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List of Abbreviations

ACTA	Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement
ALDE	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CD&V	Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams (Christian Democratic and Flemish)
cdH	Centre démocrate humaniste (Humanist Democratic Centre)
CSP	Christlich Soziale Partei (Christian Social Party)
ECB	European Central Bank
Ecolo	Écologistes Confédérés pour l'organisation de luttes originales (Confederated ecologists for the organisation of original struggles)
ECR	European Conservatives and Reformists Group
EEAS	European External Action Service
EFD	Europe of Freedom and Democracy
EPP	European People's Party
ETS	Emissions Trading Scheme
EU	European Union
F.V.	Frank Vanhecke (ex-Vlaams Belang member, MEP for the EFD)
FTT	Financial transaction tax
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services
GMO	Genetically Modified Organism
Greens/EFA	Greens/European Free Alliance
GUE-NGL	European United Left-Nordic Green Left
LDD	Lijst Dedecker (List Dedecker)
MEP	Member of European Parliament
MFF	Multinannual Financial Framework
MR	Mouvement réformateur (Reformist Movement)
NI	Non-inscrits (Non-Affiliated Members)
N-VA	Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (New Flemish Alliance)
Open Vld	Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten (Flemish Open Liberals and Democrats)
PS	Parti socialiste (Socialist Party)
S&D	Socialists & Democrats
sp.a	Socialistische Partij Anders (Socialist Party Different)
SSM	Single Supervisory Mechanism
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
TTIP	Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
VAT	Value added tax
VB	Vlaams Belang
Euratom (EAEC)	European Atomic Energy Community

Executive Summary

This Working Paper focuses on the voting behaviour of the Belgian Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) during the 2009-2014 legislative term. It discusses the general voting behaviour of the Belgian MEPs, as well as how they voted during more controversial votes in the European Parliament. To this end, 16 key votes have been identified in collaboration with our European partners VoteWatch Europe, Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute, and 17 other partner organisations.

During the legislative term 2009-2014, the European Parliament counted 22 Belgian members. In Belgium, political parties are divided both on the basis of ideology and language group. As a result, MEPs from Belgium are spread across more national parties than is the case for most other Member States. In total, twelve Belgian parties are represented in the European Parliament. In addition, one Belgian MEP is an independent. Thus on average, a Belgian political party in the European Parliament has less than two representatives in the European Parliament. No single Belgian political party has more than three MEPs.

The degree of loyalty of Belgian MEPs towards their European political group is a key element in this publication. Loyalty is to be understood as an MEP voting in the same manner as most of the MEPs from his or her European political group. High loyalty should hence not be perceived as unequivocally good and a low loyalty as unequivocally bad. A degree of loyalty is needed for the proper functioning of European political groups, but less loyalty can be an indicator of an MEP's independence in performing his or her parliamentary activities.

This publication first provides an overview of the overall loyalty of Belgian MEPs towards their European political group over the 2009-2014 period. Subsequently, it analyses the 16 key votes. The findings are similar in both cases: most of the Belgian MEPs are highly loyal towards their European political group, exceeding the average loyalty of the group. Likely reasons for the high loyalty are the general pro-European tendency in Belgium and the traditional high party loyalty in Belgian politics. Two notable exceptions apply to this high loyalty: the Flemish regionalist N-VA and the French-speaking centrist cdH prove to be outliers in their groups.

The N-VA has turned out to be to a large extent a dissident in the green/regionalist group. The current MEP from the N-VA, Mark Demesmaeker, is the least loyal MEP of his group. The difference in voting behaviour is most pronounced during contentious votes. In the 16 key votes, the N-VA only voted 6 times in the same manner as the green/regionalist group. The fact that the N-VA can be considered as a right-leaning party, while its group in the European Parliament is at the left of the political spectrum provides a major part of the explanation.

The problematic relation between the N-VA and the green/regionalist group will most likely lead to a departure of the Flemish party from the group. In terms of past voting behaviour, the N-VA would fit in well with the liberal group (ALDE). However, in strategic terms the centrist EPP appears to be the most attractive group for the N-VA to join. Joining ALDE instead of the EPP would notably link the N-VA to the strong pro-European integration stance of Open Vld, which would be in contrast to the Flemish regionalists' more reserved views towards the EU.

While the cdH is less loyal to the EPP than the average member of that group, the difference is less pronounced than is the case for the N-VA's loyalty towards its group. Nonetheless, Anne Delvaux (cdH) is among the least loyal MEPs in her group. The difference in political orientation again is a key explanation of the limited loyalty: the cdH can be considered to be centre-left, while the EPP has a more centre-right orientation. As the future MEP from cdH (Claude Rolin) stems from the left wing of the party, the tension between the cdH's preferences and the EPP's voting positions is likely to intensify over the next years. Yet, it does not seem likely that the cdH will leave the EPP.

Belgian MEPs from the same national party are overall highly cohesive when voting. In the 16 votes that were analysed, only MEPs from Open Vld at times lacked internal coordination. Across national parties, there appears to be some voting coordination between the parties of a same European group, yet this is far from being systematic.

This research did not detect voting coordination among Belgian MEPs beyond the parties belonging to the same European group. This illustrates the good integration of Belgian MEPs in European politics, instead of a predominant focus on national interests. The latter does not necessarily imply that Belgian MEPs are active parts of the European Parliament. The frequent absence of Jean-Luc Dehaene and Derk Jan Eppink indicate that they are less involved in the voting process. In any case, future MEPs will have to demonstrate in the Parliament's Committees and elsewhere that they are able to shape the outcome of the European Parliament's work - and hence influence the lives of Belgian and European citizens.

Samenvatting (NL)

Deze Working Paper richt zich op het stemgedrag van de Belgische leden van het Europees Parlement tijdens de voorbije legislatuur (2009-2014). De publicatie bespreekt het algemeen stemgedrag van de Belgische Europarlementariërs, alsook hoe ze stemden tijdens controversiële stemmingen. Betreffende dit laatste werden 16 belangrijke stemmingen geselecteerd, in samenwerking met onze Europese partners VoteWatch Europe, Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute en 17 andere partnerorganisaties.

Tijdens de 2009-2014 legislatuur telde het Europees Parlement 22 Belgische leden. Politieke partijen zijn in België verdeeld op basis van ideologie en taalgroep. Als gevolg hiervan zijn de Belgische Europarlementariërs verspreid over meer nationale partijen dan het geval is voor de meeste andere Lidstaten. In totaal zijn 12 Belgische partijen vertegenwoordigd in het Europees Parlement. Daarenboven zetelt één Belgisch parlamentslid als onafhankelijke. Een Belgische politieke partij telt in het Europees Parlement bijgevolg gemiddeld minder dan twee leden.

De mate van loyaliteit van Belgische Europarlementariërs ten opzichte van hun Europese fractie vormt de kern van dit onderzoek. Loyaliteit wordt ingevuld als de mate waarin een parlamentslid op dezelfde manier stemt als zijn of haar fractie. Hoge loyaliteit moet daarom niet worden gezien als eenduidig goed en lage loyaliteit als eenduidig slecht. Hoewel een zekere mate van loyaliteit nodig is voor het functioneren van de Europese fracties, kan lagere loyaliteit een indicatie zijn van de onafhankelijkheid van een parlamentslid in zijn of haar parlementaire activiteiten.

Een eerste deel van deze publicatie geeft een overzicht van de loyaliteit van Belgische Europarlementariërs ten opzichte van hun Europese fractie tijdens de ganse periode 2009-2014. Daarna volgt een analyse van de 16 belangrijke stemmingen. De bevindingen zijn gelijklopend: de meeste Belgische parlamentsleden zijn zeer trouw aan hun Europese fractie, trouwer dan het gemiddelde lid van hun fractie. Het is waarschijnlijk dat deze hoge loyaliteit een gevolg is van de algemene pro-Europese tendens in België, alsook de traditioneel hoge partijloyaliteit in de Belgische politiek. Er zijn twee opmerkelijke uitzonderingen op deze hoge loyaliteit: de Vlaams regionalistische N-VA enerzijds en de Franstalige centrumpartij cdH anderzijds.

De N-VA bleek tijdens de legislatuur in belangrijke mate een dissident in haar groene/regionalistische fractie. Het huidig Europarlementslid van de N-VA, Mark Demesmaeker, is het minst loyale lid van zijn fractie. Het verschil in stemgedrag tussen de N-VA en de rest van de fractie is het grootst tijdens controversiële stemmingen. Tijdens de 16 belangrijke stemmingen, kwam het slechts 6 keer voor dat de N-VA hetzelfde stemgedrag had als de groenen/regionalisten. Het feit dat de N-VA wordt gezien als een eerder rechtse partij, terwijl haar Europese fractie zich links op het politiek spectrum bevindt, is een belangrijke verklaring voor de lage loyaliteit van de N-VA.

De gespannen relatie tussen de N-VA en de groene/regionalistische fractie zal waarschijnlijk leiden tot het vertrek van de Vlaamse partij uit haar fractie. Op het vlak van stemgedrag zou de N-VA goed passen in de liberale fractie (ALDE) van het Europees Parlement. Vanuit strategisch oogpunt kan het echter aantrekkelijker zijn voor de N-VA om de Europese Volkspartij (EVP) te vervoegen. Lid worden van de liberale fractie in plaats van de EVP zou de

N-VA immers sterk linken aan de pro-Europese visie van de Open Vld. Die visie zou contrasteren met de meer gereserveerde houding van de N-VA ten opzichte van de EU.

Terwijl de cdH licht minder loyaal is dan het gemiddelde lid van de EVP is dit verschil minder uitgesproken dan de lagere loyaliteit van de N-VA ten opzichte van haar fractie. Desalniettemin is Anne Delvaux (cdH) één van de minst loyale leden van haar fractie. Het verschil in politieke visie is ook hier een belangrijke reden voor de lagere loyaliteit: de cdH wordt als een centrumlinkse partij beschouwd, terwijl de EVP een eerder centrumrechtse visie heeft. Aangezien het toekomstig Europarlementslid van de cdH (Claude Rolin) uit de linkervleugel van de partij komt, zal de spanning tussen de visie van de cdH en het stemgedrag van de EVP waarschijnlijk toenemen. Echter, het lijkt weinig waarschijnlijk dat de cdH zou kiezen om de EVP te verlaten.

Belgische Europarlementariërs van eenzelfde nationale partij zijn over het algemeen eendrachtig in hun stemgedrag. Tijdens de 16 stemmingen die werden geanalyseerd bleek enkel Open Vld soms interne coördinatie te missen. Over de partijgrenzen heen is er een zekere mate van coördinatie tussen partijen van eenzelfde Belgische politieke familie, hoewel die coördinatie verre van systematisch is.

Dit onderzoek heeft inzake stemgedrag geen coördinatie vastgesteld tussen Belgische partijen van verschillende Europese fracties. Dit illustreert dat Belgische Europarlementariërs goed geïntegreerd zijn in de Europese politiek, in plaats van een overheersende focus te hebben op nationale belangen. Dat betekent echter niet noodzakelijk dat Belgische Europarlementariërs ook actieve leden van het Europees Parlement zijn. De frequente afwezigheid tijdens stemmingen van Jean-Luc Dehaene en Derk Jan Eppink wijzen op een geringere betrokkenheid in het stemproces. Wat alvast vaststaat, is dat toekomstige Europarlementariërs in de parlementaire commissies en elders zullen moeten bewijzen dat ze het parlementaire werk mee vorm geven - om op die manier een positieve invloed te hebben op de levens van de Belgische- en Europese burgers.

Résumé (FR)

Ce Working Paper s'intéresse au comportement de vote des eurodéputés belges durant la législature 2009-2014. Il analyse le comportement général de vote des eurodéputés belges, mais également la façon dont ils ont voté durant les votes les plus controversés du Parlement européen. A cette fin, 16 votes clés ont été identifiés en collaboration avec nos partenaires européens VoteWatch Europe, Notre Europe - Institut Jacques Delors, ainsi que dix-sept autres organisations partenaires.

Durant la législature 2009-2014, le Parlement européen comptait vingt-deux députés belges. En Belgique, les partis politiques sont divisés selon un clivage à la fois idéologique et linguistique. En conséquence, les eurodéputés belges se trouvent répartis dans un plus grand nombre de partis nationaux que ce n'est habituellement le cas pour les autres Etats membres. Au total, douze partis belges sont représentés au Parlement européen. En outre, un eurodéputé belge y siège comme indépendant. Ainsi, un parti politique belge au Parlement européen compte en moyenne moins de deux représentants. Aucun parti belge n'a plus de trois eurodéputés.

Dans ce Working Paper, le degré de loyauté des eurodéputés belges envers leur groupe politique européen est un élément-clé. Un eurodéputé est considéré comme étant « loyal » lorsqu'il vote de manière identique à la majorité des eurodéputés de son groupe parlementaire. Une loyauté importante ne devrait cependant pas être perçue comme forcément bonne, et une loyauté faible comme forcément mauvaise. Un certain degré de loyauté est nécessaire pour le bon fonctionnement des groupes parlementaires, mais moins de loyauté peut également être un signe d'indépendance de l'eurodéputé(e) dans l'exercice de ses activités parlementaires.

Cette publication fournit d'abord une vue d'ensemble sur la loyauté générale des eurodéputés belges envers leur groupe politique européen entre 2009 et 2014. Ensuite, elle analyse les seize votes sélectionnés. Les conclusions sont similaires dans les deux cas : la plupart des eurodéputés belges sont très loyaux envers leur groupe parlementaire, dépassant même la loyauté moyenne du groupe. Les raisons probables sous-tendant cette loyauté sont la tendance pro-européenne en Belgique et la haute loyauté traditionnelle des partis en politique belge. Deux exceptions notables sont toutefois à noter: la N-VA, parti flamand régionaliste, et dans une moindre mesure, le cdH, parti centriste francophone, se singularisent parmi leur groupe.

La N-VA s'est largement révélée être dissidente au sein du groupe des verts/régionalistes. L'actuel eurodéputé de la N-VA, Mark Demesmaeker, est l'eurodéputé le moins loyal de son groupe. La différence dans le comportement de vote est encore plus prononcée lors des votes controversés. Parmi ces seize votes, la N-VA n'a voté qu'à six reprises de la même manière que le groupe des verts/régionalistes. Le fait que la N-VA peut être considérée comme un parti de droite, alors que son groupe se situe à la gauche du spectre politique au Parlement européen, explique en grande partie cette situation.

La relation problématique qu'entretient la N-VA avec le groupe des verts/régionalistes devrait sans nul doute conduire le parti flamand à quitter son groupe. En considérant son comportement de vote antérieur, la N-VA s'intégrerait bien dans le groupe libéral (ADLE). Cependant, d'un point de vue stratégique, le Parti populaire européen (PPE) - centriste -

apparaît être le groupe le plus attractif pour la N-VA. En effet, rejoindre l'ADLE plutôt que le PPE rattacherait notamment la N-VA à la position forte de l'Open Vld sur l'intégration pro-européenne, ce qui contrasterait avec les vues plus réservées de la N-VA sur l'Union européenne.

La discordance entre le cdH et le PPE est moins prononcée que dans le cas de la loyauté de la N-VA envers son propre groupe. Néanmoins, Anne Delvaux (cdH) fait partie des eurodéputés les moins loyaux du PPE. La différence d'orientation politique fournit encore une fois un élément important d'explication de cette loyauté limitée : le cdH peut être considéré comme étant de centre-gauche, alors que le PPE est de centre-droit. En outre, comme le futur eurodéputé du cdH (Claude Rolin) est issu de l'aile gauche du parti, la tension entre les inclinations du cdH et les positions de vote du PPE ne devrait pas s'atténuer durant les prochaines années. Toutefois, il ne semble pas probable que le cdH en vienne à quitter le PPE.

Les eurodéputés belges du même parti national font en général preuve d'une très forte cohésion lorsqu'ils votent. Pour les seize votes qui ont été analysés, seuls les eurodéputés de l'Open Vld ont parfois exprimé des voix divergentes. Par ailleurs, il semble qu'une coordination de vote existe à l'occasion entre partis belges de la même famille politique, bien que cela soit loin d'être systématique.

Cette recherche n'a cependant pas décelé de coordination de vote parmi les eurodéputés belges au-delà des partis appartenant au même groupe européen. Cela illustre la bonne intégration des eurodéputés belges dans la politique européenne où les intérêts strictement nationaux jouent peu. Mais ceci n'implique pas pour autant que les eurodéputés belges jouent un rôle actif au Parlement européen. Les fréquentes absences de Jean-Luc Dehaene et de Derk Jan Eppink indiquent qu'ils sont en tout cas peu impliqués dans le processus de vote. Dans tous les cas, les futurs eurodéputés auront à démontrer tant dans les Comités du Parlement qu'ailleurs qu'ils sont capables de modeler le résultat du travail du Parlement européen - et ainsi influencer la vie des citoyens belges et européens.

The Voting Behaviour of Belgian MEPs during 16 Key Votes: What lessons from the 2009-2014 legislature?

Introduction

Parliaments play a pivotal role in democracies, including in the EU. As EU politics tends to receive less public attention than national politics, it is often difficult for citizens to assess the functioning of their representatives in the European Parliament. Due to the fact that European citizens are invited to cast their ballots during the upcoming May elections, such an assessment is nonetheless of much importance. This Working Paper intends to shed a light on the activities of Belgian Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) during the 2009-2014 legislative term.

A crucial factor in evaluating the role of MEPs is the degree to which they have adapted to the cross-border organisation of the European Parliament. In their work, MEPs have to balance several considerations. They are expected to act on the basis of their ideological views, but national interests do of course play a role as well. An important aim of this Working Paper is to grasp the extent to which Belgian MEPs act in accordance from either a national or a European point of view.

In order to provide an assessment of the activities of Belgian MEPs over the period 2009-2014, this publication focusses on the voting behaviour of the Belgian representatives in the European Parliament. The publication is part of the pan-European project “European Parliament votes that shaped EU and national politics 2009-2014”. The project is coordinated by VoteWatch Europe and Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute. As part of the project, partner organisations in 18 Member States assess how their MEPs behaved during the key votes of the past legislature. The overall conclusion will be published in a separate publication.

The first chapter of this Working Paper provides an overview of the European Parliament’s organisation, its political groups and the Belgian MEPs. Subsequently, chapter 2 provides an assessment of the integration of Belgian MEPs in the European Parliament’s functioning. The chapter more precisely focuses on the loyalty of Belgian MEPs towards their political groups in the European Parliaments: how often do Belgian MEPs deviate from the policy stance of their political group?

While a general picture of the loyalty of Belgian MEPs towards their political group is telling for their functioning in the European Parliament, it is arguably more important to know how Belgian representatives act when the stakes are particularly high. In this regard, chapter three of this Working Paper discusses some of the most important votes of the past legislature, which

were selected together with our European partners. In total, 16 key votes that took place over the last five years are included in the chapter. For each vote, specific attention is paid to the voting behaviour of the Belgian MEPs. Based on their voting during these key 16 votes, chapter 4 provides the overall findings of how Belgian MEPs vote when it really matters.

Finally, a conclusion draws together the main elements of this Working Paper. Besides an assessment of how Belgian MEPs behave in the European Parliament, the conclusion focuses on the major exceptions among Belgian MEPs.

