



Who holds the power In the new European Parliament ? And Why ?

**Analysis of the MEPs' votes
and activities in the first 6 months
of the 2014-2019 term**

**VoteWatch Europe
Special Report
February 2015**



WELCOME TO THE FIRST VOTEWATCH EUROPE REPORT
OF THE 8TH EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT TERM !

This report examines the voting and activity behaviour of the Members of the European Parliament after the reshape of the balance of power as a result of the 2014 European elections. Furthermore, this report aims to show who holds the power in the new EP and which dynamics will explain the outcomes of the parliamentary decisions to come.

The report is based on roll-call votes (RCVs) cast in the EP plenary only. Unfortunately, the committee voting is still not transparent enough for us to be able to report on it, ie. the information is not standardised across the EP committees, and the minutes are published with significant delay.

A total of 282 plenary RCVs were recorded in the July-December interval and all are included in the statistics presented here.

More detailed information is available on www.VoteWatch.eu.

Votewatch.eu is an independent organisation set up to promote better debates and greater transparency in EU decision-making by providing easy access to, and analysis of, the decisions and activities of EU Institutions. VoteWatch.eu uses the European Parliament's own attendance, voting and activity data to give a full overview of MEP activities, broken down by nationality, national party and European party grouping.

Abbreviations:

ALDE	Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
ECR	Group of the Conservatives and Reformists
EFDD	Group of the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy
EPP	Group of the European People's Party (Christian-democrats)
Greens/EFA	Group of the Greens / European Free Alliance
GUE-NGL	Group of the United European Left – Nordic Green Left
NI	Non-attached (non-inscrits)
S&D	Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats

2

MAIN FINDINGS

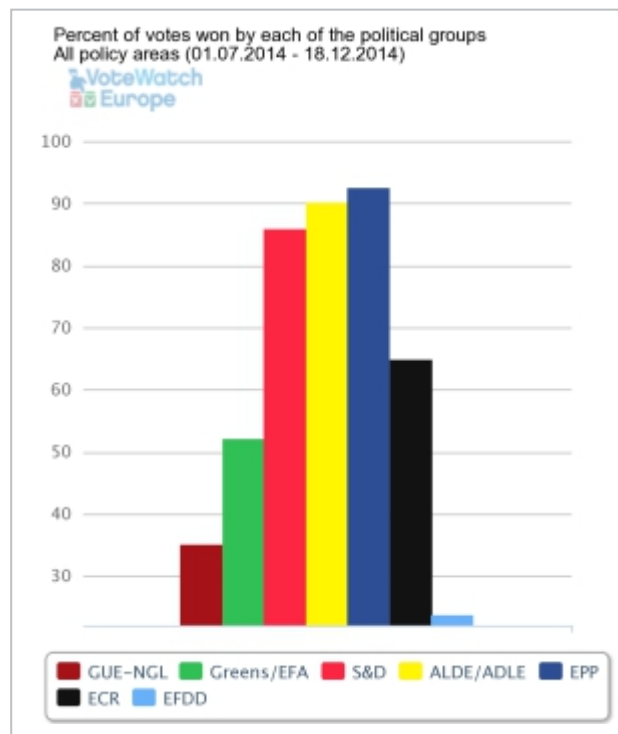
- Following the strengthening of the fringes after the EU elections in May 2014, the use of the grand coalition (EPP-S&D-ALDE) as a way to pass key legislation in the EP has increased. EPP and S&D voted the same way in 4 out of 5 votes in the first six months;
- However, the key political votes, that usually divide these groups, are yet to come: as soon as the Juncker Commission unveiled its concrete plans, the grand coalition broke down;
- The fringe groups, in spite of their increased strength in numbers, have not been able to impose their own views in key EP decisions so far. However, their presence in high numbers seems to be forcing EPP and S&D to dilute the differences between them. This will make it increasingly difficult for citizens to identify mainstream parties' agenda, and relate to them;
- The fringe groups, instead, use other tools to create a disproportionate visibility, such as parliamentary questions and oral and written statements. On the other hand, the non-attached MEPs have become substantially more participative in votes than before the elections;
- After losing a significant number of seats in the elections, the EPP Members have become more disciplined. This allows EPP to continue to be the leading EP group, as shown by the 'won votes' record. ALDE has also become more consensual, while the ECR and the Greens-EFA are struggling more to find internal commonalities;
- All in all, MEPs are increasingly interested in the votes taking place in the plenary, illustrated by their attendance reaching a record 88% in the July-December 2014 interval.



