



The 2019 European Parliament Elections: Potential Outcome and Consequences

Simon Hix and Doru Frantescu*

Summary

The 2019 European Parliament elections take place in a new context, given Brexit and the changes in the political landscape in many countries in Europe. With growing support for parties opposed to further European integration, on both the right and the left as well as within the main political groups, we expect “EU-critical” MEPs to make up 35 to 40 per cent of the next European Parliament.

As a result, the “Grand Coalition”, between the European People’s Party and Socialists and Democrats, is expected to lose its majority. This centrist/pro-European coalition will need to expand to include the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe and the Greens/European Free Alliance. However, this would be an unwieldy and uncohesive alliance on many issues.

To illustrate the significance of the 2019 elections, we discuss the current balance of power in the European Parliament, how coalitions have formed across different policy issues, and how voting cohesion of the political groups has varied across policy issues. We also analyse 10 key votes in the 2014–19 Parliament, to understand how changes in group and coalition sizes could lead to different policy outcomes in the 2019–24 term.

* Simon Hix is Pro-Director for Research and the Harold Laski Professor at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Doru Frantescu is CEO and co-founder of VoteWatch Europe.

1 Introduction

The 2019 European Parliament elections will take place in a unique and challenging context for the European Union: Brexit, sustaining the Eurozone, managing mass migration from Africa and the Middle East, global economic and geopolitical uncertainties, and growing support for populist anti-European forces in many countries across Europe. Moreover, the outcome of the election will matter for the future of Europe, as the next European Parliament will have a major influence on the European Union's transition to a Union with only 27 member states. Its policy positions and decisions will affect the EU's ability to address the myriad of issues arising from Brexit as well as the other key issues on the EU agenda, such as the digital economy, global trade deals, border policing, youth unemployment, Eurozone reform, and so on.

Due to growing support for populist anti-European parties, on the right and the left as well as within some of the mainstream political groups, the next European Parliament could contain as many as 35 to 40 per cent of Eurosceptic or "EU-critical" MEPs, who question the continued economic and political integration of the EU. MEPs from these groups and national parties are likely to play a key role in forming and breaking majorities in key votes. They are also likely to win some key agenda-setting positions, in committees and as legislative report-writers (*rapporteurs*). And, as a result of the growing fragmentation of the votes, the "Grand Coalition" between the European People's Party (EPP) and the Socialist and Democrats (S&D) is almost certain to lose its majority in the chamber.

Nevertheless, the other big winner in the election could be the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), which is expected to gain seats through its cooperation with the French president Emmanuel Macron's *La République en Marche*. This group may become the kingmaker in the new parliament, as the weakened EPP and S&D will need ALDE even more than they do now to form or maintain a majority.

For example, ALDE is likely to play a key role in the post-electoral allocation of top EU posts. While the Presidency of the European Commission may be hard to reach for a centrist group, ALDE will try to leverage its rising influence to secure another key position. If the European Council decides to stick with the *Spitzenkandidaten* procedure, the

candidate of the strongest party is likely to get priority as the pick of the national governments to replace Jean-Claude Juncker. Assuming that the EPP will remain the strongest group after the elections, the current frontrunner is Manfred Weber from the Bavarian Christian Social Union, although it might be difficult for Weber to command majority support in the new chamber.

Whether Weber will become the next Commission President or not, the job is set to become more difficult, due to the increasing political fragmentation of the European Parliament and the likely increasing resistance to the Commission's policies. Although the moderate pro-EU forces will still be able to hold a combined majority of seats, the fringes will get the chance to influence EU legislation whenever divisions within the pro-EU camp arise.

To illustrate how the political structure of the European Parliament shapes policy outcomes in the EU, we look at a series of key statistical indicators that measure the behaviour of the political groups. To point out the most important aspects of the upcoming EU elections, we discuss the current balance of power in the European Parliament and how the political forces formed coalitions to shape EU legislation. Due to its high level of heterogeneity and political fragmentation, coalitions in the European Parliament are formed on an *ad hoc* basis, meaning that majorities change from one vote to another. We look at coalition and cohesion patterns by policy area, and consider how the balance of power on each policy area may change after the elections. We also analyse 10 key votes in the 2014–19 Parliament, across a range of key policy issues, to understand how changes in political group and coalition sizes could lead to different policy outcomes in the 2019–24 Parliament.

2 Potential Election Outcome in May 2019

Figure 1 shows the potential composition of the European Parliament after the elections in May, based on the latest opinion polls, as pooled by EuropeElects.eu. The figure also shows the comparison of the new parliament to the current composition without the 73 UK MEPs. Several things are striking.

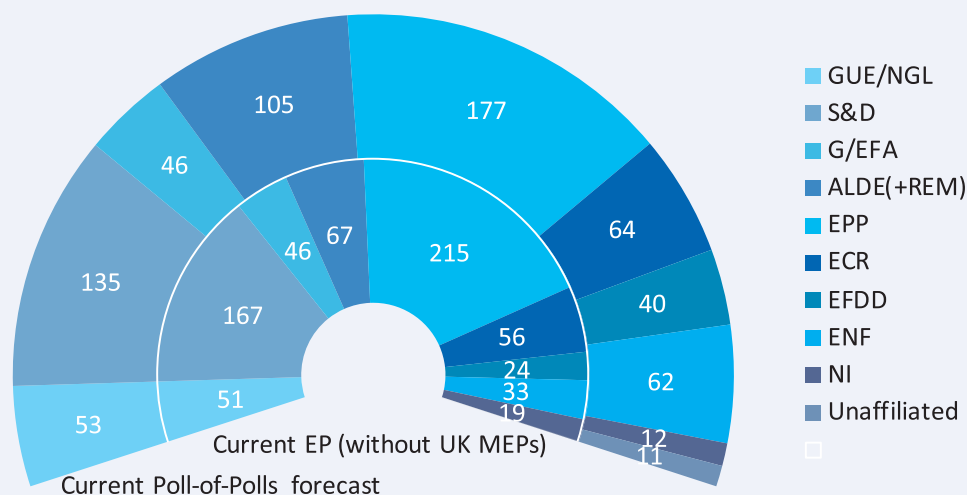
- First, there is likely to be a slight shift to the right, with the median MEP towards the left of the European People's Party (EPP).

- Second, there is likely to be a dramatic change in the composition of the right in the EP, with a significant boost in support for groups on the right of the EPP, as a result of growing support for “populist right” parties in France (*Rassemblement National*, RN), Italy (*Lega*), and in other countries across Northern, Western, and Eastern Europe.
- Third, there is likely to be a much larger representation for Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), assuming that Macron’s party, *La République en Marche*, either joins ALDE or forms an alliance with ALDE in the new parliament.

