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Voting on Russia in the European Parliament: the Role of National and Party Group Affiliations

Stefano BRAGHIROLI
Centre for EU-Russia Studies (CEURUS)
University of Tartu



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VOTING ON RUSSIA IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: THE ROLE OF NATIONAL AND PARTY GROUP AFFILIATIONS¹

ABSTRACT

While both the European Union (EU) and the Russian Federation seem to be increasingly aware of the necessity to cooperate, their relationship is still marked by diplomatic ambivalence and lack of trust. In spite of the growing institutional role and greater activism of the European Parliament (EP) in the field of external relations, EU-Russia relations have rarely been explored from the EP's perspective. This paper argues that the neglect of the EP is no longer justified. Bearing in mind the key domestic significance of the EU-Russia relations for many member states, this paper assesses the relative importance of legislators' nationality and party group affiliation in determining their voting stance towards Russia and their propensity to vote along national or party group lines when Russia-related issues are at stake. The paper uses empirical data about 27 Russia-related votes held in the EP between 2004 and 2012. The analysis reveals that the voting stance of the Members of the EP (MEPs) on Russia varies greatly across national delegations and European-level party groups, according to geo-territorial or partisan/ideological factors. The analysis also suggests that MEPs' voting stances towards Russia are, to a large extent, determined by their partisan affiliations, while the effect of nationality remains marginal.

1. INTRODUCTION

Despite growing interconnectedness, the relationship between the European Union (EU) and the Russian Federation has been often marked by mutual mistrust and ambivalence. Russia has imposed various challenges, of different nature, on the EU. Moreover, Russia has arguably employed a divisive strategy with the EU and its member states. This tendency seems to have further increased following the last two waves of enlargement.

Although often addressed from different analytical angles, EU-Russia relations have rarely been explored from the perspective of the European Parliament (EP). Most of the studies focus on the individual member states or the Council, while the EP has often been depicted as a sort of 'irrelevant other'. Some of its recent stances towards Russia, however, show that the EP is anything but voiceless. Moreover, given its growing institutional role and greater activism and autonomy in the field of external relations, the neglect of the EP seems no longer justified.

1 This research has been supported by the Estonian Research Council under grant projects ERMOS95 and ETF7903. The author wishes to thank Piret Ehin, Viacheslav Morozov, Mihkel Solvak, and Kristijan Vassil for their highly valuable suggestions. The author is also indebted to the Plenary Directorate (DG-PRES) of the European Parliament for granting access to the relevant documentation.

Given that the EU's relations with Russia are regarded as a highly relevant, politicized issue in many member states, national affiliations and perspectives are likely to be an important factor shaping the voting behaviour of the members of the EP (MEPs) on Russia-related issues. At the same time, the growing literature on EP voting suggests that European-level party groups have become increasingly influential in structuring the behaviour of MEPs².

This paper examines the relative importance of national and party group affiliations in determining MEP's votes on policy issues involving the Russian Federation. Do MEPs vote mainly along national or party group lines when Russia-related issues are at stake? What is the relative importance of MEPs' nationality and party group affiliation in determining their voting stance towards Russia? The analysis relates to aspects of interest representation and representative politics in the EP, which appear to be understudied by the mainstream literature.

The paper uses empirical data about 27 Russia-related votes held in the EP between 2004 and 2012. After a preliminary description of the variance in MEPs' voting stance towards Russia according to their nationality and party group affiliation, MEPs' propensity to vote along national or partisan lines will be assessed.

The paper will continue as follows. In sections 2 and 3 the role of the EP in the EU-Russia relations, as well as theoretical expectations regarding MEPs' voting behaviour, will be discussed. Section 4 will describe the data and methods used in this analysis. Section 5 will present a descriptive overview of MEPs' voting stances along national and party group lines. Section 6 will test two behavioural models capturing MEPs' propensity to vote along national or partisan lines. Section 7 will present some concluding considerations and discuss possible broader implications.

2. THE EP AS AN ACTOR IN EU-RUSSIA RELATIONS

Since the development of official ties in the mid 1990s³, the relationship between the Russian Federation and the European Union has been a complicated one. Despite growing interdependence, mistrust and ambivalence still seem to mark

2 Hix, S. and Noury, A. (2009), 'After Enlargement: Voting Patterns in the Sixth European Parliament', *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 2, pp. 159-174; Voeten, E. (2005), 'Legislator Preferences, Ideal Points, and the Spatial Model in the European Parliament', *Working Paper*, no. 12, Institute of Governmental Studies.

3 During the Cold War no official relations were established between the Soviet Union and the European Community. The very first document regulating the relations between the Soviet Union and the EU was the Agreement on Trade and Commercial and Economic Cooperation, signed in December 1989, while in February 1991 a Delegation of the European Commission to the Russian Federation was established. The Partnership and Co-operation Agreement (PCA), signed in 1994 and in force since December 1997, provides a political, economic and cultural framework for relations between Russia and the EU.

reciprocal perceptions. Russia imposes different kinds of challenges on the EU and its member states, ranging from trade to border disputes. It is argued that Moscow plays a deliberate *divide et impera* game in Europe undermining the EU's unity⁴. In light of these challenges, the efficacy of EU's 'missionary approach' – based on spreading wealth and stability through progressive economic and institutional integration – is often questioned. On the other hand, despite frequent disputes with specific member states and the persistent lack of mutual trust, both parties seem to be increasingly aware of the necessity to cooperate.

At the political level, especially after the eastward enlargements of 2004 and 2007, a wide variety of positions can be identified in the EU arena, ranging from enthusiastic support to open hostility⁵. A number of factors contribute to internal divisions within the EU, including the fact that Russia's positions and actions are framed and interpreted differently in different national contexts⁶.

When it comes to the most recent works dealing with EU-Russia relations, scholarly attention has mainly addressed their intergovernmental and interstate dimension, thereby focussing on the Council or on individual member states⁷. On the contrary, the EP has been generally depicted as a sort of 'irrelevant other'. The idea of an irrelevant and voiceless EP – which explains the lack of scholarly interest in the EP when it comes to the study of the EU-Russia relations – is far from reality for at least two reasons.

First, such an idea ignores the recent institutional changes introduced by the Lisbon Treaty. In light of the new provisions, the EP has gained power exponentially vis-à-vis the other EU institutions, while showing greater activism within the

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- 4 Ghimiş, A. M. (2011), 'Op-Ed: Europe's Energy Policy Challenged by Russia's 'Divide-and-Rule' Strategy', *EU External Affairs Review*, vol. 2, no. 1; Hazakis, K. and Proedrou, F. (2012), 'EU-Russia Energy Diplomacy: The Need for an Active Strategic Partnership', *EU Diplomacy Paper*, College of Europe, no. 04/2012.
 - 5 Gatev, I. (2008), 'Border Security in the Eastern Neighbourhood: where Biopolitics and Geopolitics meet', *European Foreign Affairs Review*, vol. 13, pp. 97–116; Kaempf, S. (2010), 'Russia: A Part of the West or Apart from the West?', *International Relations*, vol. 24, no. 3, pp. 313–340; Leonard, M. and Popescu, N. (2007), 'A Power Audit of EU-Russia Relations', *ECFR Paper*, no. 02.
 - 6 Berg, E. and Ehin, P. (eds.) (2009), *Identity and Foreign Policy: Baltic-Russian Relations and European Integration*, Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate; Carta, C. and Braghiroli, S. (2011), 'Measuring Russia's snag on the fabric of the EU's 'International Society': The impact of the East-West cleavage upon the cohesion of the EU Member States vis-à-vis Russia', *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 260–290; Copsey, N. and Haughton, T. (2009), 'The Choices for Europe: National Preferences in New and Old Member States', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 47, no. 2, pp. 263–286; Kononenko, V. (2007), 'Normal neighbours or troublemakers? The Baltic States in the context of Russia-EU Relations', in Kasekamp, A. (ed.), *Estonian Foreign Policy Yearbook 2006*, Tallinn: Estonian Foreign Policy Institute.
 - 7 Antonenko, O. and Pinnick, K. (eds.) (2005), *Russia and the European Union*, London: Routledge; Haghighi, S. (2007), *Energy security. The external legal relations of the European Union with major oil and gas-supplying countries*, Oxford/Portland: Hart; Lukyanov, F. (2008), 'Russia–EU: The Partnership That Went Astray', *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 60, no. 6, pp. 1107–1119.

sphere of external relations⁸. Even if changes in the EP's official prerogatives have been limited, the Parliament's substantial influence on the EU's external relations is increasing. Exactly because of its limited formal powers in the field of the external relations the EP seems much more inclined to adopt value-oriented stances, reflected in "flag legislation" such as resolutions or recommendations to the Council. The EP seems to enjoy much more *liberté de manoeuvre* than the Council. Unlike the former, it is rarely directly involved in key bilateral arenas of negotiations with third countries and therefore it appears less constrained by the nature of these dynamics. According to Zanon⁹, the EP has developed an autonomous foreign policy identity often marked by political divergence from the Council. In other words, "the identity of the European Parliament that seems to emerge is one that is less concerned with the utility of foreign policy for the Member States and more attentive to promoting the values specific to the European Union"¹⁰.

