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What to Expect in the 2009-14 European Parliament: Return of the Grand Coalition?

Abstract

There has been growing competition between the centre-left and centre-right in the last few European Parliaments. Will this continue in the new 2009-14 Parliament? The increase in the seat shares of the smaller political groups, at the expense of the three main groups – the centre-right European People's Party (EPP), the centre-left Socialists and Democrats (S&D), and the centrist Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) – means that neither a centre-right bloc nor a centre-left bloc will be large enough to dominate the assembly. As a result, in the first plenary session of the new Parliament in July 2009, the EPP put together a 'grand coalition' with the socialists and liberals to divvy up the key leadership positions and to build support for the re-election of Barroso as Commission President. However, in return, the EPP had to delay the vote on Barroso until September and give away several key committee chairs to the socialists. The EPP may seek to maintain this grand coalition. However, it is unlikely to hold together on all legislative issues on the agenda. The socialists, despite their diminished power in the European Parliament, will come under pressure to resist the overwhelming forces of the centre-right in the Council and European Commission, and the liberals will continue to switch between a centre-right coalition on economic reform issues and a centre-left coalition on environmental and justice and home affairs issues.

1. Introduction

Existing research on the European Parliament has made two 'discoveries' about how politics works inside this important institution (e.g. Hix et al. 2005, 2007). First, the main political groups in the Parliament vote in a highly cohesive way. While voting in the chamber along party lines has increased, voting along national lines has decreased, so much so that in the 2004-09 Parliament, the main political groups were more

cohesive than the Democrats and Republicans in the US Congress (cf. Hix and Noury, 2009). Put simply, if one knows which group an MEP belongs to, one can correctly predict how she votes about 85% of the time, whereas if one knows her member state, one can correctly predict how she votes only 50% of the time.

The second discovery is that coalitions in the European

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Parliament mainly form along left-right lines, with the two largest groups – the centre-right European People's Party (EPP) and centre-left socialists – often voting against each other in key legislative votes. The 'grand coalition' between these two groups has always been central to politics in the European Parliament. However, since the peak of this alliance in the 1989-94 Parliament, there has been increasing conflict between a socialist-led centre-left bloc and an EPP-led centre-right bloc, with the centrist Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) often playing a pivotal role between these two coalitions.

Will these patterns hold in the 2009-14 European Parliament? The voting cohesion of the main political groups is likely to remain high. There have been some changes in the composition of these groups. For example, the British Conservative Party and Czech Civic Democratic Party (ODS) left the EPP to form a new European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group, the Socialist Group (SOC) changed its name to the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) to enable the Italian Christian democrats in the new Democratic Party to leave ALDE and join the socialist group, and the Irish Fianna Fail party joined ALDE. Judging by previous group membership shifts, it is unlikely that these changes will have a significant effect on the internal cohesion of the main groups in the Parliament.

Nevertheless, there may be some changes in coalition patterns, away from the emerging left-right conflict and back towards an EPP-socialist grand coalition. There were some indications of a re-emergence of the grand coalition in the previous European Parliament (in 2004-09). For example, the EPP and socialists shared the Presidency of the Parliament between them and there were several deals between the two groups on major legislative issues (such as on the Services Directive). For much of the last Parliament the two main parties in Brussels felt the shadow of the CDU-SPD grand coalition in Berlin, particularly in the period when Martin Schulz (from the SPD) was the leader of the socialist group and Hans-Gert Pötering (from the CDU) was the leader of the EPP. If a CDU-FDP government wins the German election in September 2009 the shadow from Berlin will fall on the EPP and ALDE groups instead. Nevertheless, there are powerful internal incentives in favour of a renewed grand coalition in the 2009-14 Parliament. In particular, the fragmentation of the groups in the chamber means that it will be difficult for the EPP to put together a non-socialist majority or for the socialists to put together a non-EPP majority.

To assess the likelihood of a grand coalition in the new European Parliament the rest of this paper is organised as follows. The next section looks at the composition of the new chamber, potential coalitions sizes, the ideological positions of the parties, and the internal make-up of the main groups. Section 3 then analyses the 'supersized coalition' between the three biggest groups that emerged in the first plenary session in July 2009 to secure a deal on the President of the Parliament, the re-election of José Manuel Barroso as Commission President, and the allocation of committee positions. Section 4 then turns to legislative issues, and explains why a grand coalition may not hold across all issues and why the socialists will be under pressure to resist a centre-right dominated Council, Commission and European Parliament. Finally, section 5 briefly concludes.

2. Composition of the New Parliament: A Dominant EPP, But with Few Options

Because European Parliament elections tend to be held in the middle of national election cycles, small opposition parties tend to do well in these elections at the expense of parties in the three main political groups in the European Parliament: the EPP, the socialists, and ALDE. However, in the June 2009 elections small parties did even better than they did in June 2004. For example, on the extreme right, the Dutch Party for Freedom won 4 seats, the British National Party won 2 seats, and a new anti-gypsy Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik) won 3 seats in Hungary. Also on the right, a new Eurosceptic European Conservatives and Reformists group was formed; between the ex-EPP British Conservatives and Czech Civic Democrats and various populist, libertarian, and social conservative parties from Poland, Belgium, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, and the Netherlands. And, on the left, radical left and green parties did well in France and Germany, mainly at the expense of social democrats in these two countries.

