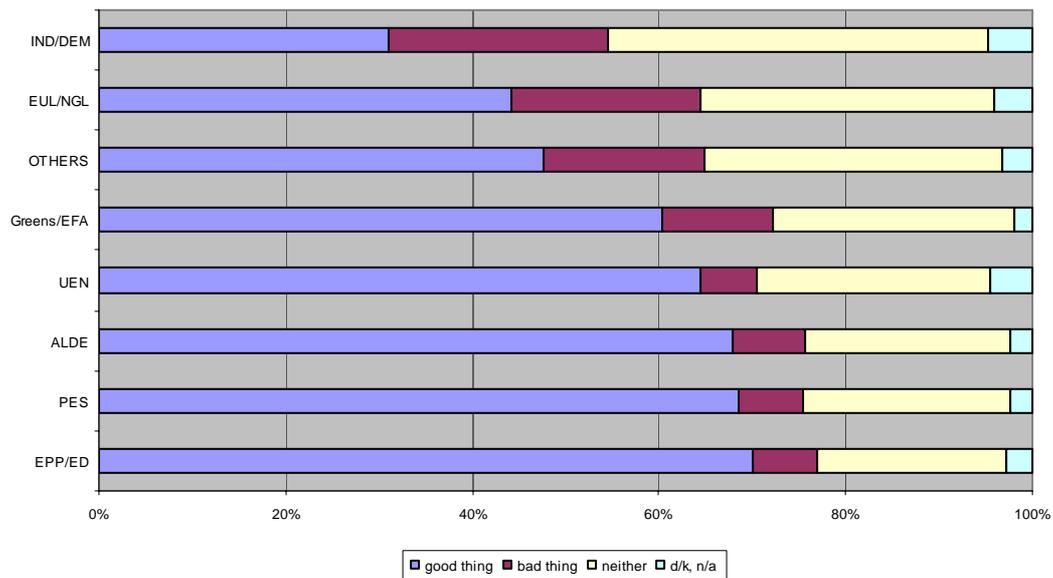


Diagram 9 EU membership good or bad per political group

Diagram 9 displays for each political group the distribution of people who believe that the membership of their country in the European Union is either a good thing or a bad thing. Most of the voters of EPP/ED (70.08%), PES (68.64%), ALDE (67.78%), UEN (64.50%), Greens/EFA (60.40%) believe that the membership of their country in the European Union is a good thing. On the other hand, among the voters of EUL/NGL (44.16%) and IND/DEM (30.99%) positive opinion has less than one out of two. Finally the voters of MEPs who were not attached to a political group also present low percentage of positive opinions (47.58%)

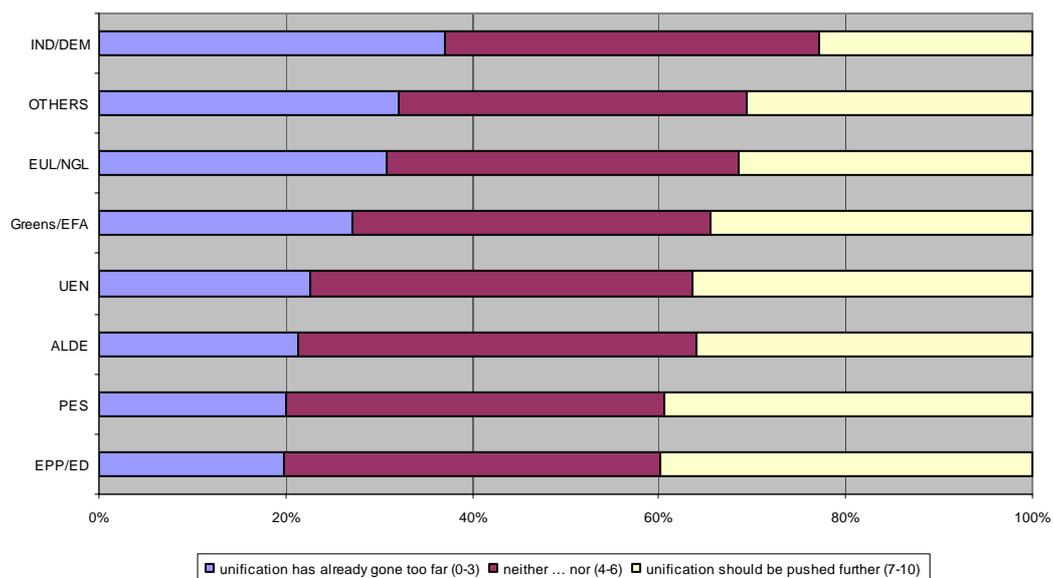


Diagram 10 Attitude towards European unification

Diagram 10 presents the views about European unification per political group. Some say European unification should be pushed further. Others say it already has gone too

far. Survey participants were asked to express their opinion using an 11-point-scale, where 0 means unification 'has already gone too far' and 10 means it 'should be pushed further'. The average rate of voters who have express an opinion closer to the statement "European unification has already gone too far" (positions 0-3) is about 23%. Among the voters of Greens/EFA (27.13%), EUL/NGL (30.73%), IND/DEM (37.04%) and the voters of MEPs who were not attached to a political group (32.145) we observe larger percentages.