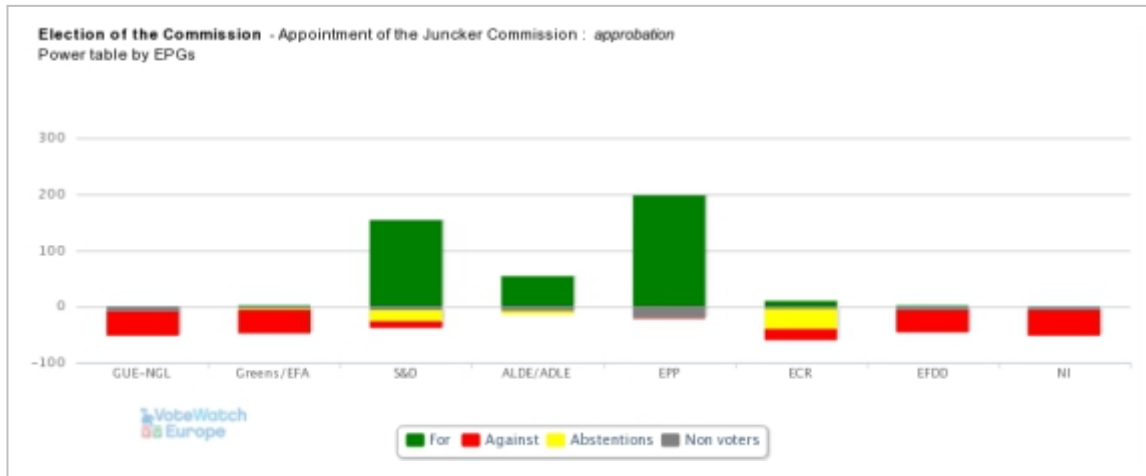
TOWARDS AN EPP+S&D (AND ALDE) 'EU GOVERNING COALITION'?

During the first six months of the current term of the European Parliament (July 2014 – December 2014), the three pro-European groups at the centre of the spectrum have succeeded in being 'on the winning side' much more often than the other groups, as a result of pre-vote agreements between them. Had there not been the vote in January 2015, when the political groups founded it impossible to reach consensus on the Commission's working plan for the current year, we could have concluded that a (super) grand coalition is alive and well. However, the picture is much more complex.

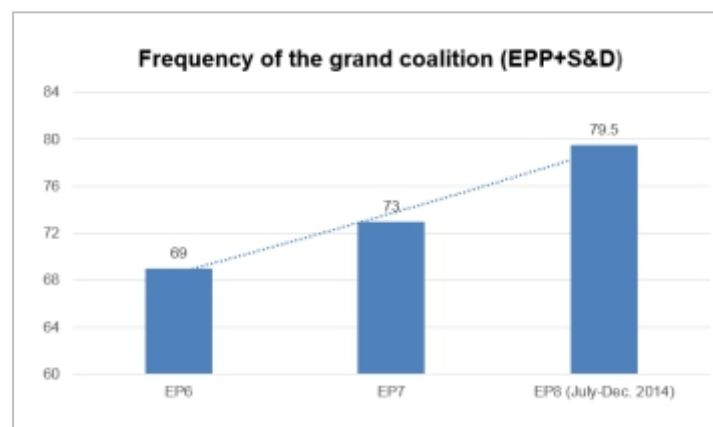
EPP group has won more votes (voting 'yes' if the majority of the Parliament voted 'yes', or 'no' if the majority voted 'no') than any other political group (92.5%). EPP is closely followed by the ALDE group (90%) and then by the S&D group (85.8%). In this respect, the situation has not changed much after the May 2014 elections.