The other main result of the 2009 election was the dismal performance of social democratic parties throughout the continent, irrespective of whether they were in government or opposition. The British Labour Party and French Socialists won only 16 and 17%, respectively, the German SPD slumped to 21%, and the new Democratic Party in Italy were beaten by almost 10% by Berlusconi's new People of Freedom party. Social democratic parties came third in Finland, the Netherlands, Poland and Ireland, fourth in Flanders, fifth in Estonia, and were well beaten by centre-right parties in

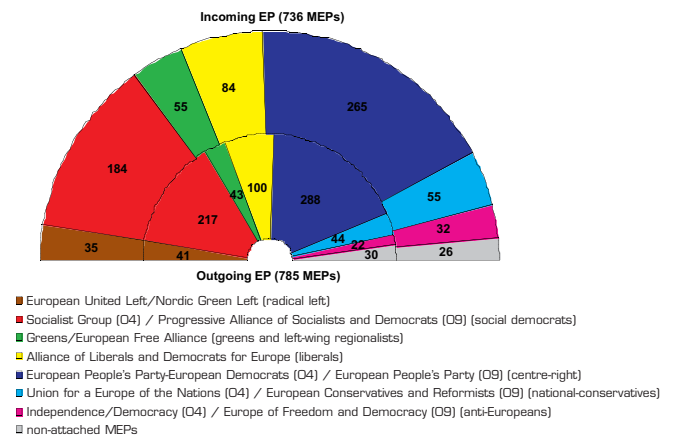
Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovenia, and Spain. Socialists topped the polls in Sweden, Denmark, Greece, Wallonia, Latvia, Malta, Romania, and Slovakia. But these successes counted for little against the losses for the centre-left in the other member states.

Figure 1 consequently shows the composition of the European Parliament after the June 2009 elections, compared to the composition of the outgoing 2004-09 Parliament. Since the outgoing Parliament had 785 MEPs whereas the incoming one has 736, it is difficult to compare the absolute numbers of the political groups across the two assemblies. As a result of the fragmentation of the votes in the election, in proportional terms all three of the main parties saw their seat-shares decline: the EPP from 36.7% to 36.0%, the socialists (SOC in 2004-09 and S&D in 2009-14) from 27.6% to 25.0%, and ALDE from 12.7% to 11.4%. In fact, the bad performance of socialist parties in 2009 means that this is the smallest representation of socialists in the European Parliament since the late 1950s.

Of the smaller parties on the left, the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (EUL/NGL) went down, from 5.3% to 4.8%, while the Greens/European Free Alliance (G/EFA) went up, from 5.5% to 7.3%. The forces to the right of the EPP also increased, with the new European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) on 4.3% compared to 2.8% for the old Union of a Europe of the Nations (UEN), and the new Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD) on 4.3% compared to 2.8% for the old Independence/Democracy (IND/DEM). There was some speculation about the formation of an extreme right group of MEPs, which would include *inter alia* the British National Party, the French National Front, the Flemish Interest (Vlaams Belang) party, and the Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik) party. However, such a grouping did not materialise, particularly after some of the potential members decided to join the new anti-European EFD group.

The shifting group sizes affect the coalition arithmetic in the European Parliament, as Figure 2 illustrates. The fragmentation of the Parliament, means that the three main parties (EPP, S&D, and ALDE) only command just over 70% of the seats, and the 'grand coalition' between the EPP and S&D commands just over 60%. A 'stop EPP' alliance of groups on the left and centre-left (S&D, G/EFA, EUL/NGL, and ALDE) no-longer commands a majority. However, an EPP-ALDE alliance also has less than 50% of the seats. Meanwhile,

Figure 1. The Outgoing and the Incoming European Parliament in June 2009



openly Eurosceptic MEPs – of which I count ECR, EFD, EUL/NGL and the non-attached members (who are almost all on the extreme right) – now constitute almost 20% of the seats.

So, what is the most likely majority coalition in the new European Parliament? To answer this question we first need to consider the policy positions of the groups. Figure 3 places the groups in a two-dimensional EU policy-space: (1) a Left-Right dimension, which captures party positions on economic regulation issues as well as socio-political issues (such as civil liberties and environment protection); and (2) an Anti-