1. About the European Parliament and Belgian MEPs

What is known today as the European Parliament was founded in 1952 as the ‘Common Assembly’ of the European Coal and Steel Community. It was composed of members from the national parliaments of Member States, and held no legislative powers. In 1962, this Assembly was renamed the ‘European Parliament’. Since 1979, members of the institution are directly elected by the citizens for a period of five years. Over time and the succession of Treaties, the institution has gradually increased its powers as legislator and supervisor of the European Commission. With the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the Parliament has become an equal partner with the Council in almost all policy areas with respect to the legislative procedure. The increasing role of the European Parliament in the European integration history is thus quite impressive.

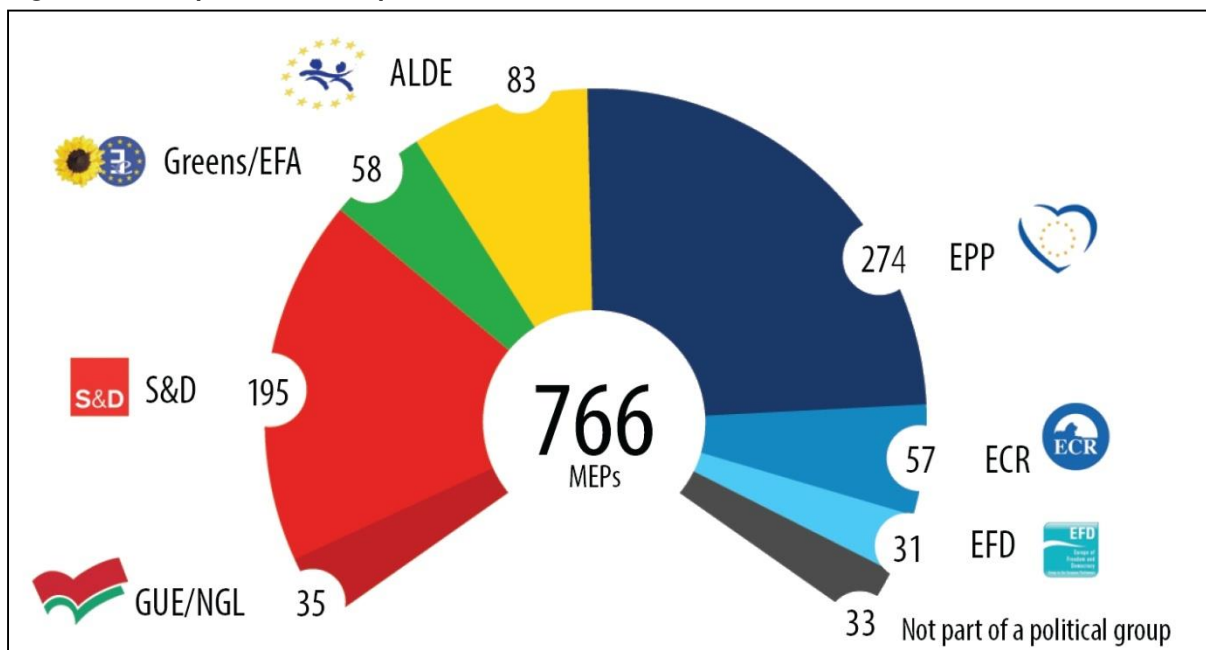
During most of the 2009-2014 legislative term, the European Parliament counted 754 members from the 27 Member States. When Croatia joined the EU in July 2013, 12 seats were added for a total of 766 seats. In accordance with the Treaty of Lisbon, this number will be reduced to 751 after the May 2014 elections in order to keep the size of the European Parliament in check. Many countries will thus lose at least one seat, which is the case for Belgium.

The number of seats is not attributed on the sole basis of national population, as the latter would leave small Member States very little voice in the European Parliament. According to the principle of “degressive proportionality” enshrined in the Treaty, smaller Member States see themselves granted more members of the European Parliament (MEPs) comparatively to their population than bigger Member States.

The MEPs are organised according to their political affinity, not their nationality. Seven groups compose the European Parliament, ranging from far-left to right-wing Eurosceptics, in addition to Non-Affiliated MEPs (NI):

- **European United Left-Nordic Green Left - GUE-NGL** (35 MEPs): it comprises mostly communists and far-left socialists;
- **Greens/European Free Alliance - Greens/EFA** (58 MEPs): left-wing group that represents an alliance between European greens and regionalist parties (grouped under the European Free Alliance);
- **Socialists & Democrats - S&D** (195 MEPs): the biggest leftist group, constituted of social democrats and socialists;
- **European People’s Party - EPP** (274 MEPs): generally perceived as centre-right, it is by far the biggest group in the 2009-2014 Parliament;
- **Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe - ALDE** (84 MEPs): the liberal and third-biggest group in the Parliament;
- **European Conservatives and Reformists Group - ECR** (57 MEPs): a conservative and Eurosceptic group. The ECR was created by the British Conservatives after they left the EPP in 2009;
- **Europe of Freedom and Democracy - EFD** (31 MEPs): the most Eurosceptic group in the Parliament. The UK Independence Party (UKIP) is the main national party in this group;
- **Non-affiliated MEPs (Non-inscrits) - NI** (32 MEPs): they are not part of a European group in the Parliament. Many of these MEPs are members of a far-right national party. In the next Parliament, they might create their own group in the Parliament.

Figure 1: Groups in the European Parliament



Source: Adapted from the European Parliament

From the 766 MEPs, 22 MEPs originate from Belgium. This number will be reduced to 21 MEPs in the next session of the European Parliament. Table 2 shows to which European parliamentary group and Belgian party each of these MEPs belong.

In Belgium, political parties are divided both on the basis of ideology and language group. As a result, the 22 Belgian MEPs are spread across more national parties than is the case for most other Member States. In total, twelve Belgian parties are represented in the European Parliament, whereas, on average, there are about seven parties by Member State. Belgian MEPs are represented in almost all European groups, at the exception of the GUE-NGL. Consequently, a Belgian party in the European Parliament counts on average less than two members, whereas the European average is almost four MEPs/national party. We can see (Table 1) that no single Belgian political party has more than three MEPs, and that no European parliamentary group counts more than five Belgian MEPs. In addition, one Belgian MEP (Frank Vanhecke) became an independent MEP in the EFD group since he left his national party - the Vlaams Belang - in July 2011.

It might seem strange for Belgians that the Flemish regionalist party N-VA is member of the same group as the green parties. This is due to an alliance between the European regionalist parties to which the N-VA belongs and the European Greens. However, while most members of the regionalist parties have a progressive/left point of view, the N-VA is a right-wing party.

Table 1: Description of the Belgian parties and their affiliated MEPs

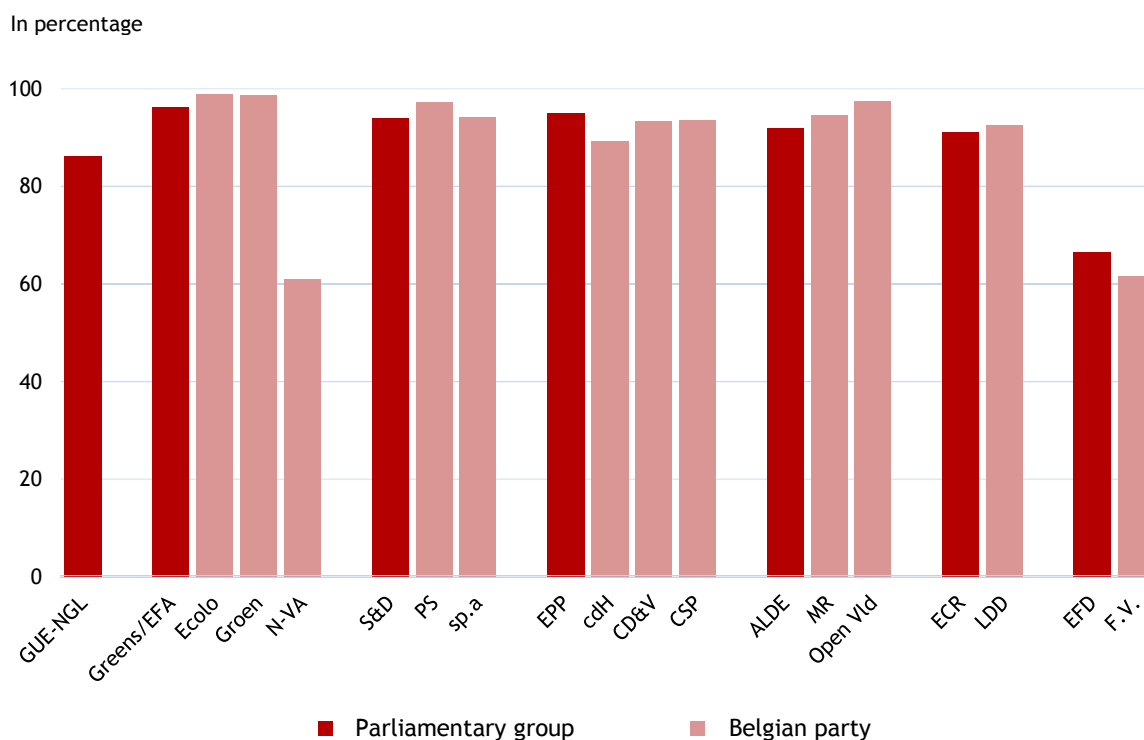
Parliamentary Groups	Belgian Parties	Description	MEPs
Greens/EFA	Ecolo	French-speaking green party	Isabelle Durant Philippe Lamberts
	Groen	Dutch-speaking green party	Bart Staes
	N-VA	Dutch-speaking regionalist party	Mark Demesmaeker (formerly Frieda Brepoels)
S&D	PS	French-speaking socialist party	Frédéric Daerden Véronique de Keyser Marc Tarabella (formerly Jean-Claude Marcourt)
	sp.a	Dutch-speaking socialist party	Saïd El Khadraoui Kathleen Van Brempt
EPP	cdH	French-speaking centrist party	Anne Delvaux
	CD&V	Dutch-speaking Christian democrat party	Ivo Belet Jean-Luc Dehaene Marianne Thyssen
	CSP	German-speaking Christian democrat party	Mathieu Grosch
ALDE	MR	French-speaking liberal party	Louis Michel Frédérique Ries
	Open Vld	Dutch-speaking liberal party	Philippe de Backer (formerly Dirk Sterckx) Annemie Neyts-Uyttebrouck Guy Verhofstadt
ECR	LDD	Dutch-speaking libertarian party	Derk Jan Eppink
EFD	/	Independent (formerly Vlaams Belang)	Frank Vanhecke
NI	Vlaams Belang	Dutch-speaking far-right party	Philip Claey's

2. Loyalty of Belgian MEPs towards their European political group

Loyalty in this publication is to be understood as whether a MEP voted in the same manner as most of the MEPs from his or her European political group. Loyalty should hence not be perceived as unequivocally good and a lack of loyalty as unequivocally bad. A degree of loyalty is needed for the functioning of the European political groups, but less loyalty can also indicate the independence of an MEP in performing his or her parliamentary activities.¹

In figure 3, the loyalty of Belgian MEPs is compared to the average loyalty in their European group.² The loyalty in the voting behaviour of most Belgian MEPs towards their European political group during the 2009-2014 legislative term is higher than the average loyalty of MEPs in their respective groups. Different reasons are likely to explain this overall high loyalty. First of all, the general pro-European tendency in Belgium might be an important factor. As a result of this pro-Europeanism, Belgian MEPs rarely vote against an increase in the level of European integration when their political group favours the measure. A second part of the explanation could lie in the traditional high loyalty of parliamentarians in Belgium. In Belgian parliaments, voting cohesion inside a political group tends to be very high. Belgian MEPs might have replicated this loyalty in the European Parliament.

Figure 3: Average group loyalty between 2009 and 2014 for Belgian parties



When one looks closer at the loyalty of each Belgian party towards their European political group, we can see that they are all above or very close to the average loyalty in their

¹ See the annex for more detail on the methodology.

² Vlaams Belang, the far-right Flemish party, is not included in the figure because it is not affiliated to any European parliamentary group.

parliamentary group, with three exceptions: the French-speaking centrist cdH, the Flemish regionalist party N-VA and ex-Vlaams Belang MEP Frank Vanhecke.

The French-speaking centrist party cdH is slightly less loyal than the average member of the EPP. This can be explained by the fact that cdH has progressively drifted towards a centre-left stance, while continuing to belong to the large centre-right EPP group. The only cdH MEP, Anne Delvaux, recognises herself that her socially-oriented views do not always align with those of the more right-wing EPP. Consequently, she is one of the least loyal MEPs in the EPP.³

Far more markedly than the cdH, the N-VA has proven to be much less loyal to its European political group (greens/regionalist) than the average member of that political group. Mark Demesmaeker (N-VA is even the least loyal MEP of his group. The fact that the N-VA can be considered as a right-leaning party while its European political group is mostly at the left of the political spectrum provides a major part of the explanation. This leads to the question whether the N-VA fits adequately in its current political group.

Finally, the MEP Frank Vanhecke has a lower loyalty than the average MEPs from EFD. This group, which already has the lowest rate of loyalty of all groups in the European Parliament, might be suffering from a lack of common vision on Europe and/or an emphasis on national interests that deprive the EFD group of a greater degree of cohesion.

³ 89.2% of roll-call votes of Anne Delvaux followed the majority of EPP MEPs. This figure is lower than for the average EPP MEP (about 95% of roll-call votes).

3. Analysis of 16 key votes

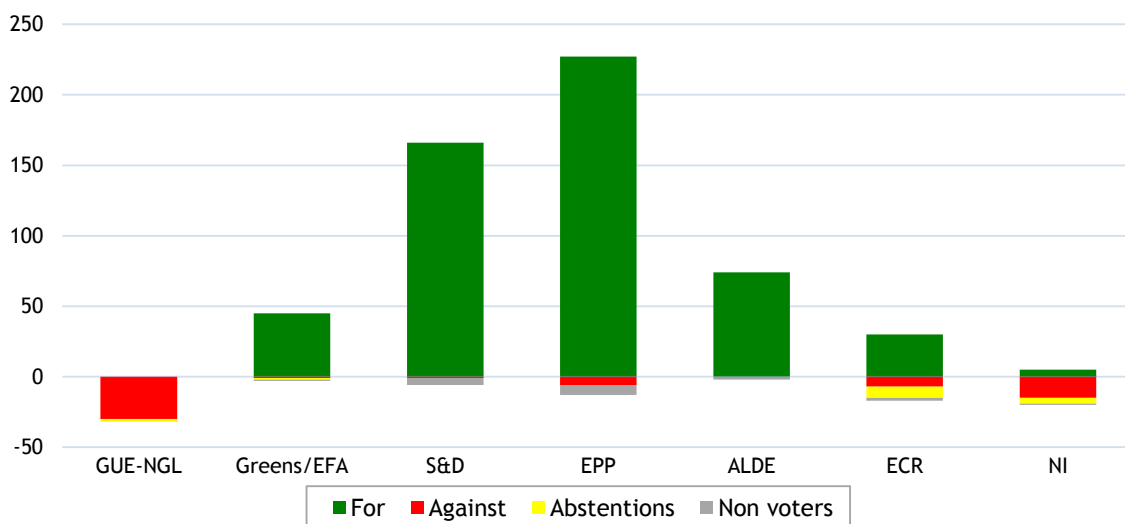
The previous chapter discussed the overall loyalty of Belgian MEPs towards their political group during the 2009-2014 parliamentary term. In addition to this overall picture, it is particularly useful to examine how MEPs behaved when it mattered most. Parliamentarians are likely to behave differently when a vote draws attention from the wider public. With the latter in mind, this chapter discusses 16 important and contentious votes in the European Parliament that took place over the past five years. For each vote, we discuss the context, the overall vote in the Parliament, and the way in which Belgian MEPs voted.⁴

1. Should the EU have its own diplomatic service?

A big change in the 2009-2014 legislature was the introduction of the European External Action Service (EEAS), which is meant to act as the EU's diplomatic service and increase the EU's voice in the world. The creation of the EEAS results from the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009. The Service is led by the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (often abbreviated as High Representative), a position that is held by Catherine Ashton. Only the Council can take decisions on the EEAS's legal framework, as the Lisbon Treaty did not give the European Parliament the role of co-legislator on the matter. Therefore, the vote analysed here was a non-binding consultation of the European Parliament.

The European Parliament approved the resolution on the creation of the EEAS with a very comfortable majority (549 in favour versus 78 votes against). As it is often the case, we notice that the four main political groups (Greens/EFA, S&D, EPP, and ALDE) supported the proposal strongly. There was a high degree of loyalty within these groups. Overall, the ECR also supported the creation of the EEAS. The other European political groups mostly voted against the European Parliament's resolution.⁵

Figure 4: EEAS - Result of the votes in each parliamentary group



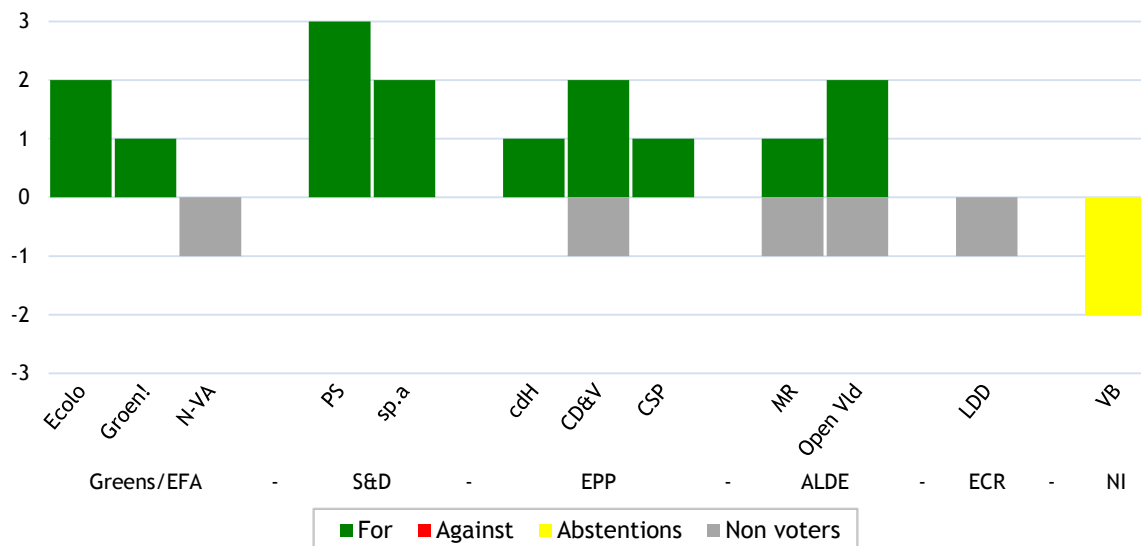
⁴ For the votes on the European External Action Service and maternity leave, Frank Vanhecke was a member of the Vlaams Belang and not affiliated to a parliamentary group. Afterwards, he quit his national party and joined the EFD group.

⁵ See votes: VoteWatch Europe. 2010. [European External Action Service](#).

The support for the EEAS was particularly strong among Belgian MEPs. Not a single Belgian MEP voted against the resolution. Only the two Vlaams Belang MEPs abstained during voting. At a later stage during the legislative term, the Vlaams Belang adopted a more hostile approach towards the EEAS, pleading for its abolishment.⁶ In terms of loyalty towards their European political group, we see that all Belgian MEPs that did participate in the vote were in line with the voting of their European political group.

