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Background Paper

Dum Bruxellae consulitur, Athenae expugnatur: Assessing the impact of the Euro-crisis on the legislative dynamics of the European Parliament¹

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Abstract

The current economic crisis is increasingly affecting the political debate in the European Union (EU) and its member states, although to different degrees and in different forms. At the same time, exogenous political changes and dramatic austerity measures appear to have been imposed on a number of national contexts (i.e. Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, and Spain). The measures imposed and the direct intervention of the EU institutions and of some external stakeholders on key realms of domestic politics seem to pose a serious challenge to the Union's cohesiveness and to its transnational democratic nature, possibly presaging a drift among the member states.

The aim of this paper is to look at the way the voting dynamics in the European Parliament (EP) are affected by the on-going crisis and in the light of which factors. It will highlight the varying balance of partisan and nationally-driven tensions behind legislators' individual and collective choices related to the management of the Euro-crisis.

In order to capture the domestic significance and the political salience of economic/financial legislation in times of crisis and to assess its impact on the actors' cohesiveness and coalition pattern, two sets of roll-call vote (RCV) based analyses will be conducted, focussing on legislators' voting patterns in the current EP, with an eye of the previous term. The proposed analysis has the ambition to shed light on the determinants behind the observed voting dynamics when crisis-related votes are at stake.

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Introduction

If we look at the way the discourse on the continental economic crisis has affected the political debate in the EU and its member states and at the way it has been constructed and framed in the transnational context, a wide variety of positions can be identified within the same partisan-ideological area. These positions seem not only determined by the ideological connotation of the actors at stake, but to a large extent by the domestic perspective through which the economic crisis is framed and contextualized. In this respect, the measures imposed on certain member states and the direct intervention of the EU institutions and national governments on key realms of domestic politics seem to pose a serious challenge to the Union's cohesiveness and to its transnational democratic nature. According to a number of institutional and academic observers the continuation of these dynamics might determine a drift of the European unity along geo-territorial lines (Verney 2009).

In this respect, a number of recent studies claim the emergence of different cleavages that might contribute to determine the effectiveness of a common European strategy. Elgström, Bjurulf, Johansson (2001) stress the growing drift between Mediterranean and Northern European/continental member states; while Zimmer, Schneider, Dobbins (2005) stress the persisting differences between 'old' and 'new' member states from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), others highlight the divergence of interests between the members of the Euro-area and the other member states (von Hagen, Schuknecht, Wolswijk, 2011).

While not representing the EU's member states, but Europe's citizens, the EP is still likely to be influenced by the current divisions affecting the EU's deliberations. The present article has the objective to assess to what extent and in which direction the debate on the ongoing crisis affects the voting dynamics in the EP and the collective voting behaviour of its members. In this respect, the EP given its multi-cleavage character and its nature as the only directly elected EU transnational institution has the potential to mirror in its deliberations the disruptive dynamics induced by the debate on the crisis.

If we look at the debates held in the EP on the ongoing sovereign debt crisis, although some of the party groups (or national delegations) might emerge, on the whole, as more in favour of a common European approach or more interventionist; the situation seems more complex than it might appear at a first sight. The same might be said with respect to the impact of legislators' nationality, given the evident domestic salience of the issue at stake. In this respect, the parliamentary debate on the ongoing crisis emerges as a cross-cleavage and, at the same time, highly divisive issue.

The work focuses on the way the debate has taken place in the EP. So far, only very limited empirical research related to the ongoing continental crisis has been conducted from an EP perspective, while most of the attention has been devoted to the negotiations at the Council and Commission level or to the national debates.

In an attempt to successfully penetrate the impact on the voting dynamics and alignments determined in the EP by the debate on the economic crisis, the proposed analysis will 'map' the voting behaviour of the Members of the EP (MEPs) in the current parliamentary term when crisis-related votes are at stake, with an eye on the 6th EP.

The positions of the MEPs are likely to reflect different ways of framing the crisis and different degrees of

support and opposition for the solutions/measures proposed, of which, the most relevant seems to be the European Stability Mechanism (ESM). MEPs' attitudes seem determined by a combination of factors, involving interest-driven domestic dynamics and partisan dynamics reflecting the groups' lines.

The analysis will first perform a comparative assessment of party groups' voting cohesiveness, internal coherence, and coalition patterns, when it comes to the votes held in current and previous EP term (between 2004 and 2012). In particular, the analysis of legislators' cohesive behaviour will distinguish between crisis-related votes, economy-related votes, and votes of other nature. In the second part of the analysis, the impact of the debate on the economic crisis on the legislators' collective voting alignments will be assessed using the RCV-based hierarchical cluster analysis.

The study proceeds as follows. After discussing our conceptual framework and the actors involved in the analysis (Section 2), we will define our research strategy, cases, and methods (Section 3). In Section 4, we will present and discuss the empirical results of the comparative analysis. In Section 5, we will present some concluding considerations and discuss possible broader implications and further developments.

2. Conceptual framework of the study

Since the first concerns about a possible sovereign-debt crisis in the Euro-area following the emergence of the Greek government-debt crisis, the European supra-national institutions (in particular, the European Commission) appeared particularly weak in the management of the critical situation and the debate has often taken the form of inter-state negotiations between the member states directly hit by the crisis and those that could guarantee a possible way out (*in primis*, Germany).

Concerns intensified in early 2010 and thereafter when other member states of Mediterranean Europe experienced increasing difficulties in placing their bonds and sovereign assets, leading the EU member states to agree on a series of financial support measures such as the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) and European Stability Mechanism (ESM).

Beside of all the political measures and bailout programmes being implemented to combat the European sovereign debt crisis, the European Central Bank (ECB) announced in September 2012 free unlimited support for all euro-zone countries involved in a sovereign state bailout/precautionary programme from EFSF/ESM, through some yield lowering Outright Monetary Transactions (OMT). The activism of the ECB sparked strong criticisms among the net contributors, including among the others, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, and the Nordic countries.

To conclude, a wide variety of positions can be identified in the EU arena, ranging from enthusiastic support to open hostility for a coordinated approach at the Community level. A number of factors concur to member states' divisive temptations, as the crisis is framed and understood differently in different EU's national contexts according to the specific interests at stake. The crisis did not only introduce adverse economic effects for the worst hit countries, but also had a major political impact, leading to power shifts in Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Slovenia, Slovakia, and the Netherlands and provoking the dramatic growth of extreme or populist political forces.

2.1. The EP and the Euro-crisis

While denying the domestic relevance of the ongoing debate on the economic crisis seems to be out of question, the balance of national and parliamentary factors that determine the EP voting stance on it is still far from being clarified.

In this respect, the debate on the Euro-crisis and its possible ways out might represent a very useful analytical shortcut to assess this phenomenon and to empirically test the impact of nationally salient issues on the EP voting dynamics.