Figure 2. Coalitions Sizes in the 2009-14 European Parliament

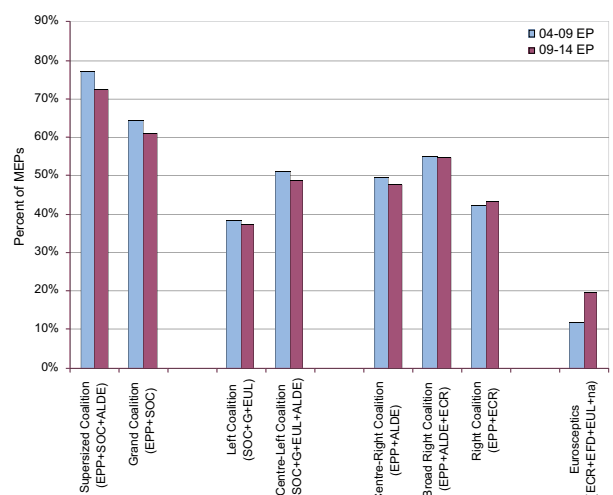
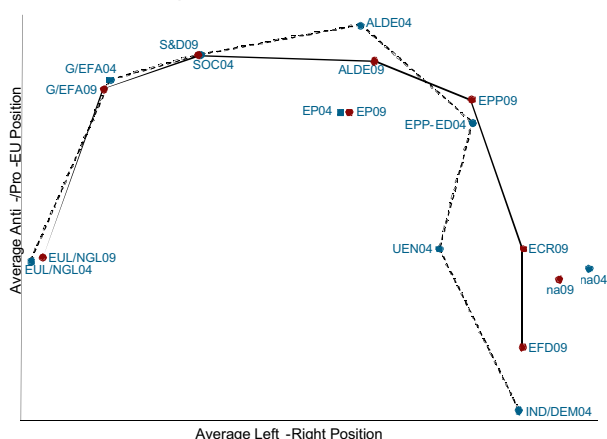


Figure 3. Ideological Positions of the Political Groups



Note: These positions are based on political scientists' estimates of where national parties are located on left-right and anti-/pro-European integration policy scales (see Laver and Benoit 2006). Each EP group position was calculated by summing the position of each national party in the group multiplying by its share of the MEPs in the group. The result is a 'weighted average' of the position of each EP group. The positions of the EP as a whole (EP04 and EP09) are the weighted average of the positions of all the national parties in each Parliament.

/Pro-EU dimension, which captures party attitudes towards the speed and extent of European integration and the powers of the EU institutions. The average positions of the political groups on these two dimensions have been calculated from the policy positions of the national parties who sit in a group, weighted by the proportion of MEPs each national party has in a group.

Previous research on the European Parliament suggests that coalition formation and voting behaviour in the European Parliament is predominantly along the left-right dimension (e.g. Attinà 1990, Raunio 1997, Kreppel and Tsebelis 1999, Kreppel 2002, Hix et al. 2006, Han 2007). This is not surprising if one considers that the MEPs' national parties mainly compete on left-right issues and the main power of the European Parliament is to shape legislation affecting the EU single market; which involves passing legislation on environmental standards, consumer protection, labour market rights, and equal opportunities practices. On these issues, MEPs mainly divide and coalesce along left-right lines. Nevertheless, the Anti-/Pro-EU dimension does play a secondary role in the European Parliament, for example when some groups oppose new EU regulations or favour more discretion

for national governments in the application of common EU rules.

The positions of the groups in Figure 3 suggest that ALDE are natural allies for the EPP. These two groups voted together more in the 2004-09 Parliament than they did in the 1999-2004 Parliament (Hix and Noury 2009). These two groups are likely to be even closer together in this Parliament than in the previous Parliament, as a result of the fact that ALDE has moved slightly to the right and in a less pro-European direction (as a result of the addition of the Irish Fianna Fail MEPs and the loss of some of the Italian centrist MEPs to S&D), while the EPP has moved in a more pro-European direction (as a result of the defection of the British Conservatives and Czech ODS to ECR).

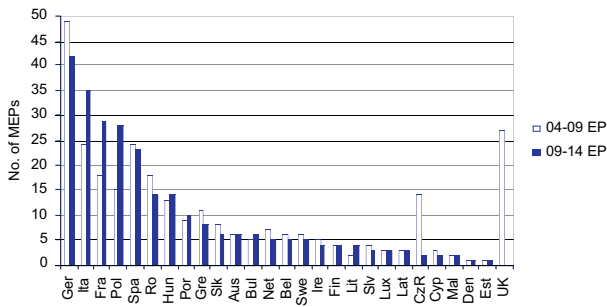
However, an EPP-ALDE coalition only commands 47.4% of the seats. This is not enough to command a simple majority, let alone the 'absolute majority' of all MEPs which is required in the second reading under the co-decision procedure to amend Council 'common positions'. With an average participation rate of approximately 85% of MEPs in legislative votes, an absolute majority usually requires a coalition with about 60% of the seats. A 'broad right' coalition of EPP, ALDE and ECR would only command 54.9%, and the ALDE and EPP are a long way from ECR on European integration issues, and so might be reluctant to rely on this group as an ally on many legislative issues. In fact, EPP and UEN were closer together in the previous Parliament than EPP and ECR are likely to be in this Parliament. The ECR are considerably to the right of the old UEN and are more openly Eurosceptic, although Figure 3 shows that most national parties in UEN were relatively anti-European even if that group was not openly opposed to the Lisbon Treaty, unlike the ECR group.