The Flemish liberals played a prominent role in the work of the European Parliament committees on the EEAS. Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck was shadow rapporteur for ALDE in the Foreign Affairs Committee, while Guy Verhofstadt was the rapporteur in the Constitutional Affairs Committee (with the former committee being responsible for the report, and the second committee providing only an opinion).

Figure 5: EEAS - Result of the votes for each Belgian party



2. Should maternity leave be extended to 20 weeks throughout the EU?

The vote was about a Commission proposal for the revision of a directive on measures to improve the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who recently gave birth. The Commission proposal notably provided for the extension of maternity leave from 14 to 18 weeks on full pay, and included a number of other measures favourable to mothers and pregnant women, as well as more generous paternity leave.⁷ The specific vote discussed here is the amendment providing for a further extension of maternity leave to a minimum of 20 weeks instead of the 18 weeks put forward by the Commission.⁸

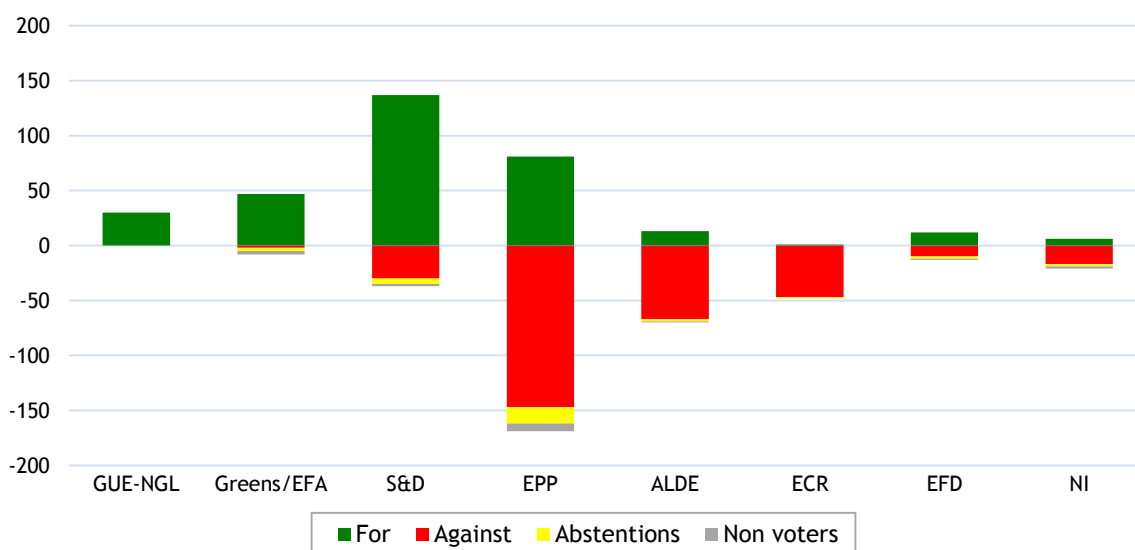
⁶ Claeys, P. and Le Pen, M. 2014. [Motion for a resolution pursuant to Rule 120 of the Rules of Procedure on the abolition of the European External Action Service](#). European Parliament. B7-0269/2014.

⁷ See for more information: European Union. 2008. [Protection of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding](#).

⁸ Amendments 12 and 38 to the Commission proposal.

The vote on a further extension of maternity leave shows a clear left-right divide in the European Parliament. The amendment passed with an extremely narrow majority of 327 MEPs in favour to 320 against.⁹ Three left groups helped pass the vote on the amendment, namely the S&D, Greens/EFA and GUE-NGL. The EPP was split, with a substantial part of its MEPs in favour while the majority rejected the amendment. To the right of the spectrum, ALDE along with ECR and the Non-Attached Members were largely against. In the end, the resolution on the draft legislative proposal (text as a whole) was adopted at first reading by a relatively narrow majority (390 votes for to 192 votes against), formed by EPP, S&D, ALDE and GUE-NGL. However, there is no agreement in the Council where a significant number of Member States (mainly those with centre-right governments) are opposed to reaching a common position on the issue. If the Ministers fail to reach an agreement, the proposal is dropped.

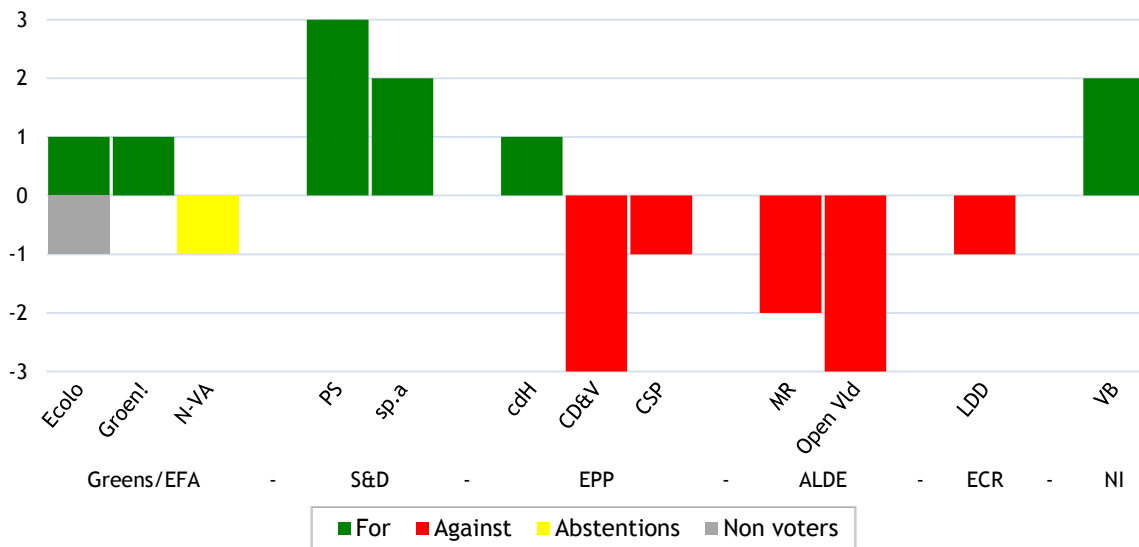
Figure 6: Maternity leave - Result of the votes in each parliamentary group



Belgian votes on the amendment extending maternity leave (from 18 to 20 weeks) show most of the same left-right divide of the European Parliament as a whole. Ecolo and Groen (Greens/EFA), PS and sp.a (S&D), cdH (EPP), and Vlaams Belang (NI) voted for; the CD&V and CSP (EPP), MR and Open Vld (ALDE) as well as LDD (ECR) voted against. Several Belgian MEPs who explicitly voted against said that they agreed with the Commission proposal to extend maternity leave to 18 weeks but found 20 weeks excessive. In sum, all Belgian MEPS voted as their European political groups with the exception of Anne Delvaux (cdH) and Mark Demesmaeker (N-VA). Vlaams Belang also voted in favour, while most non-affiliated MEPs voted against.

⁹ See votes: VoteWatch Europe. 2010. [Improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding.](#)

Figure 7: Maternity leave - Result of the votes for each Belgian party



3. Should nuclear energy be phased out in the EU?

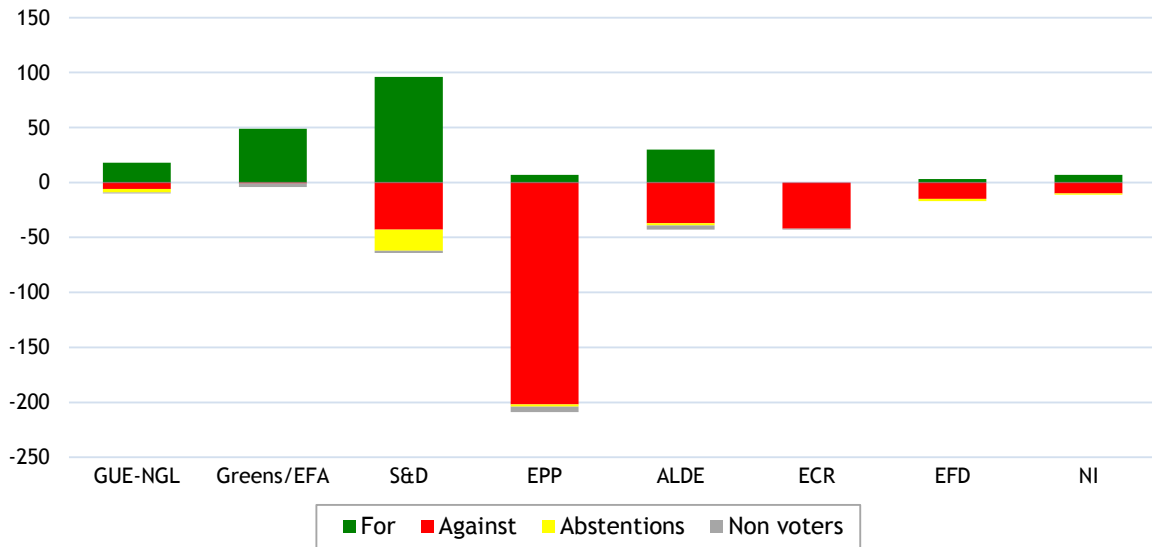
The key vote analysed here focuses on an amendment of the Framework Programme for nuclear research and training activities,¹⁰ which aimed to commit the EU to phase-out nuclear energy. Not surprisingly, this amendment was drafted by the Greens/EFA group. This framework was adopted under the consultation procedure whereby the Council is not obliged to take the European Parliament's position into account. Indeed, the right to decide whether or not nuclear energy must be phased out is not a competence of the EU. It is a prerogative of Member States, which remain entirely sovereign in choosing their energy mix.

Although the Framework Programme was adopted by the European Parliament in November 2011 under the consultation procedure and then by the Council in December 2011, the amendment to phase-out nuclear energy failed to reach a majority. The latter did not pass with 356 votes against (60%), 210 MEPs in favour (35%) and 29 abstentions (5%).¹¹ The amendment was supported by the Greens/EFA members, the GUE-NGL members, as well as two-thirds of the S&D members and almost half of the ALDE MEPs. However, this coalition failed to reach a majority, as the EPP (except for the Austrian delegation), ECR, and EFD groups, as well as most of the ALDE MEPs, voted against. This vote shows that generally the left-wing opposes nuclear energy, whereas the right-wing is to a great extent in its favour.

¹⁰ European Parliament. 17 Nov 2011. [Resolution on 'proposal for a Council decision concerning the Framework Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community for nuclear research and training activities \(2012-2013\)' - amendment 36. P7_TA\(2011\)0509.](#)

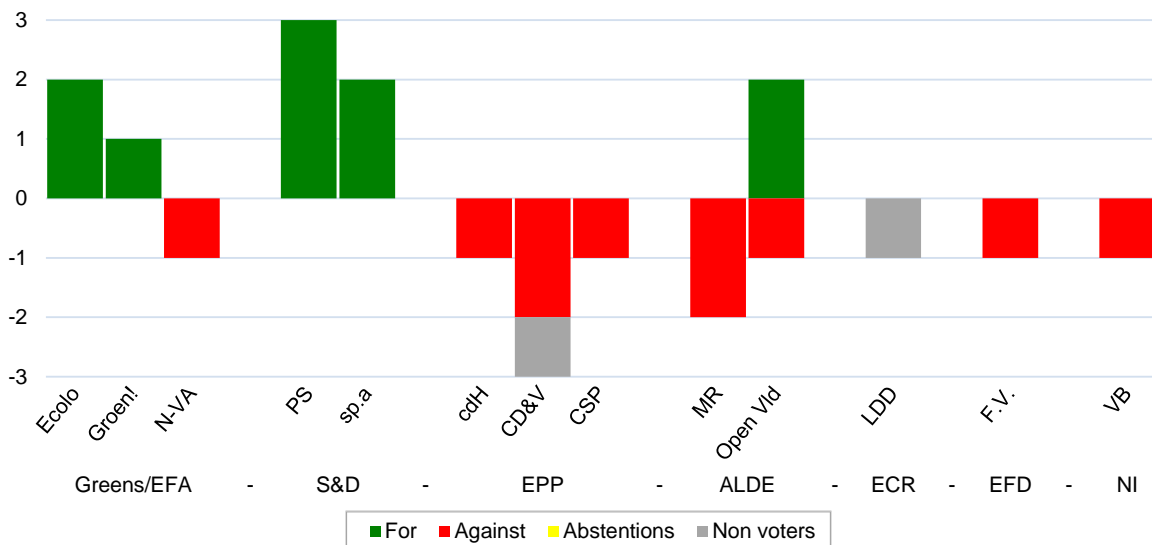
¹¹ See votes: VoteWatch Europe. 2011. [Framework Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community for nuclear research and training activities.](#)

Figure 8: Nuclear energy - Result of the votes in each parliamentary group



Belgian votes on phasing-out nuclear energy in the EU are *ex aequo*, with 10 for and 10 against (plus 2 non-voters). Generally, the Belgian MEPs voted in accordance with their European groups. The main exception is the N-VA MEP, whose vote is the only one against the text among the whole Greens/EFA group. The split within the ALDE group is well represented with both MEPs from the French-speaking party MR and one MEP from the Dutch-speaking party Open Vld voting against, and the two other MEPs from Open Vld voting in favour. The fact that Guy Verhofstadt voted to phase out nuclear energy against the majority of its group might be explained by the fact that, in 2003, the Verhofstadt I Government (a coalition including the green parties Groen and Ecolo) passed a legislation to phase out nuclear energy in Belgium.

Figure 9: Nuclear energy - Result of the votes for each Belgian party

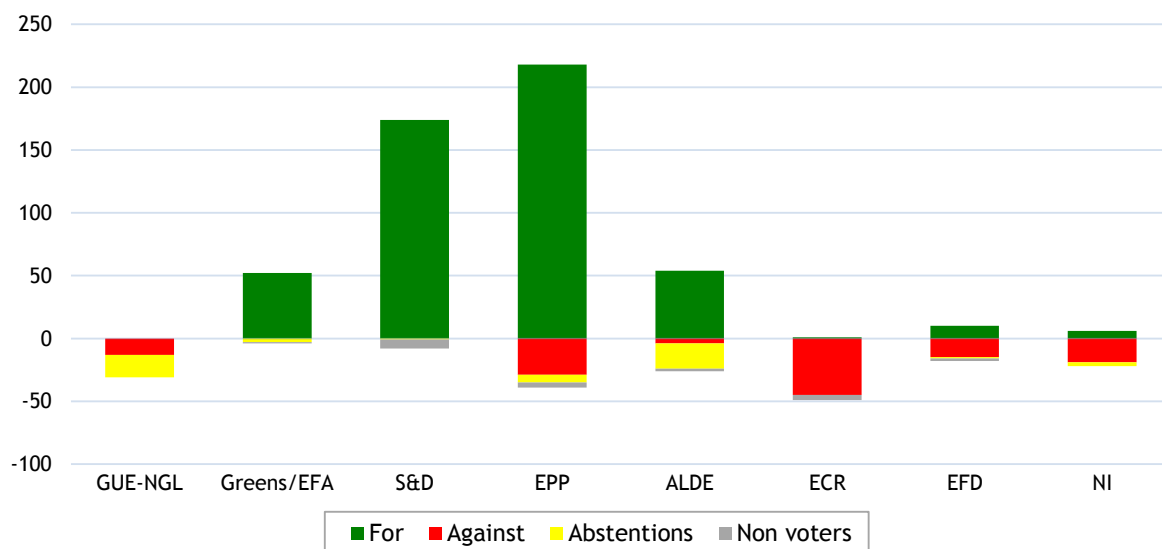


4. Should the eurozone countries pool their public debts by creating Eurobonds?

To a large extent, the 2009-2014 legislature was dominated by the eurozone sovereign debt crisis. One of the most ambitious proposals was to pool debt issuance by eurozone countries in common Eurobonds. This would allow countries with high borrowing costs (such as Greece or Spain) to issue debt at affordable rates. However, this might come at a cost for economically stronger countries like Germany. In addition, opponents argued that the creation of Eurobonds would result in a lack of pressure on the less competitive countries to carry out the reforms required of their economy. Following a Green Paper by the Commission on the feasibility of Eurobonds, the European Parliament voted in February 2012 on a non-binding resolution that pleaded in favour of the creation of Eurobonds. While the European Parliament favoured pooling debt emissions, it was not put into practice due to considerable opposition from the economically stronger Member States.

A large majority of MEPs voted in favour of Eurobonds (515 votes in favour versus 125 against).¹² The four main parties (Greens/EFA, S&D, EPP and ALDE) all supported the resolution. Support was most particularly strong among the Greens and the S&D group. In the EPP, a large part of German MEPs voted against the proposal, for the potential negative consequences mentioned above. In the liberal group, several MEPs from economically stronger Member States abstained during the vote. The far-left GUE-NGL and the ECR voted almost unanimously against the introduction of Eurobonds. The negative vote by the British Conservatives in the ECR is actually somewhat surprising, as the proposed Eurobonds only concern the eurozone, which the Conservatives do not want to join. In the Eurosceptic EFD group, the vote was split between MEPs in favour and MEPs against, with the latter representing the majority of the group.

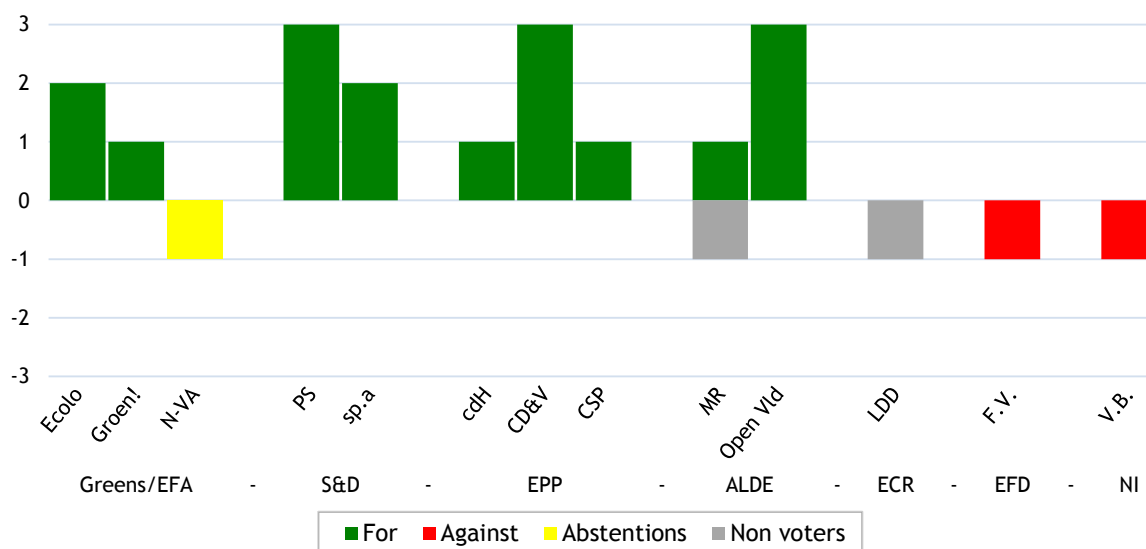
Figure 10: Eurobonds - Result of the votes in each parliamentary group



¹² See votes: VoteWatch Europe. 2012. [Motions for resolutions - Feasibility of introducing stability bonds.](#)

The Belgian MEPs voted largely in favour of the creation of Eurobonds. Only a part of the right-wing Belgian MEPs did not approve the resolution: the N-VA and LDD abstained, whereas Frank Vanhecke and Vlaams Belang voted against. Except for the N-VA, all Belgian MEPs voted according to their European group's position. The abstention from the N-VA was quite remarkable, as all but two other MEPs from the Greens/EFA group voted in favour of the resolution. The N-VA was a clear outlier in its group. The N-VA's point of view on the matter is in line with the position of political parties from stronger economic countries that oppose Eurobonds, and hence differs substantially from the Greens/EFA.¹³

Figure 11: Eurobonds - Result of the votes for each Belgian party



5. Should there be a new tax on all financial transactions in the EU?

In the framework of a consultation procedure, a significant majority of MEPs supported a tax on financial transactions (FTT) in May 2012.¹⁴ Such a tax, to be levied by EU Member States, aims to ensure that the financial sector contributes more fairly to society given the costs of the recent economic and financial crisis. However, following the consultative vote of the European Parliament, Member States failed to reach an agreement on the FTT. Indeed, tax-related issues require unanimity in the Council and several Member States such as the UK (with its large financial sector) voted against the adoption of such a tax. Consequently, at the request of eleven Member States,¹⁵ the Commission proposed a Council decision authorising the adoption of a FTT under enhanced cooperation. After being discussed in the Council, the aim is to reach an agreement on this text in May 2014.