Second, the positions of the EP – and their formation – should not be ignored because of the unique position of the EP among the institutions of the EU. Unlike the Commission and the Council, the EP is directly legitimized by the citizens. As the EP is the only directly elected supranational institution of the EU its positions are more likely to reflect the *vox populi* – including on a range of controversial issues in EU-Russia relations.

Russia and EU-Russia relations have been an important area of interest for the EP and its members, both during the current and the previous parliamentary term. Moreover, Russia and the former Soviet space are highly prioritized in debates of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the EP. Among the issue areas debated when dealing with Russia, special attention is paid to bilateral trade, energy-related issues, economic cooperation, and human and political rights.

In particular, the emphasis on the latter sets the EP apart from the other key institutions of the EU. The Parliament's activism in the field of human and political rights in the Russian Federation seems very much related to its *liberté de manoeuvre*, while its stance towards Moscow's violations is generally depicted as more intransigent and principled¹¹. Symptomatic in this respect is the EP's recent

8 Raube, K. (2012), 'The European External Action Service and the European Parliament', *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 65-80; Whitman, R. (2011), 'The Rise of the European External Action Service: Putting the Strategy Into EU Diplomacy?', *Paper presented at 12th Biennial Conference of the European Union Studie Association (EUSA)*, 3-5 March 2011, Boston.

9 Zanon, F. (2005), 'The European Parliament: an autonomous foreign policy identity?' in Barbé, E. and Herranz, A. (eds.), *The role of Parliaments in European foreign policy*, Barcelona: Office of the European Parliament in Barcelona.

10 Ibid.

11 Averre, D. L. (2005), 'Russia and the European Union: Convergence or Divergence?', *European Security*, vol 14, no 2, pp. 175-202.

call to the Council to impose a visa ban on Russian officials involved in the notorious events that led to pre-trial detention and mysterious death of the Moscow lawyer Sergei Magnitsky. A recent EP resolution openly accuses the Russian authorities of deliberately withholding information about the involvement of Russian officials. The more intransigent stance of the EP vis-à-vis the Council is well captured in an online comment by an anonymous observer: “although it’s impossible to rule out sanctions entirely, in principle the EU Council is more moderate than the European Parliament, which is by definition subject to populist influences.”¹²

Among the most frequent legislative and non-legislative activities of the EP it is worth mentioning the ratification of treaties in the fields of trade and economic cooperation and resolutions or recommendations to the Council addressing the state of EU-Russia relations. Of particular interest are the EP’s resolutions and recommendations adopted before and after the annual EU-Russia summit. These highlight the distinctive perspective of the EP on a wide array of issues.

3. VOTING ON RUSSIA: NATIONAL VS. PARTY GROUP LINES

Following the 2009 European elections, the EP consists of 753 MEPs (785 in the 6th term)¹³ from 27 member states. Although the EP is the largest directly elected parliamentary assembly in the world, its members are organized in only seven party groups. This seems to denote a strong aggregative capacity of the chamber along partisan lines. The main and largest party groups also exhibit remarkable continuity over the successive parliamentary terms. However, the relevant literature depicts MEPs as having double loyalties, given the national nature of their election and the European nature of their mandate¹⁴.

Despite its allegedly tough position on Russia (in comparison to that expressed by the other EU institutions), the EP’s stance towards Russia can hardly be described as unitary. The views expressed by individual MEPs are often highly divergent. The following excerpts from the EP debate on the Joint motion for a resolution concerning the EU-Russia Summit¹⁵ held in Rostov-on-Don in 2011 serve as an example:

12 See <http://goo.gl/4pWEP>.

13 From January 2007, following EU’s enlargement to Romania and Bulgaria, the number of MEPs rose to 785, but their number decreased to 736 following the 2009 elections. Currently, under the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty, the total number equals 753.

14 Hix, S. (2002), ‘Parliamentary Behavior with Two Principals: Preferences, Parties, and Voting in the European Parliament’, *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 46, no. 3, pp. 688–698.

15 See <http://goo.gl/pj4XS>.

Marek Józef Gróbarczyk (ECR – PL). The standards which apply in Russia are completely different from those which are in use in the European Union. It is sufficient to mention the questions of human rights and the right of association, or the ruthless use of natural resources to exert political pressure on other countries, such as those of the European Union. [...] The negotiations which are in progress are a test for the European Union and the position we are going to hold in the future – that of partner or client.

Peter Jahr (PPE – DE). I think we can argue for a long time about the extent of Russia's progress on the road to democracy. Of course, there are many problems from our perspective. However, on the other hand, it is always better to develop our cooperation with Russia [...] if only because of its size.

Tunne Kelam (PPE – EE). I voted in favour of the resolution on the EU-Russia Summit but I see no real progress from the Russian side to combat corruption, to apply the rule of law and international law. [...] I would like to remind you that whilst Russia is trying to join the WTO, it disregards, according to suitability, different international obligations, especially regarding human rights. Can the EU really trust a state that selectively applies international laws? [...] Although the EU and Russia are interdependent, we see mostly the EU adapting to Russia's wishes. The EU has to stand strong and demand full and vigorous implementation of the rule of law, democracy, respect for human rights and an independent judiciary. Anything less means not living up to our own principles. Even more, we would let down the people in Russia who desire freedom, prosperity and safety.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon (GUE/NGL – FR). This report calls for Russia to 'renounce all protectionist measures' and threatens retaliation if Russia does not bend to this demand. It only envisages reciprocal free movement of Russian and European citizens happening in the long term, yet it supports the process of free trade that is under way. It does not criticise NATO's plan for a European anti-missile shield. This is arrogant imperialism.

Monika Flašíková Beňová (S&D – SK). Russia is a huge market for goods from the EU, of course, and it is also a major supplier of oil and natural gas to EU Member States. While Russian-EU relations have steadily improved in recent years, the parties involved continue to maintain a certain reserve and distance. I believe that, if appropriate action is not taken to remedy this situation, the EU's influence could slowly wane in both Russia and its neighbouring countries, with the risk that the Union would see its role restricted solely to that of a trading partner.

Lena Ek (ALDE – SE). [...] resolutions like this one always use extremely diplomatic language. This time, I think we have been too mild in our assessment of relations with Russia. We know that the human rights situation in Russia is beneath contempt and we know that it is almost impossible for people to

express their political opinions freely. We also know that there are many people in prison precisely because they have tried to exercise their human rights. That is unacceptable. [...] We impose extremely high requirements on Norway, which imports gas into the EU, and exactly the same requirements should apply to Russia.

As evident from the quotes above, the debate on Russia seems to highlight consistent national and party group's patterns, but also to cut across traditional alignments in the EP. More in general, the way in which the Russian dossier is framed reflects a wide variety of positions and implies the juxtaposition of at least two factors: MEPs' nationality and their party group affiliation.

The mainstream literature on the EP has highlighted the increasingly central role played by the European party groups as successful aggregative entities vis-à-vis their affiliated MEPs, as reflected by the very remarkable level of intra-group voting cohesion¹⁶. In a recent study on legislators' preferences, Voeten¹⁷ claims that "the European Party Groups are more successful than national parties in swaying MEPs from their stated ideal points". Moreover, he concludes that high levels of party group cohesion suggest that "the EP has many of the features of a normal parliament". Other studies have highlighted the growing ideological coherence of the EP voting alignments along the left-right continuum, at the expense of a "grand coalition" among the three main party groups that has allegedly characterized voting in the EP during the past decades¹⁸. The same studies confirm that a large majority of the votes in the EP can be explained in terms of MEPs' group affiliation, while national origin is relatively unimportant in determining a member's voting stance.

