

Sheep in Wolf's clothing?

Comparing Eurosceptic and Non-Eurosceptic MEPs'

Parliamentary Behaviour

1. Introduction

The development of anti-EU sentiments is one of the most salient features of the integration process in the last three decades. Although opposition to European integration has existed since the very beginning, it remained on the fringe until the end of the 1980s. The debates surrounding the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty were a critical turn in European integration, as opposition to it became more visible and diversified (Lacroix and Coman 2007). The 1990s saw the end of the so-called permissive consensus and the beginning of a period of constraining dissensus (Hooghe and Marks 2007). The recent and ongoing crises have provided fertile ground for the galvanization of oppositions to the EU and Euroscepticism has progressively become embedded at the national and supranational levels (Usherwood and Startin 2013). Indeed, with the migration crisis, populist and Eurosceptic discourses have flourished, assimilating migrants, terrorism, and the free movement of persons, and blaming the EU for the lack of border controls. The length of the economic crisis has also triggered a blossoming of contestation against the EU (Conti et al. 2016), presented either as an 'alien' power imposing austerity measures on national democracies or as being incapable of providing efficient solutions in times of economic turmoil. Today, the integration process has entered a new phase, characterized by the unprecedented success of radical parties and the mainstreaming of anti-EU sentiments across the continent.

There is one place where Euroscepticism has been present from the very beginning of European integration: the European Parliament (EP). Since its creation but especially since the first direct European elections, the EP has served as a forum of expression for dissenting voices. Since then, the pro-/anti-integration cleavage has remained salient in the supranational chamber and has become even more important since the outbreak of the economic crisis (Hix et al. 2007, Otjes and van der Veer 2016). Although Eurosceptic MEPs are very dependent on their electoral successes, their share within the EP has remained quite stable: while there were 19% of Eurosceptic MEPs after the 1979 elections (Reif and Schmitt 1980), they accounted for one

fifth of the 7th assembly (Leconte 2010: 160). However, the 2014 elections brought some changes in that respect and evidenced a mainstreaming of Euroscepticism, with the EP now counting 30% of dissenting voices (Brack and Startin 2015).

Indeed, the crisis has increased the EU's visibility within national political arenas and has produced a new wave of resistance among citizens. Eurosceptic and anti-establishment parties, both left and right, experienced unprecedented success in the 2014 EP elections (Hobolt 2015), leading some commentators to speak of a "Eurosceptic storm in Brussels" (FT 26 May 2014).

Against this backdrop, it is more important than ever to understand the behaviour of Eurosceptic actors. Although opposition to the EU seems to have regained primary political relevance with the crises, the literature on Euroscepticism at the supranational level has been comparatively limited (with some exceptions though: Brack 2013, 2018; Lynch et al. 2012; Whitaker and Lynch 2014). Similarly, literature on small and anti-EU parties tends to neglect the analysis of these actors' behaviour in Parliament (Jensen and Spoon 2010). This article aims to contribute to filling in this gap by providing a comparative analysis of the parliamentary behaviour of Eurosceptic and non-Eurosceptic MEPs. More precisely, the goal is to examine to what extent the behaviour of Eurosceptics differs from the behaviour of non-Eurosceptic MEPs and whether this has evolved over time.

Drawing on the insights of research on Euroscepticism and populism, we expect that Eurosceptic MEPs generally focus on different parliamentary functions than non-Eurosceptics. More precisely, we hypothesise that diverging parliamentary behaviour can be identified for the EP groups of the Grand coalition, the non-Eurosceptic opposition, and the Eurosceptic opposition. However, as their share of seats increased in the current legislature, we also expect Eurosceptic MEPs to increasingly become institutional insiders during the 8th term, i.e. to see their behaviour become more similar to that of their non-Eurosceptic colleagues.

To test these hypotheses, we will analyse the parliamentary behaviour of MEPs during the 6th, 7th and 8th legislatures. After a brief state of the art, we will proceed first with the comparison of the three categories of actors (Grand coalition, non-Eurosceptic opposition and Eurosceptic opposition) and then of the EP groups. The analysis is based on an index of activities of individual MEPs. To further test our findings, a univariate regression was carried out (results are

to be found in the annex).¹ In addition to investigating their involvement in legislative, scrutiny and publicity activities, we will also examine the groups' actual impact on policy-making measured through the proxy of their amendment success rate. The conclusion discusses the results and assesses whether Eurosceptic MEPs are integrating the EP's activities or rather act as sheep in wolf's clothing.