The Parliament's non-binding resolution was supported by a comfortable majority of 487 votes in favour, thanks to the coalition composed of the members from GUE-NGL, Greens/EFA, S&D and EPP.¹⁶ The opposing minority was gathered around the right-wing parties of ALDE, ECR and

¹³ Wetys, B. 2014. [Startmeeting N-VA-congres](#).

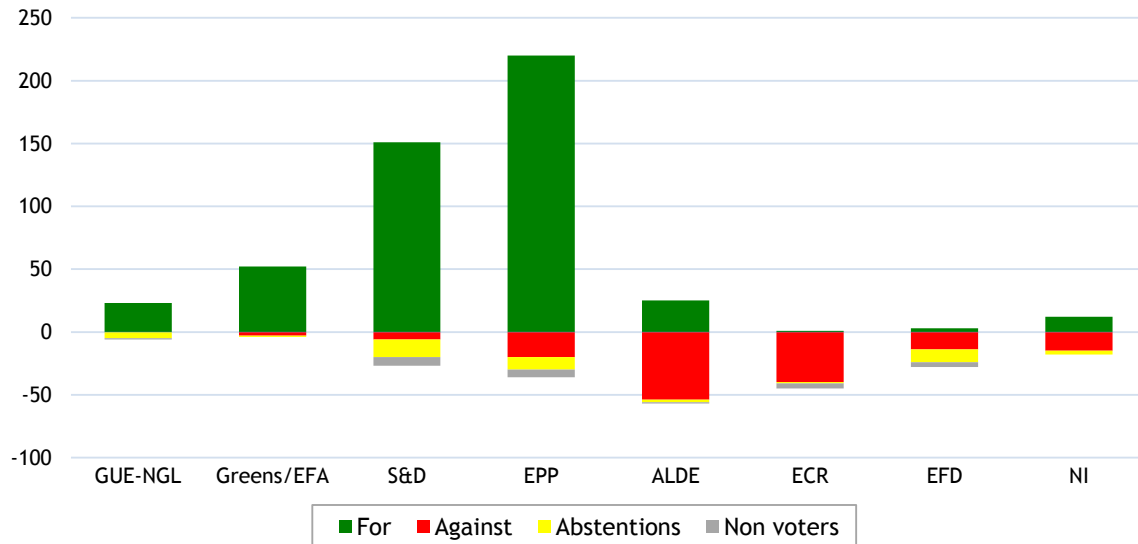
¹⁴ European Parliament. 23 May 2012. [Resolution on 'proposal for a Council directive on a common system of financial transaction tax and amending Directive 2008/7/EC'](#). P7_TA(2012)0217.

¹⁵ Belgium, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Austria, Portugal, Slovenia and Slovakia.

¹⁶ See votes: VoteWatch Europe. 2012. [Common system for taxing financial transactions](#).

EFD as well as the Non-Attached members. The groups were quite cohesive, except for the ALDE group with 54 members against the text and 25 members in favour, mainly from France, Italy and Finland. More marginally, 20 EPP members from Malta, Cyprus, Sweden and Latvia and six S&D members from Malta and Cyprus voted against the text.

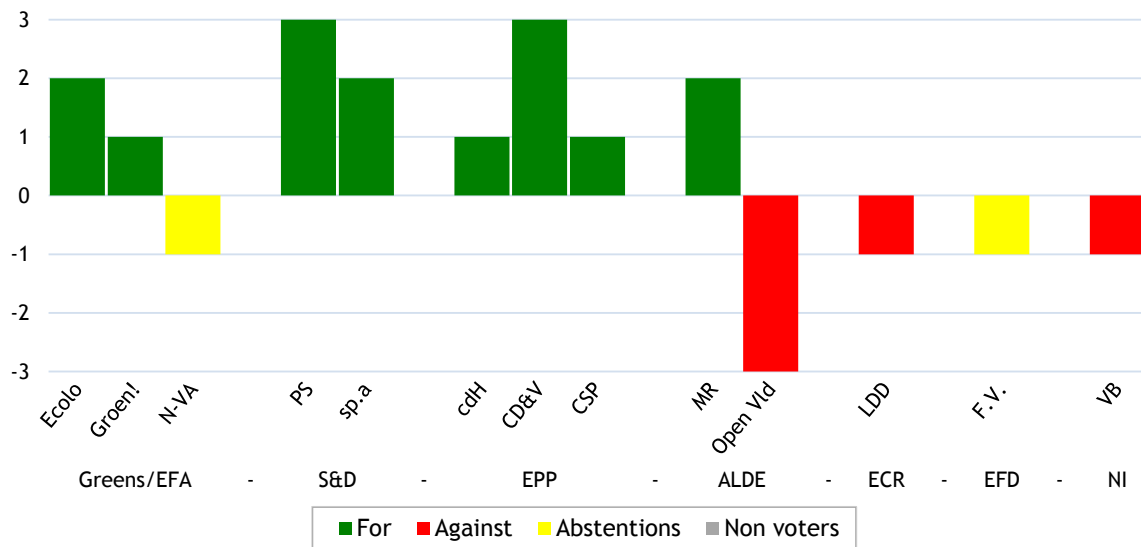
Figure 12: Financial transaction tax - Result of the votes in each parliamentary group



Generally, the vote of Belgian parties reflect the positions of their respective parliamentary groups, at the exception of the Belgian liberals in the ALDE group and the N-VA, which was the only abstention vote among the Greens/EFA members. There is a clear split among the Belgian liberals between the French-speaking MR, which voted in favour of the text, and its Dutch-speaking counterpart Open Vld, which voted against, following the main trend of its group. Whereas usually both Belgian liberal parties follow the same political line, the dissension of the MR in this particular vote can be explained by the “historical” support of this party for the adoption of such a tax at the European level. The MR was indeed instrumental in introducing this tax on the agenda, which aims not only to raise funds for developing countries and sustainable development but could also contribute to the necessary strengthening of Member States’ public finances in the aftermath of the financial crisis.¹⁷

¹⁷ According to an interview with the Secretariat of Louis Michel.

Figure 13: Financial transaction tax - Result of the votes for each Belgian party



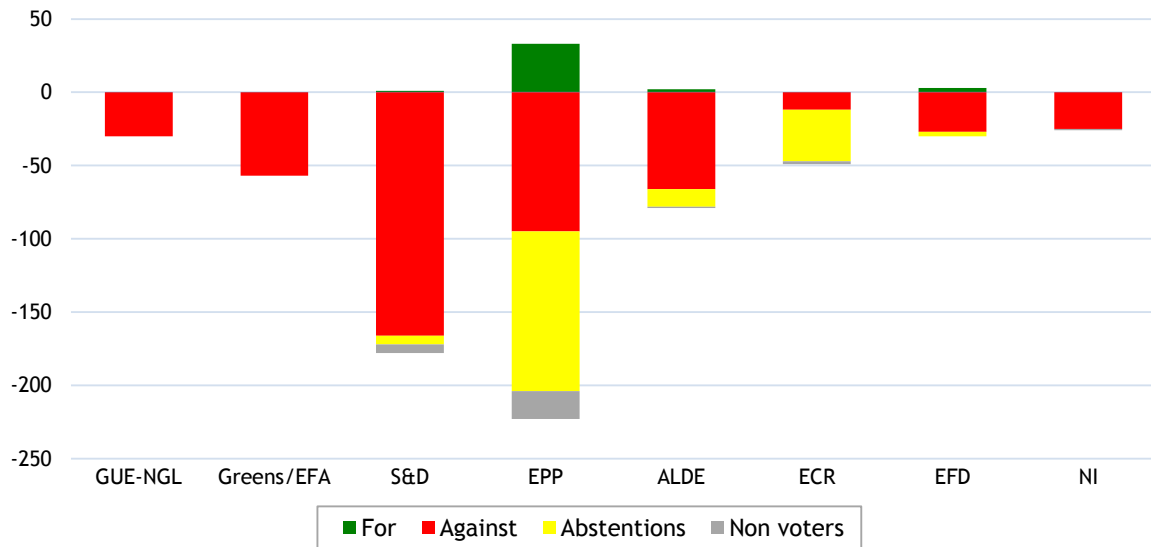
6. Should the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) be adopted?

The Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) is a proposed international treaty between the EU, its Member States and several other countries, including Australia, Japan, South Korea and the USA. Its aim is to better enforce the protection of intellectual property rights at the international level. Following the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the European Parliament is required to approve or reject trade agreements - hence including ACTA. But it can do so only by voting on the final text as a whole, as the European Parliament is not entitled to propose specific amendments. In July 2012, the European Parliament fully demonstrated its capacity to impose its will on national governments when it did not give its consent to the text. MEPs massively rejected ACTA by 39 votes in favour, 478 against and 165 abstentions.

As a result of this vote, neither the EU nor any individual EU Member State can join ACTA. MEPs raised concerns related to data protection, fundamental freedoms, openness and the transparency of ACTA negotiations. Most parliamentary groups voted against ACTA, while a majority of EPP and ECR members abstained. The EPP had initially favoured an agreement which explains its split vote.¹⁸

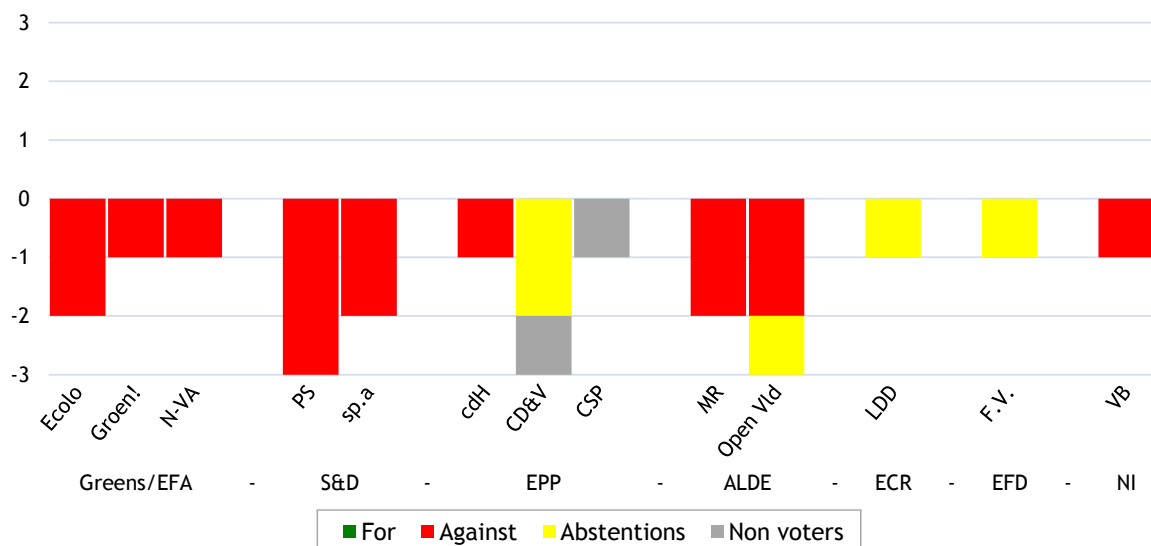
¹⁸ See votes: VoteWatch Europe. 2012. [Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement between the EU and its Member States, Australia, Canada, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mexico, Morocco, New Zealand, Singapore, Switzerland and the USA.](#)

Figure 14: ACTA - Result of the votes in each parliamentary group



No Belgian MEP voted in favour of ACTA. Only a minority of five Flemish MEPS chose to abstain. This notably included MEPs from CD&V (Dehaene, Thyssen and Belet¹⁹). Philippe De Backer (Open Vld), and Frank Vanhecke (independent) also abstained. Derk Jan Eppink (LDD) abstained but by doing so, he followed the majority of his party. These abstentions reflect that these MEPs were less unequivocal in their rejection of ACTA and acknowledged that it had its own merits.²⁰ As elsewhere in Europe, the debate on ACTA reached a prominent public dimension and was well covered in the media in Belgium.

Figure 15: ACTA - Result of the votes for each Belgian party



¹⁹ Ivo Belet (CD&V) did not vote but subsequently entered a statement in the minutes of the plenary indicating that he had intended to abstain.

²⁰ See for example the comments made on ACTA by Marianne Thyssen: Wat vinden ze van ACTA?. 2012. [Marianne Thyssen zegt JA tegen ACTA op basis van FUD.](#)

7. Should the EU strengthen its supervision of budgets of the eurozone countries?

The so-called two-pack consists in two regulations that further reinforce the economic governance of the EU, in particular that of the eurozone following the six-pack and the intergovernmental Treaty on Stability, Governance and Coordination (the so-called fiscal compact).²¹ The first of these regulations enables the EU to voice concerns when national budget plans are not consistent with the economic policy guidance issued in the context of the European semester for economic and budgetary policy surveillance. The other regulation lays down clearer procedures for dealing with countries that are in severe difficulties or are receiving an EU bailout.

The two-pack took 15 months to finalise. The delay was primarily due to a shift in the political climate which saw the centre-left become increasingly critical of excessive “austerity” in Europe. In the European Parliament, the centre-left/liberals pushed for solidarity mechanisms between countries and for public investment in favour of their economic convergence. After talks were suspended, particularly at the request of socialist, liberal and green MEPs, the Commission promised to set up a group of wise men to draw up recommendations for establishing forms of Eurobonds (see the vote on Eurobonds).

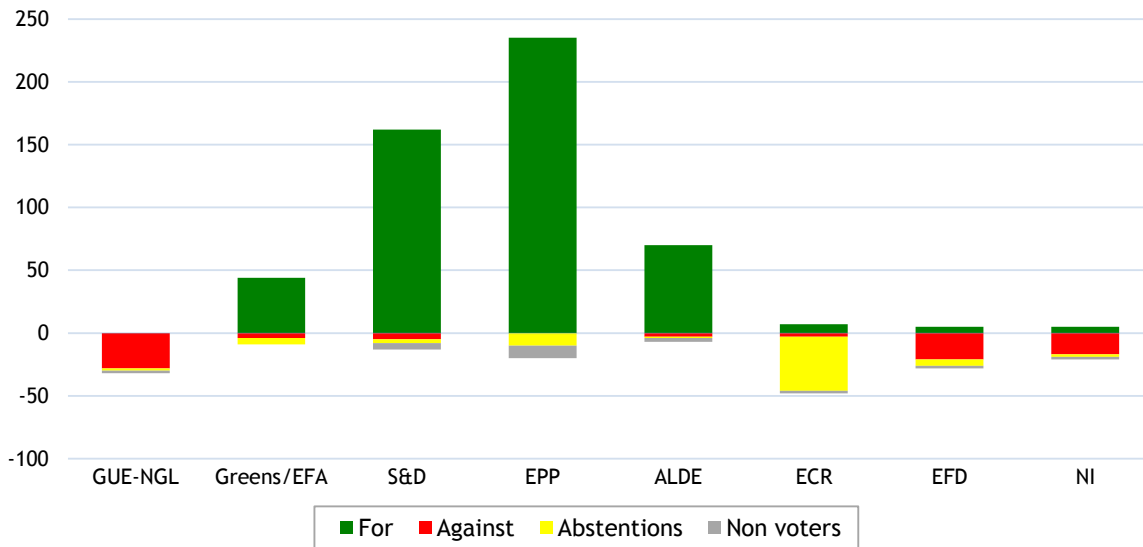
In the final agreed text, the Parliament did insert amendments to improve the transparency and accountability of the processes, and ensure that fiscal consolidation does not undermine a country's medium-term growth and employment prospects. They also inserted some “social dimension” provisions, e.g. to ensure that structural reforms and cost-cutting do not unduly undermine access to education or health care.

A broad majority was found between Greens/EFA, S&D, EPP and ALDE to carry the amended text through. On the opposition side, we find GUE-GNL, EFD and the Non-Attached Members.²²

²¹ For a general overview of the six-pack, the two-pack and the fiscal compact, see: European Commission. 2013. [Six-pack? Two-pack? Fiscal compact? A short guide to the new EU fiscal governance](#).

²² See votes: VoteWatch Europe. 2013. [Economic and budgetary surveillance of Member States with serious difficulties with respect to their financial stability in the euro area](#); and VoteWatch Europe. 2013. [Monitoring and assessing draft budgetary plans and ensuring the correction of excessive deficit of the Member States in the euro area](#).

Figure 16: Two-pack - Result of the votes in each parliamentary group

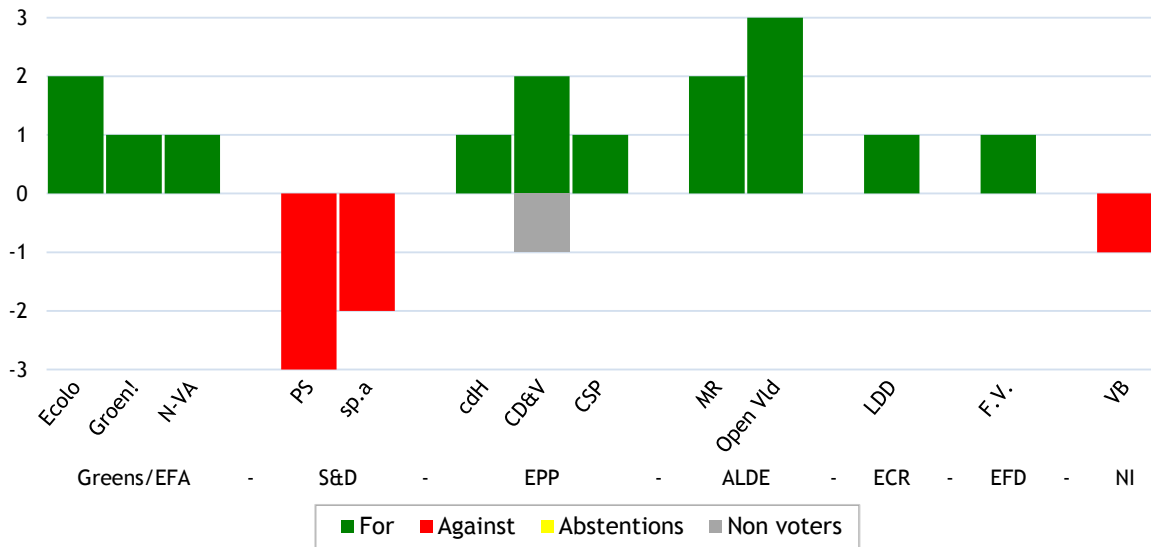


Belgian socialist MEPs from both the French- and Dutch-speaking Communities (PS and sp.a) coordinated their position and decided to vote against the two regulations. By doing so, they were the only socialist MEPs not to back the deal. This negative vote was in tune with their earlier rejection of the six-pack. The PS justified its opposition on three grounds: (a) the absence of a proper “golden rule” for public deficits that would take into account public investments, (b) the asymmetry in the adjustment process as surplus-countries are not required to adjust, and (c) the lack of commitment towards the mutualisation of sovereign debts (again, see below the vote on Eurobonds). Arguably, Belgian socialists in the European Parliament probably could afford to rebel in order to make their point because they knew they would not significantly damage the majority by doing so.