Other studies describe the EP as a weak chamber susceptible to "multiple influences operating upon its members such as diverse policy preferences, national interests, national party policies, and European party affiliations"¹⁹. While acknowledging that in most of the votes the main party groups behave coherently, a number of studies have demonstrated the disruptive impact of votes related to domestically sensitive issues²⁰ on party group cohesion. In other words, in the absence of a strong domestic interest, MEPs tend to vote along group lines, but

16 Hix, S. and Noury, A. (2009), op. cit.

17 Voeten, E. (2005), op. cit.

18 Costello, R., Thomassen, J., and Rosema, M. (2012), 'European Parliament Elections and Political Representation: Policy Congruence between Voters and Parties', *West European Politics*, vol. 35, no. 6, pp. 1226–1248.

19 Hix, S. (2002), op. cit.

20 Domestically sensitive issues refer to policy areas or specific policies that assume particular significance within specific national contexts.

when national pressure is exerted they tend to vote along national lines – allegedly reflecting their member state’s national interest – at the expense of groups’ voting coherence²¹.

This nation-centred approach is characteristic to most international relations scholarship addressing the problematique of EU-Russia relations. A number of studies highlight the different national perspectives on Russia, explore the causes and consequences of the EU’s inability to speak to Russia “with one voice”²². It is argued that the EU’s stance towards Russia is determined by the balance of member states’ national stances and their relative weight. In this respect, given the domestic significance of the Russian dossier, the EP cannot be seen as an independent actor. Instead, when important national interests are at stake, national allegiances are expected to prevail over partisan ones, and MEPs are expected to defend the national position. This view is spelled out by Faas²³:

“Bargaining in the Council of Ministers is often very difficult and time-consuming. Once a compromise has been found there, national governments do not want the EP to overturn it. Hence, they put pressure on their MEPs to vote for the compromise, even if that implies voting against the line of their EP party group.”

Studies analyzing votes on domestically sensitive issues such as the election of the President of the Commission²⁴, the enlargement process²⁵, or the successive treaty reforms²⁶ have provided substantial empirical support to this argument.

While denying the domestic relevance of the Russian dossier seems to be out of the question, the relative importance of national and partisan affiliations in determining the MEPs’ voting stance on Russia is still far from clear. In order to assess the prevalence of voting alignments either along national or group lines, this study will empirically test two opposing hypotheses.

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- 21 Hix, S. (2001), ‘Legislative Behaviour and Party Competition in European Parliament: An Application of Nominate to the EU’, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 39, no. 4, pp. 663–688; Kreppel, A. (2002), *The European Parliament and the Supranational Party System: A Study of Institutional Development*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
 - 22 David, M., Grower, J., and Haukkala, H. (2013), *National Perspectives on Russia European Foreign Policy in the Making?*, London: Routledge.
 - 23 Faas, T. (2003), ‘To defect or not to defect? National, institutional and party group pressures on MEPs and their consequences for party group cohesion in the European Parliament’, *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 42, no. 6, pp. 841–66.
 - 24 Hix, S. and C. Lord (1996), ‘The Making of a President: The European Parliament and the Confirmation of Jacques Santer as President of the Commission’, *Government and Opposition*, vol. 31, no. 6, pp. 62–76.
 - 25 Johansson, K. M. (1999), ‘Tracing the employment title in the Amsterdam Treaty: uncovering transnational coalitions’, *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 85–101.
 - 26 Moravcsik, A. (1998), *The choice for Europe: Social purpose and state power from Messina to Maastricht*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.

In the light of the arguments presented above the two hypotheses can be defined as follows:

H1. Legislators' voting stance is predominantly determined by their nationality (nationally-oriented behavioural model);

H2. Legislators' voting stance is predominantly determined by their party group affiliation (party-oriented behavioural model)

4. DATA AND METHODS

When it comes to measuring MEP' voting stance towards Russia, the available roll-call votes (RCVs)²⁷ held on Russia-related issues between 2004 and 2012 have been collected. A RCV is a vote in which legislators' voting choice (Yes, No, and Abstention) is recorded for each individual, identified by name, in the minutes.²⁸ Thus, RCV records provide information about the stance of each legislator on a specific bill. All the other voting procedures – either by a show of hands or by 'electronic vote' – do not record the way in which each individual MEP votes. The RCV procedure is usually called by political groups in the parliament²⁹.

The RCVs represent only a portion (roughly one-third) of all the votes cast by the plenary. For this reason some scholars claim that the analyses based on RCV records might not be a representative sample of the universe of votes held, given the fact that votes pertaining to certain issue areas might be over-represented at the expense of others³⁰. In this respect, Hix³¹ maintains that "RCVs [in the EP] cover a broad range of issues" and "without empirical evidence to prove that roll-call voting is systematically biased towards a particular EP party or set of issues, it is reasonable to assume that these votes should produce a fairly accurate picture of voting behaviour in the EP".

27 The record of the RCVs held is available at <http://goo.gl/HqH2n>. The 2004-09 data were kindly provided by the Plenary Directorate (DG-PRES) of the European Parliament.

28 Minutes are available at <http://goo.gl/B28bP>.

29 According to Hix (2002) and Carrubba et al. (2002), this procedure is typically requested by the parliamentary leadership for achieving two specific self-promotion goals: either to show their position to the public or to mortify other groups (Corbett, Shackleton, and Jacobs 2000). According to the article 160.1 of the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament "the vote shall be taken by roll call if so requested in writing by a political group or at least 40 Members the evening before the vote unless the President sets a different deadline". In addition, it states that "votes shall be recorded in the minutes of the sitting by political group in the alphabetical order of Members' names, with an indication of how they voted" (<http://goo.gl/2vpe6>).

30 Carrubba, C. J., Clough, R., Montgomery, E., Murrh, L., Schambach, R., and Gabel, M. (2002), 'Selection Bias in the Use of Roll Call Votes to Study Legislative Behavior', *EPRG Working Paper*, no. 11; Settembri, P. (2006), 'Is the European Parliament competitive or consensual... 'and why bother'?', *Paper presented at the Conference on 'The European Parliament and the European Political Space'*, 30 March 2006, London; Rasmussen, M. (2008), 'Another Side of the Story: A Qualitative Case Study of Voting Behaviour in the European Parliament', *Politics*, vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 11–18.

31 Hix, S. (2002), op. cit., p. 693.

The procedure adopted to record MEPs' voting stance implies three successive steps. First, for every of the 27 bills considered following a consistent selection process³² [see Appendix], the sections concerning Russia and EU-Russia relations are recorded. Second, every bill is assigned a score in the light of the overall (favourable or unfavourable) connotation it gives to Russia. Third, a final measure is calculated for every MEP on the basis of the each legislator's valid vote on the considered bills, portraying MEPs' overall voting position on Russia-related issues.

Table 1 summarizes the coding process at the individual level. If MEP 'x' supports a bill with a favourable connotation towards Russia or opposes one with an unfavourable connotation, his/her expressed vote is coded as being 'positive' on Russia. An MEP's vote is coded as 'negative', if the MEP opposes a bill that has a positive connotation towards Russia or endorses a bill that has negative connotation.

Table 1: Measuring MEPs' voting stances towards Russia

	Favourable bills towards Russia	Unfavourable bills towards Russia
Voting 'for'	Positive	Negative
Voting 'against'	Negative	Positive
Abstaining	Abstention	Abstention

The final measure of legislators' average voting stance (*AVS*) has been calculated for every MEP, on the basis of the legislator's votes according to the following function:

$$AVS = \left[\left(\frac{n_p - n_n}{n_p + n_n} \right) * \left(\frac{n_p + n_n}{n_p + n_n + n_a} \right) \right]$$

where n_p represents the number of positive votes, n_n the number of negative votes, and n_a the number of abstentions³³. The final measure ranges from -1 (most negative voting stance towards Russia) to 1 (most positive voting stance towards Russia).

32 The RCVs included in the analysis have been selected according to two cut-off criteria. First, only the bills with the modal voting option lower than or equal to 85% have been considered in the analysis. Second, only the bills displaying an identifiable (favourable or unfavourable) connotation towards Russia have been counted. Moreover, only the MEPs who attended at least 40% of the valid votes were computed. Following the selection procedure, a total of 27 (out of 52) RCVs held on Russia and Russia-related issues have been included in the analysis, representing more than 50% of the entire universe of eligible RCVs.