The key reason behind the lack of research on the role of the EP in the debate on the ongoing crisis is its alleged irrelevant role. In this respect, the idea of a voiceless and prone EP seems to be far from reality for at least two reasons.

A first factor deals with the recent institutional changes introduced by the Lisbon Treaty. In the light of the new provisions, the EP has gained power exponentially vis-à-vis the other EU institutions, while showing greater activism within the sphere of budgetary and economic and monetary affairs. This does not necessarily imply that such activism is fully reflected in the EP's official prerogatives, but that its substantial influence on the EU's debate is increasing. Exactly because of its limited formal powers in the field the EP has the potential to enjoy much more *liberté de manoeuvre* than the Council.

A second factor deals with the very nature of the EP. Unlike the Commission and the Council, the EP is the only EU institution directly legitimized by citizens' vote. Accordingly, it is not only the sole legitimate representative of the peoples of Europe at the supranational level, but, given its nature and composition, it is also more likely to reflect their attitudes in its voting dynamics.

Moreover, given its multi-national and politically diverse character, the EP is the only EU institution in which partisan-ideological cleavages emerge not only between but also within national delegations. For this reason, the EP represents the only direct institutional channel that conveys national inter-party politics into the European political arena (mediated via the EP party groups). This represents a challenge to the realist idea of the EU member states as unitary actors; an assumption better fit by other internal organizational mechanisms of the other "executive" EU institutions such as the Council and – to a certain extent – the Commission. This institutional characteristic is what really makes it possible to assess the inter-domestic weight of ideology-partisanship and national interests inside the different delegations at the EU level.

The debates related to economic and monetary affairs have represented a key area of interest for the EP and its members and their outcome reflect a varying balance of factors oscillating between an ideological-partisan pole and a nationally-driven pole. The debates on the ongoing economic crisis are highly prioritized both in the plenary and in the EP Committee for Economic and Monetary Affairs Meeting (ECON) chaired by the Liberal-democratic MEP Sharon Bowles. Among the main issues areas debated when dealing with the economic crisis, key attention is posed to the implementation of the ESM, financial assistance to the highly indebted member states, creation of Eurobonds, and a more central role for the European Central Bank (ECB).

Looking at the committees partisan character, according to Hix (2011), while in 2009 a stable coalition between the EPP and ALDE groups has dominated, the third semester (July to December 2010) saw a

noticeable increase in the appearance of the 'grand coalition' (up to 81% of votes). This is the highest level reached in the 2004-2010 period. Can this evolution be extended also to the votes more directly related to European economic governance and to the measures to address the financial crisis? More in general, a number of observers, both at the European and domestic level, claim that the ongoing crisis has deepened the split between proponents and opponents of the European integration, rather than between left and right.

Among the most frequent legislative and non-legislative activities of the EP it is worth mentioning resolutions, reports, and recommendations to the Council. Particularly interesting appear the debates on "Financial, economic and social crisis: recommendations concerning the measures and initiatives to be taken" (20.10.2010), "Motions for resolutions - Establishing a permanent crisis mechanism to safeguard the financial stability of the euro area" (16.12.2010), and "Financial, economic and social crisis: measures and initiatives to be taken" (06.07.2011)¹. Particularly interesting is the case of the latter. In that case, the debates highlighted both a political drift between mainstream and non-mainstream parties and between delegations belonging to the Eurozone and non-Euro delegations (in particular, the Swedish, British, Polish, and Danish ones). The result of the vote highlighted also a lack of internal coherence in the three major parties reflected in a severe decrease in groups' voting cohesion.

The following quotes are excerpts from the above-mentioned debated texts.

Thomas Ulmer (EPP, Germany) – *I voted against this report because it turns budgetary consolidation by the Member States on its head and contains the usual flowery Communist dross about inter-State transfers. Moreover, there is a very clear violation of the principle of subsidiarity in the social sphere.*

Izaskun Bilbao Barandica (ALDE, Spain) – *There have been a variety of factors in the current crisis: the speculative behaviour of the financial markets, and the development of internal demand over recent years based on consumer credit, among other things. There are many reasons, which we have discussed a great deal in Parliament, but we need to look to the future. The future is part of fulfilling the content of this initiative. In order to do so, Europe needs to overcome the problem of the ageing population. It must regulate, reorganise and supervise the Union's financial market, improve its coordination, and use this strength to play an active role at global level. [...] This is the only way that we will be able to ensure that Europe is a great opportunity for the world.*

George Sabin Cutaş (S&D, Romania) – *I voted for the European Parliament Resolution on establishing a permanent crisis mechanism to safeguard the financial stability of the euro area, given that this kind of mechanism has become a necessity in the current economic and financial crisis. I also support this resolution as it calls for the mechanism to be inspired by the Community method, which involves decision making at a common European level. Having a permanent crisis mechanism is beneficial to all Member States, including those which have not yet adopted the euro, given the interdependency among Europe's economies.*

Charalampos Angourakis (GUE/NGL, Greece) – *The war against the workers, the self-employed and small-scale farmers is a strategic choice by the bourgeois governments and*

the EU in order to support the profitability of capital. The debt and deficit are simply a pretext. All the national governments in the Member States of the euro area and the EU are being called upon to step up the adoption and application of even more savage, barbaric and anti-labour and anti-grassroots measures coordinated by the EU, the ECB and the IMF. [...] In light of this all-out attack by capital and the plutocracy, there is an urgent need for a broader grassroots rally to radically reverse the power correlations for the benefit of the grassroots alliance and to achieve an exit from the EU, grassroots power and a grassroots economy.

Daniel Hannan (ECR, United Kingdom) – *Madam President, when I was a teenager, I travelled in what we still thought of as Eastern Europe and I remember being struck, even then, by the paradox that here was a system that nobody believed in. Even the people running it no longer professed, if ever they had, the principles of Marxism-Leninism. Yet one could not see how it was going to end because so many people had a vested interest in the maintenance of the status quo. I had an eerie sense of nostalgia as I listened to the debate this morning. One by one, the pillars that sustained the European ideal have been kicked away and yet we continue to tell ourselves that the answer is more integration, more Europe, monetary and fiscal union, common economic governance, and so on.*

As evident from the quotes above, the EP's strategy can hardly be defined as unitary and the debate on the Euro-crisis seems to highlight consistent national and party group's patterns, but also to cut across the traditional alignments in the EP. More in general, the way in which the debate is framed reflects a wide variety of positions and implies the juxtaposition of, at least, two broadly defined factors: MEPs' national and partisan affiliation. Although MEPs' collective voting strategies can be vaguely sketched in the light of the ongoing debate, the situation seems much more complex than it might appear at a first sight and more in depth analysis seems required.