Derk Jan Eppink (LDD) voted in favour of the reinforced surveillance of countries experiencing difficulties regarding their financial stability because as an MEP from a eurozone country, he felt he could not abstain like the conservative British MEPs that constitutes the bulk of the ECR (he however abstained on the vote concerning the EU scrutiny of national budget plans). Frank Vanhecke (ex-Vlaams Belang) voted in favour of the two regulations while his group (EFD) generally opposed it. These positive votes also possibly show that these MEPs favoured the element of budgetary discipline introduced in the two-pack, over the considerations of national sovereignty that dominate in the ECR and EFD, labelled as “Euro sceptic”.

Belgian MEPs were active participants in the Parliament’s committees that were involved in the two-pack legislative process: Marianne Thyssen (CD&V), Philippe Lamberts (Ecolo) and Derk Jan Eppink (LDD) were shadow rapporteurs in the responsible committee, while Frédéric Daerden (PS) was rapporteur in one of the committees for opinion.

Figure 17: Two-pack - Result of the votes for each Belgian party



8. Should the EU have a genuine system of own resources for its budget?

In March 2013, the European Parliament largely supported a legislative resolution on general guidelines for the preparation of the 2014 budget.²³ This resolution underlines the role of an enhanced EU budget in implementing the EU 2020 Strategy and in creating economic growth and jobs. The key vote analysed in this publication is about paragraph 15 of this resolution regarding the system of financing the EU budget, and more precisely, the need to increase the EU's own resources. According to the text of the paragraph, the EU's high dependence on national contributions to finance its budget (75%) is in contradiction with the spirit of the Treaty and can be particularly detrimental in times of national budgetary constraints, as witnessed during the last economic crisis. The European Parliament was thus in favour of the Commission's proposal to reform the financing system of the EU Budget by introducing more genuine own resources via a financial transaction tax and a new EU Value Added Tax (VAT). The system of own resources will be discussed in 2016, within the framework of the 2016 mid-term review of the Multiannual Financial Framework.

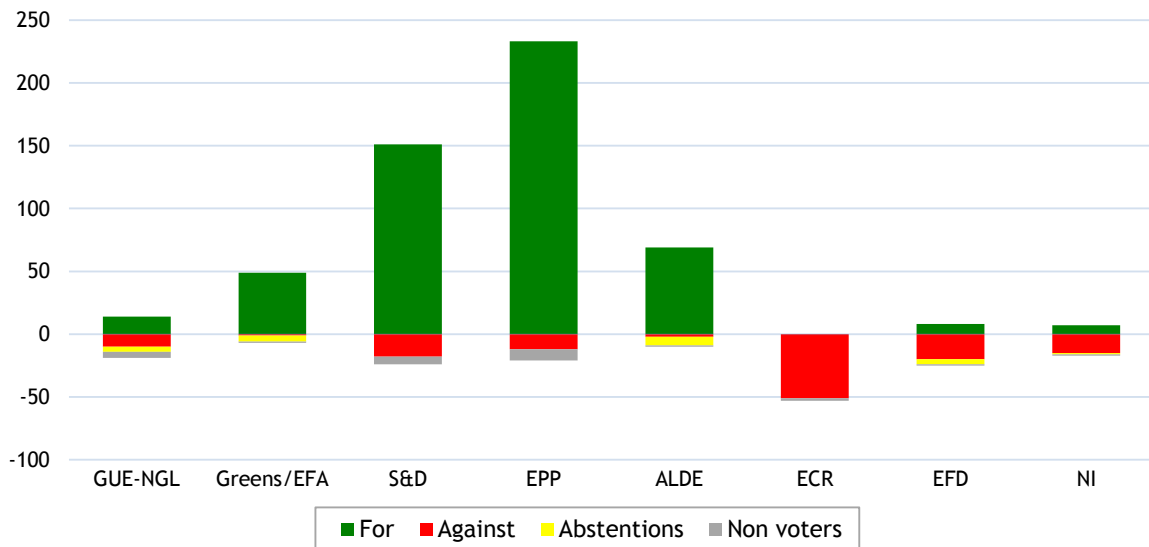
The paragraph passed with a comfortable majority of 531 votes in favour, 129 against and 21 abstentions. This large majority was formed by the EPP, S&D, ALDE, Greens/EFA and GUE-NGL groups. However, most of the Swedish and Danish MEPs from these groups voted against or abstained.²⁴ Generally, the groups of the majority as well as the opposing group ECR behaved loyally. The opposition of the ECR can be partly explained by the position of the British conservatives who are against a financial transaction tax and want to maintain the British

²³ European Parliament. 13 March 2013. [Resolution on 'general guidelines for the preparation of the 2014 budget, Section III - Commission'. P7_TA\(2013\)0081.](#)

²⁴ See votes: VoteWatch Europe. 2013. [Guidelines for the 2014 budget - Section III.](#)

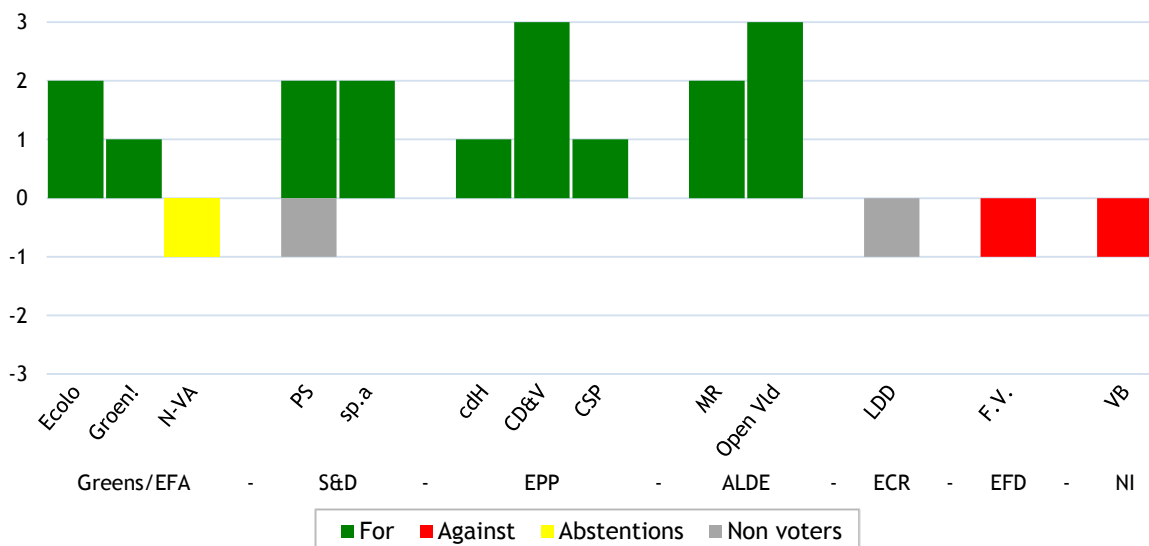
rebate.²⁵ The smaller GUE-NGL, EFD groups and the NI were more divided but mostly opposed the issue.

Figure 18: Own resources - Result of the votes in each parliamentary group



This vote shows a very high degree of loyalty from the Belgian MEPs to the main political line of their European groups. The only exception comes from the MEP from the N-VA, who abstained to vote unlike the rest of the Greens/EFA group that voted in favour.

Figure 19: Own resources - Result of the votes for each Belgian party



9. Should the EU create a single market with the United States?

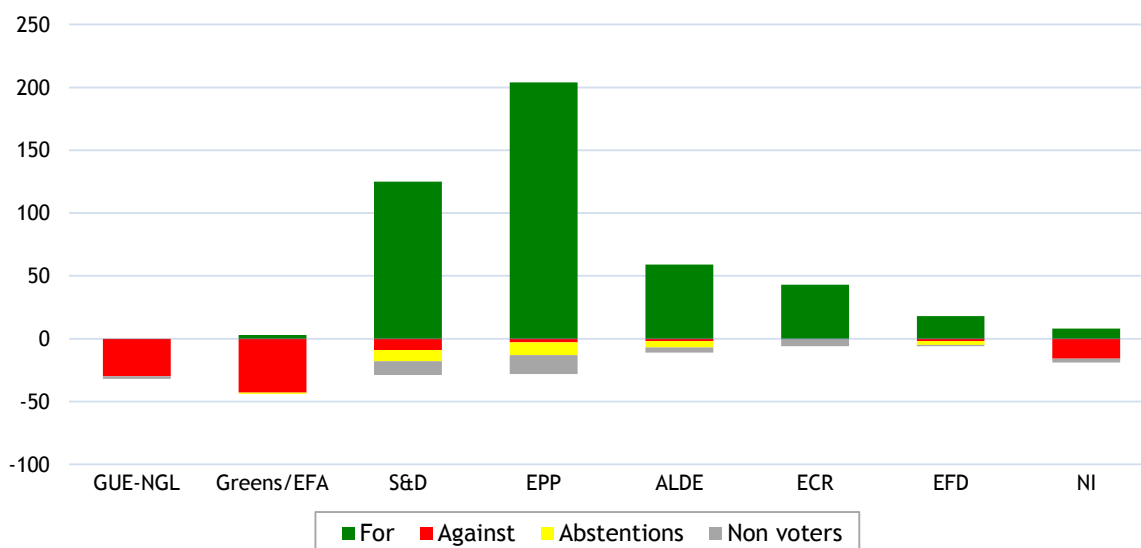
In a non-legislative resolution from May 2013, the European Parliament gave its position regarding the mandate to start negotiating for a transatlantic free trade agreement with the

²⁵ The British rebate is a rebate on the United Kingdom's contribution to the EU budget paid back to UK Government by the European Union.

United States, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). Although non-binding, this statement exerted influence on the Council because the European Parliament must consent to the Treaty at the end of the negotiation process (the European Parliament showed that its resolve to block treaties with its earlier rejection of ACTA). The envisaged free trade agreement would cover everything from regulatory issues, technical barriers to trade, raw material and energy, services, to intellectual property rights, investment and market access for agricultural and industrial goods.²⁶

With a majority of 460 MEPs in its favour, and 105 against, the European Parliament endorsed the launch of the negotiations.²⁷ However, the European Parliament stressed the importance of several elements. Under the pressure of France, it called on the Commission and the Council to exclude cultural and audio-visual services from the negotiating mandate, including those provided online. The European Parliament also emphasised the sensitivity of certain fields of negotiation, such as the agricultural sector, where perceptions of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs), cloning and consumer health tend to diverge between the US and the EU. It also stressed that the agreement should not undermine the precautionary principle that is valued in the EU. Finally, the Parliament stated that the negotiations should protect clearly defined areas of intellectual property rights, including geographical indications; ensure sufficient protection of personal data; address the current restrictions on maritime and air transport services owned by European businesses; address the environment and labour aspects of trade and sustainable development; and include financial services with particular attention to be paid to equivalence, mutual recognition, convergence, and extraterritoriality. Only GUE-NGL, Greens/EFA and most Non-Attached Members (who are mostly on the radical right) were opposed. French MEPs in the S&D and ALDE groups abstained, despite the concessions that France obtained.

Figure 20: TTIP - Result of the votes in each parliamentary group

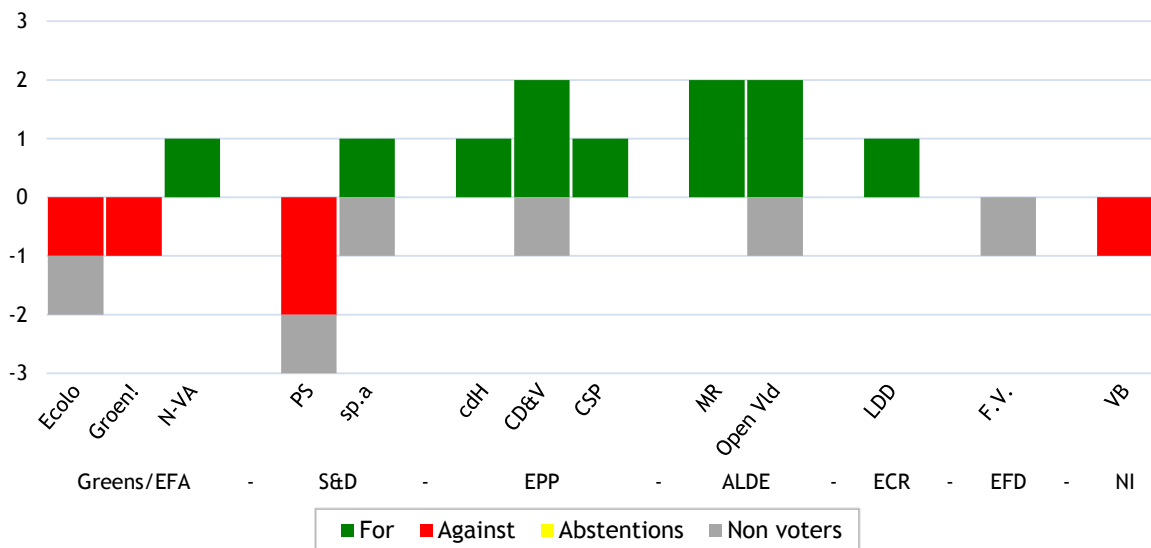


²⁶ European Parliament. 2013. [EU - US trade agreement. 2013/0007\(NTT\)](#).

²⁷ See votes: VoteWatch Europe. 2013. [EU trade and investment agreement negotiations with the US](#).

Most Belgian MEPs voted in tune with the majority in their respective parliamentary groups. So is notably the case of Bart Staes (Groen) who had previously presented a failed alternative motion on behalf of the Greens/EFA group. Frank Demesmaecker (N-VA) voted in favour and thereby rebelled against the majority position of his Greens/EFA group (along two other EFA MEPs). Interestingly, French-speaking Belgian socialists (PS) were part of the few S&D MEPs that rebelled and voted against the resolution. They explained their opposition by claiming that the agreement would, among other issues, undermine European labour norms, social standards, environmental norms, and food safety norms. The Flemish sp.a did not follow the PS in deviating from the S&D's voting stance. Frank Vanhecke (ex-Vlaams Belang) abstained while the EFD group voted largely in favour of the deal.

Figure 21: TTIP - Result of the votes for each Belgian party



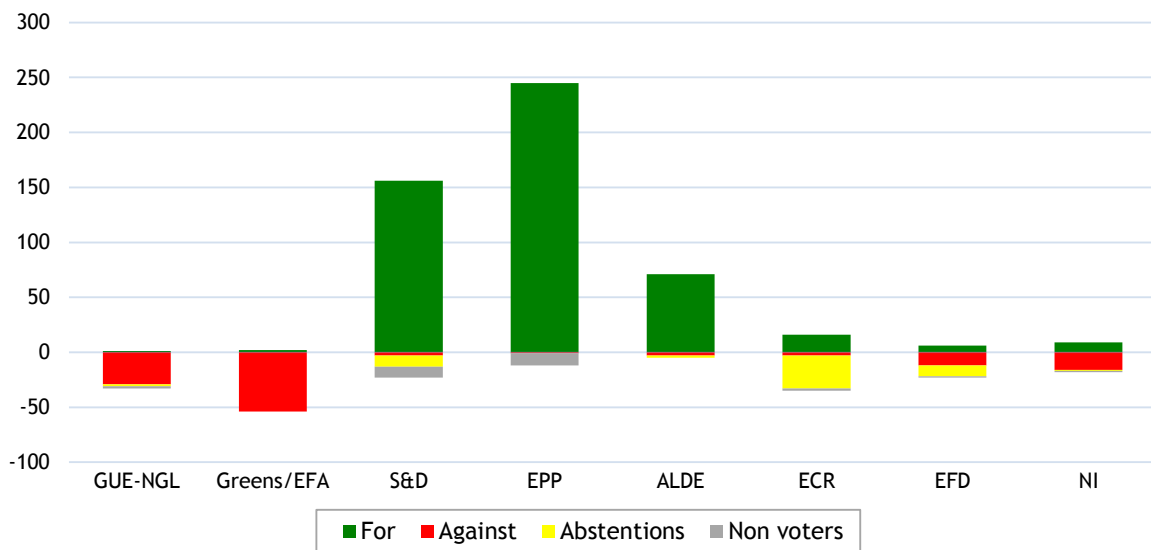
10. Should the EU allow temporary reintroduction of border controls at internal borders?

In 2011, following the Arab Spring protests in Tunisia, Italy saw a large increase in the number of migrants coming from that country. As the Italian government provided the migrants with temporary resident permits, Tunisian migrants were allowed to travel freely in the Schengen Area, which covers most of the EU. This had negative repercussions in France, as many of the migrants headed for French territory as soon as they had entered the Schengen Area. France denied them entry and called for a revision of the Schengen Area rules. After lengthy discussion, this resulted in legislative changes to the rules that govern the Schengen Area. In June 2013, the European Parliament finally voted on a compromise text, which allowed for the reintroduction of border controls in exceptional circumstances linked to security issues. The text became law later that year.

In the European Parliament, about 3 out of 4 MEPs voted in favour of the legislative changes. The three largest groups (S&D, EPP and ALDE) supported the changes to the Schengen Area rules. On the left of the political spectrum, almost all far-left GUE-NGL and Greens/EFA MEPs

voted against the legislation.²⁸ They believed these rules made it too easy to close national borders. On the other side of the political spectrum, the majority of Eurosceptic EFD also voted against the proposal, but mostly for the opposite reason: they believed that Member States should have more possibilities to close national borders. In the ECR group, British conservatives abstained during the vote because the UK is not part of the Schengen Area, while most other MEPs from that group approved the legislative changes. Besides the ECR and the EFD, where a clear voting position for the whole of the group is not apparent, the large majority of MEPs voted in line with their European political group.