2. Euroscepticism at the supranational level: A burgeoning literature

The increasing visibility of Euroscepticism has generated an explosion of scientific studies on this topic over the past two decades. Since Taggart's seminal article (1998), the study of reactions critical of the integration process has gradually become an established sub-discipline of European studies (Mudde 2011).

The literature on party-based Euroscepticism seeks first and foremost to understand the nature of Euroscepticism as such. There has been much discussion among scholars as to the best way to define and categorize the various forms of opposition to the EU (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2002; Harmsen and Spiering 2004; Kopecky and Mudde 2002). These scholars underline that attitudes towards Europe have become more complex over time and that the scope and the range of both Europhile and Eurosceptic positions have broadened (Hooghe and Marks 2007; Mudde 2011). Another strand of literature has concentrated on the factors which explain the stances of political parties towards the EU. While the Sussex school tends to emphasize the strategic factors explaining party-based Euroscepticism, the North Carolina School highlights the ideological nature of a party's positions towards Europe (Conti and Memoli 2012; Kopecky and Mudde 2002; Marks et al. 2006; Mudde 2011; Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008). Other studies have attempted to go beyond this debate between ideological and strategic considerations by emphasizing institutional factors, national history, as well as the perceptions of

¹ As very few studies exist concerning the difference between Eurosceptic and non-Eurosceptic behaviour in the EP, this paper remains largely exploratory in nature. Therefore, we concentrate the empirical analysis around the index built in this paper as we believe it is a very suitable tool for the exploration of the data. Indeed, it does not display static differences among the actors but shows their evolution over three legislatures in a comparable way, taking into account the EP's varying composition and, very importantly, the varying amount of activities MEPs engage in over time. However, in order to confirm our findings, a univariate negative binomial regression analysis was carried out (see annex). This latter analysis has been conducted in order to support the index' findings. In its current univariate structure it is not designed to be the focus of the study. Further research and more elaborate multivariate regression models are needed to make other claims regarding the diverging behaviour of Eurosceptic and non-Eurosceptic MEPs.

politicians and public opinion (Gifford 2008; De Vries and Edwards 2009; Steenbergen et al. 2007; Emanuele et al. 2016). More recently, the various crises of European integration have led to the blossoming of contestation against the EU and have reinforced the power of Eurosceptics in many Member States. Interest in Euroscepticism grew more. While some writings assess the potential dangers Eurosceptic parties may represent (for instance Dye 2015; Harris 2014), others try to analyse the relation between the crisis and (the nature and type of) Euroscepticism as well as the impact of Eurosceptic support on mainstream parties (Meijers 2017; Szczerbiak and Taggart 2017; Gomez-Reino and Plaza Colodro 2018; Pirro and Taggart 2018).

However, this literature tends to focus on the national arena and barely considers the supranational level. Moreover, despite a renewed interest for anti-EU parties, the literature concentrates on their level of Euroscepticism and not so much on their parliamentary activities. A few studies have examined the dynamics behind the transnational cooperation of Eurosceptic actors, especially of radical right-wing parties. These showed how difficult it generally is for right-wing and populist Eurosceptic actors to forge lasting alliances but also that their forming a group in the EP follows different motives than is the case for other political families (Almeida 2010; Settembri 2004; Startin 2010; Whitaker and Lynch 2014). The recent analysis of Cavalloro et al. (2018) for instance shows that radical right-wing parties do not act as a political family and have no common voting strategy in the EP, regardless of the issue or its salience. Also, Henceroth (2017) finds that the diverging parliamentary behaviour of hard Eurosceptic group influences these groups' success at EP elections.

A few research have examined the attitudes and behaviour of Eurosceptic MEPs. They have shown that right-wing Eurosceptics tend to have a very limited impact within the EP's plenary or committees. In particular, radical right-wing parties are not involved in legislative activities and are rarely allocated reports due to self-exclusion, a rejection of compromise, and a cordon sanitaire in the EP (Almeida 2012; Mamadouh and Raunio 2003). When studying the use of parliamentary questions in the EP, scholars found for example that anti-European parties tend to ask more written questions but these questions serve another purpose than mainstream parties: small Eurosceptic parties are less concerned with the legislation in force or with oversight but rather with obstruction (Jensen et al. 2013; Proksch and Slapin 2010). Eurosceptic MEPs are in a rather paradoxical situation: if representation in the EP provides hard Eurosceptic parties with resources, it also poses awkward questions about the extent to which they should engage with the EU system (Lynch et al. 2012). They face a dilemma, having to bal-