As a result of the policy positions and the relative sizes of the political groups, a 'grand coalition' between EPP and S&D or even a 'supersized coalition' between EPP, ALDE and S&D might be the only viable options in the 2009-14 Parliament. Having said that, on economic regulation issues, an EPP-ALDE alliance might be able to command a non-socialist simple majority – for example at first and third readings under the co-decision procedure – by relying on votes from ECR and other MEPs on the right in the new Parliament.

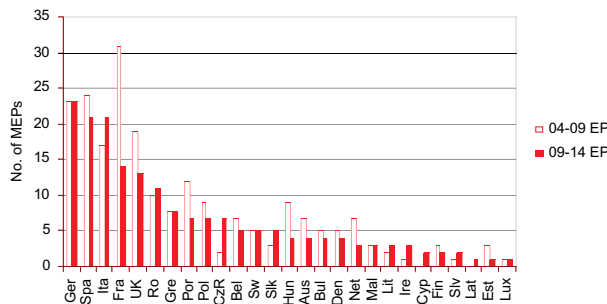
A final issue to consider when thinking about the likely coalition patterns in the new Parliament is the balance of power inside the groups. Figure 4 shows the number of MEPs from each member state in the three main groups in the pre-

Figure 4. Balance of Power Inside the Main Political Groups

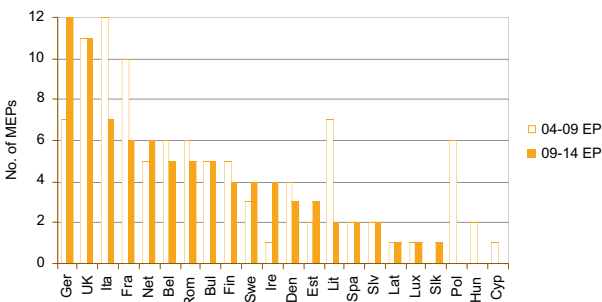
European People's Party



Socialists and Democrats



Liberals and Democrats for Europe



vious and the current Parliament. In the EPP, the CDU/CSU will remain the largest delegation, but the Italian, French and Polish MEPs will be more influential in the new group than in the old group, while the Eurosceptic voices of the British and Czech MEPs will no-longer be heard at EPP meetings. In the socialists, the SPD are once again the largest delegation, with the French, Spanish and British delegations weakened. And, ALDE will be dominated by the German and British MEPs, with secondary influence for the Italian, French and Benelux members.

With the German parties in such strong positions in the main groups, the outcome of the German federal election in September 2009 is likely to have a significant effect on the politics inside the European Parliament. If a CDU-FDP coalition emerges in Berlin, which currently seems the most likely outcome, this would strengthen cooperation between these two groups in Brussels.

3. A Supersized Package Deal in the First Plenary Session

An indication of the likely pattern of coalitions in each European Parliament is the deals done in the first month after the elections, culminating in the first plenary session. The first plenary of the new Parliament was held on 13-16 July 2009 in Strasbourg. Three main issues were due to be decided: (1) the election of the President of the European Parliament (which is largely a ceremonial position but nonetheless highly attractive for the person who wins the post); (2) the election of the Commission President (after the Heads of State and Government in the European Council have nominated someone at their scheduled summit at the end of June); and (3) the election of the chairs of the committees in the European Parliament (which are the key legislative agenda-setting positions in the chamber).

Immediately after the elections the interests of the three main groups on these issues were as follows. As the largest group in the chamber the EPP expected to win the office of the Parliament President, and there was speculation about whether this would go to the Polish MEP Jerzy Buzek or the Italian MEP Mario Mauro, who were both members of the EPP. The EPP also wanted to see José Manuel Barroso re-elected as President of the Commission. However, the EPP would need to put together a majority coalition to achieve either or both of these goals.

For the socialists, it was widely known that Martin Schulz, who was re-elected as the leader of the S&D group by a large majority, wanted to make a deal with the EPP to become President of the Parliament in the second half of the Parliament's term. However, he had been openly critical of Barroso before the European Parliament elections, and there was a strong anti-Barroso sentiment amongst many S&D back-bench MEPs, some of whom were angry that the socialist party leaders had not put forward a rival candidate for the Commission President before the elections. At the Party of European Socialists (PES) congress in Madrid in December 2008 many delegates wore t-shirts bearing the slogan: "Who

is Your Candidate for President of the European Commission?”. Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, the PES President and former Danish prime minister, was a popular choice. But several social democratic prime ministers, including José Luis Zapatero (Spain), José Socrates (Portugal) and Gordon Brown (UK) blocked such a move. It was suspected that Martin Schulz was also opposed, as he thought he could secure the Parliament Presidency for himself in return for his group backing Barroso’s re-election.

For ALDE, Graham Watson, who had been the ALDE leader in the previous Parliament, declared his candidacy for President of the Parliament. To secure this aim he suggested that a non-socialist majority could be put together in the new Parliament, which could dominate on legislative issues and would allow the EPP and ALDE to share the Presidency between themselves rather than between the EPP and S&D. However, Guy Verhofstadt, the former Belgian Prime Minister, was elected leader of ALDE and immediately scuppered this plan, by ruling out any dealings with the ECR, who he regarded as beyond the pail because of their anti-European position. Verhofstadt was also very critical of any move to re-elect Barroso as Commission President, having written a book before the European elections which openly criticised Barroso’s actions on the economic crisis (Verhofstadt 2009), and which many people regarded as Verhofstadt’s manifesto for the Commission Presidency – recall that Barroso was appointed in 2004 after several governments had vetoed a Franco-German attempt to elect Verhofstadt as Commission President. So, like Schulz, it was going to be difficult for Verhofstadt to give in to pressure from the EPP to re-elect Barroso without some major concessions in return.