Figure 22: Border controls - Result of the votes in each parliamentary group

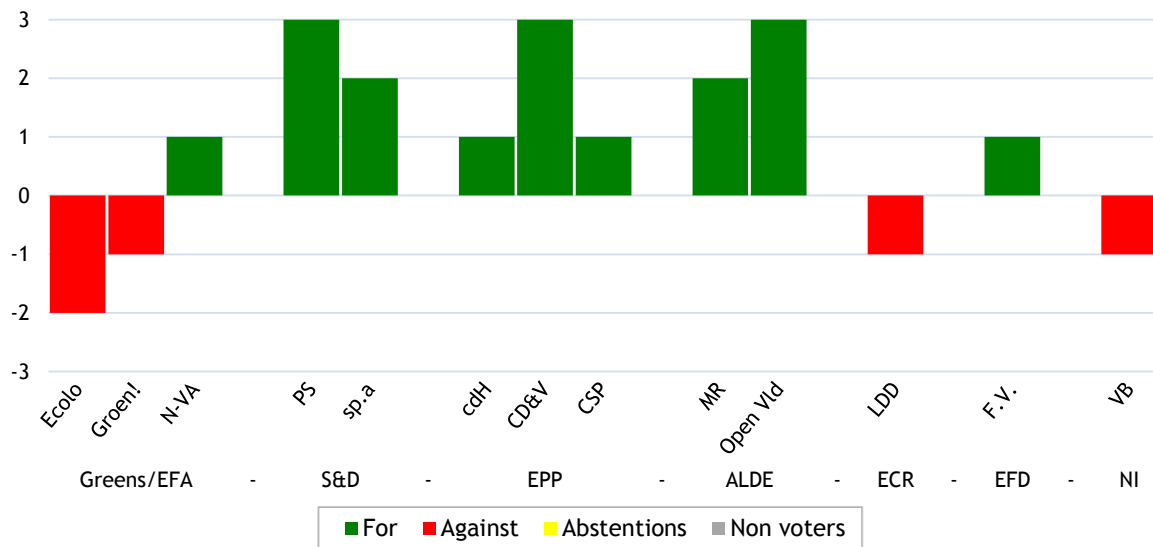


Belgian MEPs largely followed the stance of their European political groups: the green MEPs voted against, while all the three traditional political families voted in favour. In the Greens/EFA group, the N-VA was a clear exception. Mark Demesmaeker (N-VA) was one of only two MEPs from that group to vote in favour of the legislation. Derk Jan Eppink (LDD) was one of the rare members of the ECR group to vote against, as he criticised the limits it put on the free movement of persons - a position that he shared with the leftists European groups.²⁹

²⁸ See votes: VoteWatch Europe. 2013. [Temporary reintroduction of border control at internal borders](#).

²⁹ WithTheVoices. 2012. [Interviews with MEPs: Derk Jan Eppink, ECR](#).

Figure 23: Border controls - Result of the votes for each Belgian party



11. Should the EU increase the costs of economic activities that pollute?

In July 2013, the European Parliament adopted a softened version of the Commission’s proposal on the timing of auctions of greenhouse gas allowances (i.e. CO₂ certificates) in the EU Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS).³⁰ This text aims at “backloading” - or temporarily withholding - 900 million carbon allowances in a bid to raise carbon prices. Since 2008, the EU ETS has experienced a growing surplus of allowances and international credits compared to emissions, which has significantly weakened the carbon price signal for investors. This is largely the result of the economic crisis. Overall, this surplus stands at almost two billion allowances. It is thus already clear that backloading 900 million allowances will not have much effect on carbon prices. The adoption of this text was nevertheless necessary as a patched-up plan to gain time so as to maintain the ETS before a more structural reform of the scheme. This “backloading” proposal had been previously defeated in a European Parliament plenary vote in April 2013.³¹ It was thus revised by the environment committee in order to soften the text’s impact on heavy industrial users of power (such as the steel or chemical sectors).

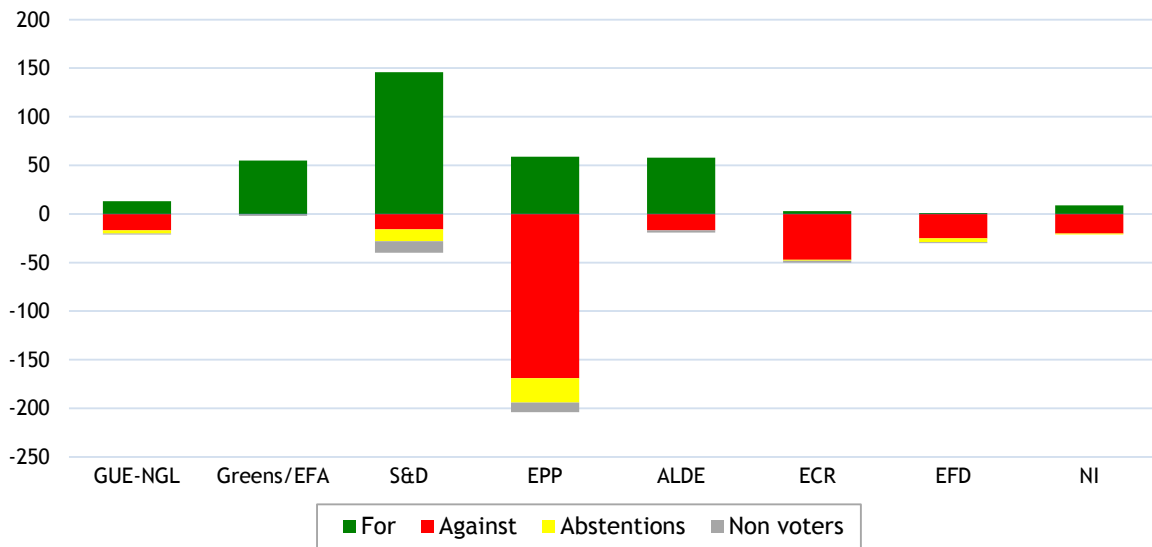
The revised version of the text was approved by 344 votes in favour (mainly from S&D, ALDE, Greens/EFA and a minority of EPP Members), 311 against (most of EPP, as well as ECR and EFD members), with 46 abstentions.³² This vote is one of the rare cases where the EPP was not part of the majority. The softer version allowed some MEPs to modify their earlier voting position, principally Spanish, Romanian and Austrian S&D MEPs, Bulgarian ALDE MEPs and Austrian EPP MEPs. This vote particularly divided two groups, namely GUE-NGL and EPP, with most of their members opposing the text.

³⁰ European Parliament. 10 Dec 2013. [Resolution on ‘proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2003/87/EC clarifying provisions on the timing of auctions of greenhouse gas allowances’](#). P7_TA(2013)0543.

³¹ VoteWatch Europe. 2013. [Clarifying provisions on the timing of auctions of greenhouse gas allowances](#).

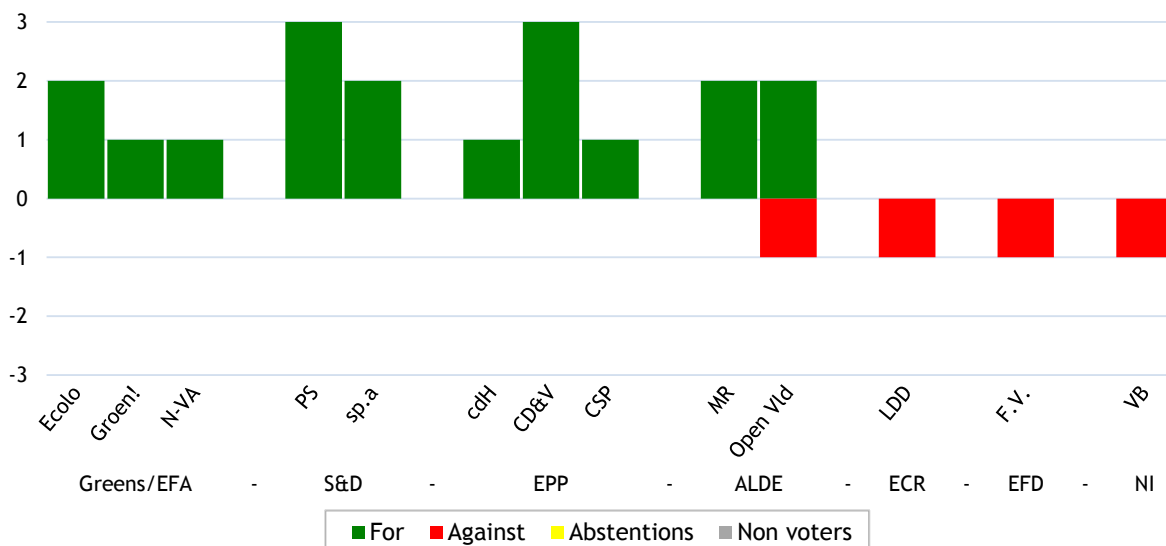
³² See votes: VoteWatch Europe. 2013. [Timing of auctions of greenhouse gas allowances](#).

Figure 24: Greenhouse gas allowances - Result of the votes in each parliamentary group



Although Belgian MEPs have not always followed the majority of their group in this vote, most of them (18 out of 22) were in favour of backloading. Generally, Belgian MEPs recognised that ‘backloading’ part of the EU ETS allowances was necessary to develop investment in a low-carbon economy, while avoiding to constraint the European energy-intensive industries too much. Therefore, unlike the great majority of their group, the five Belgian EPP MEPs (cdH, CD&V and CSP) supported the text. With respect to cohesion inside Belgian parties, the only exception comes from Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck, from Open Vld. While the two other MEPs of her party as well as the majority of the ALDE group voted in favour of the text, she decided to follow the voting behaviour of Jan Mulder, a Dutch ALDE MEP, who voted against.³³

Figure 25: Greenhouse gas allowances - Result of the votes for each Belgian party



³³ According to an interview with Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck’s assistant, Pascal Dubois.

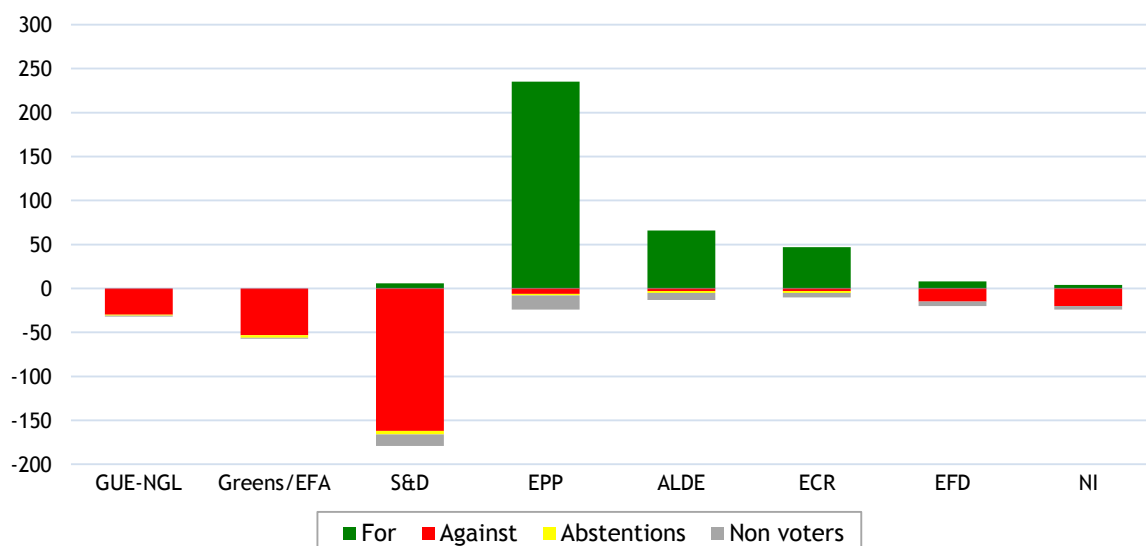
12. Should the EU strengthen and extend its internal market for services?

While the single market is one of the key pillars of the EU, many feel that it is far from complete due to differences in national legislation. However, these national rules on social protection are frequently seen by Member States as safeguards against unfair competition from foreign workers and companies. Because the level and design of their social protection differ among Member States, it is difficult to replace national rules with common European ones. During the 2009-2014 legislature, the Commission has launched several proposals to remove, or at least reduce, national legislative barriers. Yet these proposals did not lead to many sizeable results. In September 2013, the European Parliament voted on a non-binding report, with which it aimed to support the internal market for services. The text notably deplored the poor enforcement of the 2006 Services Directive and called for more efforts to reduce national barriers. The EU's report had, in the end, limited results.

In the European Parliament, a clear left-right divide shaped the vote on the resolution. Most of the amendments of the leftist groups to foresee social and ecological rules to prevent unfair competition were rejected, which led these groups to vote against the overall resolution. This is the case for the far-left GUE-NGL, the Greens/EFA and the S&D group. The Eurosceptic EFD also voted largely against the resolution. As the centrist EPP, the liberal ALDE and ECR voted in favour, the resolution was approved.³⁴

The margin was smaller than is normally the case: 366 MEPs voted in favour, while 292 voted against. Inside the different political groups, we notice a high degree of loyalty in the voting behaviour. Very few MEPs voted differently than their European group. The relative narrow margin between those in favour and those against might have played a role in this cohesion.

Figure 26: Internal market for services - Result of the votes in each parliamentary group

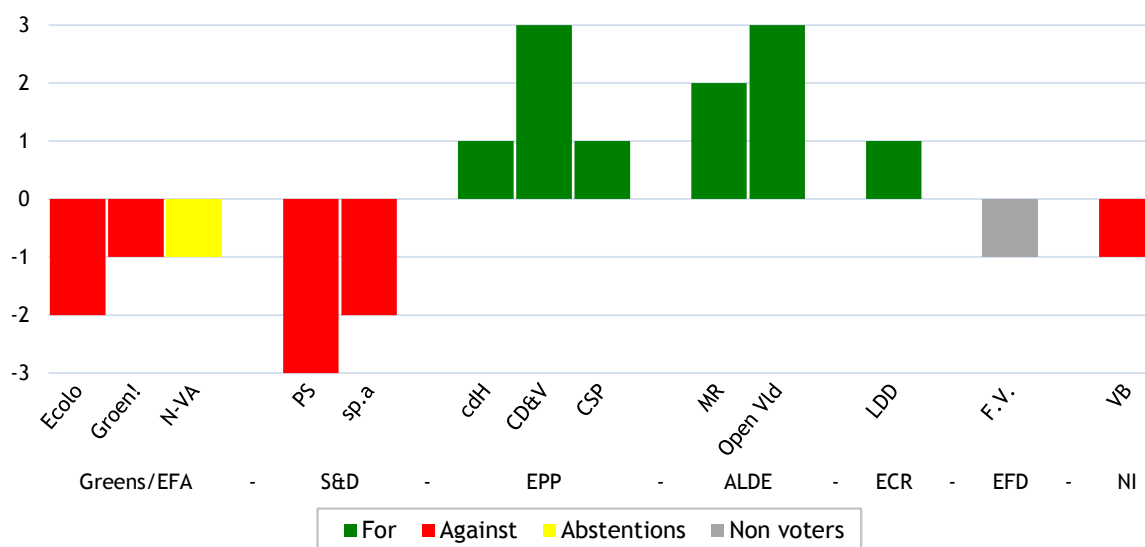


Overall, Belgian MEPs were no exception to this high loyalty in the European groups. Of all the Belgian MEPs that took part in the vote, only one failed to vote in line with their European

³⁴ See votes: VoteWatch Europe. 2013. [Internal market for services](#).

political group. The exception is Mark Demesmaeker (N-VA), who abstained when the vote took place.³⁵ Only two other MEPs from the Greens/EFA group abstained during the vote, while all other members of the group voted against. This different voting behaviour signals that the N-VA's position on internal market issues is rather different from its European political group. Nonetheless, the N-VA chose not to vote in favour of the report. The fact that the party would otherwise have been in outright opposition to the Greens/EFA group's point of view is likely to have played a role.

Figure 27: Internal market for services - Result of the votes for each Belgian party



13. Should the EU create a banking union?

In September 2013, the European Parliament voted on the creation of a Single Supervisory Mechanism (SSM). It was the result of a relatively short but all the more intense negotiation process. This Mechanism is a first step in the development of a Banking Union that encompasses the eurozone and other potential Member States (the latter would be allowed to join on a voluntary basis). The Banking Union is part of the EU's strategy to overcome the eurozone crisis, and aims to break the link between sovereign debt and banking crises. The SSM was created by two regulations. The first regulation endowed the European Central Bank with tasks so as to exercise bank supervision.

The vote on this regulation is discussed below. The second legislative regulation modified the rules of the pan-EU European Banking Authority. The voting behaviour on this second vote was almost identical to the vote we discuss.³⁶

There was a very large majority in the European Parliament in favour of endowing the ECB with supervisory tasks (559 in favour, only 62 against).³⁷ The four main political groups (Greens/EFA,

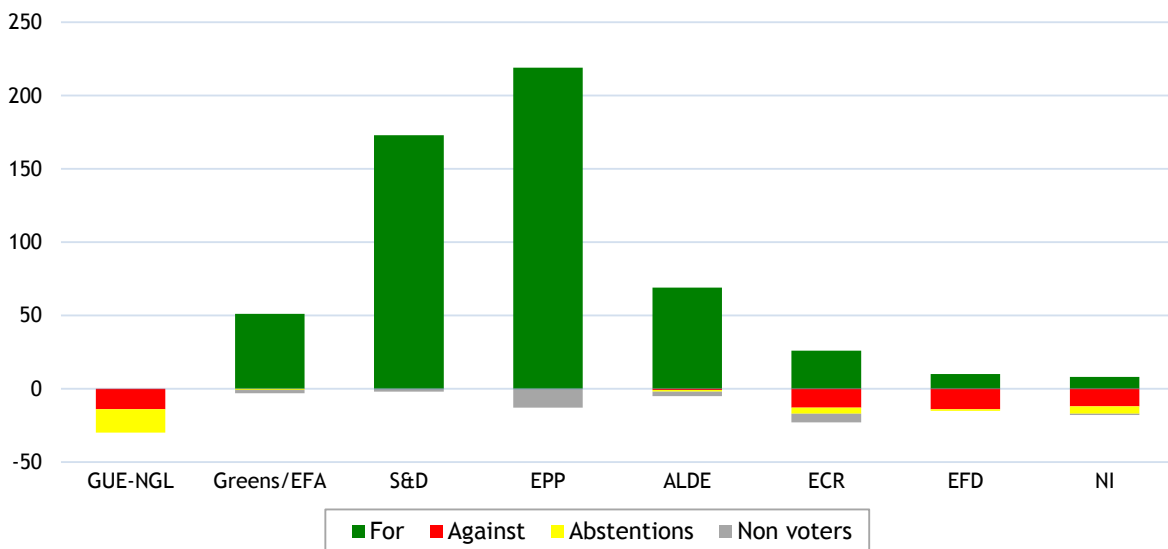
³⁵ According to the reply from his secretariat, Mark Demesmaeker actually intended to vote in favour of the resolution. This would have distanced him further from his parliamentary group.

³⁶ See votes: VoteWatch Europe. 2013. [Specific tasks for the European Central Bank concerning policies relating to the prudential supervision of credit institutions.](#)

³⁷ See votes: VoteWatch Europe. 2013. [European Banking Authority and prudential supervision of credit institutions.](#)

S&D, EPP and ALDE) all supported the legislation. Inside the four main groups, we notice a very large consensus in favour of the legislative act, with only three MEPs from these groups voting against. The far-left GUE-NGL was the main political group that voted against. The ECR and the EFD partially voted against the legislation, mostly due to concerns that the SSM would hurt the financial sector in the UK and in other non-eurozone countries.