ance their anti-establishment sentiments with operating within the establishment. A recent study (Brack 2018) examines how right-wing and left-wing tackle this tension over their involvement in the EP. It shows that they have diverging views of their roles and develop different strategies within the parliament, depending on the degree of their opposition to the EU. At the national level, the recent work of Otjes et al. (2015) constitutes one notable exception in the study of parliamentary behaviour of radical actors. Indeed, their research compares the strategies of populist and mainstream opposition parties in the Dutch parliament. They show that, contrarily to non-radical opposition parties, anti-establishment, populist and radical parties tend to choose a particular type of parliamentary behaviour, stressing the control rather than the legislative function of Parliament. These parties tend to challenge the status quo and voice a critical opposition against the consensual way established parties do politics. As a result, they engage in continuous and outspoken scrutiny of the government rather than in law-making activities.

Building on these recent research on Eurosceptic MEPs and populist MPs, the following analysis examines whether Eurosceptic MEPs display a different parliamentary behaviour than non-Eurosceptic MEPs. Drawing on the insights of the Otjes et al. (2015) study², we hypothesise that Eurosceptic MEPs tend to focus on different parliamentary functions than non-Eurosceptics (both from the Grand coalition and the other non-Eurosceptic groups). As Eurosceptics, these actors challenge the political establishment and the consensual politics of the EU. It can therefore be expected that they exhibit a dissimilar behaviour given that they see their position in the EP as being in opposition to the EU establishment.

More particularly, we expect that:

H₁: Eurosceptic MEPs are less involved in legislative activities than their non-Eurosceptic colleagues (from the Grand coalition as well as from the small non-Eurosceptic groups).³ Indeed, as has been shown in several studies, anti-

² Although the analysis of Otjes et al. focuses on the national level, it can be applied to the EU level for at least two reasons. First, the EU can be compared to a consociation in the sense that it relies on fairly consensual interactions, and the EP is structured around a Grand coalition of the centre (see Leconte 2010, Costa and Magnette 2003, Bogaards and Crepaz 2002). Of course, we cannot speak of an opposition/majority nexus in the EP but there is an increasingly stabilised coalition between the EPP and the S&D group on key issues. Second, Eurosceptic groups are fundamentally anti-system parties, positioned on the salient pro-/ anti-EU cleavage in the EP as are the radical and anti-establishment parties studied by Otjes and his colleagues.

³ As our focus in this analysis is on the particularities of Eurosceptic behaviour in the EP, we do not test separate hypothesis for the behaviour of the Grand coalition or of the non-Eurosceptic opposition. However, the three categories of actors are considered separately in the analysis.

establishment and radical actors tend to be much less engaged in legislating, following rather the course of a sort of extra-parliamentary opposition (Almeida 2012, Brack 2018).

H₂: Consequently, Eurosceptic MEPs are much more involved in activities designed to voice their opposition and increase their visibility with their voters.

H₃: However, an evolution is expected to take place in the behaviour of Eurosceptic actors during the 8th legislature: with their increased share of seats, Eurosceptic MEPs tend to model their behaviour on that of non-Eurosceptic MEPs and progressively become institutional insiders to be more influential. They therefore display more involvement in legislative activities in the current term.

3. Data and Method

To test our hypotheses, we analyse the parliamentary behaviour of all MEPs during the 6th, 7th and 8th term of the EP (respectively 2004-2009; 2009-2014 and 2014-2016).⁴ MEPs are classified into three categories: the *Grand coalition* (S&D + EPP); the *non-Eurosceptic opposition* (ALDE + Greens)⁵; and the *Eurosceptic opposition* (GUE/NGL, ECR, EFD(D), UEN, IND/DEM, ENF as well as non-attached MEPs)⁶.

The activities of MEPs are also classified into three categories. We draw here on the insights of Otjes et al. (2015) who divided activities into two categories (policy-making and scrutiny), but we have modified their classification to account for the specificities of the EP. The three categories are:

- *Legislative activities:* Actors engaged in legislative activities focus on policy-making, using the EP as a market place for finding new majorities to support their policy initia-

⁴ The data for the analyses in this paper is publicly available on the EP's official homepage (<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/portal/en>) and has been collected and provided by Votewatch (<http://www.votewatch.eu/>).

⁵ The ALDE group is sometimes part of the Grand-coalition building but is not fully committed to the stabilised Grand coalition (Dinan 2016).