33 According to the formula defined above, the balance between positive and negative votes determines whether MEPs' AVS scores are positive or negative, while an increase in the number of abstentions determines a decrease in its intensity.

Figures 1 and 2 chart the distribution of the eligible 52 RCVs by issue area, compared to the universe of bills on Russia-related issues deliberated in the 6th and 7th EP. The two tables confirm that no issue area is systematically over-represented in the RCV sample, compared to the universe of bills voted on. The only differences larger than 5 percentage points between the RCV sample and the universe of votes occur in the area of human and political rights (7%) and non-EU neighbours (6%) in the 6th EP and in the realm of human and political rights (8%) in the 7th EP. None of these differences appear relevant enough to justify the claim that roll-call voting is systematically biased.

In both the 6th and 7th EP sample human and political rights emerge as the most commonly debated issue area. However, the relative weight of the key issue areas differs considerably between the two parliaments. While in the 6th EP the issue area “human and political rights” represents barely one fourth of the bills included in the sample, in the 7th EP it represents more than 60% of them. Moreover, some issue areas such as “cooperation with Russia” or the Baltic dimension appear to have lost relevance in the 7th EP.

In conclusion, notwithstanding their controversial nature, the analysis of RCV records represents by far the most effective means currently available for studying MEPs’ voting behaviour from an empirical perspective. Moreover, in our specific case the sample of RCVs does not seem to suffer from selection bias that might compromise its generalization potential.

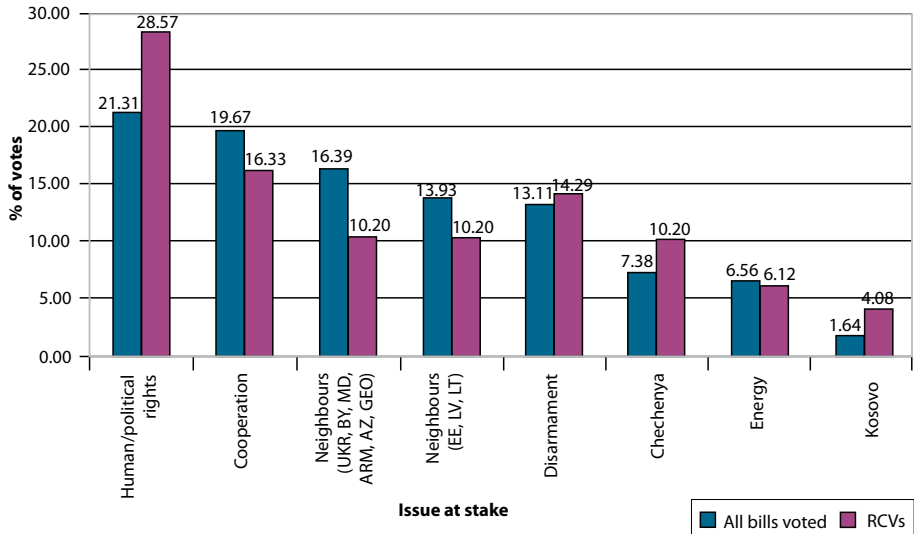


Figure 1: Distribution of votes according to issue area in the 6th EP

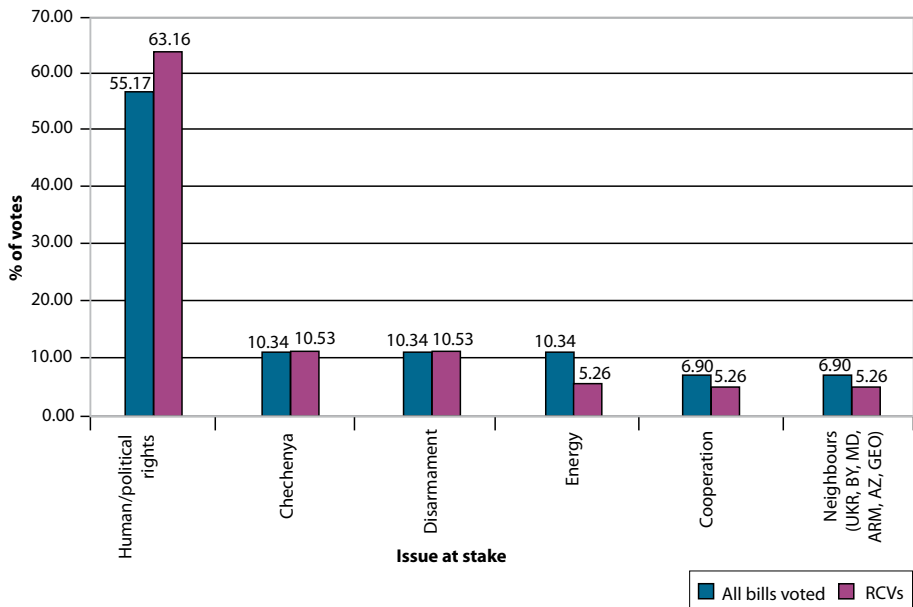


Figure 2: Distribution of votes according to issue area in the 7th EP

On the other hand, it is evident that the actual balance of issues debated and their relative weight in the universe of Russia-related RCVs have a direct impact on the voting stance of the individual MEPs and of the groups, collectively. For instance, some MEPs might be very critical towards Russia when it comes to human rights, but very favourable in terms of economic cooperation with Russia. In this respect, a high number of votes on 'human and political rights' would determine a more negative voting stance. Similarly, we cannot ignore the fact that the AVS of the national delegations (or of the groups) is highly dependent on the balance and relative weight of the national parties that compose them. These represent structural, exogenous, factors and the best way to account for them seems to be acknowledging their unavoidable presence.

The analytical section of the paper will be structured as follows. The RCV-based measure of AVS towards Russia represents our dependent variable. After a preliminary description of the variance in MEPs' AVS according to their nationality and partisan affiliation (and related dimensions), MEPs' propensity to vote along national or party group lines will be tested. In the light of H1 and H2, competing OLS regression models are tested in order to assess how much of the variance in legislators' AVS is explained by their nationality and how much by their party group affiliation.

5. DESCRIPTIVE RESULTS: MEPS' VOTING STANCE TOWARDS RUSSIA

Of the 27 bills included in the analysis, eleven are characterized by a favourable connotation towards Russia, while eighteen had an unfavourable connotation. Most of the RCVs analyzed are amendments to resolutions or recommendations to the Council addressing the state of EU-Russia relations, and therefore capturing a wide array of issues.

Figure 3 charts the distribution of MEPs' average voting scores in the 6th and 7th EP among the 1255 MEPs included in the sample. The votes clearly do not appear normally distributed. If we look at the five voting categories, ranging from the most negative (-1/-0.60) to the most positive voting stance towards Russia (0.61-1), the most positive category (0.61-1) represents the modal category, with 369 MEPs, accounting for 30% of the total. On the other hand, the chart shows that moderately negative scores are almost as frequent as the highly positive ones, with 362 MEPs (29%) falling into this category. This bimodal distribution, combined with the small share of the MEP's with neutral voting scores, suggests that the European Parliament is clearly polarized in terms of its members voting stances on Russia.

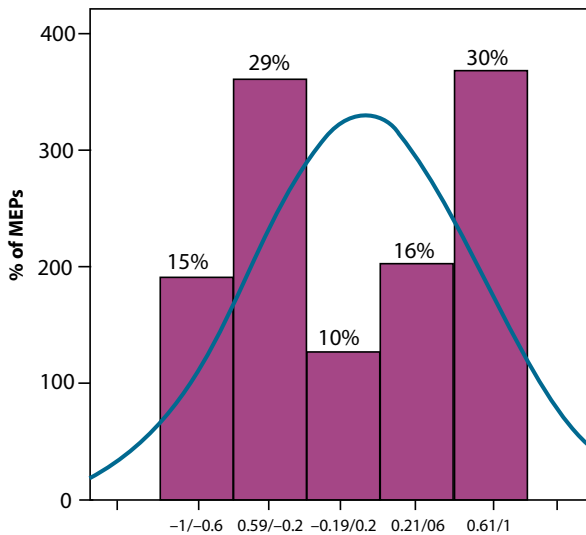


Figure 3: Distribution of MEPs' individual voting scores

In the following subsections the variance in the AVS will be discussed in terms of MEPs' nationality, party group affiliation, and a number of related criteria of geo-territorial and ideological/partisan nature.