- Fourth, the Socialists and Democrats (S&D) are likely to be considerably smaller, as support for parties on the mainstream centre-left continues to decline in many countries across Europe.

A typical question in the run-up to the elections is whether the parties to the right of EPP will form a single political group in the new Parliament. At this point, this seems unlikely, due to different policy positions on some key issues. Most of these parties agree on limiting immigration, but they disagree on economic policies: the French RN are interventionists, whilst the Polish PiS or Spanish VOX are economically liberal. Another divisive subject is their

Figure 1 Current EP Composition and Potential Composition after May 2019



Political group abbreviations:

GUE/NGL European United Left-Nordic Green Left
S&D Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats
G/EFA Greens/European Free Alliance
ALDE(+REM) Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe + *La République en Marche*
EPP European People’s Party (Christian Democrats)

ECR European Conservatives and Reformists
EFDD Europe of Freedom and Democracy
ENF Europe of Nations and Freedoms
NI Non-attached MEPs
Unaffiliated MEPs from national parties who are not yet affiliated to a political group

Note: The figure shows the composition of the current European Parliament without the 73 MEPs from the United Kingdom (the inner hemicycle) and the composition of the EP as predicted by the latest forecast of EuropeElects.eu (at 5 April 2019), which pools the latest national opinion polls. We have assumed that the party of French President Macron, *La République en Marche*, will form an alliance of some kind with the ALDE group. EuropeElects places new national parties in the political groups to which they already belong or have indicated which political group they will join. The “unaffiliated” MEPs are from national parties who have not yet indicated which political group they will join.

stance on EU-Russia relations, where the French RN wants closer ties to Russia while the Polish PiS fears interference from Moscow. Even if these parties fail to coalesce into one or two groups, they will create *ad hoc* alliances on many issues on the EU agenda, as they have done in the 2014–19 Parliament.

There is also uncertainty about where the Italian M5S (the Five Star Movement) will end up. M5S is trying to build a new group but may find it difficult to reach the necessary thresholds (of at least 20 MEPs from at least 6 member states). In case they succeed, this group would be somewhere to the left of ALDE. In the 2014–19 term, for example, the M5S MEPs were closest to the Greens in their voting behaviour (with a roughly 75 per cent matching score).

The first decision of the incoming European Parliament will be to “elect” the next Commission President. All the major political groups have proposed one or more *Spitzenkandidat* (“lead candidate”). In 2014, it was assumed that the candidate of the largest political group in the new parliament would be automatically proposed by the European Council, and then would be able to form a majority in the European Parliament – as happened in July 2014 with the proposal of Jean-Claude Juncker, who was then supported by a “grand coalition” between the EPP, S&D and ALDE. However, the changing make-up of the EU could mean that it might be difficult for Manfred Weber, the candidate of the EPP, to be elected. In addition to the smaller representation of the S&D, many S&D and ALDE MEPs may be reluctant to support Weber, due to

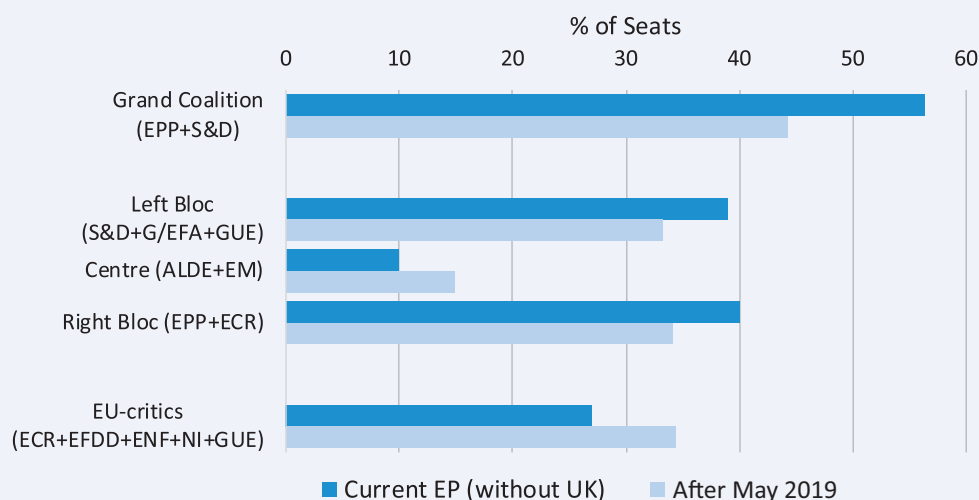
his defence of Victor Orbán’s actions in Hungary and *Fidesz* MEPs continuing to sit with the EPP group, despite the party’s temporary suspension from the EPP party. And, without the full support of S&D and ALDE, Weber could not command a majority. Likewise, in response, the EPP will be reluctant to support Frans Timmermans, the S&D candidate.

There will inevitably need to be a coalition bargain, though, covering all the senior posts that will need to be filled: the Commission President, the Council President, the ECB President, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and the Parliament President. So, we expect a “super grand coalition” bargain to emerge, which will involve the EPP, S&D, ALDE and perhaps also the Greens. To the “populists” on the radical left and right, however, such a deal between the four mainstream groups will reinforce their claim that the EU elites govern as an “undemocratic cartel” against the interests of “the people”, as the elites would once again not have responded to the growing support for “a different kind of Europe”, as represented by the larger contingent of populist right MEPs.

3 Changing EP Political Dynamics: Coalitions and Cohesion

To reinforce the significance of the likely changing composition of the European Parliament, Figure 2 shows the changing sizes of the main types of coalitions that form in key votes in the chamber.