⁶ Although right-wing and left-wing Euroscepticism may differ in nature – the former concentrating on the issue of sovereignty and opposing political integration, the latter focusing its criticism on the neoliberal nature of the EU – they both share a strong opposition towards the EU as it currently stands. As noted by Szczerbiak and Taggart (2008), Euroscepticism tends to produce strange bedfellows. Scholars have also shown that radical left- and radical right-wing actors share a common denominator, i.e. nationalism, which explains their common opposition to the EU (Halikopoulou et al. 2012). We decided therefore to include both left-wing and right-wing Eurosceptic groups in our study of behaviour of Eurosceptic MEPs.

tives. They consider the EP as a working parliament and will typically be involved in writing *reports* or *opinions* for committees and proposing *amendments* to reports.

- *Scrutiny activities*: These activities draw on the right of MEPs to obtain information, and to draw attention to the fact that EU institutions (especially the Commission) but also national governments make mistakes or ignore the relevant problems of citizens. Typically, scrutiny tools include *parliamentary questions* and *motions for resolutions*.
- *Publicity activities*: Actors engaged in publicity activities see the parliament as an amplifier to express their opposition to the majority. They attempt to send a message to their voters and to show them that they care about their concerns. These activities consist of *speeches in plenary* as well as *written declarations*⁷.

These three categories of activity are not mutually exclusive but are rather complementary, in the sense that actors can use one or several of these strategies at the same time. MEPs can ask questions to scrutinize the actions of the Commission, propose amendments to change a policy and make a speech to signal their position to their voters, all on the same issue. However, we hypothesise that the Eurosceptic opposition is more concerned with scrutiny and publicity activities than with legislative ones (H1 & H2). Indeed, participating in the decision-making process with mainstream parties would legitimise the establishment and the current state of the EU which is precisely what Eurosceptic parties usually object to. Nevertheless, we also assume that there might have been a “normalisation” of the Eurosceptic MEPs’ behaviour in the 8th legislature (H3). As shown in many studies, Eurosceptic MEPs have long been sidelined in the EP’s parliamentary life. With their increased share of seats, we hypothesise a strive for influence which can only be realised through modelling their behaviour on that of their non-Eurosceptic counterparts.

4. An analysis of the behaviour of MEPs behaviour over three legislatures

MEPs’ parliamentary behaviour has undergone an important evolution in the period under study (2004-2016). It has overall been characterised by a significant increase of parliamentary

⁷ Due to recurring doubts over their contribution to constructive policy-making, written declarations were abolished through a reform of the rules of Procedure of the EP on December 13, 2016 (<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P8-TA-2016-0484&language=EN>). This strongly underlines the publicity character of written declarations making them very suitable for our analysis.

activities over time, especially in law-making (see Fig. 1).⁸ This important rise in parliamentary activities as well as the lack of continuity of EP political groups make it difficult to compare the behaviour of MEPs in absolute numbers.

Figure 1 here

Therefore, an activity index has been developed and calculated for each legislature separately in order to trace an evolution in the MEPs' behaviour over time. This index considers each MEP's participation in the different parliamentary activities in relation to the EP's average for the respective activities in the given term. As an example, the activity index of MEP₁ for legislative activities in legislature X is calculated as follows:

$$\text{LegInd}_{MEP_1} =$$
$$\left(\frac{\text{Number of reports submitted by MEP}_1}{\text{Average number of reports per MEP in legislature X}} + \frac{\text{Number of amendments submitted by MEP}_1}{\text{Average number of amendments per MEP in legislature X}} + \frac{\text{Number of opinions authored by MEP}_1}{\text{Average number of opinions per MEP in legislature X}} \right) / 3.$$

The index value for the EP's average per activity in this model is always 1,0.

The activity index of an entire political group, then, is calculated as the average of the activity indexes of all its members.⁹ Thereby, the index measures the relative rather than the absolute engagement of political groups in each activity category for each legislative term. This represents an answer to the problem of rising absolute numbers and varying group compositions in the EP. A longitudinal analysis of three legislatures thus becomes possible.

In the following section, we trace the evolution of MEPs' parliamentary behaviour belonging to the Grand coalition, the non-Eurosceptic and the Eurosceptic opposition in legislative, scrutiny and publicity activities. The second section concentrates on EP political groups. The findings show that the various actors use different strategies to gain influence and to use the EP as a platform for their goals. While the presented index is descriptive, an exploratory negative univariate regression largely confirms its results (see annex).

⁸ The decrease in scrutiny activities in the 8th term can at least partially be subscribed to a new institutional constraint limiting the amount of written parliamentary questions that can be submitted by each MEP (EP's Rules of Procedure, Rule 130.3).