5.1. Voting stance by nationality

Figures 4 and 5 represent the AVS towards Russia by national delegation. Considering the high political salience of the Russian dossier both in European and domestic terms and the likelihood of nationally-oriented pressures, it is no surprise that average voting scores for national delegations vary widely. In both the 6th and 7th EP samples, there is a gap corresponding to almost 60 per cent of the possible range between the delegations with the most negative and the most positive AVS.

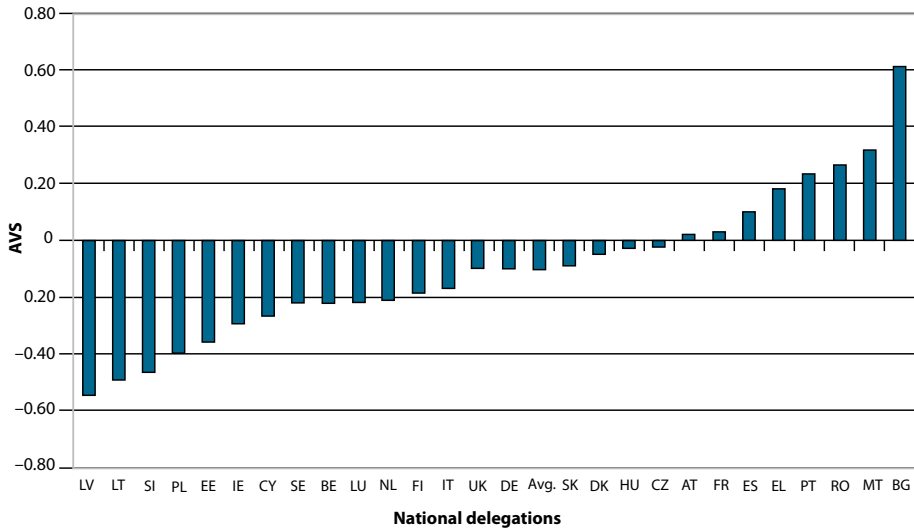


Figure 4: Voting stance towards Russia by nationality (6th EP)

If we look at the 6th EP sample, against an average EP score of -0.1 (denoting a nearly neutral average voting score), a number of ‘usual suspects’ present very low AVS scores. In particular, the Latvian (-0.55), Lithuanian (-0.49), and Estonian (-0.36) delegations as well as the Polish (-0.39) delegation present the most negative scores. While the negative stances of these delegations come as no surprise, the relatively low scores of the Slovenian (-0.47), Irish (-0.29), Cypriot (-0.26), and the Belgian, the Luxemburgish and the Swedish delegations (-0.22) are more difficult to explain.

The case of the Cypriot delegation is particularly interesting. Cyprus is often referred to as Russia’s ‘Trojan horse’ in the EU in the light of Nicosia’s very close economic and diplomatic ties with Moscow³⁴. In this respect, we should clearly

34 According to Leonard and Popescu (2007), Cyprus (along with Greece) “often take[s] the lead in defending Russia’s position on issues such as energy or the Eastern neighbourhood (allowing other EU member states to hide behind them)”. On the other hand, without mentioning the relevance of

bear in mind that MEPs do not, in any way, represent their national governments. The negative AVS in this specific case might be due to exogenous factors discussed in the previous section.

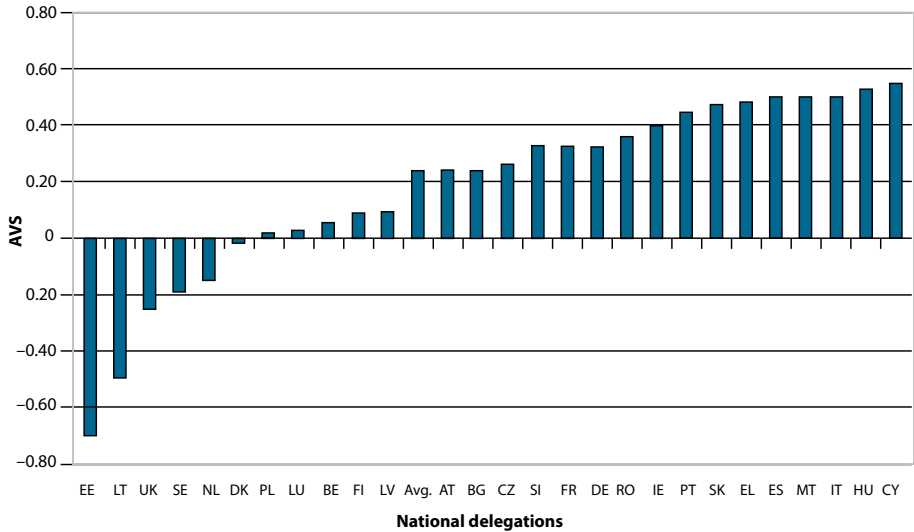


Figure 5: Voting stance towards Russia by nationality (7th EP)

Only eight of the twenty-seven national delegations have positive AVS on Russia-related issues. All of the ‘positive’ delegations represent member states that are generally depicted as having comparatively warm relations with the Russian Federation³⁵. In particular, France (0.03) and Spain (0.10) represent two of Russia’s strategic partners in the EU, while Greece (0.18) is probably one of Moscow’s more loyal allies among the twenty-seven. Bulgaria (0.62), the highest scoring delegation, has, despite some minor disputes with Moscow, developed very close and long lasting ties with Russia both in economic terms and in the light of the shared Orthodox tradition and many cultural commonalities. In general, Figure 4 shows that the majority of national delegations in the EP have moderate AVS scores marked by low levels of inter-group variance (differences are rarely higher than 10%).

Comparing the AVS scores of national delegations across the two parliamentary terms (see Figure 5) reveals a number of potentially important differences. In the 6th

Russian investments in the Mediterranean island worth mentioning is the role of Moscow as “a firm supporter of the Cypriot position in the conflict over North Cyprus - support which even extended to vetoing a UN resolution condemning the Republic of Cyprus for its rejection of the Annan peace plan in 2004”.

35 Romania represents a partial exception.

EP, national delegations appeared to have tougher stances on Russia compared to the current EP. The average difference equals almost 20 percentage points, marking a shift from -0.10 to 0.24 . This seems to suggest that the EP has adopted a friendlier stance towards Moscow in the current parliamentary term which is likely to be reflected in its legislative and non-legislative activities and to potentially affect the nature of EU-Russia relations.

This point is even more relevant considering that more than 60% of the eligible RCVs in the 7th EP deal with the issue of human and political rights in Russia. This seems to suggest an increasingly weak stance of the EP in this specific field³⁶. The shift may be connected to a mix of endogenous parliamentary factors, such as the different nature of issue areas at stake in the two parliaments (as denoted by Figure 1 and 2), and exogenous factors, such as the parliamentary turnover following the 2009 European elections. However, assessing the relative weight of individual factors is beyond the scope of this study.

If we compare the delegations' average voting scores in the 6th and 7th EP, a general trend seems to emerge. While the delegations falling at the two extremes of the scale appear fairly stable over the two parliamentary terms, mid-scale dynamics are more fluid. The Cypriot delegation ceases to be an exception in the 7th EP: its ranking changes by 21 positions and it emerges as the highest scoring delegation with an AVS score of 0.55 . Similarly, the Italian delegation experiences an increase of 14 positions and emerges as the third most positive delegation with a score of 0.50 ³⁷. The position of the Italian delegation seems to reflect Rome's highly relevant relation with Russia for which Italy represents a strategic partner in the EU³⁸.

The trend described above is confirmed by the analysis of aggregate geo-territorial dimensions presented in Figure 6. As predictable, and in line with the country-specific ranking, the MEPs from the Baltic countries³⁹ emerge as the group displaying the most negative AVS (-0.43), followed by the MEPs from the Nordic delegations⁴⁰ with a score of -0.1 . Interestingly, MEPs from Central and Eastern

36 Barysch, K. (2011), 'The EU and Russia: All smiles and no action?', *Centre for European Reform – Policy Brief*, April; Wood, S. (2009), 'The European Union: A Normative or Normal Power?', *European Foreign Affairs Review*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 113–128.