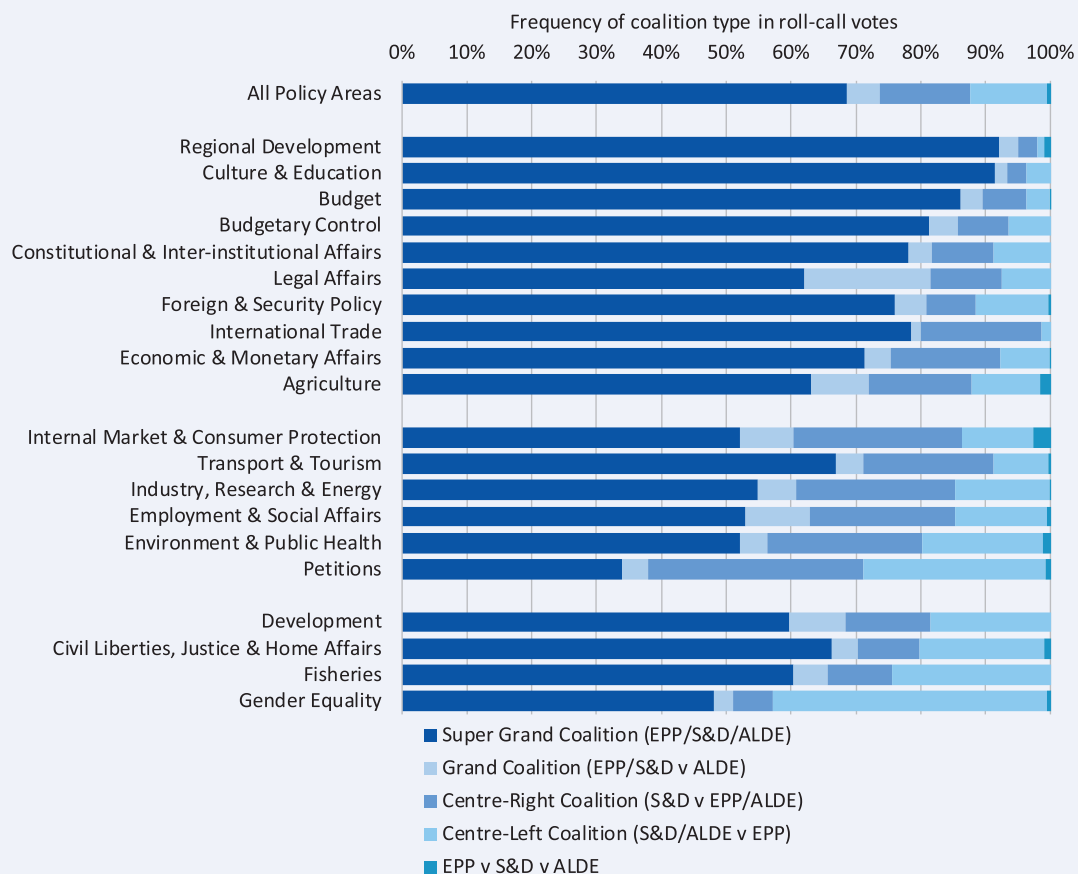
Figure 2 Coalition Sizes



First, the “grand coalition” between the EPP and S&D is likely to be down below 50 per cent of the seats of the first time. This would be a significant change, as the grand coalition between EPP and S&D has been the dominant bloc in the European Parliament since 1994. Second, a centre-left bloc (of S&D, G/EFA and GUE/NGL) and a centre-right bloc (of EPP and ECR) will also be considerably reduced. However, the larger representation of ALDE may mean that it is in pivotal position in deciding whether a centre-left or centre-right majority forms.

However, neither S&D-G/EFA-GUE plus ALDE nor EPP-ECR plus ALDE may have enough seats to command a majority, unless a significant number of MEPs on the populist right either abstain or do not show up, which is often the case. The reason it will be more difficult to form a stable “governing majority” in the new Parliament is a result of the likely significant increase of what we call here the “EU-critical” MEPs. Here we include GUE with the MEPs on the right of the EPP, in ECR, EFDD, ENF, and the non-attached, as the GUE MEPs often vote with these MEPs on the right against

Figure 3 Coalition Patterns by Policy Area in the 2014–19 EP



Note: The figure shows the proportion of times the pluralities of the parties in a particular coalition voted the same way in all roll-call votes (where how each MEP votes – Yes, No, or Abstain – is recorded in the minutes) in a policy area. The coalition patterns are based on the voting behaviour of the three main political groups. The policy areas are identified by the committee from which the report emerged. The figure only includes policy areas for which there were at least 60 roll-call votes between July 2014 and February 2019. The Appendix contains the raw figures.

Source: Compiled by authors from data on www.VoteWatch.eu.

Table 1 Political Group Cohesion by Policy Area in the 2014–19 EP

Policy Area	GUE/ NGL	G/ EFA	S&D	ALDE	EPP	ECR	EFDD	ENF	Average
Budgetary Control	83.5	97.7	94.7	94.7	96.5	85.0	56.0	73.1	85.1
Economic & Monetary Affairs	81.1	96.3	94.2	91.1	95.9	84.9	53.7	61.0	82.3
Regional Development	85.5	98.4	95.7	96.0	97.6	72.3	45.5	67.0	82.3
International Trade	85.3	91.0	86.9	92.4	97.2	87.3	49.6	67.1	82.1
Internal Market & Consumer Protection	78.7	97.2	95.3	91.7	90.5	86.8	45.2	66.8	81.5
Legal Affairs	85.5	95.9	94.1	87.1	94.5	85.2	46.6	62.6	81.4
Constitutional & Inter-institutional Affairs	75.6	93.8	92.1	89.9	95.2	76.1	54.2	72.8	81.2
Development	88.7	98.0	95.5	88.3	94.6	78.9	37.6	63.5	80.6
Budget	75.8	92.6	91.0	90.0	95.9	70.8	57.4	70.9	80.5
Culture & Education	80.3	97.4	96.6	93.5	96.9	62.5	46.7	70.0	80.5
Foreign & Security Policy	82.0	92.7	89.0	90.7	93.1	80.7	47.9	67.5	80.5
Industry, Research & Energy	82.4	97.2	90.5	86.3	95.2	83.9	43.4	62.5	80.2
Civil Liberties, Justice & Home Affairs	85.1	98.2	92.3	89.0	90.0	73.4	39.7	72.1	80.0
Employment & Social Affairs	86.5	97.9	96.5	79.9	89.7	76.7	37.3	71.2	79.5
Environment & Public Health	87.4	97.4	91.9	82.8	89.3	77.1	40.3	68.8	79.4
Transport & Tourism	76.2	96.5	85.8	90.7	89.9	75.6	44.2	66.6	78.2
Fisheries	70.1	89.0	91.7	87.7	94.2	75.1	51.1	64.5	77.9
Agriculture	86.8	96.3	86.6	85.2	92.8	66.1	38.3	59.3	76.4
Gender Equality	91.1	98.5	98.0	84.5	74.0	62.2	32.9	69.2	76.3
Petitions	84.5	97.6	92.1	83.0	88.4	51.6	43.3	59.0	74.9
All votes	82.2	95.4	91.8	88.6	92.7	77.3	47.2	67.7	80.4

Note: These cohesion scores are calculated using an index developed by Simon Hix, Abdul Noury and Gerard (2007) *Democratic Politics in the European Parliament*, Cambridge University Press. This index equals 100 in a roll-call vote if all the MEPs in a group vote the same way, and equals 0 if the MEPs in a group are split equally between Yes, No, and Abstain. The table only includes policy areas for which there were at least 60 roll-call votes between July 2014 and March 2019. The table is sorted by the average cohesion score in a policy area, from highest to lowest. The cells are shaded from low (light) to high (dark) cohesion.