In this respect, the ongoing debate on the Euro-crisis represents a very relevant case study in the light of four key factors related to its nature. *First*, it represents an issue of clear transnational nature affecting more or less all the member states and very diverse strata of the EU societies. It can be therefore defined as a typical cross-cleavage issue. *Second*, its significance is indisputable, given the evident repercussions of the crisis both on the European societies and on the national and European political dynamics. *Third*, given the different interests at stake and the different ways in which the crisis has affected the EU member states, clear inter-state coalitions are emerging when it comes to the definition of the price that every actor involved has to pay to define a way out of the crisis. *Fourth*, the high ideological potential of the debates on the possible ways out of the crisis is indisputable, as they imply different political/economic recipes and different potential winners and losers according to the political/economic choices sponsored.

2.2. The voting dynamics in the EP

In the past decade much has been written concerning the nature of the EP and the voting dynamics that characterize its members. A number of scholars have claimed the increasing "normalization" of the EP and its growing compatibility with the domestic legislatures in the member states. The growing similarity with the national parliamentary experiences of continental Europe as well as the parliamentarization of the EU has been generally linked to two phenomena (Hix, Noury and Roland, 2006).

The first factor represents a consequence of the macro developments that have taken place over the past

decades, since the EP direct election in 1979, and marked a gradual but constant increase in the competences and powers of the Parliament in the EU decision-making process. Today, the EP has a wide range of powers and prerogatives (although with some relevant exceptions) comparable to those of most of the assemblies of parliamentary Europe. In line with this process of parliamentarization, the recently approved Lisbon Treaty acknowledges the EP's role as equal co-legislator vis-à-vis the Council of Ministers, thereby paving the way to a two-chamber system.

Aside this macro-level development, another – equally relevant - phenomenon of micro-level nature related to the nature of MEPs' voting behaviour has been widely analyzed. A number of scholars (Hix and Noury, 2009) highlighted a trend towards higher ideological coherence in the decision-making process at the expenses of the parliaments' consociational nature (Fabbrini, 2005). In particular, Hix (2005) and Kreppel (2002) claim that the EP's dynamics of 'government'-opposition are gradually shifting the pivot from a *grand coalition* coalescing the three main party groups, characterizing the first parliamentary terms, to more ideologically-coherent coalition patterns favoured by the generalized introduction of the qualified majority voting (QMV) in most of the EP's deliberations reducing the need for oversized majorities.

In this respect, it is particularly surprising that while a lot of scholarly attention has been devoted to both micro-level and macro-level developments related to the normalization of the EP and of MEPs' voting behaviour, practically very limited analysis has been conducted on the effects of exogenous pressures and issue-salience on the alleged trend of normalization and on the EP's dynamics of 'government'-opposition. More specifically, very few studies have been devoted to the analysis of the impact of highly salient issues on the EP voting dynamics and on the individual voting behaviour of the involved legislators.

When it comes to the tension between partisan and nationally-driven factors, the relevant studies in the field seem to suggest the possibility of two different and opposing scenarios. As mentioned above, the mainstream literature on the EP has highlighted the increasingly central role played by the European parliamentary groups as successful aggregative entities vis-à-vis their affiliated MEPs, as reflected by the very remarkable level of intra-group voting cohesion (Hix 2005). In this respect, in a recent study on legislators' preferences, Voeten (2005) claims that "the European Party Groups are more successful than national parties in swaying MEPs from their stated ideal points". Moreover, he concludes that "European Party Groups appear capable of swaying MEPs towards their ideal points, thus exerting some amount of control over the policy-making process. All of this is good news for the thesis 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. The same studies confirm that a large majority of the votes in the EP can be read in the light of MEPs' group affiliation, while only a minority of votes can be explained along national lines.

On the other hand, other works often 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" (Hix 2002). While acknowledging that in most of the votes the main party groups behave coherently, a number of studies have demonstrated the disruptive impact of domestically sensitive votes on the legislators. In other words, in absence of interest from home MEPs tend to vote along group lines, but 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 coherence (Hix 2001; Kreppel 2002).

This nation-centred narrative seems to go beyond the borders of the European studies. In particular, a number of authors, not only among the realists, stresses the relevance of national interest and claims that the EU's debate on the ongoing European sovereign debt crisis and on the global economic crisis is determined by the balance of member states' national stances and their relative weight. In this respect, given the specific domestic significance of the issue at stake, the EP cannot be seen as an independent actor, but MEPs appear rather subject to the priorities of their respective member states' national interests.

As clearly put by Faas (2003) "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". Considerable support for these arguments was found in studies analyzing domestically sensitive votes such as the election of the President of the Commission (Hix & Lord 1996; Hix 1997), the enlargement process (Johansson 1997), or the successive treaty reforms (Moravcsik 1998).

The present study has the ambition to contribute to a wider comparative assessment in this respect. In particular, we aim at identifying a balance between European partisan and country-based factors and their repercussions on MEPs' collective voting trends and the coalition patterns at macro-level. As we are addressing a relatively unexplored ground, this study is conceived as an exploratory analysis towards a more precise understanding of the parliamentary face of the Euro-crisis. For this reason, we will not propose a formal set of hypotheses to test; but we rather assume the possibility of different, multi-cleavage, and (potentially) intertwined explanatory scenarios, respectively calling into question both partisan factors (i.e. the divide between mainstream and non-mainstream forces and the left-right ideological divide) and nationally-driven factors (i.e. the geo-territorial divide or member states-participation in EU integration structures such as the Euro).

3. Methods, measures and techniques

In this section, we describe the methods and the tools used to conduct the analysis. The final objective of the analysis is to cluster legislators' delegations according to their voting attitudes in the crisis-related votes included in the sample. The analysis is based on 33 RCVs held between 2009 and 2012 (see Appendix).

The study will focus on the parliamentary works of the current EP thereby following the emergence of a growing awareness of a pan-European malaise and the contagion fear in the last three years. To grant the salience and the consistency of the votes included in the analysis, we considered only the votes falling in the policy area of 'Economic and Monetary Affairs' as they represent the only votes directly related to the debate on the crisis and its possible ways out. This decision is also based on the consideration that other votes falling in different policy areas, although tangentially related to the Euro-crisis debate, appear to call into cause other realms such as Foreign policy or Environment (and different national and political priorities) whose weight in the voting dynamics would be difficult to determine and disentangle in a general assessment of the crisis-related votes. All the bills included are in the form of resolutions or motions for resolutions and mainly deal with the implementation of the ESM, financial assistance to the highly indebted member states, creation of Eurobonds, and the definition of the role for the European Central Bank (ECB).