Some important votes have already taken place in the first six months of the 8th parliamentary term. Among these, the vote on the approval of the new Commission led by Jean-Claude Juncker was a milestone. The dynamic of this vote confirmed the existence of a 'super grand coalition' composed of the main pro-European groups (EPP, S&D, ALDE). These groups were interested in supporting the college, as they all had commissioners 'inside'.



These three groups also voted together on a number of issues linked to further European integration, such as the increase of funding for the EU 2015 budget, or on the implementation of the European semester. All in all, the two biggest EP groups, the centre-right EPP and centre-left S&D groups have voted the same way in almost 80% of the votes, which is 7% more often than before the EU elections in May 2014 as shown by the graph below.



The political groups outside this super-grand coalition have been on the winning side much more rarely: ECR won 65% of the votes, the Greens 52%, GUE-NGL 35% and EFDD only 23%.

Such a development makes it much more difficult for the public to understand what the alternatives proposed by these mainstream political forces are, and therefore for the citizens to relate to any of them. In exchange, it creates the impression of an EPP-S&D governing coalition (joined by ALDE), thus fuelling the narrative of the fringe groups who try to position themselves as the real 'opposition to the EU governing coalition'.

4

A MARRIAGE UNDER STRESS

Moreover, the unusual developments at the plenary sitting held in January, when the Commission's working plan for 2015 was voted, announce that this 'marriage' is troublesome for the political groups as well. In a dramatic display of power play, the political groups voted down each other's proposals one by one, thus leaving the Parliament as an institution with no official position on what the priorities of the Executive lead by Mr Juncker should be for this year.

It seems Pandora's box was opened when measures aimed at reducing red tape were proposed, along with the debate over TTIP. This greatly antagonised the left, who argued that social and environmental standards would be affected. In this instance, the EPP and S&D behaved more like senior and junior governing partners who are unable to agree internally before the matter blows wide open.

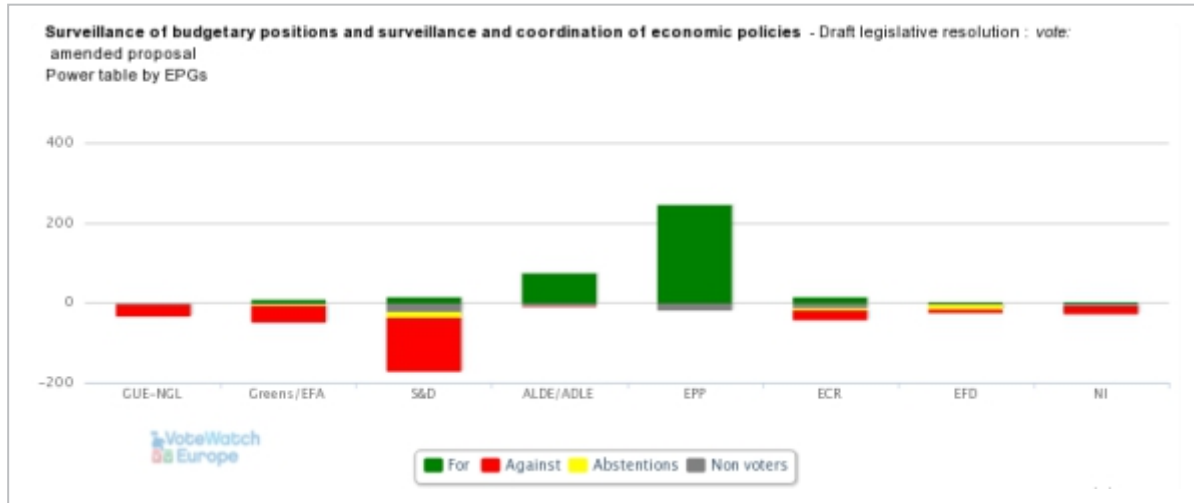
This is a clear signal that, after the EU elections in May 2014 and the Spitzenkandidaten process, the European Commission has become more political and that it will have a more difficult time working with Parliament. The new balance of power in the EP makes it more laborious for the Executive to push its agenda: the EPP is the largest group, but is far from having a comfortable majority. The rise in numbers of the far left and the nationalists have substantially complicated the majority building processes, which inserts an element of unpredictability as regards to the outcome of some of the most controversial pieces of legislation expected to be dealt with in 2015.