Source: Compiled by authors from data on www.VoteWatch.eu.

the grand coalition or further EU powers. It is also worth pointing out, though, that if we include the Eurosceptic MEPs in EPP (*Fidesz* from Hungary, for example), in ALDE (*ANO* from the Czech Republic) and even from some of the parties from Central and Eastern Europe in S&D, the number of “EU-critical” MEPs in the next European Parliament may even be as high as 35–40 per cent. If that is indeed the case, the elections could have a dramatic effect on EU politics over the next five years.

To consider the potential consequences of the election for EU politics, it is important to understand that coalitions between the political groups in the Parliament tend to shift by policy area. This is illustrated in Figure 3 (see also Table A1 in the Appendix for the numeral data behind the figure). On average, in 69 per cent of the roll-call votes (where how each MEP votes is recorded in the minutes) in the 2014–19 European Parliament there has been a “super grand coalition”, where EPP, S&D and ALDE all voted together. On many of these votes, the issues are on non-controversial, and many other parties voted in favour along with these parties. In 5 per cent of the votes there was a “grand coalition” between the EPP and S&D but without ALDE. Of the remaining votes, in 14 per cent of the votes, S&D was in a minority against a “centre-right coalition” of ALDE together with EPP, usually with ECR supporting, while in 12 per cent of the votes EPP was in a minority against a “centre-left coalition” of ALDE together with S&D, usually with G/EFA and GUE/NGL supporting.

The coalition patterns vary by policy area, though. On Regional Development, Culture & Education, Budget, Budgetary Control, Constitutional & Inter-institutional Affairs, Legal Affairs, Foreign & Security Policy, International Trade, Economic & Monetary Affairs, and Agriculture, the majority has tended to be formed by EPP and S&D, and often with ALDE. On these issues, then, the dominant coalition has been a centrist grand coalition or super grand coalition, often against the smaller more extremist parties. However, on Internal Market & Consumer Protection, Transport & Tourism, Industry, Research & Energy, Employment & Social Affairs, Environment & Public Health, and Petitions, a centre-right coalition (where EPP and ALDE vote together against S&D) has been more likely to form than a centre-left coalition (where S&D and ALDE vote together against EPP). Finally, on Development, Civil Liberties, Justice &

Home Affairs, Fisheries, and Gender Equality, a centre-left coalition has been more likely to form than a centre-right coalition.

It is important to note, though, that whether a group or coalition of groups wins on a particular policy issue also depends on how far the group or the coalition is able to hold together in a vote: in other words, the level of “voting cohesion” of a group or coalition. In general, the political groups in the European Parliament have relatively high levels of cohesion in roll-call votes; somewhere between the very high levels of cohesion in most national parliaments in Europe, and the moderate levels of cohesion amongst the Democrats and Republicans in the U.S. Congress. Also, voting cohesion in the European Parliament has grown over time, as the powers of the European Parliament have grown, and as the political groups have tried to reward voting loyalty and punish voting rebellion – for example by promoting MEPs from loyal national parties to key committee or legislative report-writing positions, and demoting MEPs from less loyal national parties.

Nevertheless, voting cohesion in the European Parliament varies across the political groups and across the policy areas, as Table 1 shows. On average, EPP, S&D, ALDE, and G/EFA are more cohesive than the other groups. G/EFA has been highly cohesive in votes in the 2014–19 Parliament across all policy areas, whereas cohesion has varied across policy issues for the other three groups. In particular, EPP has found it difficult to enforce party discipline on Gender Equality issues. S&D has found it difficult to enforce cohesion on International Trade, Transport & Tourism, and Agriculture, while ALDE has been unable to enforce cohesion on Employment & Social Affairs, Environment & Public Health, Gender Equality, Agriculture, and Industry, Research & Energy. On average, ALDE is more divided than EPP and S&D because ALDE MEPs often find themselves split when EPP and S&D decide to vote against each other.

These cohesion patterns mean that the coalitions shown in Figure 3 are not always stable. For example, on Employment & Social Affairs and Environment & Public Health issues, a centre-right coalition (with ALDE voting with EPP) tends to occur more frequently than a centre-left coalition. However, because ALDE is often divided on these issues, a centre-left coalition (of S&D, G/EFA,

GUE/NGL and some ALDE MEPs) can sometimes win. In contrast, the high levels of cohesion of EPP and ALDE MEPs on Economic & Monetary Affairs and International Trade means that when these two groups vote together on these issues, they have been a powerful bloc: pushing for tighter controls on national budgets in the Eurozone, and more liberal international trade policies.

To consider how the changing relative sizes of the political groups, combined with the existing coalition and cohesion patterns, could change policy outcomes in some key policy areas, and to illustrate in more detail how coalitions in the European Parliament shift issue-by-issue, in the next section we look at 10 key votes that took place in the 2014–19 Parliament.

4 Potential Policy Consequences

The 2019 European Parliament elections are drawing substantial interest due to expected changes in the balance of power between the political forces in the chamber. However, the fluctuations in terms of the direction of policy are less clear as in a number of areas the changes may compensate each other. For example, on regulation of the internal market, environmental policies, or the negotiation of international trade agreements, subjects where the voting behaviour is explained more on a left-right basis, the overall balance of power will not change much.

More concretely, on economic left-right issues, the losses of the EPP and the departure of the more economically-liberal British MEPs are likely to be compensated by the significant increase in the size of ALDE and that of the liberal-conservative groups to the right of EPP. Similarly, the losses of the S&D are likely to be compensated by the increase of the radical left and of some nationalist-protectionist forces, such as the French *Rassemblement National*. That being said, the areas where we are likely to see a more substantial change are on those issues which often split a centrist pro-European majority against a Eurosceptic bloc, such as on constraints on government deficits in Economic and Monetary Union, or on issues on which the national populist parties have been more vocal, such as on migration and asylum policies.