3.1. Defining the RCV-based tests

The first part of our analysis implies a comparison among groups' internal cohesion in three different voting contexts. Cohesion measures are calculated respectively on the basis of the crisis-related votes (CRISIS sample), of the votes dealing with 'Economic and Monetary Affairs' (ECO sample), and all the RCVs available in the current EP² (ALL sample). It is worth noting that in terms of votes included, that ECO is a subsample of ALL, while CRISIS is a subsample of both ECO and ALL. The time span included in the analysis covers both the current and the previous EP (6th and 7th EP), thereby allowing a comparative assessment of the voting dynamics before and during the Eurocrisis. For this reason, the CRISIS sample is included only in the data covering the current EP. The measure of groups' internal cohesion is based on Attinà's Agreement Index (AI). The IA. Indexes sharing the features of Attinà's Index have been used by Marin-Bosh (1998)³. However, unlike the others, the former was designed to count also "abstentions" and has been specifically developed to measure the voting cohesion in the EP (Attinà 1990). The index is as follows:

$$AI_i = \frac{\max\{Y_i, N_i, A_i\} - \frac{1}{2}[(Y_i + N_i + A_i) - \max\{Y_i, N_i, A_i\}]}{(Y_i + N_i + A_i)}$$

where Y_i denotes the number of "Yes" votes expressed by the cluster (i) on a given vote, N_i the number of "No" votes and A_i the number of abstentions. The Index equals 1 when all the delegations of one cluster vote together and equals 0 when the members are equally divided between all three of these voting options. The average score of the group represents its cohesion index.

The second part of the analysis implies the empirical definition of the voting clusters, accounting for the results emerged in the first analytical step. When it comes to the definition of the voting clusters of legislators' delegations, the procedure adopted implies three successive steps. *First*, crisis-related bills are identified and selected⁴. *Second*, for every crisis-related bill considered, legislators' individual voting stances are computed. *Third*, a final measure of voting proximity is calculated for every delegation on the basis of the each legislator's stance on the considered bills.

The final measure of delegations' average voting proximity (D_{avp}) is calculated for every national delegation, on the basis of the voting stance expressed on every considered vote according to the following function:

$$D_{avp} = \left(\frac{nP - nN}{nP + nN} \right)$$

where nP represents the number of positive votes, nN the number of negative votes. The final measure ranges from -1 (all affiliated MEPs express a negative vote) to 1 (all affiliated MEPs express a positive vote), while a score of 0 means that half of the affiliated MEPs express a negative vote, while the other half expresses a positive vote. The closer are two delegations' D_{avp} scores, the more similar their voting attitude on the crisis.

Finally, the constellations of actors in the debates are inductively identified according to their national delegation affiliation using hierarchical cluster analysis on the basis of the computed D_{avp} scores.

Cluster Analysis is a statistical method which groups (or segments) a collection of data rows into "clusters" (Hartigan, 1975; Zhong and Ghosh, 2003; Fraley and Raftery, 2002). The data grouped within each cluster

are more closely related to one another than those assigned to any different clusters. The process of grouping follows the notion of degree of similarity (or dissimilarity) between the individual objects to be clustered⁵. Clustering has been widely used in social sciences; however, its application to political science has been as yet limited. Webb (2008) and Chae (2010) introduce hierarchical clustering to find groups in political attitude. Ahlquist and Breunig (2009) and Spirling and Quinn (2010) provide rigorous discussion of model-based cluster analysis for investigating types of welfare regimes and legislative voting behavior, respectively. Compared to other scaling techniques, clustering has a number of key advantages as it does not require *a priori* assumptions (e.g., NOMINATE) and it tells more than how “far” various observations are from one another (agglomerative clustering).

Before moving on, it seems useful to briefly discuss the nature of the RCVs. When a RCV is requested, the voting choice (Yes, No and Abstention) of each MEP is recorded in the minutes, thereby providing the voting stance of each legislator on a specific vote. The RCVs represent only a portion (roughly one-third) of all the votes cast by the plenary.⁶ 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 RCVs are usually called by the party groups. 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 several scholars, the analyses based on RCV records might suffer from a structural bias determined by the particular nature of this procedure (Carrubba et al. 2002; Settembri 2006; Rasmussen 2008). On the other hand, Hix (2002) maintains that:

RCVs cover a broad range of issues on the European Union agenda do not appear to be called disproportionately by one EP party or another. Hence, 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.

In conclusion, notwithstanding their still-controversial nature, the analysis of RCV records represents by far the most effective means currently available for studying MEPs’ legislative behaviour from an empirical perspective.

4. Defining the constellation of actors and factors in crisis-related votes

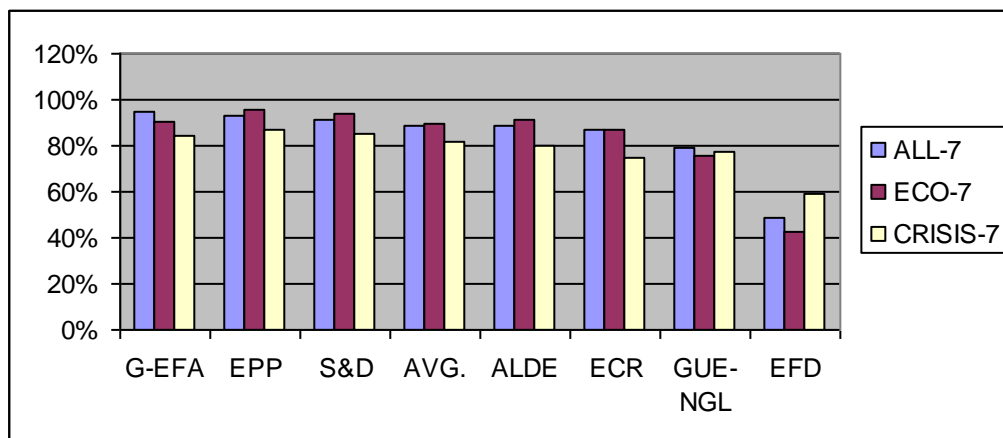
In this section we will first comparatively assess how MEPs’ collective behaviour changes in terms of cohesion when the crisis-related votes are at stake. In the second part of the analysis, the impact of the debate on the economic crisis on the legislators’ collective voting alignments will be assessed using the RCV-based hierarchical cluster analysis.

4.1. Comparative assessment of groups’ cohesion

Figures 1 and 2 chart party groups’ level of cohesion in the 6th and 7th EP, respectively covering the 2004-2009 and 2009-2012 periods. The level of cohesion is calculated on the basis of three samples of votes: ALL (including all the votes held in the respective parliamentary term), ECO (including all the votes related to “Economic and Monetary Affairs” held in the respective parliamentary term), and CRISIS (including all the

crisis-related votes held in the respective parliamentary term). The level of cohesion is calculated according to the Attinà's AI defined in the previous section.