37 When it comes to the exogenous factors mentioned above, it is worth noting that most of the delegations that present high absolute differences in AVS between the 6th and 7th EP, present also a high or relatively high level of parliamentary turnover. In the specific case of the Cypriot delegation only 33% of MEPs were re-elected in the 7th EP, while in the case of the Italian delegation the percentage falls to 22%.

38 Leonard, M. and Popescu, N. (2007), *op. cit.*

39 Baltic delegations include Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

40 Nordic delegations include Denmark, Finland, and Sweden.

Europe (CEE)⁴¹ display an AVS score that perfectly equals the EP average (0.06). In light of the nature their countries' historical relations with Russia, one would expect the AVS score of the MEPs from CEE to be lower. However, what seems indicative in this respect is the large standard deviation (highest among the four geo-territorial groups of MEPs) denoting a high level of internal variance. This is in line with the finding that some CEE delegations presented very negative voting attitudes (as in the case of the Polish MEPs) and others towered among the most positively-minded (as in the case of the Bulgarian or Romanian MEPs)⁴². The aggregate analysis confirms also the generally positive voting stance of the Mediterranean delegations⁴³ (0.25) while no significant difference emerges between delegations from small⁴⁴ and large member states⁴⁵.

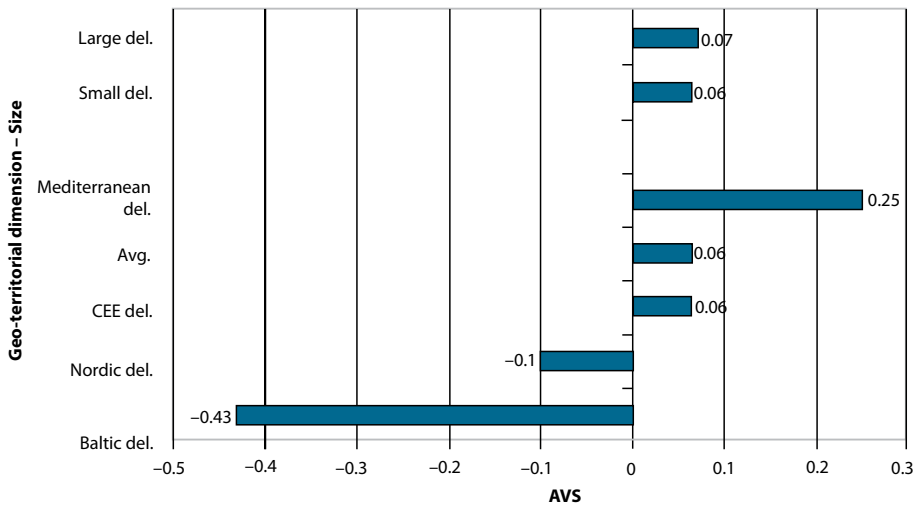


Figure 6: Average voting stance by geo-territorial groups

41 CEE delegations include Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovenia.

42 If we include also the three Baltic delegations in the CEE category the AVS score falls to -0.01.

43 Mediterranean delegations include Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain.

44 Small delegations include Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Sweden.

45 Large delegations include France, Germany, Italy, United Kingdom, Spain, and Poland.

5.2. Voting stance by party group

Figure 7 charts the AVS towards Russia by political group in the 6th and 7th EP. A point that emerges from the figure below is that party groups' AVS towards Russia is only moderately associated with the groups' location on the left-right continuum. Although, on average, centre-right party groups appear to display slightly lower scores than their leftist counterparts, the ideological match appears far from perfect and many exceptions seem to emerge. The imperfect ideological match, however, does not contradict the idea of internally coherent groups and of MEPs' voting predominantly along group lines. The fact that the AVS does not change consistently as we move from the left to the right is not in conflict with the idea of party groups having a high level of internal coherence when Russia-related issues are at stake.

A significant factor seems to be the nature of the party groups. In this respect, as confirmed also by Figure 8, the major mainstream party groups⁴⁶ appear to display a positive voting stance (0.17), while minor and non-mainstream groups⁴⁷ are characterized by more negative scores. Indicative in this respect is the very low AVS score registered among the latter, including mainly euro-sceptic and radical MEPs, equalling -0.28 . One of the main factors explaining this gap seems to be the different *liberté de manoeuvre* of the party groups vis-à-vis the other EU institutions and in particular the Council. Most of the governments represented in the Council are composed of national political parties affiliated either with the conservative EPP (0.57 in the 7th EP) or with the S&D (0.68). For this reason they are very likely to disincentive parliamentary voting behaviours that might overrule unanimously agreed package deals or parliamentary motions that might push EU-Russia relations in undesired directions. Most of the non-mainstream party groups completely lack this inter-institutional connection and are therefore free from such kind of pragmatic constraints. They appear to be more inclined to adopt identitarian voting stances towards Moscow. This seems to be the case especially when it comes to the right and radical right (see also Figure 8).

The average voting scores of parliamentary groups range from -0.75 (ECR) to 0.69 (S&D). The observed range is therefore larger than in the case of AVS distribution by nationality. Looking at the scores of the specific party groups, the euro-realist ECR group displays the most negative AVS with a score of -0.75 ,

46 Mainstream party groups include Socialists and Democrats (S&D), the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), and the European People's Party (EPP).

47 Non-mainstream party groups include European United Left–Nordic Green Left (EUL-NGL), Greens/EFA (G-EFA), Independence and Democracy (IND/DEM), Union for a Europe of Nations (UEN), Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD), and European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR).

followed by the dissolved euro-sceptic UEN group with an AVS score of -0.59 .⁴⁸ Interestingly, Liberal Democrats also have a very low score (-0.54 in the 7th EP and -0.64 in the 6th EP), followed by the European Greens, scoring respectively -0.5 in the 7th EP and -0.34 in the 6th EP, and by the dissolved euro-sceptic IND-DEM group (scoring -0.33 in the 6th EP).

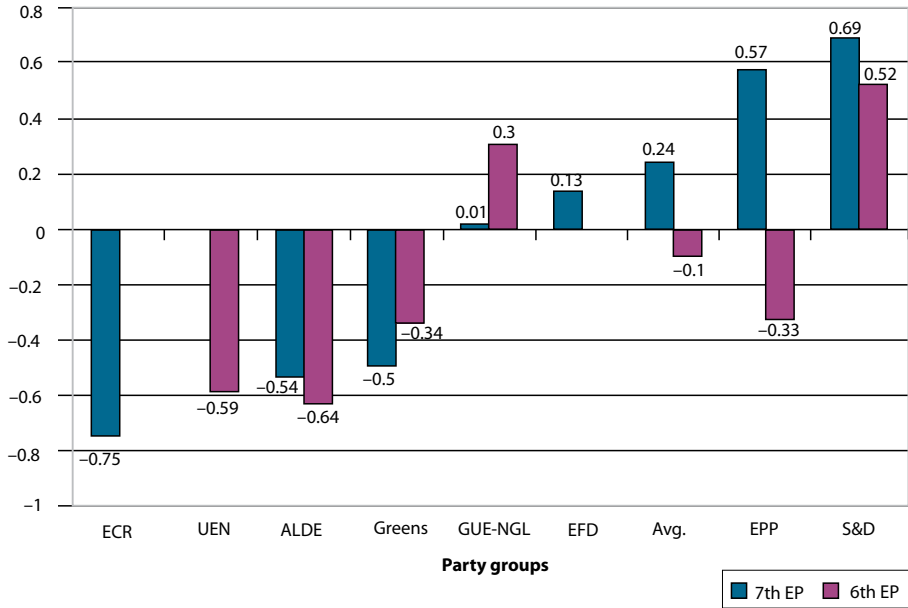


Figure 7: Voting stance towards Russia by party group

The ALDE's low AVS scores seem to be determined by a combination of factors, namely the party group's membership and its policy positions. Most of the key constituent national parties of the group are associated with national delegations that fall on the negative end of the scale presented above (see Figures 4 and 5). Specifically, it is important to consider the special relevance of the Estonian and Dutch delegations within ALDE. Despite their limited size, the Estonian Reform party and the Dutch People's Party for Freedom and Democracy are the only prime ministerial parties in ALDE. This fact undoubtedly increases their political influence within the party group, and makes it more likely that parties' cautious attitude towards Russia resonates in the entire group. It should also be noted that a key

⁴⁸ Both party groups are dominated by political forces that appear characterized by negative stances towards Russia, such as the Polish League of Families and Law and Justice, the British Conservatives, the Czech Civic Platform, and Latvia's For Fatherland and Freedom.