To better show how the majorities are built in the European Parliament, we have selected 10 votes that reveal the coalition formation patterns among the political groups. The list takes into account 3

criteria: 1) the issue is highly salient for political parties, member states and citizens in Europe; 2) the subject of the vote is relatively easy to explain to a non-EU specialist audience; 3) the issue generated controversy both inside the European Parliament and in the public domain, which resulted in conflicts between and within the political groups in the Parliament. Some of these votes are not formally binding, as they are not on EU legislative acts. Nonetheless, votes on EP resolutions send important political messages about the positions of the MEPs, national parties and the political groups on key issues on the EU agenda and often influence future EU legislation. Figure 4 shows the outcome of the votes by political group, while Tables A2 and A3 in the Appendix show the vote breakdowns by political group and member state, respectively.

One thing to consider is that in the 2014–19 Parliament, in 816 votes (roughly one in ten) the majority was less than 50 votes. So, if 26 MEPs had voted the other way, the result of one of these votes would have also changed. Many tight votes took place on Environmental & Public Health issues that impact on industry, such as the vote to consider “the establishment of an EU level surveillance authority for the automotive sector”, which was approved by a majority of only 1 vote (329 to 328, on 27 October 2015). In this case, one MEP from the ECR group, who voted with the centre-left groups, effectively decided the outcome of the vote!

Many tight votes also took place on Civil Liberties, Justice & Home Affairs (particularly related to migration issues), International Trade, and Gender Equality. There were also close votes on budgetary questions, including the part of the budget that covers the salaries and expenses of the MEPs themselves. In total, in almost 200 votes, the winning majority margin was smaller than 10 members.

Vote 1: Privacy of online communication

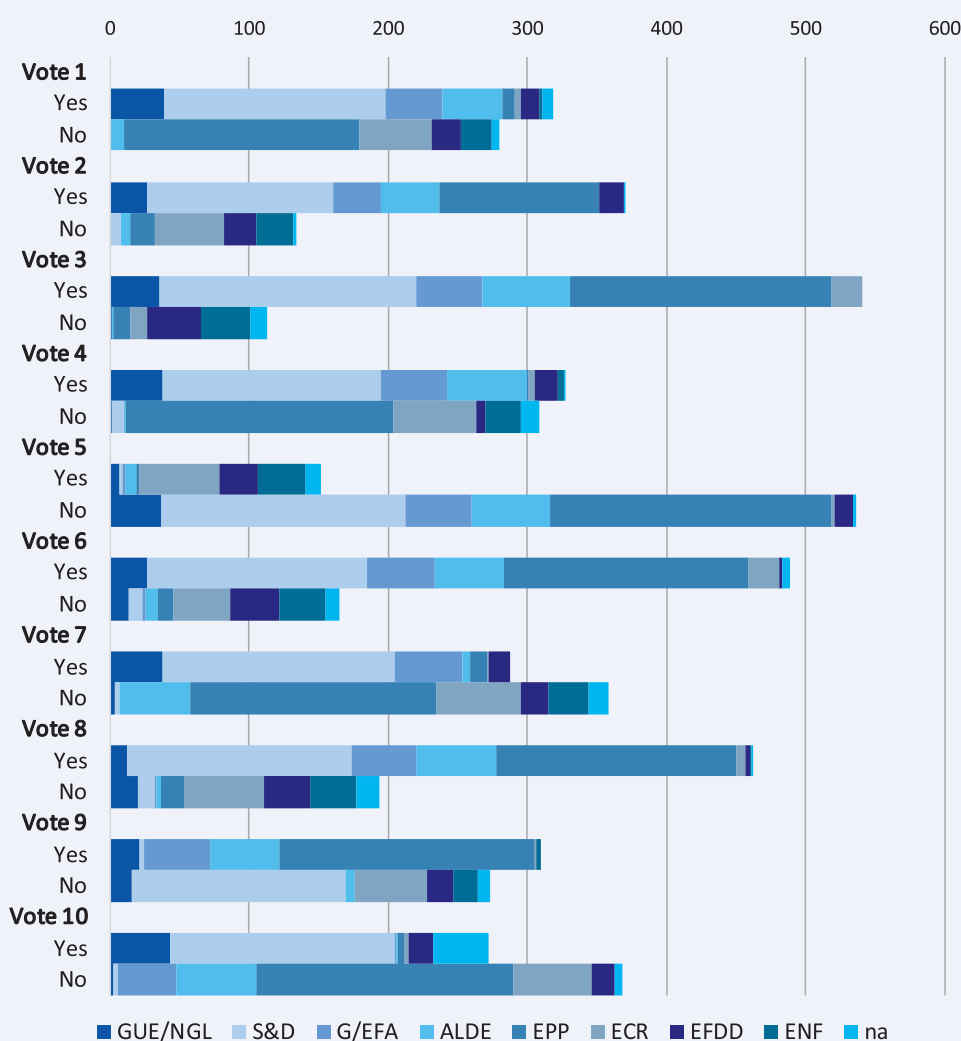
On 26 October 2017 the European Parliament decided to enter negotiations with the EU Council regarding the updating and simplification of ePrivacy rules in order to protect the communication data of the European citizens. The proposal aimed for stricter rules as the current Directive from 2002 only required the user’s consent for using cookies. The centre-left groups supported the proposal, as they believed stricter rules would make consumers better informed and protected against potential misuse, as well as cyber terrorism. The centre-right

groups, meanwhile, argued that stricter rules would burden companies, especially small companies and startups, which depend on free information. Moreover, customers may have eventually to pay for currently free services and in general, stricter policies would hurt the sovereignty of the Member States.

The vote passed with 351 in favor to 280 against. A centre-left coalition, consisting of GUE/NGL,

G/EFA, S&D and ALDE won the key vote, with the support of some MEPs from the right. According to current projections, the outcome of a similar vote (all other things being equal) in the next European Parliament would not change much, as the pro-privacy camp would continue to hold a majority, albeit a very thin one, in which just a few MEPs could swing the outcome of the vote in the next Parliament.