Figure 1. – Comparative internal cohesion of the party groups in the 7th EP



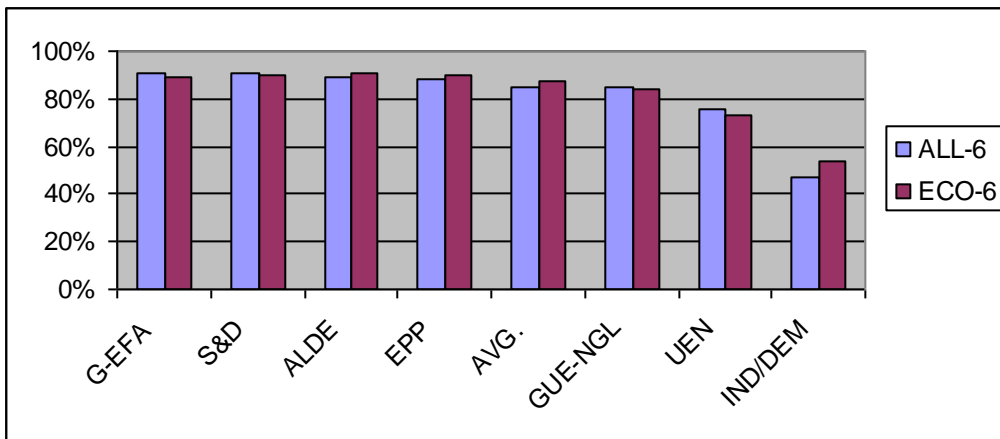
If we look at the levels of cohesion in the current EP (Figure 1), what emerges is a generalized trend that involves all the mainstream party groups. All the major party groups present a structurally high level of cohesion (ALL), generally higher than 85%, and often topping 90%. The highest scores are registered in the three main party groups (EPP, S&D, and ALDE).

Interestingly, in almost all the cases, the registered level of cohesion in the votes dealing with “Economic and Monetary Affairs” appears higher than in the ALL sample. This datum is not only confirmed by the scores of the three main party groups (96% vs. 93% in the case of the EPP; 94% vs. 91% in the case of S&D; and 91% vs. 89% in the case of ALDE); but also reflected by the average EP scores, although at a more moderate level.

If we look at the crisis-related votes (CRISIS), in five out of the seven groups the trend reflects a substantial decrease of groups’ coherence, with an average decline of almost 10 percentage points (CRISIS = 82%). In the case of European Liberal-Democrats (ALDE/ADLE) and of the Euro-realist group of the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), the decrease is higher than 10 percentage points; while in other cases – i.e. the European People’s Party (EPP), the Greens, and the group of European United Left–Nordic Green Left (GUE-NGL) it is more moderate.

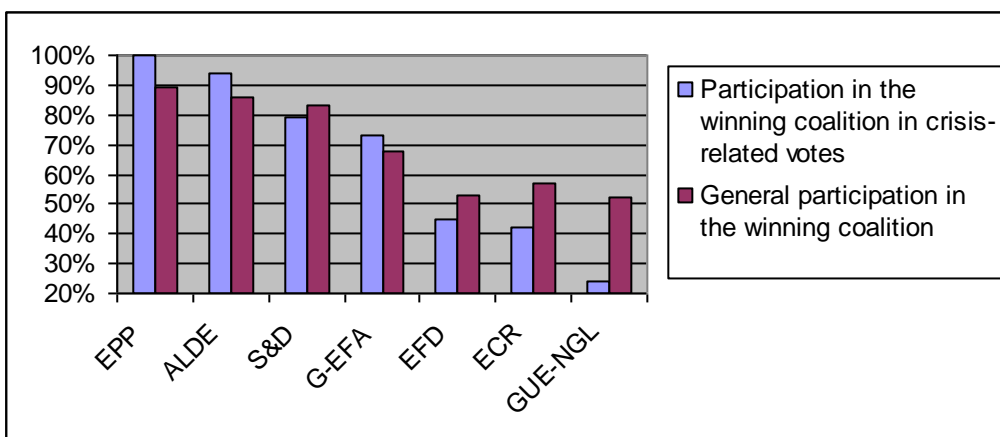
What is interesting is that the party groups that experience the most substantial drop in the internal cohesion are also among those that appear more coherent in terms of economic policies in the ECO sample of votes. What seems to be worth noting, is that while, in the light of the emergency determined by the crisis, the level of intra-group cohesion in votes related to “Economic and Monetary Affairs” appears – understandably – higher than the average voting cohesion (ALL), it substantially decreases when it comes to the votes directly related to the crisis, thereby contradicting our expectations in terms of responsible burden-sharing behaviour involving the main parties of the left and of the right. This datum might suggest that, while the Eurocrisis has determined more cohesive voting attitudes when it comes to general votes related to “Economic and Monetary Affairs”, only marginally related to the crisis; this sort of *rally-round-the-flag effect* is not taking place in the votes more directly related to the crisis.

Figure 2. – Comparative internal cohesion of the party groups in the 6th EP



In order to have a clearer picture of the dynamics taking place in MEPs’ collective voting attitudes in times of crisis, it is worth looking at the same trends in normal times. Figure 2 charts the groups’ internal cohesion in the 6th EP, distinguishing between ALL and ECO samples. As no surprise, also in the 6th parliamentary term, the three main party groups (along with the greens) emerge as the most cohesive with respect to both the ALL and ECO samples. On the other hand, the average intra-group voting cohesion has increased in the current term. More specifically, and more significantly in the light of our research focus, the phenomenon appears even more relevant when it comes to the economy related votes, where the increase equals 5 percentage points. The cohesion of all the mainstream groups grew substantially, especially when it comes to votes related to “Economic and Monetary Affairs” (EPP +6 percentage points, S&D +4, ALDE + 1, G-EFA +2). This datum seems to confirm that – when it comes to the economy-related votes only indirectly connected to the Eurocrisis – a trend towards convergence emerges in line with the idea of sharing responsibilities and burdens in difficult times. However, this same very datum confirms also that this phenomenon of growing intra-group coherence does not take place in the votes more directly related to the crisis and that possibly an opposite trend is emerging, as demonstrated by the evident decrease in intra-party cohesion if the look at the CRISIS sample⁷.

Figure 3. – Party groups’ participation in winning voting coalitions in crisis-related votes (7th EP)



Before moving on to the second part of our analysis it is worth looking at how the EP’s inter-group voting dynamics change when CRISIS-related votes are at stake. Figure 3 charts party groups’ comparative participation in winning voting coalitions when crisis-related votes are held. What emerges is a less cooperative and more ideologically-coherent inter-party voting behaviour in the crisis-related votes, if we

look at the three main party groups. In the ALL sample of votes all the three main party groups present a participation rate in the winning coalitions ranging between 80-90%, respectively 89% for the EPP, 86% for the ALDE, and 83% for the S&D, thereby confirming that a cooperative voting style among the three main party groups is still dominating the dynamics in the EP. If we look at the crisis-related votes we can identify a much wider ideological drift between the liberal-conservative and progressive-socialist components of the main party groups. In this respect, while the S&D group participates to the winning coalitions 79% of the times, the percentage grows to 94% when it comes to the ALDE group and even to 100% when it comes to the EPP group. All the minor party groups face a generalized drop in their participation rate.