Russian opposition party – the United Democratic Party ‘Yabloko’ – is a full member of the European Liberal Democrats⁴⁹.

Moreover, in terms of policy positions, both ALDE and the European Greens appear to highly prioritize respect for human and political rights in Russia and frequently express their support for the Russian opposition and human rights activists. Both party groups frequently criticize the current Russian leadership and its alleged repression campaigns⁵⁰. Given the preponderance of bills related to human and political rights in Russia in the sample of RCVs included in the analysis, the low AVS scores of the ALDE group and of the European Greens appear to be in line with the groups’ public posturing.

The radical leftist GUE-NGL group and the euro-sceptic EFD group display moderately positive voting stances towards Moscow which, again, appear to conform to the party groups’ political activities and policy positions⁵¹. As mentioned above, in the 7th EP the two main parties exhibit AVS scores far above the average. In particular, the EPP equals 0.57 and the European Social Democrats equal 0.69.

Unlike in the case of the national delegations, no major change in the party groups’ AVS scores seems to have taken place between the 6th and the 7th EP, with the notable exception of the EPP (see Figure 7). This remarkable difference seems to have affected the overall average EP voting stance. The main reason behind the dramatic increase in the AVS score of the EPP seems to be the exit of the British Conservative Party and of the Czech Civic Platform (ODS) from the party group that led to the creation of the euro-realist group ECR in 2009.⁵² As the ECR emerges as the party group displaying the most negative voting stance towards Moscow, it is reasonable to hypothesize the existence of a ‘communicating vessels’ effect.

On the whole, the MEPs can be grouped in three macro-clusters⁵³. The left side of the political spectrum – including the social-democrats, the Greens, and

49 See <http://goo.gl/BO52f>.

50 See <http://goo.gl/BffMq>.

51 The party recently organized a seminar entitled “Strengthening EU-Russia energy relations”. In that context Russia has been defined “a critical factor for stability and prosperity in Europe” (see <http://goo.gl/5QmmU>). When it comes to the GUE-NGL, particularly indicative is the stance taken by the party group in relation to the Russo-Georgian war of 2008, when its leadership harshly criticized the Western “foreign interference” in the conflict and the “adventurous choice” of the Georgian President Saakashvili (see <http://goo.gl/LC8Wo>).

52 Since 2007 the new conservative leadership of David Cameron increasingly denounced the alliance with the ‘federalist’ EPP and eventually broke the ties with the group following the 2009 European elections. In the new EP a fresh conservative group was established including both British Conservatives and Czech ODS. For further details see Bale, Hanley, and Szczurbiak (2010).

53 The categories of the variable are coded as follows: the European United Left–Nordic Green Left (EUL-NGL), the Greens-EFA (G-EFA) and the Socialists and Democrats (S&D) as ‘left’; the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) as ‘centre’; the European People’s Party (EPP) and the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), Independence and Democracy (IND/DEM), Union for a Europe of Nations (UEN), and Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD) as ‘right’.

the radical left – presents the highest AVS scores (0.36). The right side of the political spectrum (including extreme right, euro-sceptic right, and moderate-conservative EPP) is characterized by an overall AVS score close to the EP average (−0.02). However, the large standard deviation of this score suggests that one must differentiate between mainstream MEPs belonging to the EPP displaying a pragmatic voting stance and the radical right holding more views on Russia. As evident from the discussion above, the centre of the spectrum presents the lowest AVS scores, thereby confirming Liberal Democrats’ very negative voting attitude towards Russia.

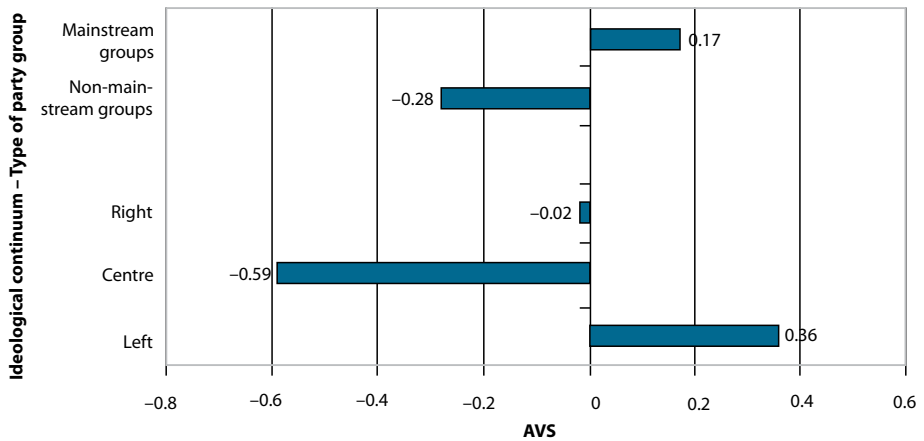


Figure 8: Voting stance and the partisan/ideological dimension

6. MULTIVARIATE RESULTS: NATIONALITY VS. EUROPEAN PARTISAN AFFILIATION

In this section, the results of the multivariate regression tests are presented in order to assess the explanatory power of the nationally-oriented vis-à-vis the party group-oriented behavioural models. Model 1 and Model 2 represent the two ‘pure’, competing models aimed at assessing how much of the variance in legislators’ AVS is explained respectively by their nationality and their party group affiliation. Model 3 captures the combined effect of MEPs’ party group affiliation and nationality. The three models provide the opportunity to empirically assess how party groups’ voting coherence respond to the ‘stress test’ of nationally-oriented pressures when domestically-sensitive issues are at stake.

The independent variables were operationalized as follows. We coded a dummy variable for each party group and national delegation, with the EPP and

the German delegation as respective reference groups. Because every dummy variable included in Model 1 and Model 2 is mutually exclusive, the possibility of intra-model collinearity can be ruled out *a priori*. In order to control for the potential composite effect of the parliamentary turnover, we included a dummy variable for the 6th EP (with the 7th EP as the reference group).

If we look at the two 'pure' models, we see that the nationally-oriented behavioural model (Model 1) explains barely 16% of the variance in MEPs' AVS, while the party group behavioural model accounts for over 60% of the variance in the outcome variable (Model 2). The combined effect of MEPs' nationality and party group affiliation, captured by Model 3, accounts for 62% of the variance. Thus, a MEP's party group affiliation is central to explaining and predicting individual votes on Russia, while the role of nationality appears marginal⁵⁴. These results are in line with our party-oriented hypothesis (H2), while disconfirming the nationally-oriented behavioural model (H1).

This first reading of the results is confirmed by a more in-depth analysis of the coefficients. Only 11 out of the 26 dummy variables in the nationally-oriented model have statistically significant effects. The dummies yielding significant coefficients in Model 1 represent national delegations whose registered AVS towards Russia is either very negative (as in the case of the Baltic, Nordic, Polish, or British delegations) or, more rarely, very positive (as in the case of the Spanish, Portuguese, or Greek delegations). Affiliation to delegations displaying a more moderate stance [see Figures 4 and 5] does not seem to alter MEPs' voting behaviour enough to have significant effects in the regression model.

If we look at the party group behavioural model (Model 2), all of the regressed dummy variables produce significant effects, with the exception of the dummy representing the GUE/NGL party group. The greatest relative effect is produced by the ALDE dummy, confirming the particularly negative stance of Liberal Democratic MEPs. The coefficients confirm the negative effect of Green, UEN, EFD, and ECR affiliation on MEPs' voting stance. On the other hand, the S&D dummy has a positive effect in the model, confirming the expectation that mainstream parties are more positively oriented than non-mainstream party groups. This point is confirmed by the fact that the only non-mainstream party group displaying a positive stance towards Russia (GUE/NGL; see Figure 7) does not seem to produce effects strong enough on MEPs' voting behaviour to be captured by the regression model.

54 The difference in the R-squared values persists even if we run separate regression models for the 6th and 7th EP, as another way to remove the effect of parliamentary turnover between the 6th and the 7th EP.