Where the smaller parties were concerned, Timothy Kirkhope, the leader of the ECR, called for an ‘anti-socialist alliance’ in the new Parliament, presumably comprising the EPP, ALDE and ECR. On the other side, Dany Cohn-Bendit, the leader of the Greens, insisted that the Parliament vote to reject Barroso and find a politician who would stand up against the big member states to replace him.

In the end, the EPP managed to put together a ‘supersized coalition’ between themselves, the socialists and the liberals which covered all three of the key issues. Buzek emerged as the EPP candidate for the European Parliament President post, and a deal was struck with Schulz whereby the socialists would support Buzek for the first half of the term and the EPP would support Schulz for President for the second half of the term. Buzek indicated in a press conference that he

was also supported by ALDE, which Watson immediately denied. Watson then withdrew his candidacy the next day, which suggested that the EPP leadership had already indicated to Buzek that a deal was being done with ALDE, and that Watson had not yet been informed. In the end, only Eva-Britt Svensson from EUL/NGL stood against Buzek, and Buzek was duly elected by 555 votes to 89.

Meanwhile, the vote on the President of the Commission was delayed until the September plenary. The European Council had initially given only their ‘political support’ for Barroso at their meeting at the end of June, but this became an official nomination for the post just before the European Parliament plenary. Verhofstadt and Schulz then argued that they would not have enough time to meet with Barroso and scrutinise his plans for the next five years, and so suggested that the European Parliament should not take a vote on his candidacy until September. This clever plan allowed these two leaders to set out a series of demands for Barroso, to which he will have to respond, and so appear to set an apparently high price for their support for him – which they had presumably already committed to Joseph Daul, the EPP leader, behind the scenes. As a result, Barroso can be expected to be re-elected in September with the support of the EPP, ALDE, and most of the S&D. One potentially complicating factor, however, is that it will be difficult for Barroso to make any firm commitments to the socialists, as it is likely that there will only be a few socialist Commissioners in his next administration (see below).

The final piece of the jigsaw puzzle was the committee assignments and the deal on several other key offices in the new Parliament. Table 1 shows which political group and which national party gained which committee chair in July 2009. An unofficial norm in the European Parliament is that committee chairs and other offices are allocated via the d’Hondt system of proportional representation – although this is not set out anywhere in the Parliament’s Rules of Procedure (Corbett et al. 2005). If the d’Hondt system had been strictly applied this time, 9 chairs would have gone to the EPP, 6 to S&D, 3 to ALDE, and 1 each to G/EFA, ECR, EUL/NGL and EFD. In fact, 10 went to the EPP, 6 to S&D, 2 to ALDE and G/EFA, 1 to ECR and EUL/NGL, and 0 to EFD. This does not suggest that ALDE did badly from a deal, however, as it emerged that ALDE traded its final committee chair for the position of First Vice-President in the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety committee (which is usually the most active committee in the Parliament in terms

Table 1. Allocation of Committee Chairs in July 2009

Group	Expected no. under d'Hondt (order)	Actual no. (in EP6)	Committee (in order of allocation) ¹	MEP (member state, national party)
EPP	9 (1,3,5,7, 11,13,15, 18,21)	10 (9)	AFET Foreign Affairs BUDG Budget ITRE Industry, Research & Energy REGI Regional Development PECH Fisheries JURI Legal Affairs AFCD Constitutional Affairs SEDE Security and Defence sub-committee CULT Culture and Education PETI Petitions	G. Albertini (Ita, FI) A. Lamassoure (Fra, UMP) H. Reul (Ger, CDU) D. Hübner (Pol, ODS) C. Fraga Estévez (Spa, PP) K-H. Lehne (Ger, CDU) C. Casini (Ita, PdL) A. Denjean (Fra, UMP) D. Pack (Ger, CDU) E. Mazzoni (Ita, PdL)
S&D	6 (2,4,8,12, 16,20)	6 (7)	LIBE Civil liberties, Justice & Home Affairs ENVI Environment, Public Health & Food Safety AGRI Agriculture and Rural Development EMPL Employment and Social Affairs TRAN Transport and Tourism INTA International Trade	F. Lopez Aguilar (Spa, PSOE) J. Leinen (Ger, SPD) P. De Castro (Ita, PD) P. Beres (Fra, PS) B. Simpson (UK, Lab) V. Moreira (Por, PS)
ALDE	3 (6,14,22)	2 (3)	ECON Economic and Monetary Affairs CONT Budgetary Control	S. Bowles (UK, LD) L. de Magistris (Ita, IdV)
G/EFA	1 (9)	2 (1)	DEVI Development DROI Human Rights sub-committee	E. Joly (Fra, V) H. Hautala (Fin, VIHR)
ECR	1 (10)	1 (1) ²	IMCO Internal Market and Consumer Affairs	M. Harbour (UK, Con)
EUL/NGL	1 (17)	1 (1)	FEMM Women's Rights and Gender Equality	E-B. Svensson (Swe, VP)
EFD	1 (19)	0		

Notes:

¹ The order of the allocation of the committee chairs is my estimation, based on the order of the allocation of chairs in the previous Parliaments and the size of the national parties inside the groups in the current Parliament.