Concretely, we should expect that the debates over proposals to reduce red-tape, those that affect environmental agenda, extend the internal market for services and strengthen economic supervision (revision of the 6-pack), as well as the TTIP (particularly investors' protection clause) will be fiercely disputed and the votes will be too close to call, unless some kind of consensus is reached beforehand.

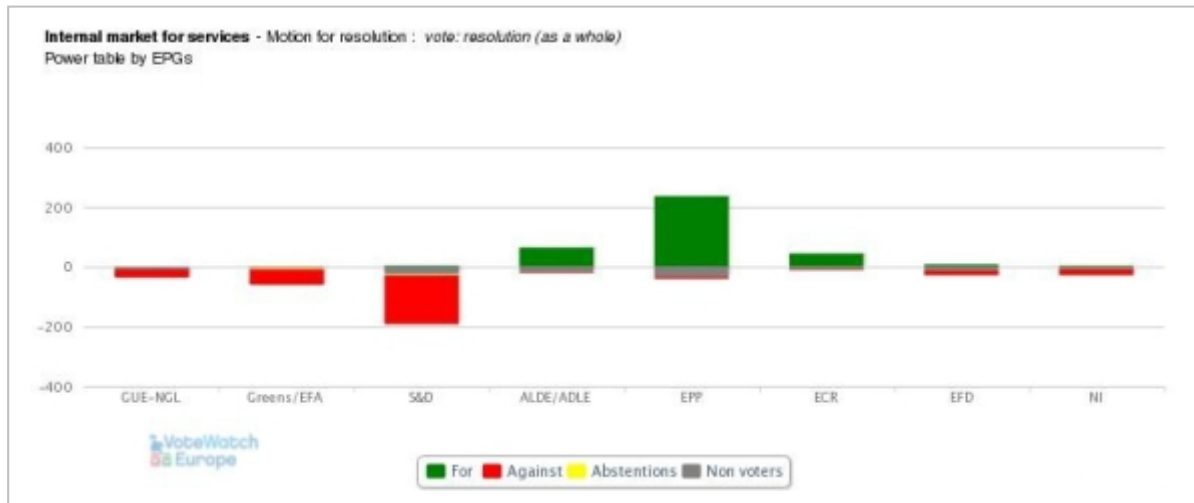


Below are just a few examples of votes from the past term, where outcomes might be different in the new EP, given the changes in the balance of power:

Macroeconomic supervision, part of 6-pack, adopted in September 2011:

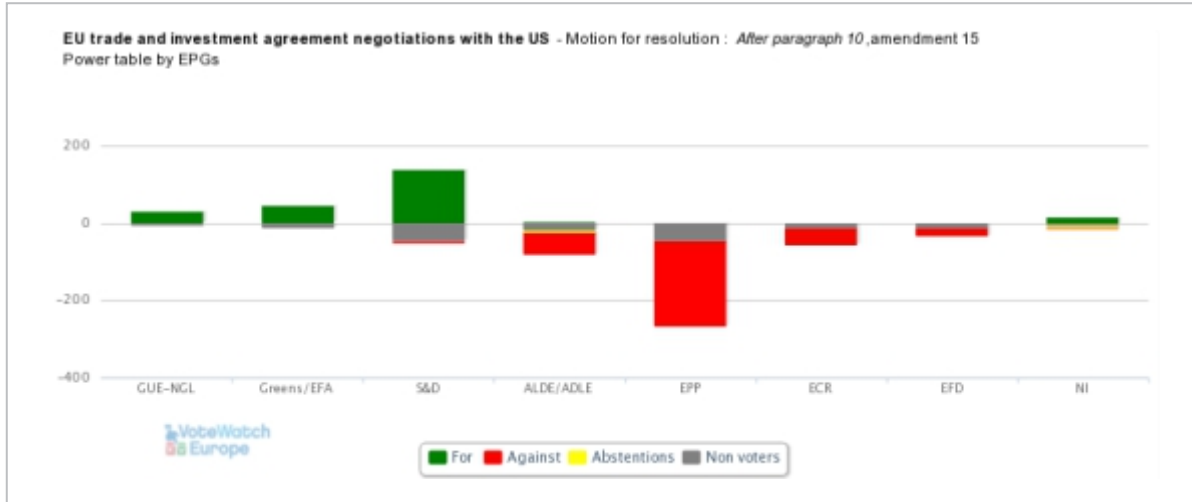


Call for the strengthening of the internal market for services, adopted in September 2013:



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Call to exclude the investors' protection clause from the TTIP, rejected in May 2013:



5

CENTRE-RIGHT REGROUPING AFTER LOSSES IN ELECTIONS

The largest European political group, the EPP, is proving much better at mobilising its members in this first part of the parliamentary term, and as a result it continues to be the group who has won most votes. All of this despite substantial losses in the May 2014 elections. This can be partly explained by the new political landscape, with the EPP under increased pressure to rally its members.

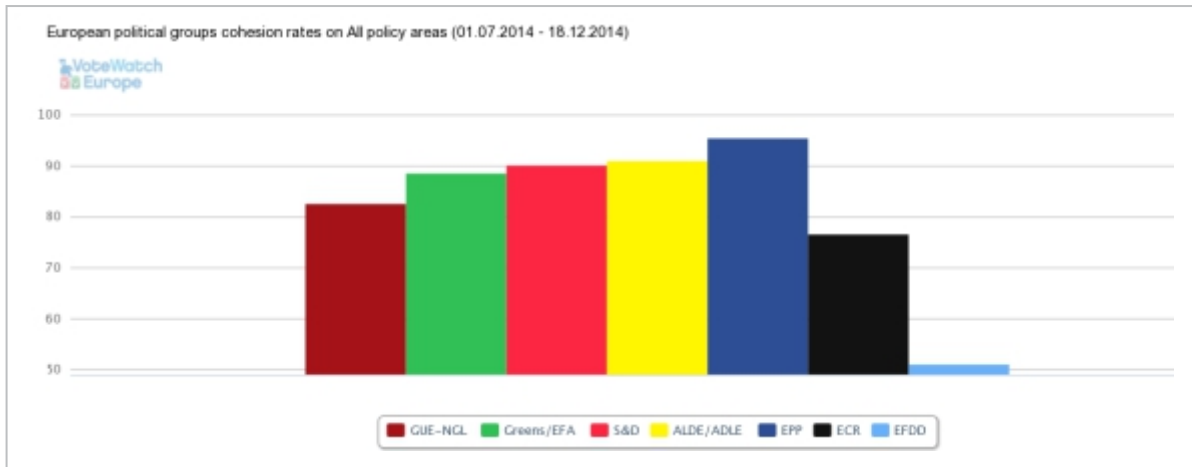
The policy areas where the EPP wins most easily are economic and monetary affairs, budget, internal market and industry, research and energy. On the other hand, EPP won only on 75% of the votes on civil liberties justice and home affairs, where a centre-left majority continues to hold the upper hand, as before the elections.

The level of internal cohesion of the EPP has reached a record 95% (the highest level since 2004, when VoteWatch began measuring this indicator). Similarly, ALDE group, once the 4th most cohesive group has moved to 2nd, improving its score from 88% to 91%.

The ECR group has, in theory, become stronger after the elections, as it is now the third largest in the House. In practice, however, its new structure, in which the British and Polish delegations are almost on par, apparently makes more difficult to reach a common position than before: the group has lost 10% in cohesion.

On the left side, the S&D group is slightly less cohesive than before the elections, while the biggest negative change is recorded in the Greens-EFA group: this group has lost 6%, reaching a record low of 88.5% at the end of 2014.