However, what we can conclude from this first analytical step is that focusing on the ideologically-defined clusters, such as the EP's party groups, does not say much when it comes to the actual definition of the opposed voting constellations and to the factors that define them. A clear evidence of this crucial point is represented by the fact that the EPP and the ALDE – both dominating the winning coalitions – present the least internally coherent voting behaviour in the crisis-related votes.

The 23 crisis-related RCVs considered in the analysis deal with three main points: the adoption of the ESM, the creation of Eurobonds, and the definition of a more effective role for the (ECB). In this respect, the two party groups have very clear ideas about these points. While both the three mainstream party groups appear generally in favour of the three points, most of the remaining party groups support rather a re-nationalization of the economic policies, thereby favouring a more limited role of the European institution and of the European coordination instruments; while some of them also criticize the very existence of the Euro.

However, in more than one occasions the affiliated MEPs belonging to different national delegations voted in opposite ways. That is the case for example of the final vote on a “Motions for resolutions - Establishing a permanent crisis mechanism to safeguard the financial stability of the euro area” (16.12.2010). In that occasion, the IA score of the PES, the ALDE/ADLE, and the EPP dropped respectively to 50%, 76%, and 88%. In particular, given their national government opposition to the creation of a Eurobond regime, the German MEPs affiliated both to the EPP and ALDE/ADLE voted against the line of their party group. The same dynamics, although in a more moderate way, seem to have taken place in all the five groups that experienced tangible decreases in their internal voting coherence (IA).

4.2. Clustering MEPs' delegations

If we think of legislators' voting cohesion as a system of communicating vessels, in the light of the literature on the EP voting dynamics, we might suppose that as intra-party cohesion decreases, consequentially the weight of national-driven factors increases, as reflected by the growing voting coherence of voting blocs patterned after member states' alleged national interests.

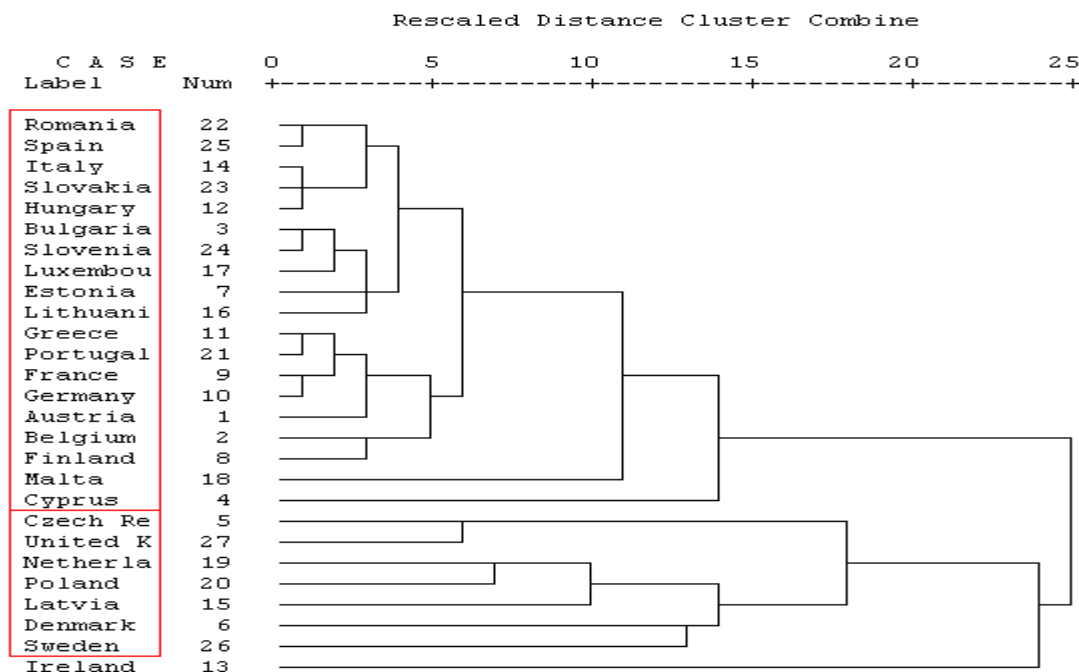
In other words, we might expect that as the party groups' (ideological) internal coherence decreases in the CRISIS-related votes; the voting coherence of inter-state blocs inside the EP grows. The aim of this section is to identify the factor(s) according to which the opposing/competing constellations of national delegations are defined.

As showed in the above-mentioned example, we can suppose that the generalized decrease in groups' internal coherence can be a consequence of MEPs' increasing likelihood to vote considerations of national

nature in domestically-significant votes such as those related to the debate on the ongoing economic crisis. However, what we do not know is how and according to which criteria do national lines cross cut and match each other. In other words, we do not know according to which patterns national delegations coalesce or oppose each other. As hypothesized in the previous sections, the emerging divide might reflect geo-territorial dimensions such as the East-West or North-South tension or the degree of participation in the structures of European integration or incorporate different endogenous factors.

In order to answer these questions a cluster analysis of the 27 national delegations in the EP has been ran on the basis of the delegations' *Dvap* scores for each of the 23 crisis-related votes taken into consideration.

Figure 4. - Clustering national delegations voting attitudes in crisis related votes



The dendrogram in figure 4 charts national delegations' patterns of coalition and opposition in the light of the degree of similarity or dissimilarity among their *Dvap* scores. The interval differences have been minimized according to the respective squared Euclidean distance, while the cluster method implies a between-groups linkage.

The dendrogram seems to highlight the presence of two macro-clusters and of five sub-clusters, including 26 out of 27 national delegations⁸. The key point that emerges from the dendrogram is indeed a clear divide between the delegations belonging to the Eurozone and those that do not participate to the European single currency. The macro classification along Euro membership lines presents very few exceptions. In particular, what can be labelled as the "Euro cluster", includes 15 out of the 16 computed Euro member states, with the exception of the Netherlands.