⁹ MEPs who held their parliamentary mandate for less than one year (6 months for the 8th term) have been excluded from the analysis.

4.1. A diverging oppositional behaviour?

Relying on the insights from research on Eurosceptic actors in the EP and the findings of Otjes et al. (2015), we expect to find divergences in the behaviour of the Eurosceptic opposition in the EP on the one hand and the non-Eurosceptic opposition (Greens and Liberals), on the other. Further, significant differences should occur when comparing the parliamentary behaviour of both groups to that of the Grand coalition, even if there is no traditional majority/opposition cleavage within the EP.

Legislative Activities

Focusing first on the evolution of legislative activities (Fig. 2), we observe an important change in the EP's dynamics over time. Compared to the EP average, the non-Eurosceptic opposition is the most engaged in legislative actions in the 6th legislature, followed rather closely by the Grand coalition. Eurosceptic MEPs are far behind, confirming our hypothesis that they neglect law-making activities (H1). The overall distribution does not change much in the 7th legislature despite a small increase in activity among Eurosceptics and both other groups approaching each other's level of activity. The 8th legislature shows a very different dynamic in the MEPs' involvement in active policy-making, though. From 2014 to 2016¹⁰, the legislative activities of the non-Eurosceptic opposition exceed those of all other groups by far. The Eurosceptic opposition however also submits many more reports, amendments and opinions with an activity level now clearly above average. On the contrary, and always in relation to the overall average, the legislative activities of the Grand coalition decrease massively.

Figure 2 here

Over time, a growing gap and a changed dynamic between the three categories of MEPs becomes visible: the non-Eurosceptic opposition remains the most engaged in legislative activities over time but becomes even more active in the 8th term. The Eurosceptic opposition and the Grand coalition, on the other hand, appear to switch strategies: the former is now on average more active in submitting reports, opinions and amendments than the latter.

¹⁰ Given that an independent index was created for each legislature, the fact that only a two-year period could be analysed here is not an issue for the comparison.

H1 can thus be confirmed for the Eurosceptic MEPs' behaviour in the 6th and 7th legislature – they are less active in rapporteurship and the authoring of opinions and amendments than other MEPs. H3, the normalisation hypothesis, also seems to be true for legislative activities but needs to be evaluated under consideration of the other activities as well. It becomes very clear however that Eurosceptic MEPs are striving to become more involved in tangible law-making in the EP. This evolution might be explained by their increased number in the EP since 2014 which allowed them to better organise and integrate into the functioning of the assembly. The 'mainstreaming' of Euroscepticism in society might further have led to an increased number of members willing to actively influence and change policies at the EU level instead of limiting their activities to scrutinizing and publicly criticising the EU and its institutions.

Scrutiny Activities

Scrutiny activities include parliamentary questions and motions for resolutions and aim at controlling or draw attention to the potential failures of the institutions or of national governments. The analysis of the use of scrutiny activities reveals important divergences among the three groups of actors in the 6th legislature. Contrarily to legislative activities, these divergences decrease over time (Fig. 3).

Figure 3 here

During the 6th legislature, the three categories of MEPs clearly have different strategies regarding the use of control mechanisms: Eurosceptic MEPs are by far the most active, followed by the non-Eurosceptic opposition, while the Grand coalition produces very few parliamentary questions and motions for resolutions compared to the other groups. The latter can indeed be found at the lower end of the activity level during the entire three legislatures. This may be because the S&D and the EPP have many national parties which are in their respective governments. This traditionally lowers the need for these actors to take the detour of interrogating the European executive on European or national policy issues as other actors do (Jensen et al. 2013). Nevertheless, their involvement in these activities increases over time and all three groups find themselves rather close to the EP's average in the 8th term.

Our hypothesis regarding the stronger involvement of Eurosceptic actors in scrutiny activities (H2) clearly holds true for the 6th term. Nevertheless, what follows hints at a confirmation of H3 as well: the behaviour of Eurosceptic MEPs, who decrease their engagement in scrutiny,

gets closer to the average while, on the other hand, the Grand coalition becomes more involved in this kind of activities. Taken together, an important change seems to have taken place in the inner dynamics of the EP from the 7th to the 8th term involving mainly the Eurosceptic opposition: while their level of activity increased steadily in legislating, their involvement in scrutiny activities significantly dropped.

Publicity activities

According to H2 we would expect Eurosceptic MEPs to be the most involved in publicity activities in order to promote their criticisms of the EU. The Grand coalition, on the other end, is assumed not to lay a very strong focus on written declarations and speeches in plenary.