Table 3: Effect of nationality and party group affiliation on MEPs' voting stance on Russia

Predictor	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	beta	t	beta	t	beta	t
<i>Parliamentary term</i>						
6th EP	-.268***	-10.276	-.328***	-17.622	-.325***	-17.694
<i>National delegations</i>						
LT	-.117***	-4.480			-.043***	-2.442
UK	-.132***	-4.929				
PL	-.145***	-5.458			-.054**	-2.904
EE	-.099***	-3.801			-.065***	-3.678
NL	-.089***	-3.409			-.049**	-2.767
SE	-.083**	-3.163			-.060***	-3.412
BE	-.062**	-2.379				
LV	-.068**	-2.616				
ES	.067**	2.542				
PT	.061*	2.308				
EL	.056*	2.119				
<i>Party groups</i>						
S&D			.371***	19.078	.370***	19.280
ALDE			-.373***	-19.755	-.359***	-19.005
Greens/EFA			-.243***	-13.148	-.240***	-13.123
UEN			-.146***	-7.969	-.133***	-7.082
ECR			-.307***	-16.689	-.299***	-16.246
IND/DEM			-.049**	-2.741	-.041**	-2.299
NI			-.058***	-3.209	-.037**	-2.080
EFD			-.039*	-2.163		
<i>N.</i>		1255		1255		1255
<i>Adj. R. sq.</i>		.162		.609		.621

Note: The coefficients represent standardized OLS coefficients. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001. Only statistically significant effects are reported.

The relevant role played by the party group vis-à-vis MEPs' nationality is confirmed by Model 3 that combines the two 'pure' models. When combining the two sets of variables, a number of national dummies lose significance (with the exception of a few particularly negative cases); while in all the cases their registered effect decreases notably. Conversely, all the significant party groups' dummies produce

a greater effect than the national delegations' dummies, confirming the marginal effect of nationality.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The objective of this paper was to assess the relative importance of nationality and party group affiliation in shaping MEPs' voting stance on Russia-related bills. In order to do so, a measure of MEPs' voting stance was calculated on the basis of 27 RCVs held between 2004 and 2012. Following a description of the variance in legislators' AVS, competing regression models, respectively capturing nationally-oriented and party group-oriented voting behaviours, were reported and examined.

The descriptive analysis showed that MEPs' voting stance on Russia varies greatly across national delegations and European-level party groups. More specifically, it showed that party groups or delegations falling in specific geo-territorial (Baltic or Scandinavian delegations) or partisan/ideological (mainstream vs. non-mainstream groups) clusters regularly presented above- or below-average AVS scores. The analysis showed also that while these legislators' voting behaviour appeared fairly stable across the two parliamentary terms, more fluid dynamics could be observed among the MEPs falling in the median categories (neutral or moderate voting stance on Russia). In line with this point, this analysis recorded a dramatic increase in the AVS score of the conservative EPP in the 7th EP, following the exit of the British conservative delegation and of the Czech ODS.

The descriptive analysis also showed that the EP's voting stance appears, on average, to be markedly more negative in the 6th term than in the current one. This seems to suggest that the EP has, in recent years, adopted a friendlier stance towards Moscow. This point appears even more relevant if we consider that more than 60% of the Russia-related roll call votes in the 7th EP included in our sample dealt with the issue of human and political rights in Russia.

The regression models tested our two competing hypotheses, associating MEPs' voting stances with their national and party group affiliations, respectively. The empirical tests seem to provide a meaningful answer to our research question suggesting that MEPs' voting stances towards Russia are, to a large extent, determined by their partisan affiliations, while the effect of nationality remains marginal. However, national allegiances remain significant in the case of national delegations that present below-the-average AVS scores (as in the case of the Baltic states and Poland).

Our attempt to understand the role played by nationality and party affiliation in determining the way MEPs' vote on Russia can serve as a stepping-stone for further

research seeking to decode legislators' voting behaviour in situations where important national interests are at stake. In this respect, our results lend additional credibility to the argument that European party groups are central to structuring voting behaviour in the world's only directly-elected supranational parliament. On the other hand, further research is needed to assess whether the predominance of party group-oriented behaviour among the MEPs is the result of party discipline enforced by the group itself or of exogenous factors.

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APPENDIX

Analysed votes (6th EP)

(Source: <http://personal.lse.ac.uk/hix/HixNouryRolandEPdata.HTM>)

Vote ID	Date	Title / type	Link
583	26/05/2005	EU-Russia Relations, Motion for a resolution, after A§ 31,43	http://goo.gl/K70kK
584	26/05/2005	EU-Russia Relations, Motion for a resolution, A§ 35,28	http://goo.gl/K70kK
585	26/05/2005	EU-Russia Relations, Motion for a resolution, A§ 35,16	http://goo.gl/K70kK
586	26/05/2005	EU-Russia Relations, Motion for a resolution, A§ 35,16	http://goo.gl/K70kK
587	26/05/2005	EU-Russia Relations, Motion for a resolution, recital G,25	http://goo.gl/K70kK
2688	10/5/2007	Preparation for the EU-Russia summit, Motions for resolutions, after ,5	http://goo.gl/ISdwY
2689	10/5/2007	Preparation for the EU-Russia summit, Motions for resolutions, after ,6	http://goo.gl/ISdwY
2690	10/5/2007	Preparation for the EU-Russia summit, Motions for resolutions, after ,7	http://goo.gl/ISdwY
2691	10/5/2007	Preparation for the EU-Russia summit, Motions for resolutions, after ,9	http://goo.gl/ISdwY
2692	10/5/2007	Preparation for the EU-Russia summit, Motions for resolutions, after recital F,3	http://goo.gl/ISdwY
3459	14/11/2007	EU-Russia summit, Motions for resolutions, After, 4	http://goo.gl/zQYI3
5764	02.04.2009	Recommendation to the Council on the new EU-Russia agreement, Report, A§ 1, point (b), 13D	http://goo.gl/YsWbQ
5766	02.04.2009	Recommendation to the Council on the new EU-Russia agreement, Report, A§ 1, after point (c), 5	http://goo.gl/YsWbQ
5769	02.04.2009	Recommendation to the Council on the new EU-Russia agreement, Report, A§ 1, after point (k), 19	http://goo.gl/YsWbQ

Vote ID	Date	Title / type	Link
5770	02.04.2009	Recommendation to the Council on the new EU-Russia agreement, Report, A§ 1, after point (t), 15	http://goo.gl/YsWbQ
5771	02.04.2009	Recommendation to the Council on the new EU-Russia agreement, Report, Recital A, 7	http://goo.gl/YsWbQ
5773	02.04.2009	Recommendation to the Council on the new EU-Russia agreement, Report, Recital D, 3	http://goo.gl/YsWbQ
5774	02.04.2009	Recommendation to the Council on the new EU-Russia agreement, Report, Recital L,6D	http://goo.gl/YsWbQ

Analysed votes (7th EP)

(Source: <http://www.votewatch.eu/>)

Vote ID	Date	Title / type	Link
140	12.11.2009	Motions for resolutions – EU-Russia summit on 18 November 2009 in Stockholm – Joint Motions for a resolution: After paragraph 16, amendment 6	http://goo.gl/uAMKh
141	12.11.2009	Motions for resolutions – EU – Russia summit on 18 November 2009 in Stockholm – Joint Motions for a resolution: After paragraph 16, amendment 6	http://goo.gl/uAMKh
778	17.06.2010	Conclusions of the EU/Russia summit (31 May – 1 June) – Joint motion for a resolution: Paragraph 6, amendment 5	http://goo.gl/9cnRw
779	17.06.2010	Conclusions of the EU/Russia summit (31 May – 1 June) – Joint motion for a resolution: After paragraph 15, amendment 2/1	http://goo.gl/9cnRw
780	17.06.2010	Conclusions of the EU/Russia summit (31 May – 1 June) – Joint motion for a resolution: After paragraph 15, amendment 2/2	http://goo.gl/9cnRw
781	17.06.2010	Conclusions of the EU/Russia summit (31 May – 1 June) – Joint motion for a resolution: After paragraph 15, amendment 3	http://goo.gl/9cnRw
782	17.06.2010	Conclusions of the EU/Russia summit (31 May – 1 June) – Joint motion for a resolution: Paragraph 16, amendment 4	http://goo.gl/9cnRw
783	17.06.2010	Conclusions of the EU/Russia summit (31 May – 1 June) – Joint motion for a resolution: After recital F, amendment 1	http://goo.gl/9cnRw
1890	09.06.2011	EU-Russia summit – Joint motion for a resolution: Paragraph 11, amendment 1	http://goo.gl/LUVjt