The second macro-cluster identified by the analysis includes 6 of the delegation that do not participate to the Eurozone, plus the Netherlands. Interestingly, the only non-Euro delegations falling in the "Euro cluster" are the Romanian, Hungarian, and Bulgarian ones. In this respect, all the three countries appear very much dependent from the EU's financial and economic support. In particular, Bucharest and Budapest have been included as recipient countries in the European Bank Coordination Initiative (better known as the "Vienna Initiative"), launched at the height of the financial crisis to prevent a large-scale and

uncoordinated withdrawal of cross-border bank groups in Central and Eastern Europe. The Vienna Initiative brought together the IMF, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the European Investment Bank, the World Bank, the EC and ECB. When it comes to Bulgaria, although the Bulgarian authorities are dismissing the claim as groundless, in the light of the ongoing economic and political crisis, Sofia appear increasingly likely to need further European assistance in order to safeguard its financial stability. In this respect, we should not forget that Bulgaria's represent by far the EU's poorest economy.

The two macro-clusters seem to suggest that the key factor behind MEPs' individual national oriented defections (as highlighted by the decline in groups' cohesion) and behind delegations' patterns of coalition and opposition is represented by their member states' participation to the Euro-area. In this respect, it is clearly understandable that participating and non-participating member states frame and understand their national interests in different ways, especially when it comes to sharing costs and benefits of possible ways out of the crisis, including, but not limited to the creation of a Eurobond regime or the implementation of the ESM.

Looking at the sub-clusters worth noting is the presence of geo-territorial/economic cleavages within the macro "Euro cluster". On the other hand, the effect of these additional cleavages seems residual if compared the Euro-zone membership. In particular, we can identify a Southern sub-cluster, including – among the others – Italy, Spain, and Romania; a Central and Eastern European cluster, including Bulgaria, Slovenia, Estonia, and Lithuania; and a cluster including the delegations of continental and Northern Europe, including France, Germany, Austria, Belgium, and Finland. Malta and Cyprus have been clustered separately, within the "Euro cluster". In the macro-cluster of the non-Euro delegations, worth mentioning is the Scandinavian sub-cluster, including Swedish and Danish delegations, and the iron axe between British and Czech MEPs, whose countries appear champions of Euro-scepticism, often openly opposing the idea of Euro itself.

Concluding considerations

The present study represents an attempt to explore the impact of nationally salient issues on the EP voting dynamics and legislators' alignments. In particular, we focused on the parliamentary debates concerning the current economic crisis that is affecting the EU and in particular the Eurozone.

Our belief is rather that the EP might represent the perfect laboratory to study the impact of cross-cleavage issues on the voting dynamics, given its multinational, multilingual and multicultural nature. On the other hand, the recent experience has proven that the EP is all but politically voiceless, despite its exceptional nature and multidimensionality.

The primary objective of this study is to assess to what extent and in which direction these general dynamics change when the debate on a highly salient issue, such as the economic crisis, is at stake and according to which factors. In this respect, competing partisan and nationally-driven narratives are presented, debated, and tested in the empirical section of this study. In this respect, the study of the parliamentary votes on the Euro-crisis presents a significant explanatory potential in the light of four characteristics of the votes themselves. More specifically, we assume the crisis-related votes to be: 1. transnational, 2. politically significant, 3. nationally-, 4. and ideologically-divisive.

In the light of our results and considering our objectives, the analysis proved successful and particularly

revealing. In particular, the comparison between the ECO and the CRISIS samples of votes highlights that, while in the economy-related votes, only tangentially connected to the management of the Euro-crisis, the presence of a burden-sharing approach and rally-'round-the-flag effect can be identified both with the main party groups and among them; the same cannot be said with respect to the latter. The assessment of party groups' cohesion and coalition patterns, before and during the crisis, shows a relevant and generalized decrease in voting coherence along partisan lines, thereby challenging the normalization paradigm, while not confirming the existence of a grand coalition. On the other hand, what emerges is the significant impact of exogenous interests and influences on the voting dynamics, as claimed by the mainstream nation-centred narrative.

The cluster analysis based on the degree of similarity and dissimilarity among the delegations' *Dvap* scores successfully categorized 26 delegations out of 27 in two macro-clusters, respectively consisting of five sub-clusters. Interestingly, the delegations' distribution can be hardly explained along the dimensions generally discussed in the literature. The key point that emerges from the dendrogram is indeed a clear divide between the delegations participating to the Eurozone and those that do not participate to the European single currency. The macro classification along Euro membership lines presents very few exceptions.

In this respect, explanatory dimensions such as ideology appear residual, in favour of a more utility-oriented discourse. The emerging of a new divide opposing Euro members and other delegations, although partially reflecting the national interest of the different member states, does not seem limited to it, but it appears to reflect the diverging positions of two coalitions of actors with different interests to safeguard in the management of the crisis. The same divergence of interests and geo-territorial differences seem to be at the basis of the definition of the five sub-clusters, distinguishing respectively among Southern, Central and Eastern European, Continental, and Scandinavian delegations. In particular, this appears especially true when it comes to the definition of the acceptable costs and benefits of possible ways out of the crisis, including, but not limited to, the creation of a Eurobond regime or the implementation of the ESM.

In conclusion, our comparative analysis provides a map to identify an emerging dimension of conflict in the case of the debate on the ongoing economic crisis, thereby structurally affecting the 'government'-opposition dynamics and the coalition trends in the EP and questioning the universal validity of the claims towards a progressive normalization and parliamentarization of the EP. More in general, our study seems to introduce an empirically rigorous comparative method of analysis bridging *particulare* and *generale* which might be easily applied to other sensitive cross-cleavage policy areas.

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Appendix – Crisis-related votes included in the analysis