Figure 4 here

Looking at Figure 4, we can again confirm this hypothesis for the 6th legislature. However, a strong evolution takes place in the 7th legislature with an equal distribution of activity levels in publicity among all three groups re-dispersing slightly in the first two years of the 8th term. While the Eurosceptic opposition still concentrates more on publicity activities than the non-Eurosceptic one, nowadays the most active MEPs in this regard come from the Grand coalition – even if the differences remain marginal. Roles have been reversed again between the Grand coalition and the Eurosceptic opposition: while the interest of oppositional actors, particularly Eurosceptic ones, in delivering speeches in plenary and submitting written declarations has significantly decreased, the contrary is true for the EPP and S&D.

So far, our three hypotheses seem confirmed in this first step of analysis. The Eurosceptic opposition exhibits ‘stereotypical’ behaviour in the 6th and (part of) the 7th legislature but a clear evolution towards the normalisation of their parliamentary behaviour takes place in the current legislature. However, this evolution probably does not stem only from a shift in behaviour of Eurosceptic MEPs but involves strategy changes by the other actors as well. To investigate this in more detail, we proceed with an analysis on the basis of the EP’s different political groups in the following.

4.2. Behavioural divergences across political groups

The preceding analysis, which concentrated on the macro level, has evidenced important changes in the dynamics of the EP over time. It is not clear, though, if those changes are caused by all actors or rather by specific political groups. Aiming for a deeper understanding, one must consider the important changes in the EP's composition between the 6th and the 8th legislature. During the 7th term, the EPP-ED group split with EPP remaining the largest group in parliament and the members of -ED and parts of the UEN group forming the new ECR group. Other members of UEN created the EFD together with former ID members. During the 8th term, the ENF has been formed mainly from former non-attached members. The political landscape within the EP, particularly its Eurosceptic component, has therefore significantly evolved during the decade under analysis. Consequences on the MEPs' parliamentary behaviour are more than likely and are difficult to detect on the basis of the broad categories we have used so far. This is why, in the following section, the analysis focuses on the strategies of each political group, using the same three categories of activities.

Legislative Activities

A closer look at the extent to which MEPs from different groups are engaged in active law-making basically confirms the broad trend of the preceding analysis (Fig. 5).

Figure 5 here

Based on the EP's average (1,0), one can observe that the groups in the Grand coalition remain close to the average in the 6th and 7th term but that their activity level has significantly dropped during the 8th term. This holds true for both the EPP and the S&D. As far as the Liberals and the Greens are concerned, similar levels of legislative activity can also be observed. However, a truly different picture emerges when we look at the various Eurosceptic groups. It is well known that their Euroscepticism is heterogeneous in degree and nature, but they are nevertheless often taken together as a single category of actors. As the analysis shows, though, there are not only important differences in the attitudes of Eurosceptic MEPs but also in their behaviour. The far-left group GUE/NGL shows a high involvement in legislative activities from the beginning. It actually follows the same pattern as the non-Eurosceptic opposition. But the ECR and especially the EFDD also show a high engagement in law-making in the current legislature. Finally, even the newly created ENF has a relatively high activity level

comparable to the one of the EPP. The only actors with a constantly low interest in the use of legislative tools are the non-attached MEPs: their activity level even decreases further in the 8th term which might be due to the fact that the members who were motivated to engage more in legislating joined the ENF group. Generally speaking, one can say that the focus on legislative activities has increased during the three legislatures but that it is not at all the ‘traditional’ political actors one would expect, but the non-Eurosceptic opposition and some of the Euro-sceptic groups that dominate – at least quantitatively – law-making in the EP.

Scrutiny Activities

Fig. 6 clearly shows that not all political groups put the same emphasis on scrutiny activities. The overall picture seems even more heterogeneous than in the case of legislative activities.

Figure 6 here

Indeed, over time, there is actually no continuous pattern identifiable among groups regarding scrutiny activities. S&D and EPP act in a similar fashion only in the 6th term while the Greens and Liberals show comparable behaviour in the 7th term. At all other moments, there are huge differences in the attention that the respective EP groups pay to scrutiny activities. The Euro-sceptic opposition remains divided as was the case for legislative activities. Only the far-left GUE/NGL group shows a constant high involvement in scrutiny activities. The newly created ENF group emerges in the 8th term as a rather invested actor as well. The assumption that those MEPs willing to engage in parliamentary work joined this group and that the ‘outsiders by choice’ remained non-attached seems to be confirmed when looking at this activity. Both the ECR and the EFD(D) group increase their level of legislative activities but dedicate less efforts to scrutiny activities over time. Overall, it can be noted that the disparities between all the groups – and therefore the variances around the EP’s general mean – tend to decrease over time, contrarily to what was observed in the case of legislative activities.