Figure 4 Ten Key Votes in the 2014–19 EP



The 10 votes:

1. Privacy of online communication
2. Redistribution of asylum seekers based on a quota system
3. Border controls within the Schengen Area
4. Phase-out of fossil fuels subsidies
5. Tax on plastic and single-use items
6. Multi-annual budget for the period 2021–2027
7. Common rules on minimum income
8. Financial sanctions for violating EU values
9. Veto power for national parliaments
10. Economic sanctions against Russia

Vote 2: Redistribution of asylum seekers based on a quota system

On 17 September 2015 the European Parliament voted on the EU Council's decision to establish a quota system to reallocate asylum seekers from Italy, Greece and Hungary. Either the member states had to take in a certain number of asylum seekers or they had to pay a contribution of 0.002 per cent of their GDP into the EU budget. The centre and the left argued that the EU is a community and that member states are obliged to help each other, and that the EU should show its capabilities to solve complex and transnational problems. The right groups, meanwhile, argued that member states should be free to decide whether to take asylum seekers and how many to take, and that not every country is equipped to take the allocated number of asylum seekers.

The key vote passed with a majority of 370 in favor to 134 against. A "Super Grand Coalition", with GUE/NGL and G/EFA backing EPP, S&D and ALDE won the vote. The coalition was also supported by the Italian Five Star Movement. Based on current electoral trends, the next parliament may still pass such a decision, but the majority would be much narrower. On this particular subject, "all other things" are far from being equal in the next Parliament, as trends in the debate in the member states have changed substantially since 2015. The changes in the public debate have pushed some parties, especially from the EPP, into the opposition camp. As such, we can expect a much stronger opposition to an open immigration policy.

Vote 3: Border controls within the Schengen Area

On 12 April 2016 the European Parliament decided on a text that addressed the problem of some member states reintroducing border controls due to the "Refugee Crisis". The right groups stated that the member states are sovereign and therefore should be allowed to reintroduce border controls to ensure national security. The centre and left groups argued that border controls would undermine the principles of free movement, and that businesses and consumers would be harmed due to higher costs.

The vote passed easily, with 570 in favor to 113 against, and a supporting coalition of GUE/NGL, G/EFA, S&D, EPP and ALDE, as well the Polish MEPs in the ECR group. The current projections indicate that the changes in the balance of power

in the next European Parliament on this subject would not be very significant.

Vote 4: Phase-out of fossil fuels subsidies

On 17 February 2018 the European Parliament voted on a text that asked for faster phase-out of fossil fuel subsidies. In order to realize the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement, the European Parliament wants to ensure investments and jobs in the transition towards non-fossil fuels and renewable energies. Those in favour of promoting renewable energy argued that the phase-out could be accelerated by stopping the support of fossil fuels. This would lead to further developments of "green" technologies and thus to less pollution. The other side argued that stopping subsidies would increase the prices as fossil fuels are currently the main source of energy. "Green" energy is currently underdeveloped and an overhasty transition would lead to a higher usage of nuclear power.

With 327 votes in favour of stopping subsidies to 308 votes against, a centre-left coalition, of GUE/NGL, G/EFA, S&D and ALDE, won the vote by a small margin. Current projections estimate that the changes in the next European Parliament would cancel each other out, to the extent that a small majority of MEPs would still be in favour of phasing out subsidies to fossil fuels. However, a swing in the views of just a handful of MEPs could change the outcome of the vote.

Vote 5: Tax on plastic and single-use items

On 14 March 2018 the European Parliament voted on whether a tax on plastic and single-use items should be included in the EU budget. To compensate for the budget losses due to Brexit, the centre-left in the Parliament supported taxes on plastic and single-use items, and argued that the tax would fund the EU budget and could be used to support regional projects, development and sustainable alternatives. The centre-right groups, meanwhile, argued that a tax would lead to job losses and a deterioration of quality and, for this reason, the EU should focus more on recycling, the development of recyclable plastics and the education of the citizens through public information campaigns.

With 536 votes supporting a tax, against 151 opposed, the centre-left coalition, consisting of GUE/NGL, G/EFA, S&D, EPP and ALDE won by a large margin. Based on current projections,

the opposition to this tax would only increase marginally, as in the next Parliament over 70 per cent of MEPs would still be in favour of this tax.

Vote 6: Multi-annual budget for the period 2021–2027

On 30 May 2018 the European Parliament voted on a proposal to maintain or even increase the EU budget for the 2021–2027 period. The centre and left groups argued that the budget is needed to fund common policies for the EU's regions, as well as for solving EU-wide issues more effectively. Moreover, they argued that the losses triggered by Brexit should be compensated, to ensure investments in research, innovation, education and digitalisation. The right-wing groups countered that the biggest contributors to the budget often do not benefit from the prioritized policies and that, instead, member states should spend their money on national policies, which would mean a shift in decision-making towards to the national level.

The key vote was decided in favour of the centre and left groups with 488 votes in favour to 165 votes against. The coalition, consisting of GUE/NGL, G/EFA, S&D, ALDE and EPP, was also supported by the Polish MEPs in ECR. Current projections indicate that the opposition to maintaining or increasing the size of the EU budget would increase in the next European Parliament, but there would still be a clear majority for maintaining or increasing the size of the EU budget.

Vote 7: Common rules on minimum income

On 24 October 2017 the European Parliament voted on a text addressing the establishment of a common set of rules regarding a “minimum income” for the whole of the European Union. The centre-left groups argued that common rules would promote the redistribution of wealth and ensure a minimum standard of living for all EU citizens. The centre and right groups, on the other hand, emphasized the difficulties of implementation, as each member state has a different social and legal system. Moreover, they argued that some member states would be heavily burdened by such a policy, which would harm their economy.

With 358 against to 287 in favour, a centre-right coalition consisting of ALDE, EPP, ECR, ENF and EFDD won this key vote. According to current projections, the majority opposed to a common

EU minimum income would increase in the next Parliament, from around 54 per cent to 60 per cent of MEPs.

Vote 8: Financial sanctions for violating EU values

On 30 May 2018 the European Parliament voted on a resolution addressing whether member states should be punished in case they violate EU values regarding the rule of law, without straining recipients of support from the EU budget. The left and centre groups underlined that the strict criteria, which have to be fulfilled when a state joins the EU, cannot be neglected once a country has joined. The right groups, meanwhile, countered that sanctions may hurt citizens, who are in need of EU financial aid, and that such sanctions would increase tensions within the EU.

The key vote was decided in favour of sanctions, with 462 votes to 193 votes against. The winning coalition was made up of pro-EU centrist coalition of G/EFA, S&D, ALDE and most of the EPP. The projections indicate that on this subject the supporting majority would shrink in the next Parliament. Moreover, the changing balance of power within the EPP may shift the position of this group and the overall result of a similar vote, for example if Hungary's *Fidesz* becomes the third largest national delegation in EPP.