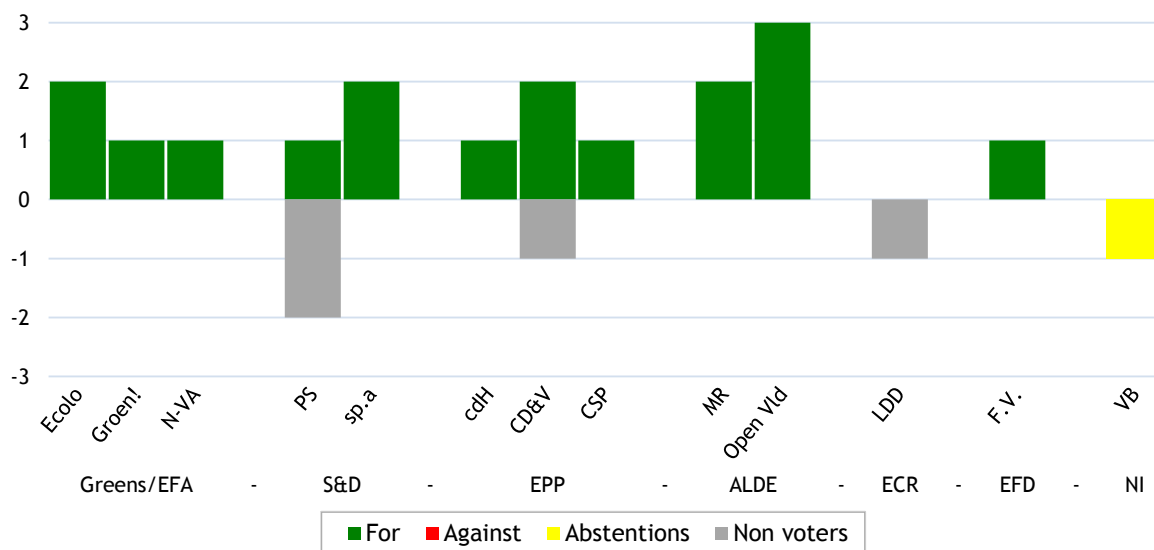
Figure 28: Banking union - Result of the votes in each parliamentary group



All Belgian MEPs voted in favour of the proposal, except for Philip Claeys (Vlaams Belang) who abstained. Four Belgian MEPs did not participate in the vote, two of which from the PS. In their vote, Belgian MEPs were in general loyal to their European political group. The only exception is Frank Vanhecke, who voted in favour of the proposal while his European political group narrowly voted against the proposal. The high loyalty and the positive vote by Frank Vanhecke are probably linked to a large consensus in the Belgium in favour of the proposal, which was seen as a big step in undoing the sovereign debt crisis.

Marianne Thyssen was the rapporteur for the Parliament on this piece of legislation, giving her a highly prominent role in the issue. Philippe Lamberts (Ecolo) was the shadow rapporteur for the Greens/EFA, making him one of the key MEPs in his group with regard to the banking union.

Figure 29: Banking union - Result of the votes for each Belgian party



14. Should the European Parliament have a single seat?

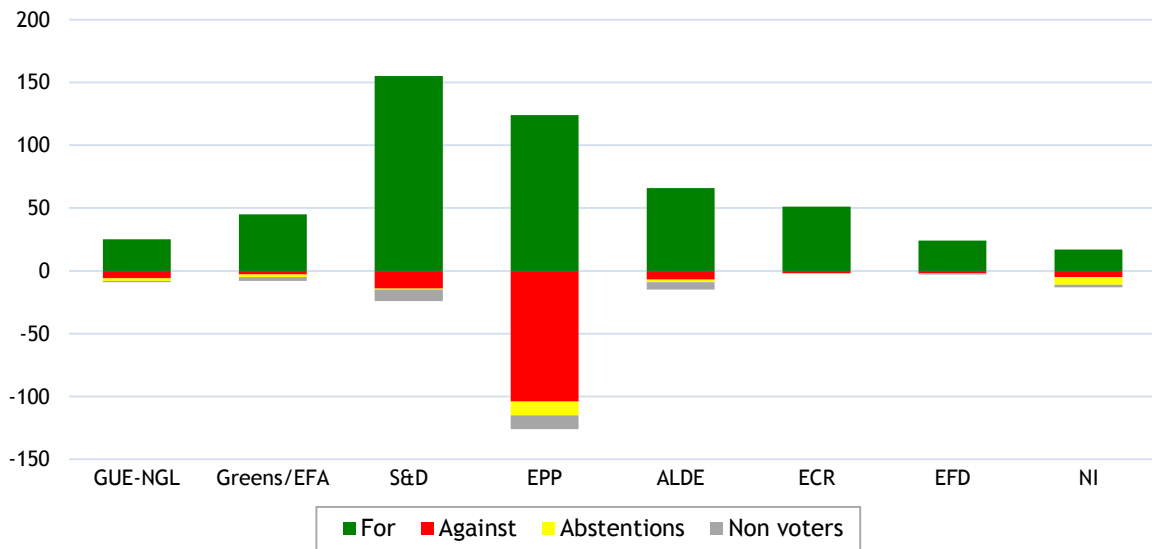
A recurring issue in the debates of the European Parliament is the revision of the Parliament's seat. Its current official seat is located in Strasbourg where the European Parliament plenary takes place, though most of the parliamentary work happens in Brussels. The MEPs voted on the matter several times during the 2009-2014 term. The latest of these votes took place on October 2013 as part of the report on the 2014 budget.³⁸

With this vote, the MEPs called once more on the Council to consider the elaboration of a roadmap for a single seat for the European Parliament, in order to lighten the load in the EU budget. A majority of MEPs from all groups voted in favour, renewing their support for the revision of the seat policy. Overall, a large majority was reached, as three quarters of the MEPs voted in favour.³⁹ As expected, French MEPs from EPP, S&D, ALDE and GUE-NGL defected, voting in line with the position of the French government of maintaining the Parliament's seat in Strasbourg. Only a few French MEPs, mostly Greens, voted in favour of the seat revision. In the EPP, MEPs from German, Spanish, Romanian, Estonian, Greek and Croatian joined their French colleagues in voting against the single seat. The result was a noticeable split in the EPP's position on the matter.

³⁸ European Parliament. 23 Oct 2013. [Resolution on 'the Council position on the draft general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2014'. P7_TA\(2013\)0437.](#)

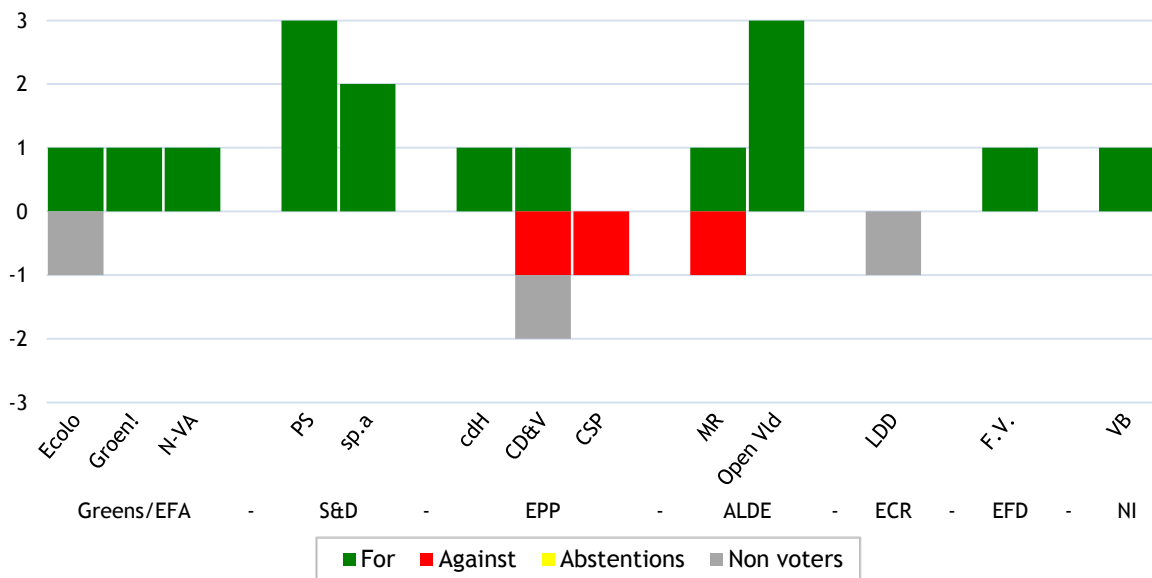
³⁹ See votes: VoteWatch Europe. 2013. [Draft general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2014 - all sections - paragraph 90.](#)

Figure 30: Single seat - Result of the votes in each parliamentary group



Almost all Belgian MEPS voted in favour of a revision of the seat policy. Frédérique Ries (MR) from ALDE and Marianne Thyssen (CD&V) from EPP voted against but both stated afterwards that they had made a mistake when voting. Only Mathieu Grosch (CSP), the single MEP from the German-speaking community, opposed the principle of a revision as did many of his colleagues from the EPP.

Figure 31: Single seat - Result of the votes for each Belgian party



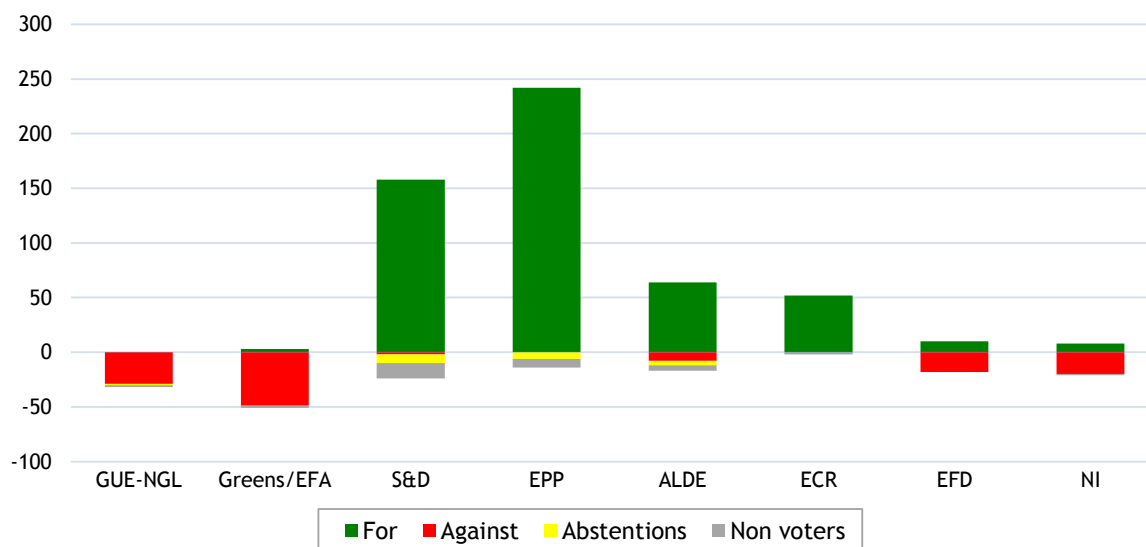
15. Should the EU budget be increased and be made more flexible?

In November 2013, the European Parliament approved the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). This decision sets a multiannual budgetary framework until 2020, a deadline that falls after the end of the next term of the European Parliament. Since the Treaty of Lisbon, the Parliament has to give its consent on the MFF, thus giving it a more important role.

The Council decided that the multiannual budget will shrink in absolute value compared to the previous 2007-2013 MFF. It will amount to 960 billion euros in commitments, down from 995 billion euros, a decrease of 35%. While MEPs were not able to revise the size of the MFF, they succeeded in obtaining a number of important concessions from the Member States: flexibility between budget years and budget lines, the promise of the creation of a high-level group to discuss the increase of own resources in the EU Budget (see the separate vote on the matter) and a revision clause that states that the Commission will have to bring forward a review of the MFF in 2016. The latter provision is also aimed at aligning the future duration of the MFF with the 5-year political cycles of the EU institutions.

The deal was supported by a comfortable majority (EPP, S&D, ALDE and ECR), passing with 537 votes in favour to 126 against, and 19 abstentions. The opposition came mainly from the Greens/EFA, GUE-NGL and EFD groups.⁴⁰

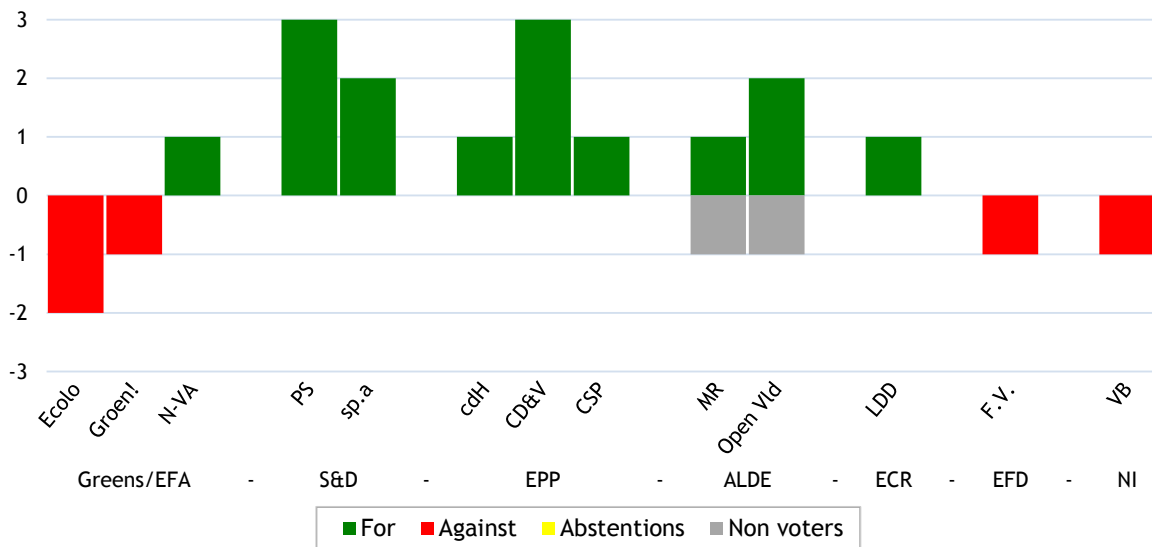
Figure 32: EU budget - Result of the votes in each parliamentary group



All Belgian MEPs but one voted in line with their European groups. Ecolo and Groen MEPs voted against what they considered a bad compromise. The exception is the MEP Mark Demesmaeker (N-VA) who did not side with the protest vote of Greens/EFA, along with a few other British MEPs colleagues. Belgian MEPs from the Flemish far-right (Vlaams Belang) and Frank Vanhecke also voted against the final text.

⁴⁰ See votes: VoteWatch Europe. 2013. [Multiannual financial framework 2014-2020](#).

Figure 33: EU budget - Result of the votes for each Belgian party



16. Should the agricultural subsidies remain a budgetary priority for the EU?

Formally adopted by the Council in December 2013, the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in order to make the policy more equitable, green and market-oriented is composed of four Basic Regulations.⁴¹ The vote of the European Parliament analysed here is about the Regulation on the financing, management and monitoring of the CAP, which took place in November 2013.⁴² This text aims at harmonising many of the rules on the financing and management of direct payments, market measures and rural development, and at implementing a monitoring system that will serve to assess the progress, efficiency and effectiveness of the policy in meeting its objectives.

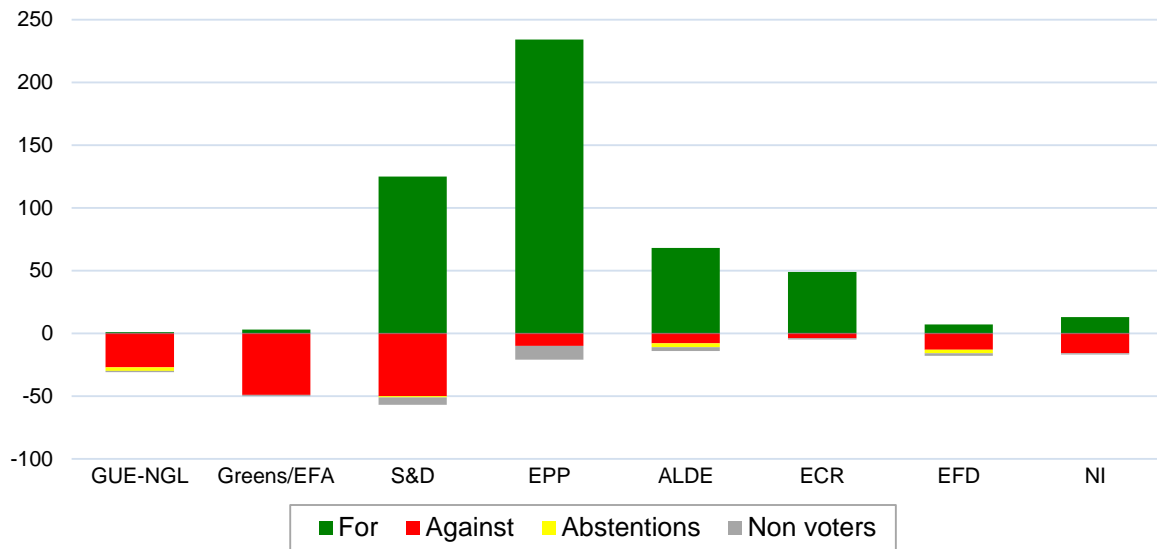
The regulation was backed by a majority of 500 votes formed by the EPP, S&D, ALDE and ECR groups. However, the S&D votes were divided, as six delegations (UK, the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, Sweden and Austria) joined the 177 opposing votes from the Greens/EFA, GUE-NGL and EFD.⁴³ The reasons behind the opposition of the Greens/EFA and GUE-NGL is the lack of fair redistribution of funds to smaller farmers, subject to a CAP too liberalised for them. Not surprisingly, the Greens/EFA were also disappointed by the lack of ambition to make the CAP more sustainable. Although the EFD group was mainly opposed to the text (13 votes against), seven of its members voted in favour.

⁴¹ The four regulations are on the financing, management and monitoring of the CAP (1), direct payments to farmers (2), rural development (3), and the agricultural market (4).

⁴² European Parliament. 20 Nov 2013. [Resolution on 'proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the financing, management and monitoring of the common agricultural policy'](#).

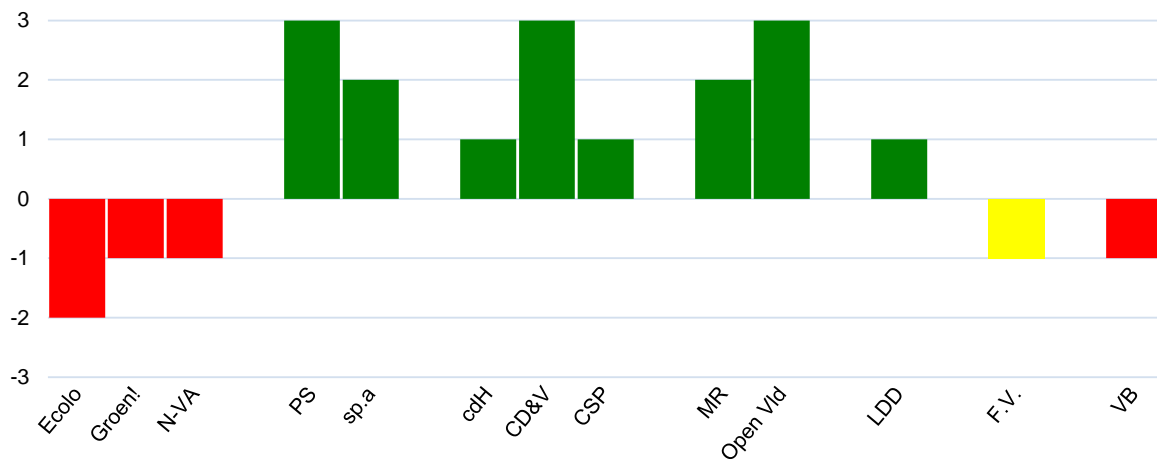
⁴³ See votes: VoteWatch Europe. 2013. [Financing, management and monitoring of the CAP](#).