Publicity activities

The macro analysis of the number of speeches in plenary and written declarations suggested a convergence of activity levels among the three different groups of actors over time. Looking at single political groups (Fig. 7) this trend can be broadly confirmed, but again, divergences between the groups that could not be captured by the macro level analysis become obvious here.

Figure 7 here

The activity levels of the groups become grouped closer around the average over time. EPP and S&D show a rather similar but not identical evolution in their interest in publicity tools. The non-Eurosceptic opposition however does not form a coherent group at all. In the same way as was the case for scrutiny, the Greens apparently loose interest in publicity activities while the opposite is true for the Liberals. Among the Eurosceptic political groups, the involvement in publicity activities decreases over time – with the exception of the ENF in the 8th term. As for the other activities, the far-left GUE/NGL is more involved than the other groups, followed here by the EFDD and the ECR.

Interestingly, only two groups at two single moments in time match our ‘stereotypical’ expectations for Eurosceptic actors exactly (H1 & H2). First, the ENF group in the 8th term. Their engagement in legislative activities is under-average but they are highly active in promoting their own views in publicity activities and in scrutinizing EU institutions. The second ‘group’ are the non-attached MEPs in the 6th term that are outstandingly active in publicity and highly involved in scrutiny activities but show nearly no engagement in law-making. The other Eurosceptic groups do not show the parliamentary behaviour that has been assumed to be ‘typical’ for these actors. More precisely, they increasingly normalise their behaviour over time (H3). They no longer largely engage in publicity activities but concentrate more on scrutiny and legislative activities.

All in all, it becomes obvious that classifying the different political groups according to their ‘political status’ within the institution is not without its problems. Across the EP groups, diverging patterns of behaviour can be identified which hint to different conceptions of the parliamentary mandate and of the representative function MEPs should embody. Of course, one of the obvious limits of the analysis is that it only focuses on measurable amounts of parliamentary activities. Neither the MEPs’ involvement in committee work, for instance, nor the content of the activities are part of this analysis. This prevents any assessment of the relevance or the constructiveness of the MEPs’ activities. Nevertheless, this analysis has shown that the EP’s inner dynamics have undergone important changes since 2009. The main outcome is that today Eurosceptic actors seem to be more involved in the process of law-making and that the Grand coalition has shifted its attention to scrutiny and even publicity activities. There is no homogeneous non-Eurosceptic opposition as such, Greens and Liberals obviously pursue different strategies in their parliamentary behaviour, but they however show similarities in their high engagement in legislating.

5. What consequences on the EP's dynamics?

All in all, our analysis demonstrates that many Eurosceptic MEPs seem increasingly to become institutional insiders, with a profound shift in the 8th term. They are more involved in legislative activities and no longer solely concentrate on publicity and scrutiny. Yet, this does not say much about their actual impact on policy-making. In order to get a first impression of the new Eurosceptic dynamics' influence on the EP's functioning, we now use the proxy of the EP groups' amendments success rate in plenary.

Figures 8 and 9 here

Figures 8 and 9 attest to the difference between trying to influence and actually influencing the EP's decision-making process. Fig. 8 shows the submission rate of EP groups over time while Fig. 9 reveals the success rate of these amendments, i.e. how many of them have been accepted in plenary.¹¹ The submission rates of some Eurosceptic groups indeed greatly increase over time. Only the Liberals submit as many amendments as the GUE/NGL group and the EFDD in the 8th term. The Greens' engagement in submitting amendments drops significantly compared to the 6th legislature. The ECR and the EPP group also table quantitatively less amendments than before. Even the ENF, which was only created in the 8th term, shows the same activity level as the EPP group in the period covered in the analysis.

The success rate of these amendments does not mirror this distribution at all (Fig. 9). Even if the quantity of their tabled amendments lies only around average (Fig. 8) – and for the EPP even below average in the 8th term – the success rate of the EPP's and S&D's amendments is by far the highest. The Liberals, who consistently submit one of the highest number of amendments, see their success rate drop from 54% to 26% during the period under analysis. The Greens, despite tabling less amendments than previously, manage to increase progressively their percentage of accepted amendments. The ECR group outnumbers their rate of accepted amendments in the 8th term while submitting far fewer of them. Indeed, they appear to be the only Eurosceptic groups that increases its rate of successful amendments over time. The GUE/NGL and the EFD(D) groups, despite submitting more amendments than

¹¹ Fig. 8 displays the totality of amendments submitted (including amendments tabled in committees) while Fig. 9 provides the success rate of amendments tabled by single political groups in plenary only. Non-attached members are therefore excluded in the latter – given that they are not a political group, they cannot table amendments in plenary.

nearly all other political groups, rank far behind the others with a success rate nearly always below 10%. The ENF group had none of its amendments accepted in the new term.