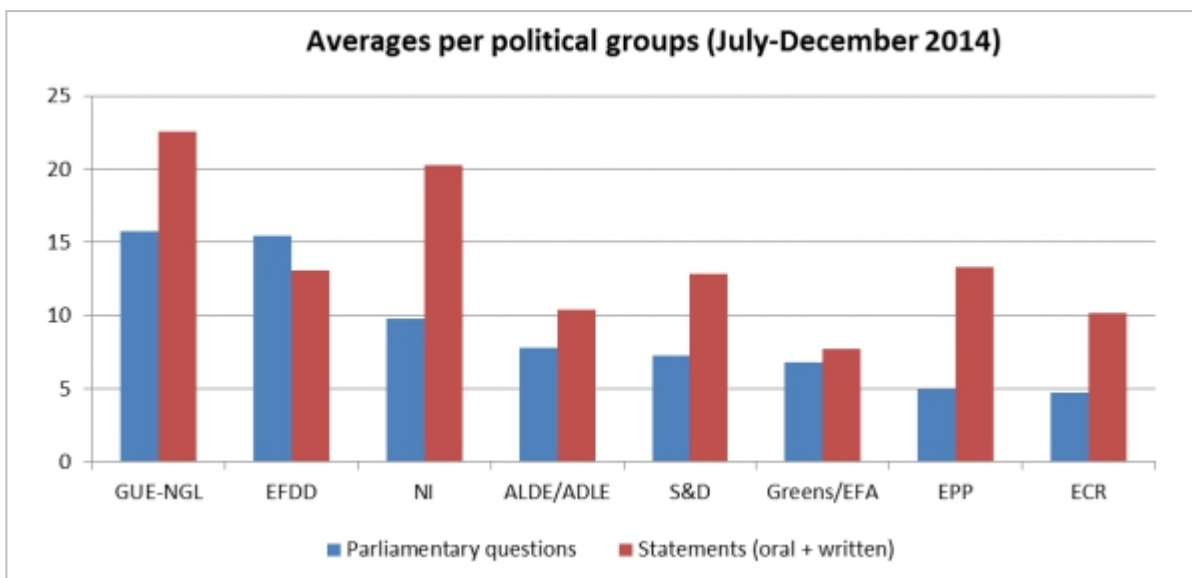
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6

FRINGE GROUPS USE ALTERNATIVE TOOLS TO INCREASE VISIBILITY

The impression of the centrist grand governing coalition vs. opposition at the fringes is increased even more by the way these smaller groups use alternative tools to hold EU institutions accountable, while at the same time gain visibility: the GUE-NGL, EFDD and non-attached MEPs draft substantially more written statements and parliamentary questions than centrist MEPs. This may come as a reaction to the low capacity of directly influencing decisions by votes and amendments, where one needs a political majority in order to pass proposals. On the other hand, submitting statements and parliamentary questions can be done by individual Members alone in an unlimited manner, which allows the Member the ability to put political pressure on the institutions, particularly if these statements are well-communicated to the public.



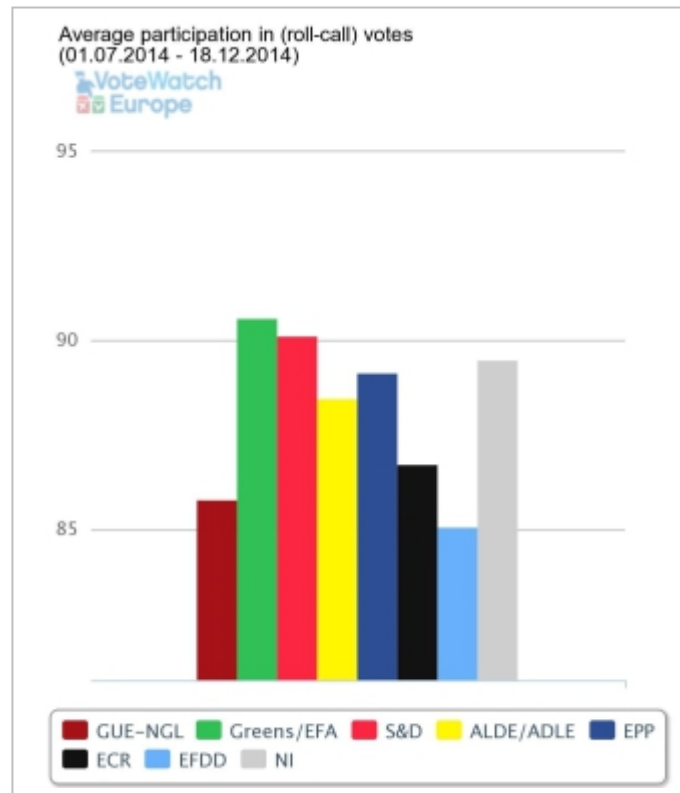
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CENTRIST MEPS PARTICIPATE IN VOTES MORE THAN FRINGE GROUPS