Vote 9: Veto power for national parliaments

On 19 April 2018 the European Parliament decided on a political declaration regarding the veto power of national parliaments over EU legislation. The proponents of the proposal argued that member states should get more control over the direction of the EU, as currently the bigger countries are disproportionately powerful in the EU institutions. The opponents argued that national parliaments already have enough powers to influence EU policies, via scrutinising EU legislation and ratifying EU international agreements. Furthermore, they argued that the EU Council is made up of national governments, who are themselves accountable to national parliaments.

In the end, a coalition opposing a veto by national parliaments, of GUE/NGL, G/EFA, ALDE and EPP, won the vote with 309 votes to 273 votes against. Somewhat counter-intuitively, the current projections seem to indicate that the majority opposing the introduction of the veto may actually

increase in size in the next Parliament. This is because the gains of the sovereignist parties will be compensated by the departure of the British MEPs and the losses of the S&D group (who voted in favour of more national parliament powers).

Vote 10: Economic sanctions against Russia

On 12 March 2015 the European Parliament voted on the issue of economic sanctions against Russia, due to the Ukrainian crisis, which included restrictions on buying and selling Russian bonds or providing loans, as well as embargoes and restrictions on import and export of military material and energy technology. The opponents argued that the economic sanctions only reinforce the image of the EU being an enemy to Russia and that the attempt to get Russia to retreat from Ukrainian territories has failed. On the other hand, the proponents underlined that the sanctions have been successful and have limited Russia's territorial expansion.

The key vote was decided in favour of sanctions, with 368 votes in favour and 272 against. The winning coalition consisted of G/EFA, ALDE, ECR and EPP groups. Current projections indicate that in the next Parliament there will be significantly more MEPs in favour of maintaining sanctions on Russia.

5 Conclusion

The outcome of the May 2019 elections is likely to lead to a more politically fragmented European Parliament. The traditional “grand coalition”, between the centre-right EPP and centre-left S&D, will not command a majority in the European Parliament for the first time. Parties and political groups opposed to further European integration are likely to be significantly stronger, and could command as much as 35 to 40 per cent of the seats. This will enable Eurosceptic national parties and MEPs to win some influential policy-making positions, such as key committee positions and legislative report-writing roles (*rapporteurships*). Nevertheless, the centrist/pro-European forces are also likely to be strengthened, with an increased representation of ALDE and their allies. Hence, we

expect EPP, S&D and ALDE to become the new dominant coalition.

If a new “Super Grand Coalition” can hold together, it could dominate decision-making in the 2019–24 European Parliament. However, the fragmentation of the Parliament, plus the divisions between as well as within the three main political groups, could mean higher unpredictability of policy outcomes, as majorities will be more volatile. This will open up opportunities for forces that are critical of EU policies or the direction of European integration to shape policy outcomes. This could also mean an increase in the number of votes that are decided by a smaller majority of MEPs. This would mean that the power of *rapporteurs* and political group leaders is likely to be weaker, while the individual “backbench” MEPs may have more freedom, or margin for manoeuvre. Against this background of increased unpredictability, the need to treat each MEP as an influencer and to find the hidden potential allies on each key policy issue will become evident.

In combination, these changes are likely to mean that the new Parliament will scrutinize the Commission more than the current Parliament has done. While the Juncker Commission has been supported by a broad coalition of MEPs and groups, the appointment of the next Commission President, as well as the committee hearings on the individual Commissioners, could be highly contentious. This would lead to growing splits between EPP and S&D, and increasing challenges to established parties and politicians by the new emboldened Eurosceptic/EU-critical MEPs and parties. Also, without a stable and cohesive majority coalition in the Parliament, it is likely to be more difficult for the Commission to deliver on its policy agenda. In turn, though, a fragmented European Parliament may be marginalised in negotiations with the EU governments in the Council. This could be a recipe for policy gridlock, at a time when citizens need the EU to take decisive policy decisions, to promote economic growth and to address the new geopolitical security challenges facing Europe.

6 Appendix

Table A1 Coalition Patterns by Policy Area in the 2014–19 EP

Policy area	Super Grand Coalition (EPP/S&D/ALDE)	Grand Coalition (EPP/S&D v ALDE)	Centre-Left Coalition (S&D/ALDE v EPP)	Centre-Right Coalition (S&D v EPP/ALDE)	Other type of coalition	Total votes
All Policy Areas	6139	457	1242	1076	40	8954
Agriculture	167	24	42	28	4	265
Budget	973	38	78	40	1	1130
Budgetary Control	351	19	34	28	0	432
Civil Liberties, Justice & Law Affairs	434	26	62	126	6	654
Constitutional & Inter-institutional Affairs	445	21	54	50	0	570
Culture & Education	97	2	3	4	0	106
Development	55	8	12	17	0	92
Economic & Monetary Affairs	512	28	121	55	1	717
Employment & Social Affairs	245	46	103	66	2	462
Environment & Public Health	397	32	183	141	9	762
Fisheries	79	7	13	32	0	131
Foreign & Security Policy	958	62	96	142	4	1262
Gender Equality	173	10	22	152	2	359
Industry, Research & Energy	306	32	137	81	1	557
Internal Market & Consumer Protection	100	16	50	21	5	192
International Trade	339	7	80	6	0	432
Legal Affairs	167	52	30	20	0	269
Petitions	41	5	40	34	1	121
Regional Development	92	3	3	1	1	100
Transport & Tourism	193	12	58	24	1	288

Table A2 Result of the Key Votes, by Political Group

Group	Vote 1			Vote 2			Vote 3			Vote 4			Vote 5			Vote 6			Vote 7			Vote 8			Vote 9			Vote 10		
	Y	N	A	Y	N	A	Y	N	A	Y	N	A	Y	N	A	Y	N	A	Y	N	A	Y	N	A	Y	N	A	Y	N	A
GUE/NGL	39	0	1	27	0	4	35	1	13	38	1	9	7	37	0	26	13	6	38	3	2	12	20	15	21	15	4	43	2	0
S&D	159	0	8	133	8	10	185	0	1	157	9	0	2	175	0	159	10	0	166	4	3	161	12	2	3	154	1	162	3	2
G/EFA	41	0	0	35	0	0	47	0	0	47	0	0	2	48	0	48	2	0	49	0	0	47	1	0	48	0	0	1	42	0
ALDE	43	10	0	42	6	4	63	1	1	57	1	1	8	56	0	50	9	4	6	50	0	57	4	2	50	7	0	1	58	0
EPP	9	169	3	114	18	28	188	12	7	2	192	4	2	202	0	176	11	4	12	177	0	173	16	2	183	0	1	4	185	0
ECR	4	52	0	1	50	6	22	13	37	4	60	0	58	3	0	22	41	0	1	61	1	7	57	0	1	52	0	3	56	0
EFDD	13	21	0	17	23	0	0	38	0	17	7	16	27	13	0	2	36	2	15	20	1	3	34	5	0	19	16	18	16	2
ENF	3	22	6	0	26	0	0	36	0	4	25	1	34	0	0	0	33	0	0	29	1	1	33	0	3	17	9			
na	7	6	2	1	3	0	0	12	3	1	13	1	11	2	0	5	10	3	0	14	1	1	16	1	0	9	3	40	6	0
Total	318	280	20	370	134	52	540	113	62	327	308	32	151	536	0	488	165	19	287	358	9	462	193	27	309	273	34	272	368	4