The reasons for these very low success rates of Eurosceptic groups in the EP's legislative process are to be found in at least two elements. First, in order for an amendment to be passed it needs a majority of votes in the EP's plenary. Given the numerical superiority of the EPP and the S&D group it is of course easier for them to reach the necessary majority. In return, the other groups need to convince many more MEPs to vote for their amendments – and are obviously successful to very varying degrees. The ability of coalition-forming is particularly low for the GUE/NGL, the EFD(D) and even more so for the ENF group. Second of all, research has shown that the general hostility of the majority of MEPs towards right-wing Eurosceptics in particular has led to a “cordon sanitaire” (Startin 2010: 432), preventing them from acceding to positions of responsibility or influence on sensitive issues. An apparent ‘normalisation’ of the parliamentary behaviour of many Eurosceptic groups does not automatically lead to an equal rise in influence on policy outcomes in the EP. Nevertheless, both could be related. One could indeed hypothesise that the ‘hyperactivism’ of some Eurosceptic groups might be triggered by their lack of influence. Whether the cordon sanitaire still holds up in the upcoming legislatures is therefore to be investigated in future research.

6. Conclusion

The EP has long served as a forum for the expression of opposition to Europe. Indeed, especially since its first direct election, the EP has included a persistent minority of Eurosceptic members who have been active in defending their views and who have developed various strategies within the institution. Often presented as threats or opportunists by the media and their colleagues in the EP, these MEPs have been comparatively understudied, and few studies have examined the extent to which they are different from other MEPs. At a time when the EU is facing a polymorphic crisis and citizens' discontent has led to a significant increase in the Eurosceptics' share of seats in the EP, it is crucial to analyse empirically whether Eurosceptic MEPs act as ‘foxes in the henhouse’ or are progressively displaying a normalized behaviour. This article constitutes a first attempt to answer this question.

The analysis of the MEPs' parliamentary behaviour over a period of three legislatures reveals a clear shift in the strategies of Eurosceptics. While, as expected, they tended to focus more

on voicing their opposition through publicity and scrutiny activities during the 6th term, they are becoming significantly more involved in legislative activities over time. Although disparities exist across political groups, Eurosceptic MEPs can no longer be labelled indistinctively as institutional outsiders. They are now much more interested in obtaining reports and submitting amendments, i.e. in participating in all aspects of parliamentary work. That does not mean that they share the same behaviour as their non-Eurosceptic colleagues since many Eurosceptics hold anti-system stances. But such a shift could mean that far from being a threat for the EP's legitimacy (Schmidt 2015), the representation of Eurosceptics at the supranational level could actually help alleviate the EU's democratic deficit (Brack 2015). As they are increasingly involved in the whole range of parliamentary activities, Eurosceptic MEPs could come to be perceived as the legitimate representatives of those European citizens who are dissatisfied with the EU and who have felt side-lined in the past. At the same time, the analysis of the success rate of amendments also shows that MEPs' involvement does not automatically lead to influence. For instance, the GUE/NGL group has always been very active in submitting amendments but has a success rate constantly under 10%. This seems to confirm that the larger political groups are unwilling to engage with Eurosceptic MEPs during the legislative process. The gradual involvement of Eurosceptic MEPs in law-making activities combined with the increased salience of the pro-/anti-EU divide within the chamber since the economic crisis (Otjes and van der Veer 2016) tend to push the Grand Coalition to work even more closely together. This bloc could be challenging for the EP's legitimacy: in an attempt to avoid any influence from Eurosceptic actors, it blurs the policy differences between centre-right and centre-left even more and further depoliticizes the policy-making process. EU politics might become even more muddled to citizens as it becomes increasingly difficult for them to identify the agenda of mainstream parties, especially in those Member States where the bipolarization of political life is the rule. The strategy of mainstream pro-EU parties to prevent anti-system actors from gaining sway in parliament might therefore backfire and finally lead to more electoral success for Eurosceptics at the 2019 EP elections, especially in the current challenging political context.

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