Perceptions of Citizenship

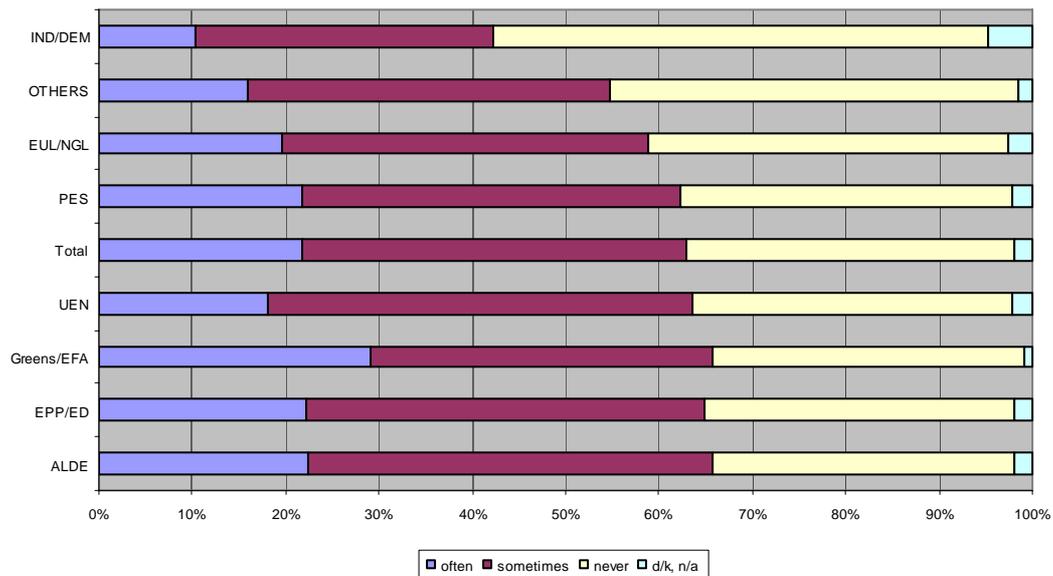


Diagram 11 European citizenship

Diagram 11 displays the distribution of opinions per political group when survey participants were asked if they ever think of themselves not only as a citizens of their country, but also as a citizens of the European Union. It is worth to note that more than one out of three voters have answered that they never feel as citizens of the European Union. The situation is even worse in the group of IND/DEM voters where more than one out of two do not feel as European citizens.

Diagram 12 shows for each political group the rate of people who are proud to be citizens of the European Union. Most of the voters of Greens/EFA (51.4%), ALDE (53.6%), UEN (58.3%), PES (60.6%) and EPP/ED (62.5%) are proud to be European Union citizens. On the other hand, three out of ten voters of IND/DEM, four out of ten voters of EUL/NGL and OTHERS are proud to be citizens of the European Union.

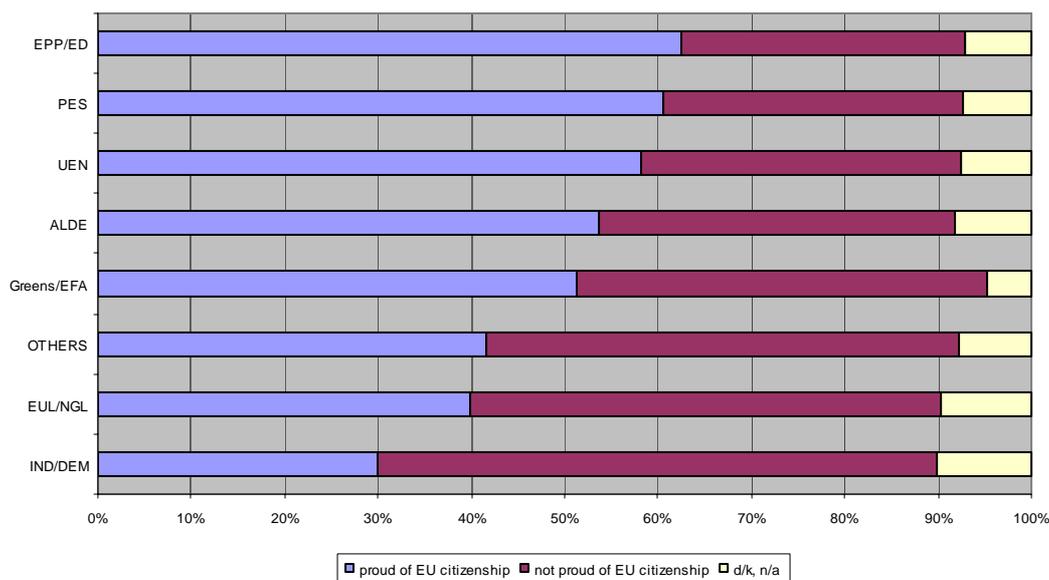


Diagram 12 Proud of European citizenship

Discussion

The findings presented in this paper indicate that the most significant dimension of the political competition in the seventh European Parliament is the dimension of Euroscepticism. According to the correspondence analysis results this dimension was also the most important dimension of political competition in the sixth European Parliament. Maybe the finding that is most worth to note is that the significance of this dimension was raised from 2004 to 2009. After the elections of 2004 and the formation of the political groups of the sixth European Parliament, Euroscepticism could explain 32% of the variability. Today it explains almost 40%.

A surprising outcome of the correspondence analysis is that the second dimension of political competition is formed by ECR, GUE/NGL, EPP and S&D political groups on the one side and EFD, Greens/EFA, ALDE political groups and non attached MEPs on the other side of the axis. This axis is not associated by any means to the left-right political dimension. As a result we see the leftist GUE/NGL, together with conservative EPP and the socialist S&D in the same group of political groups. This indicates that another dimension of political competition has become more important than the left-right dimension.

The last part of the paper includes findings from the 2004 European Election Study. These findings shed some light on various characteristics and patterns of the most important dimension of political competition in the European Parliament, the dimension of Euroscepticism. Of course it would be better if the findings have been from the 2009 European Election Study. This is one of the limitations of the present paper.

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