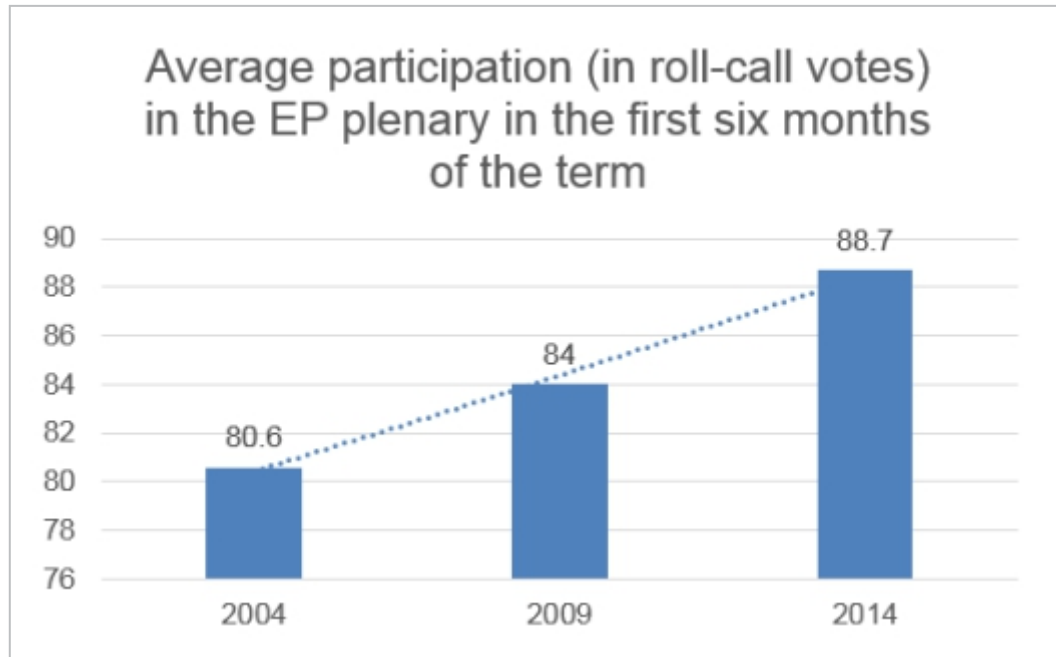
NON-ATTACHED MEPS SUBSTANTIALLY MORE PARTICIPATIVE THAN BEFORE ELECTIONS

Similar to the first six months of the preceding Parliament, the European political group most present in the roll-call votes is the Greens-EFA, with an average participation of 90.5%. It is closely followed by the centre-left S&D group (90%). Interestingly, the non-attached MEPs have become much more participative in votes after the elections: their participation score has gone up from 77% to 89%.

The groups at the fringes, the GUE-NGL and the EFDD have the lowest averages of participation, 85.7% and 85%, respectively.



All in all, the MEPs seem to have become more interested in the work of the parliament: we spotted a clear ascendant trend in participation in votes, having compared the behaviour in the first six months of each of the last three terms. During the interval July-December 2014, the average participation (in roll-call votes) has reached a record 88%. This development can be explained mainly by the fact that the role of the European Parliament as an institution has increased over time and the issues voted have more concrete impact. At the same time, the more careful scrutiny exercised by the civil society is also likely to play an important role.



At individual Member level, 49 MEPs have never missed a vote in the first six months of the current term: 21 from EPP, 14 S&D, 6 ECR, 3 EFDD, 2 GUE-NGL, 2 non-attached and 1 ALDE Member.

To see the real-time participation score for each MEP, go to <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term9-voting-statistics.html>

Need an in-depth, tailor-made analysis ?

If you are an interest group, an NGO, a journalist or a private citizen and you want to know more about who holds the balance of power in a specific policy area, contact VoteWatch at secretariat@votewatcheurope.eu. We offer a number of paid-for services in addition to our regular, free-to-the-public work.

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And why ?

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