² The UEN had a committee chair in the previous Parliament.

of legislative business). Also, in return for not standing against Buzek for the Parliament President, Graham Watson was elected to the position of chair of the European Parliament's delegation to China.

Furthermore, looking at which committee chairs went to which group, it is clear that the EPP gave away a lot to the S&D group, presumably to smooth the deal on the Parliament President and the Commission President. Previous research on committee allocations in the European Parliament suggests that there is a clear hierarchy in terms of the most desirable committee positions (esp. McElroy 2001). Of the ten most desirable committees in the new Parliament, the S&D have five chairs (Environment/Public Health/Food Safety,

Civil Liberties/Justice and Home Affairs, Employment/Social Affairs, Agriculture/Rural Development, and Transport/Tourism), the EPP will have only three (Industry/Research/Energy, Legal Affairs, and Foreign Affairs), ALDE has one (Economic and Monetary Affairs), and G/EFA have one (Development).

Overall, a grand coalition between the EPP and the socialists was much stronger at the beginning of this Parliament than it was at the beginning of any of the previous three Parliaments. In July 1994, the overwhelming majority of socialist MEPs voted against Jacques Santer for Commission President. In July 1999, the EPP and liberals struck a deal over the European Parliament President against the socialists,

which secured the post for Nicole Fontaine (from EPP) for the first half of the term and Pat Cox (from the liberals) for the second half. Then in July 2004 a majority of the socialist MEPs voted against Barroso for Commission President and a socialist-led coalition blocked the appointment of Rocco Buttiglione (an Italian Christian democrat) to the Commission in October 2004, against the position of the EPP. In other words, this is the first time in twenty years that the two biggest groups have worked so closely together in the opening plenary session. However, whether this grand coalition will hold in the day-to-day legislative business of this Parliament is another matter, to which I shall now turn.

4. Shifting Coalitions Are Likely on Legislative Issues

The European Parliament is not like national parliaments, in that it is highly unlikely that a particular coalition between a group of parties will be stable across all issues. At the national level, because governments are formed out of the parties in the parliament and because the government can dissolve the parliament if the chamber does not support its legislative programme, the party or parties in government act collectively in the parliament on all major issues. At the European level, in contrast, there is a separation of powers between the executive (the Commission) and the legislature (in this case the European Parliament). The Commission cannot dissolve the European Parliament and the European Parliament can only remove the Commission by a 'double majority' vote (an absolute majority plus two-thirds of those voting) – which makes the censure vote in the EU more akin to an impeachment procedure in a presidential system than a parliamentary majority withdrawing its support for a cabinet in a parliamentary system. This means that the Commission, once invested, has few powers to force a majority in the European Parliament to support its legislative proposals. As a result, legislative coalitions in the European Parliament have to be built issue by issue, as is the case in the US separation of powers system.

Table 2 illustrates how this worked in the 2004-09 European Parliament. The table shows the percentage of times the plurality in a political group voted the same way as the pluralities in the other groups, in all votes and on four key sets of issues (which together accounted for almost one-third of the roll-call votes in 2004-09).¹ Looking first at all the 6,145 roll-call votes in the 2004-09 period, the left-right pattern of voting is immediately clear, since the closer together groups are on the left-right dimension the more frequently

they voted the same way. In general, ALDE were in a pivotal position between the EPP and the socialists (SOC), but voted slightly more often with EPP than with SOC.

Nevertheless, the voting patterns are quite different across the four separate issues. On Environment, Public Health and Food Safety issues, the G/EFA voted to the left of EUL/NGL, and ALDE voted more with SOC than with EPP. On Civil Liberties and Justice and Home Affairs issues a centre-left bloc is even clearer: with ALDE voting with SOC, G/EFA and EUL/NGL more often than with EPP. Together, an ALDE-SOC-G/EFA-EUL/NGL bloc commanded a slight majority in the 2004-09 Parliament in support of 'liberal' civil liberties and migration policies. Although the combined majority of these groups has fallen slightly, it will be difficult for the EPP to secure more 'conservative' policies on these questions against this powerful coalition.

On the other hand, a centre-right majority dominated in the 2004-09 Parliament on Economic and Monetary Affairs issues and Internal Market and Consumer Protection issues. An EPP-ALDE-UEN bloc voted together more than 70% of the time on Economic and Monetary Affairs issues and 80% of the time on Internal Market and Consumer Protection issues. On this later set of issues, ALDE even voted to the right of EPP, with the SOC, G/EFA and EUL/NGL all more likely to vote with the EPP than with ALDE on these issues. A similar pattern of voting may well emerge in the 2009-14 Parliament.