Figure 34: Agriculture - Result of the votes in each parliamentary group



Overall, Belgian MEPs were in favour of the text. All of them voted in accordance with their European groups. The only dissident is Frank Vanhecke (EFD), who abstained from voting whereas the majority of his group was opposed to the text. The N-VA followed the majority of the Greens/EFA group in voting against the text, even though the parties at the centre-right were in favour.

Figure 35: Agriculture - Result of the votes for each Belgian party

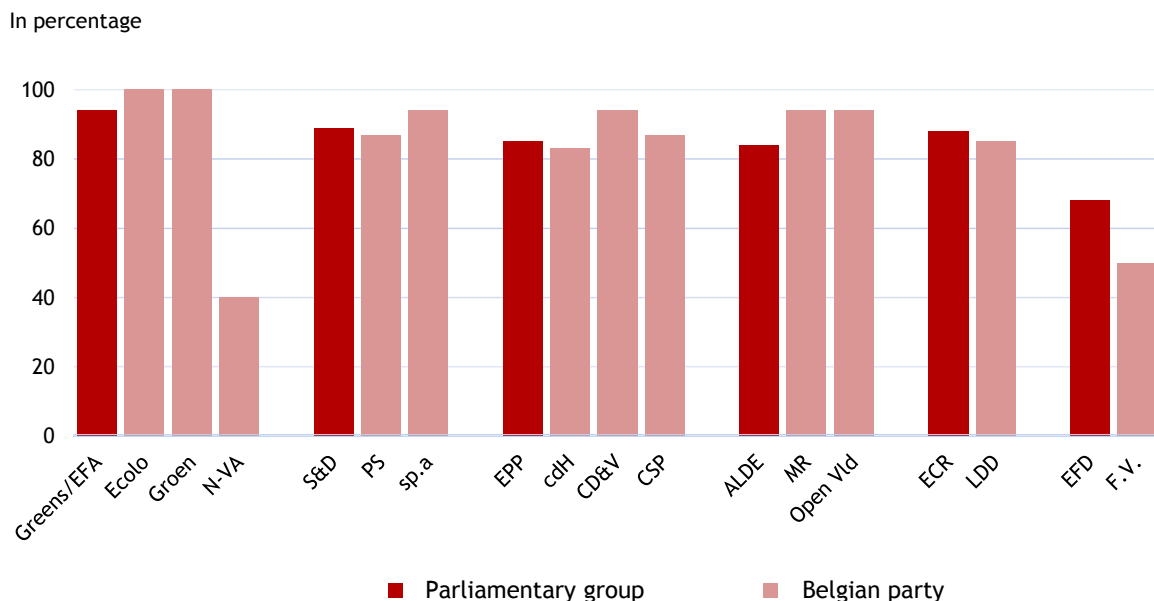


4. General findings on the 16 votes

In general, Belgian MEPs are very much integrated in the voting dynamics of the European Parliament. For the 16 votes considered, loyalty of Belgian MEPs to their group is high compared to average loyalty in their groups (see figure below). The loyalty of Belgian MEPs to their political group was slightly lower for the 16 votes than for the legislature as a whole. But this is a general tendency among MEPs, and the controversy and salience of some of these votes is likely to explain this difference.

Moreover, on the key files analysed, it is doubtful that Belgian MEPs expressed a national Belgian vote. Although for half of the votes, a large majority of Belgian MEPs - usually about three quarters - expressed the same view, we tend to believe this merely reflect the internal political dynamic of the European Parliament. However, the almost unanimous Belgian vote in favour of backloading part of the allowances of the emissions trading scheme is most noticeable (with cdH, CD&V, and CSP in favour of the text, unlike their EPP group). But whether this vote can be considered as a single Belgian vote remains open to interpretation.

Figure 36: Loyalty during the 16 key votes



Beyond these general trends for all Belgian MEPs, we can draw some more detailed conclusions for each Belgian political party. A clear exception to the high loyalty observed between Belgian MEPs and their European political group concerns the N-VA. The N-VA successive representatives, Frieda Brepoels and Mark Demesmaeker, voted differently than their Greens/EFA group in 9 out of the 15 key votes in which the N-VA participated⁴⁴ (i.e. 60% of the selected votes) - compared to about 40% of the time over the whole legislature. The N-VA notably abstained on the vote for the introduction of several pro-integration instruments that the Greens/EFA favoured: Eurobonds, a Financial Transaction Tax and own-resources instruments for the EU. The N-VA also opposed the phasing-out from nuclear energy but

⁴⁴ Frieda Brepoels was absent during the vote on the EEAS.

favoured the reintroduction of border controls. In sum, as a centre-right party defining itself as “eurorealist”, the N-VA is an outlier in the Greens/EFA group where centre-left “federalists” MEPs dominate. For a comparison of the N-VA with other European groups, see box “which parliamentary group could the N-VA join after the elections?”

Box: which parliamentary group could the N-VA join after the elections?

Our analysis shows that the N-VA does not fit in well in the Greens/EFA group. The average loyalty during the 2009-2014 term has been just above 60%, while loyalty during the examined key files drops to 40%, with only 6 out of 15 votes where the N-VA voted in line with its group. The regionalist stance of the European Free Alliance proved insufficient for the proper integration of the N-VA in the left-leaning Greens/EFA group. Different socio-economic viewpoints often led to different voting behaviours.

As a result of the difficult relation between the N-VA and the Greens/EFA, there has been frequent speculation on whether the N-VA will join another parliamentary group after the elections. This would in fact partly be the result of its own success: the number of N-VA MEPs is expected to jump from one to at least four. It would be difficult to have such a large set of “rebel” MEPs in the otherwise rather small and highly cohesive Greens/EFA group.

While the party has no official position on which group they would join, we believe there are three possibilities: either the N-VA joins (a) the ALDE, (b) the ECR or (c) the EPP. The past voting record provides a useful insight into the alignment of the N-VA with these groups. The party’s voting record during the key controversial votes is interesting in that respect, as these votes tend to reveal the political orientation of an MEP.

When considering the 15 key votes in which the N-VA participated, the voting behaviour of the N-VA (first by Frieda Brepoels, subsequently by Mark Demesmaeker) appears to fit in best with the ALDE. Out of the 15 votes, the Flemish regionalists voted 9 times in line with the liberal European group. The EPP comes second, with 7 out of 15 identical votes, followed by the ECR with 5 out of 15. However, these results are likely to underestimate to some extent the N-VA’s alignment to these groups. During certain votes, the N-VA may have abstained in order not to go fully against the position of the Greens/EFA. Presuming that an abstention by the N-VA signals that the party preference was actually to vote the opposite of its European group, the N-VA is in reality even more closely aligned with the ALDE, with a suspected identical voting pattern in 12 out of 15 votes. The ECR then comes in second (11 out of 15) and the EPP third (10 out of 15).

Apart from past voting patterns, strategic considerations would undoubtedly play a major role in the N-VA’s choice if the party decides to join another group. It would arguably not be a wise move for the N-VA to join the ECR. Given the general pro-European attitude in Flanders, it would be risky for them to join a Eurosceptic group. This is especially true if we take into account the fact that the biggest national party of that group - the British conservatives - is attempting to organise a referendum on the UK’s membership in the EU. Choosing the ALDE would come with its own set of drawbacks, but for the opposite reason. It would link the N-VA to the strong pro-Europeanism of Guy Verhofstadt (Open

Vld), which is at odds with the N-VA's own middle-of-the-road views on the EU, which the N-VA labels as "eurorealism".

The EPP might, on the other hand, be a valuable partner for the N-VA, strategically speaking. The EPP is the key decision-shaping group in the Parliament, making membership particularly attractive for the N-VA. In addition, the party has already been a member of the EPP in the past, it would thus be a rather natural decision for them to join back. Finally, if the elections result in the predicted neck-and-neck race between the EPP and the S&D to become the biggest Parliamentary group, the four N-VA MEPs could help tip the balance in favour of the EPP. Because being the biggest group plays an important role in the nomination of the President of the European Commission, the N-VA would potentially be able to get certain concessions from the EPP (e.g. senior posts in the Parliament) in exchange for their potential role as kingmakers.

In sum, in terms of its voting record the N-VA is closely aligned to the ALDE, but if we take other considerations into account, the EPP seems to be a particularly likely group for the N-VA to join after the elections.

Another exception to the rather high loyalty of Belgian MEPs to their group is the far-right MEP Frank Vanhecke, who sits in the EFD group since July 2011. In half of the cases, Frank Vanhecke did not follow the majority of his group, although the general voting behaviour within the EFD is far from cohesive. Contrary to the dominating "Eurosceptic" stance of the EFD, Frank Vanhecke voted in line with the majority of the European Parliament in favour of the two-pack, the Banking Union and the reinforcement of border controls.

The voting behaviour of Frank Vanhecke did not coincide with his former Vlaams Belang colleague Philip Claeys. On the 16 votes analysed, Frank Vanhecke had a tendency to vote more in line with the majority of the European Parliament (6 out of 16 votes) than Philip Claeys (4 out of 16). However, both Vanhecke and Claeys voted in favour of an extension of maternity leave that mostly the left favoured.

On the right-side of the political spectrum, Belgian liberals (5 MEPs from MR and Open Vld) and Christian-democrats (5 MEPs from CD&V, cdH and CSP) voted very cohesively with their groups, respectively the ALDE and the EPP. A large majority of Belgian MEPs from these two political groups were almost always on the winning side of the vote. The sole exception in the selected votes is on maternity leave, where the left managed to impose its views. The domination of winning votes illustrates that ALDE and EPP are instrumental in passing legislation as well as major non-legislative resolutions of the Parliament. For the selected key votes, Belgian MEPs from the centre-right were part of the "majority" in the European Parliament.

While the voting behaviour is very cohesive, it conceals different participation rates. Most notably, Jean-Luc Dehaene (CD&V) did not often participate in the votes of the European Parliament - only in 44% of the roll-call votes during the legislature. This is also the case for the key votes selected for the purpose of this paper, where his participation is limited to 10 out of the 16 votes.

Cohesion is also not absolute among Belgian MEPs from the Christian democrat family and the liberal family. For the 16 votes that were examined, Open Vld seems the only Belgian party that, at times, lacked internal coordination. The Flemish liberals were noticeably split for the

key votes on nuclear energy and the ETS (backloading). Also noteworthy is that on two occasions - maternity leave and ACTA -, Anne Delvaux (cdH) voted differently than her Flemish counterparts of the CD&V and the majority of MEPs from the EPP. This is not very surprising: in the Belgian political scene, cdH and CD&V are no longer considered quite as close, the cdH having drifted towards the centre-left. As for the analysis on overall loyalty over the 2009-2014 period (see supra), the diverging voting behaviour also illustrates that the cdH is at times not entirely at ease with the dominating centre-right leanings of the EPP. This is also in line with the comments made in the press by Claude Rolin who is due to replace Anne Delvaux after the elections.

In general, Belgian socialists voted like their S&D peers. However, for the selected votes, the Belgian left and especially the French-speaking PS occasionally voted differently than the S&D group. On the most emblematic vote about “austerity” (the two-pack) both PS and sp.a MEPs voted against the deal in which S&D took part. The limited weight of the Belgian socialists probably allowed them - as a symbolic gesture - to vote against the deal that their group negotiated. Belgian socialists did not have as much leeway in the Belgian federal Chamber where they are part of the majority. This explains the paradox that Belgian socialists gave consent to the Fiscal Compact Treaty in Belgian parliaments but opposed the six-pack and two-pack in the European Parliament even though all of them are perceived as enshrining “austerity”. The French-speaking socialist MEPs (PS) also voted against the TTIP which reflects their party opposition to an extensive free trade agreement. With regard to this vote, the sp.a did not follow the PS in their departure from the S&D stance.

The Belgian Greens participated diligently and cohesively to the work of the Greens within the European Parliament. Belgian MEPs systematically voted in support of the majority of their group for the selected votes. On nuclear energy, border control, the Multiannual Financial Framework, the TTIP, CAP, internal market for services, the Greens were in the opposition. Their position in several votes highlights that the Greens are both in favour of more European integration and part of the left.

Within the ECR, Derk Jan Eppink was often absent - 6 times for the selected 16 votes. This is in line with his absence for about 30% of the roll-call votes in the plenary between 2009 and 2014, making him one of the least present MEPs in the European Parliament. For the rest, he voted in line with his group, most often opposing the majority vote taking place in the European Parliament.

Conclusion

Overall, Belgian MEPs prove themselves to be loyal and well-integrated in their European Parliament groups. This is both the case for overall voting over the Parliament's 2009-2014 term, as well as when deciding on the 16 contentious votes identified in this Working Paper. Belgian MEPs typically vote in accordance with the position of their European group, rather than according to national (or Flemish, or French community) interests. While there is some observable coordination among Belgian parties belonging to the same European group, the research did not detect noteworthy voting coordination among Belgian MEPs across ideological lines.

The general pro-European attitude of Belgian MEPs and the strong party discipline in Belgian politics most likely play a role in the overall strong loyalty of Belgian MEPs with respect to their European groups. Two Belgian parties deviate from this overall high loyalty: the Flemish regionalist N-VA and, to a lesser extent, the French-speaking centrist cdH.

The N-VA is the most pronounced exception, as the party visibly did not fit in with the joint greens and regionalist group in Parliament. The N-VA's current MEP, Mark Demesmaeker, was overall the least loyal MEP in the otherwise highly cohesive Greens/EFA group. The left of centre orientation of both its green and regionalist MEPs appears to be the main reason for the mismatch between the N-VA and its political group.

The difference in political orientation also explains why Anne Delvaux (cdH) is not entirely comfortable in the centrist EPP group. The cdH is often perceived as centre-left, which contrasts with the EPP's centre-right position. While the gap between the cdH and its European group is less pronounced than the N-VA, the party was nonetheless one of the outliers in the EPP. This tension will not decrease in the Parliament's upcoming term, as the cdH's future MEP (Claude Rolin) is part of the left wing of his party.

Despite the unease between the cdH and the EPP, a change of group membership is unlikely for the French-speaking centrists. This is radically different for the N-VA, for which a change in political group is a near certainty. In terms of voting behaviour during past key votes, it appears the N-VA would fit in best with the ALDE. However, from a political and strategic point of view, joining the EPP could prove a better choice.

High loyalty is not necessarily a synonym for being a "good" MEP. While a degree of group loyalty seems needed in order for the Parliament to function, a certain degree of independence is also needed for a MEP to perform his or her role. Another useful indicator of the involvement of MEPs is the participation rate during votes. In this regard, some Belgian MEPs are frequently absent when votes are cast. This is notably the case for Jean-Luc Dehaene (CD&V) and Derk Jan Eppink (LDD). Their low participation rate might be an indication of their limited association with the activities of the Parliament - although other factors that go beyond the scope of this publication also have to be taken into account.

While small changes cannot be excluded, Belgian MEPs will most likely remain highly loyal to their European groups during the 2014-2019 Parliamentary term. If the N-VA uses the momentum of its increased political weight to join a group that is more in line with its political views, this loyalty is even set to increase. And consequently, considered as a whole, the future

Belgian MEPs will be more integrated within the main political groups of the European Parliament, putting them in a position to contribute to decision-making. Their influence on the outcomes of the European Parliament will mostly depend on their actual involvement in the parliamentary committees and elsewhere, well before the final votes are cast in the plenary.

Annex: Methodology

Data

A large part of the data used for this research came from the VoteWatch Europe database. Part of the data was provided directly to the Egmont Institute by VoteWatch Europe, and the remainder was taken from its website. VoteWatch Europe gathers quantitative data from the roll-call votes in the European Parliament.

The selection of the 16 votes that were discussed throughout this Working Paper is the result of a transnational selection process by EU experts. On the basis of a list of 50 potentially important votes drawn up by VoteWatch Europe and Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute, each of the 18 participating national think tanks voted on the European Parliament votes that they deemed most important.

The Egmont Institute completed this data with Belgian MEPs' personal blogs and websites, documents of the European Parliament, and additional information from various other sources. The Institute approached Belgian MEPs who, for one or several of these 16 votes, did not vote in accordance to their European parliamentary group, as well as Philip Claeys (Vlaams Belang) who is not affiliated to a group. Replies were received from all MEPs, with the exception of: Philip Claeys (Vlaams Belang), Véronique De Keyser (PS), Jean-Luc Dehaene (CD&V), Mathieu Grosch (CSP), Frank Vanhecke (independent), and Guy Verhofstadt (Open Vld).

Loyalty

Throughout this Working Paper, the concept of loyalty is used. The concept is not used as a value judgement of the performance of an MEP. It is rather a neutral indication of whether the MEP followed his parliamentary group's majority voting line (= loyal position) or whether the MEP voted differently (= rebel position). A voting line can be the expression of a vote for, a vote against or an abstention. The majority voting line is therefore defined as the main vote (among the three aforementioned choices) cast by the parliamentary group.

To calculate the average loyalty of a political group for a given vote, we have used the following formula: the number of MEPs who voted like the majority voting line, divided by the total number of MEPs of this parliamentary group.

Figures

Concerning the figures in the Working Paper, the Egmont Institute chose to draw a distinction in the 'non-voters' bar, depicted in grey. In the figures on the voting by MEPs from all Member States, the non-voters bar only represents MEPs who attended the plenary session but did not vote.

To the contrary, in the figures on the voting by Belgian MEPs, the non-voters bar represents both MEPs who were present at the plenary but did not vote, and MEPs who were simply absent from this plenary session. This choice was made to represent the vote by all 22 Belgian MEPs in the figures, including all forms of voting (for, against, abstention, no vote) as well as an absence.

About the EGMONT Institute

EGMONT - The Royal Institute for International Relations is an independent think-tank based in Brussels. Its interdisciplinary research is conducted in a spirit of total academic freedom. Drawing on the expertise of its own research fellows, as well as that of external specialists, both Belgian and foreign, it provides analysis and suggests international policy options that are meant to be as operational as possible.

Benefiting from the role acquired by Brussels in the global arena and from the prestigious setting of the Egmont Palace, the Institute offers an ideal forum to visiting Heads of State, Heads of government, representatives of international organisations, foreign ministers and other political figures.

Conferences, colloquia and seminars nurture the work of the research fellows. They also give participants the opportunity to exchange views with other specialists and with a well-informed public made up of representatives of the political, economic and academic spheres, the media and civil society.

Along with research and meetings, the Institute has also developed specialised training activities, both in Brussels and abroad. It can, on request, offer specific programmes for visiting and resident diplomats and foreign professionals.

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Situated in Brussels at the heart of EU political decision-making, the European Affairs Programme aims to provide in-depth as well as policy-oriented analyses on a wide range of topics of relevance to EU policy-makers. Special attention is devoted to those matters that are - or ought to be - at the heart of the EU policy debate. Aside from a continuous focus on institutional matters, various substantive EU policies dominate the research agenda, such as the single market, energy and climate and the EU budget. The Programme also deals extensively with the evolution of the Economic and Monetary Union in the context of the economic and financial crisis.

Project “European Parliament votes that shaped EU and national politics 2009-2014”

VoteWatch Europe and Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute initiated the project “European Parliament votes that shaped EU and national politics 2009-2014”. Together with partners in two thirds of the Member States the objective of the project is to highlight and analyse the impact of European policy issues on national politics in the last five years and to help raise public awareness of the May 2014 European elections on the basis of a set of key votes between 2009 and late 2013.