The 10 votes:

1. Privacy of online communication
2. Redistribution of asylum seekers based on a quota system
3. Border controls within the Schengen Area
4. Phase-out of fossil fuels subsidies
5. Tax on plastic and single-use items
6. Multi-annual budget for the period 2021–2027
7. Common rules on minimum income
8. Financial sanctions for violating EU values
9. Veto power for national parliaments
10. Economic sanctions against Russia

Note: Y = Yes, N = No, A = Abstain.

Source: Compiled by authors from data on www.VoteWatch.eu.

Table A3 Result of the Key Votes, by Member State

Group	Vote 1			Vote 2			Vote 3			Vote 4			Vote 5			Vote 6			Vote 7			Vote 8			Vote 9			Vote 10		
	Y	N	A	Y	N	A	Y	N	A	Y	N	A	Y	N	A	Y	N	A	Y	N	A	Y	N	A	Y	N	A	Y	N	A
Austria	11	4	1	11	5	0	14	3	0	13	4	0	4	13	0	12	6	0	8	10	0	14	4	0	9	9	0	8	10	0
Belgium	13	7	0	14	4	0	16	5	0	12	7	1	5	16	0	15	5	0	8	11	0	20	0	0	11	7	0	5	15	0
Bulgaria	14	0	0	11	1	0	16	0	1	5	12	0	2	15	0	14	2	0	4	11	0	12	2	2	10	3	0	2	12	0
Croatia	5	6	0	5	1	1	10	0	1	5	6	0	1	10	0	10	1	0	3	8	0	9	2	0	7	3	0	1	9	0
Cyprus	4	1	0	6	0	0	3	0	3	2	1	0	0	6	0	5	0	0	5	0	0	3	2	0	1	1	2	3	2	0
Czech Rep.	6	12	0	4	9	2	10	3	7	8	10	3	3	18	0	16	3	0	7	11	0	12	4	3	7	9	1	6	12	0
Denmark	5	5	0	5	2	1	6	3	2	9	2	0	4	5	0	1	6	0	1	6	4	4	3	0	3	6	0	3	6	0
Estonia	5	0	0	5	0	0	5	0	0	2	1	0	0	6	0	6	0	0	1	3	0	6	0	0	5	0	0	1	5	0
Finland	6	5	0	5	2	2	9	1	3	7	3	0	3	10	0	7	4	1	4	7	0	9	2	0	6	2	0	3	6	0
France	27	34	1	24	16	2	41	31	1	27	36	1	24	45	0	50	19	0	22	43	0	48	22	1	32	18	11	36	30	0
Germany	39	36	0	70	9	0	80	7	7	48	42	0	10	81	0	75	9	1	40	41	0	72	9	6	52	29	2	31	52	0
Greece	12	2	2	9	1	0	16	4	0	6	9	3	5	15	0	10	3	2	14	5	0	5	7	3	7	7	1	15	3	0
Hungary	8	10	0	3	4	0	17	3	0	6	10	0	0	15	0	18	0	0	6	13	0	6	11	0	10	4	1	6	12	0
Ireland	6	4	0	5	0	0	7	0	3	2	5	2	3	6	0	5	4	0	5	4	0	6	4	0	5	5	0	4	4	0
Italy	42	8	6	52	5	0	45	20	2	43	15	0	7	58	0	40	24	1	43	16	0	37	26	3	17	32	13	54	11	0
Latvia	2	4	1	2	2	4	6	0	1	2	4	1	0	7	0	8	0	0	2	3	0	7	1	0	5	1	1	1	3	1
Lithuania	4	4	0	5	3	0	7	2	1	6	4	0	2	8	0	10	0	0	4	3	1	7	3	0	6	3	1	1	8	1
Luxembourg	4	1	1	6	0	0	6	0	0	3	0	3	0	6	0	6	0	0	3	3	0	5	0	0	3	0	0	1	4	0
Malta	3	3	0	6	0	0	5	0	0	3	3	0	0	6	0	6	0	0	3	3	0	4	0	2	3	3	0	3	3	0
Netherlands	10	11	0	13	4	0	20	4	2	15	11	0	10	15	0	3	20	3	5	19	0	17	8	0	10	13	0	4	18	0
Poland	4	42	0	4	22	19	45	4	1	0	46	0	20	27	0	44	4	0	4	40	3	25	23	0	21	22	0	10	35	0
Portugal	9	6	0	17	0	0	21	0	0	14	6	0	3	16	0	18	0	1	16	4	0	16	4	1	9	10	0	12	9	0
Romania	8	12	7	4	7	9	29	1	0	11	14	0	1	31	0	27	1	0	14	16	0	22	6	0	13	14	0	14	14	0
Slovakia	1	7	1	0	5	5	10	1	2	5	8	0	1	9	0	9	3	0	3	8	0	8	3	1	6	3	0	3	9	1
Slovenia	3	4	0	8	0	0	5	0	3	3	5	0	0	8	0	3	0	0	2	4	0	2	1	0	6	0	0	1	7	0
Spain	30	16	0	42	1	4	49	1	0	32	17	0	2	47	0	40	3	5	28	17	0	43	7	0	28	12	0	23	23	0
Sweden	14	5	0	13	2	0	16	2	1	12	6	0	3	13	0	6	13	0	6	12	1	16	1	2	9	9	0	3	13	0
U.Kingdom	23	31	0	21	29	3	26	18	21	26	21	18	38	24	0	24	35	5	26	37	0	27	38	3	8	48	1	18	33	1
Total	318	280	20	370	134	52	540	113	62	327	308	32	151	536	0	488	165	19	287	358	9	462	193	27	309	273	34	272	368	4

Source: Compiled by authors from data on www.VoteWatch.eu.