- 2080 [Economic & monetary affairs] Financial, economic and social crisis: measures and initiatives to be taken - Motion for a resolution : Paragraph 44/1 06.07.2011
- 2076 [Economic & monetary affairs] Financial, economic and social crisis: measures and initiatives to be taken - Motion for a resolution : Paragraph 13 06.07.2011
- 2083 [Economic & monetary affairs] Financial, economic and social crisis: measures and initiatives to be taken - Motion for a resolution : Paragraph 73 06.07.2011
- 2081 [Economic & monetary affairs] Financial, economic and social crisis: measures and initiatives to be taken - Motion for a resolution : Paragraph 44/2 06.07.2011
- 2079 [Economic & monetary affairs] Financial, economic and social crisis: measures and initiatives to be taken - Motion for a resolution : Paragraph 30, amendment 30 06.07.2011
- 2077 [Economic & monetary affairs] Financial, economic and social crisis: measures and initiatives to be taken - Motion for a resolution : Paragraph 29/1 06.07.2011
- 2087 [Economic & monetary affairs] Financial, economic and social crisis: measures and initiatives to be taken - Motion for a resolution : Paragraph 91 06.07.2011
- 2090 [Economic & monetary affairs] Financial, economic and social crisis: measures and initiatives to be taken - Motion for a resolution : Paragraph 107 06.07.2011
- 2088 [Economic & monetary affairs] Financial, economic and social crisis: measures and initiatives to be taken - Motion for a resolution : Paragraph 95 06.07.2011
- 2082 [Economic & monetary affairs] Financial, economic and social crisis: measures and initiatives to be taken - Motion for a resolution : Paragraph 57 06.07.2011
- 2086 [Economic & monetary affairs] Financial, economic and social crisis: measures and initiatives to be taken - Motion for a resolution : Paragraph 82 06.07.2011
- 2084 [Economic & monetary affairs] Financial, economic and social crisis: measures and initiatives to be taken - Motion for a resolution : Paragraph 76 06.07.2011
- 2085 [Economic & monetary affairs] Financial, economic and social crisis: measures and initiatives to be taken - Motion for a resolution : Paragraph 81 06.07.2011
- 2078 [Economic & monetary affairs] Financial, economic and social crisis: measures and initiatives to be taken - Motion for a resolution : Paragraph 29/2 06.07.2011
- 2091 [Economic & monetary affairs] Financial, economic and social crisis: measures and initiatives to be taken - Motion for a resolution : vote: resolution (text as a whole) 06.07.2011
- 2089 [Economic & monetary affairs] Financial, economic and social crisis: measures and initiatives to be taken - Motion for a resolution : After paragraph 99, amendment 18=36/2 06.07.2011
- 1344 [Economic & monetary affairs] Motions for resolutions - Establishing a permanent crisis mechanism to safeguard the financial stability of the euro area - Motion for a resolution : Paragraph 20 16.12.2010
- 1343 [Economic & monetary affairs] Motions for resolutions - Establishing a permanent crisis mechanism to safeguard the financial stability of the euro area - Motion for a resolution : Paragraph 19 16.12.2010
- 1342 [Economic & monetary affairs] Motions for resolutions - Establishing a permanent crisis mechanism to safeguard the financial stability of the euro area - Motion for a resolution : After paragraph 15, amendment 2/2 16.12.2010
- 1341 [Economic & monetary affairs] Motions for resolutions - Establishing a permanent crisis mechanism to safeguard the financial stability of the euro area - Motion for a resolution : After paragraph 15, amendment 2/1 16.12.2010

- 1340 [Economic & monetary affairs] Motions for resolutions - Establishing a permanent crisis mechanism to safeguard the financial stability of the euro area - Motion for a resolution : After paragraph 14, amendment 12 16.12.2010
- 1339 [Economic & monetary affairs] Motions for resolutions - Establishing a permanent crisis mechanism to safeguard the financial stability of the euro area - Motion for a resolution : Paragraph 9/2 16.12.2010
- 1346 [Economic & monetary affairs] Motions for resolutions - Establishing a permanent crisis mechanism to safeguard the financial stability of the euro area - Motion for a resolution : vote: resolution (text as a whole) 16.12.2010
- 1345 [Economic & monetary affairs] Motions for resolutions - Establishing a permanent crisis mechanism to safeguard the financial stability of the euro area - Motion for a resolution : Recital C/2 16.12.2010
- 1074 [Economic & monetary affairs] Financial, economic and social crisis: recommendations concerning the measures and initiatives to be taken - Motion for a resolution : After paragraph 181, amendment 3 20.10.2010
- 1073 [Economic & monetary affairs] Financial, economic and social crisis: recommendations concerning the measures and initiatives to be taken - Motion for a resolution : Paragraph 103 20.10.2010
- 1070 [Economic & monetary affairs] Financial, economic and social crisis: recommendations concerning the measures and initiatives to be taken - Motion for a resolution : Paragraph 83 20.10.2010
- 1072 [Economic & monetary affairs] Financial, economic and social crisis: recommendations concerning the measures and initiatives to be taken - Motion for a resolution : Paragraph 101 20.10.2010
- 1076 [Economic & monetary affairs] Financial, economic and social crisis: recommendations concerning the measures and initiatives to be taken - Motion for a resolution : vote: resolution (text as a whole) 20.10.2010
- 1075 [Economic & monetary affairs] Financial, economic and social crisis: recommendations concerning the measures and initiatives to be taken - Motion for a resolution : Paragraph 190 20.10.2010
- 1071 [Economic & monetary affairs] Financial, economic and social crisis: recommendations concerning the measures and initiatives to be taken - Motion for a resolution : Paragraph 92 20.10.2010
- 1069 [Economic & monetary affairs] Financial, economic and social crisis: recommendations concerning the measures and initiatives to be taken - Motion for a resolution : Paragraph 77 20.10.2010
- 1068 [Economic & monetary affairs] Financial, economic and social crisis: recommendations concerning the measures and initiatives to be taken - Motion for a resolution : Paragraph 68 20.10.2010

¹ See <http://www.votewatch.eu/>.

² The votes computed in the cohesion test for the 7th EP include the 33 crisis-related RCVs (CRISIS sample) and the 1342 RCVs held in the current EP until our last observation held on 15 January 2013 (ALL sample). The ECO sample includes 125 votes on 'Economic and Monetary Affairs', accounting for almost 10% of the total. In the 6th EP the ALL sample includes 6149 votes, while the ECO sample includes 412 votes. Interestingly, the number of votes on 'Economic and Monetary Affairs' has dramatically grown in the current term. No additional selection criterion has been applied at this stage.

³ Marin-Bosh's Coincidence Index is calculated as follows: $[2(\text{total identical votes}) + (\text{total abstentions/yes} + \text{abstention/no})] / 2(\text{total resolutions both voted})$. See Marin-bosh (1998: 118).

⁴ The RCVs included in the analysis have been selected according to the following criterion. Only the bills with the modal voting option lower than or equal to 90% have been considered in the analysis. Following the selection procedure, a total of 23 (out of 33) RCVs held on crisis-related issues have been included in the analysis, representing almost 70% of the entire universe of eligible RCVs.

⁵ There are two major methods of clustering, namely hierarchical clustering and k-means clustering. In the former the data are not partitioned into a particular cluster in a single step but by means of a step-by-step vertical process, which implies a single cluster at the top containing all objects and n clusters in the bottom each including a single object. We preferred the former since this method – unlike the k-means clustering - allows the researcher to identify each phase of the process of segmentation, thereby delineating distinct subgroups (if any) within a broader cluster. Hierarchical clustering may be represented by a two dimensional diagram known as dendrogram which illustrates the fusions (upwards) or divisions (downwards) made at each successive stage of analysis and defined by the degrees of similarity.

⁶ 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://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getLastRules.do?language=EN&reference=TOC>).

⁷ It is worth clarifying that, given the structurally high level of internal cohesion of the three mainstream parties, even a drop of a few percentage points in the groups’ cohesion rate represents a significant indicator of decreasing internal voting coherence.

⁸ The Irish delegation was classified as not belonging to any cluster.