The other key factor that will influence legislative politics inside the European Parliament is the political composition of the Council and the Commission. The political groups in the Parliament have to take positions on legislative proposals from the Commission and amendments from the EU governments in the Council to the draft Directives and Regulations. In previous periods, the relative make-up of the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament has caused tensions. For example, towards the end of the 1994-99 period there was a centre-left majority in the Council against a centre-right majority in the European Parliament, and in 1999-2004 there was a centre-left majority in the Commission against a centre-right majority in the European Parliament (Warntjen et al. 2008).

Table 3 shows the likely composition of the European Council in January 2010. Sixteen governments are likely to be led by member parties of the EPP. This group will together command close to a qualified-majority in the Council under the Nice Treaty rules and a clear qualified-majority if the Lisbon Treaty is ratified.² Also, by the middle of 2010, if the

¹ A 'roll-call' vote in the European Parliament – when how each MEP voted (Yes, No, or Abstain) is recorded in the minutes – can be requested by a political group or one-tenth of the MEPs. Roll-call votes are held on approximately one-third of all votes.

² Under the Nice Treaty a qualified-majority in the Council is 255 of the 345 votes, plus 50% of the member states (14 out of 27), who must together constitute at least 62% of the total EU population. Under the Lisbon Treaty, a qualified-majority is 55% of the member states (15 out of 27), and 65% of total EU population.

Table 2. Issue-By-Issue Voting Coalitions in the 2004-09 Parliament

All Roll-Call Votes (6,149 votes)

	EUL/NGL	G/EFA	SOC	ALDE	EPP-ED	UEN
EUL/NGL						
G/EFA	74.0					
SOC	62.0	69.8				
ALDE	51.5	61.9	75.4			
EPP-ED	41.4	49.8	69.7	77.1		
UEN	45.2	48.7	63.4	70.9	81.3	
IND/DEM	40.9	38.7	39.7	45.3	50.7	54.3

Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (794 votes)

	G/EFA	EUL/NGL	SOC	ALDE	EPP-ED	UEN
G/EFA						
EUL/NGL	87.5					
SOC	73.6	74.8				
ALDE	57.1	60.5	76.3			
EPP-ED	40.9	40.6	59.7	70.3		
UEN	46.6	45.6	61.3	68.6	81.5	
IND/DEM	42.7	40.9	45.8	50.8	51.5	53.5

Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (509 votes)

	EUL/NGL	G/EFA	SOC	ALDE	EPP-ED	UEN
EUL/NGL						
G/EFA	80.4					
SOC	73.1	82.3				
ALDE	69.9	82.7	85.7			
EPP-ED	43.6	54.4	63.9	64.6		
UEN	33.8	39.7	50.1	49.7	78.8	
IND/DEM	28.9	26.5	25.2	28.9	49.5	58.0

Economic and Monetary Affairs (412 votes)

	EUL/NGL	G/EFA	SOC	ALDE	EPP-ED	UEN
EUL/NGL						
G/EFA	68.7					
SOC	55.6	74.3				
ALDE	32.0	48.5	62.6			
EPP-ED	25.2	39.6	52.4	83.3		
UEN	34.5	35.9	46.4	70.9	78.6	
IND/DEM	35.7	31.6	31.8	49.3	52.7	59.2

Internal Market and Consumer Protection (260 votes)

	EUL/NGL	G/EFA	SOC	EPP-ED	ALDE	UEN
EUL/NGL						
G/EFA	85.4					
SOC	61.5	66.2				
EPP-ED	34.2	40.4	67.3			
ALDE	33.1	35.8	65.4	84.6		
UEN	40.4	40.8	63.5	81.5	86.9	
IND/DEM	50.4	50.0	48.9	48.5	48.1	53.5

Note: Each cell shows the percentage of times the plurality of any two political groups votes the same way in all the roll-call votes in a particular policy area in the 2004-09 Parliament. Frequencies above 70 percent are shaded. The political groups are sorted within each policy area from left to right according to their voting patterns.

Table 3. Likely Composition of European Council in January 2010

Member state	National party of Prime Minister (or President)	QMV votes	% of EU population
Centre-Right (all European People's Party)			
Germany	CDU ¹	29	16.7
France	UMP (president)	29	12.8
Italy	FI	29	11.9
Poland	PO	27	7.7
Romania	PD-L	14	4.4
Netherlands	CDA	13	3.3
Greece	ND	12	2.3
Portugal	PSD ²	12	2.1
Belgium	CD&V	12	2.1
Czech Republic	ODS ³	12	2.1
Sweden	M	10	1.8
Bulgaria	GERB	10	1.6
Lithuania	TS-LKD	7	0.7
Latvia	JL	4	0.5
Luxembourg	CSV	4	0.1
Malta	PN	3	0.1
Total	16 member states (59.3%)	227	70.2
Left (Socialists and Democrats, or European United Left/NGL)			
United Kingdom	Lab	29	12.3
Spain	PSOE	27	8.9
Hungary	MSZP	12	2.0
Austria	SPO	10	1.7
Slovakia	Smer	7	1.1
Slovenia	SD	4	0.4
Cyprus	AKEL (president)	4	0.2
Total	7 member states (25.9%)	93	26.5
Centrists (all Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe)			
Denmark	V	7	1.1
Finland	KESK	7	1.1
Ireland	FF	7	0.9
Estonia	Ref	4	0.3
Total	4 member states (14.8%)	25	3.3

Notes:

¹ The next election of the German Bundestag will take place on 27 September 2009, and a CDU-FDP coalition is currently leading in the polls (see http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/view/33838/germans_to_elect_right_of_centre_government).

² The next election of the Portuguese Assembly will take place on 27 September 2009, and the centre-right PSD are marginally ahead in the current polls (see http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/view/33790/psd_threatens_ruling_socialists_in_portugal).

³ The next election of the Czech Chamber of Deputies will take place on 9-10 October 2009, and the centre-right ODS are currently slightly ahead in the polls (see http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/view/33798/new_party_starts_at_31_in_czech_republic).

elections in the United Kingdom and Hungary go the way the polls are predicting, the centre-right in the Council is likely to be even more dominant. In addition, assuming that the main party in government in each member state nominates a Commissioner from its party, and that Barroso is the Portuguese Commissioner irrespective of which party wins the Portuguese election in September 2009, then the next Commission is likely to have a larger proportion of politicians from the centre-right than any previous Commission.

In other words, despite the grand coalition bargains that dominated the first plenary session of the new European Parliament, it is unlikely that a coalition between the EPP and the S&D group will hold on all issues in the 2009-14 session. On some issues – such as environmental policies and justice and home affairs issues – the socialists might be able to build a non-EPP coalition. On others, the EPP will be able to build a non-socialist majority. Also, with the dominance of the centre-right in the other two legislative institutions in the EU, we can expect some major battles on environmental policies (such as climate change) and migration policies (such as rights for third country nationals) between a centre-left coalition in the European Parliament and a centre-right dominated Council and Commission. But, the centre-left groups in the European Parliament are likely to find their backs against the wall on most economic regulation issues (such as financial services regulation), against a dominant centre-right majority in all three of the EU's legislative institutions on these issues.

5. Conclusion

The centre-right European People's Party is likely to dominate the new European Parliament. Despite the loss of the British Conservatives to a new anti-federalist group to their right, the EPP will be the main agenda-setting force in the new chamber. The EPP's power was shown in the first plenary session of the new Parliament, when they secured the President of the European Parliament for their candidate, won 10 of the 22 committee chairs for their MEPs, and secured tacit support from the other two main parties for their candidate for the Commission President (Barroso) to be elected in September. The EPP will remain in a strong position throughout the term of the 2009-14 Parliament, not least because they will be backed by overwhelming centre-right majorities in the Council and the next European Commission.

However, the EPP will need partners to achieve their goals. The centrist ALDE group are their closest ally, and they are likely to support the EPP on many legislative issues, especially in relation to economic regulation and market

liberalisation. However, these two groups do not command a majority in the new Parliament. As a result, in the first plenary session, the EPP chose to reach out to the socialists to their left rather than the new anti-federalist ECR group to their right. This was partly in response to ALDE opposition to the new group, but was also in recognition of the need to build a 'grand coalition', at least for the first few key issues before the Parliament.

Nevertheless, a grand coalition between the EPP and the socialists may not be as stable as the EPP might wish. Many backbench socialist MEPs may vote against Barroso in September, bruised from their heavy election defeat in June and eager to cause problems for the incumbent politicians in Europe. And do not count out the greens, who feel emboldened by their most successful European election performance to date. Then, once the new Commission is formed, with few centre-left members, the socialists and greens in the European Parliament might start to behave like an 'opposition' bloc, against a centre-right Commission and Council. There will be few opportunities to inflict defeat on the centre-right forces across the three EU institutions, as a majority without the S&D group will win on many economic reform issues. However, on some issues, such as environmental protection, civil liberties and migration policies, the liberals are likely to vote with the socialists, greens, and radical left MEPs, which will force the governments and the Commission to compromise considerably.

Finally, a return of a stable grand coalition in the European Parliament would bolster the position of those who criticise the EU – such as the German Constitutional Court – for not being sufficiently responsive to the views of citizens. From this perspective, if the centre-right clearly won the June 2009 elections and the centre-left clearly lost, then the centre-right should be given a chance to govern, within the checks-and-balances of the EU system, of course (cf. Hix 2009). This would allow voters to base their choices in the 2014 elections at least partially on the performance of those MEPs and parties who won the 2009 elections. In contrast, if the socialists climb into bed with the EPP on most issues between now and 2014, it will be impossible for voters to see how their choices in 2009 had any effect on politics in the European Parliament, let alone the direction of EU policies more generally. It would be much better for the legitimacy of the EU, if the socialists accept their electoral defeat in 2009 and start promoting a clear alternative set of policies to those that we are likely to see from the dominant centre-right forces at the European level in the next five years.

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