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Assessment of and lessons learnt during the 7th Legislature of the European Parliament 2009-2014

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Abstract :

The European Parliament, one of the biggest democratic assemblies in the world, comprises at present 766 [1] MEPs representing more than 505 million [2] people spread across 28 Member States. Since 1979 the European Parliament has been the only European Union institution to be elected directly by the citizens. It is also the only institution whose powers have continually grown as the treaties have been signed, notably since the Lisbon Treaty. Between 22nd and 25th May 2014 citizens are being called to appoint 751 MEPs who will represent them until 2019.

1. There will be 751 MEPs in line with measures set out in the Lisbon Treaty

2. Eurostat, 2013 <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&language=fr&pcode=tps00001&tableSelection=1&footnotes=yes&labeling=labels&plugin=1>

3. European Issue n° 224, Mid-mandate review of the 7th legislature of the European Parliament, Charles de Marcilly, Pierre Thibaudat, Jan Wilker

4. On this issue readers might look at European Issue ° 224 dated 9th January 2012 and to the ten explanatory sheets "Understanding the Lisbon Treaty" published by the Robert Schuman Foundation.

5. The anti-counterfeit trade agreement (Acta) is one negotiated by the EU and ten third States which was rejected by the European Parliament on 4th July 2012

6. During the "trilogues", Parliament often gives the MEPs designated as « rapporteur » the role of negotiating with the States. He is supported by MEPs from other political groups who have also worked towards drafting the institution's position (fictitious rapporteurs). They are often accompanied by their assistants. Source : Contexte, Jean-Sébastien Lefebvre, 10th February 2014

7. European Parliament resolution 13th March 2014 on the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty regarding the European Parliament (2013/2130(INI))

8. Article 30 of the European Parliament's regulations

This European Issue brings data published in the mid-mandate assessment of the 7th legislature of the European Parliament up to date [3]. The power struggles between political groups, a quantitative analysis of parliamentary work and action by national delegations are assessed in the first part before focus turns to major issues which have marked this mandate.

I/ NOW AN IMPORTANT INSTITUTION

"This time it will be different" announces the European Parliament's slogan for the elections in May 2014. The 2009-2014 legislature has already led to many changes. This has been the first "post-Lisbon" term with the extension of power attributed to MEPs in the normative, budgetary and supervisory spheres [4].

Politically speaking MEPs have made their voice heard, including on issues in which their prerogatives are limited, as for example in the anti-counterfeit trade agreement Acta [5], the NSA's communication tapping activities and the transatlantic free-trade agreement. On these issues MEPs have assumed their role as directly elected representatives by the citizens to the full.

The community decision-making procedures have moved forwards. Over the last years the role played by MEPs has grown in terms of drafting European law and notably in the quest for compromise with the Commission and the Council. Whether this has been during trilogue negotiations [6] or in first reading agreements the role played by MEP has been preponderant in the quest for a final compromise.

The presence of MEPs amongst the candidates to succeed José Manuel Barroso as head of the European Commission is also a sign of the parliament's growing power. Four candidates amongst the six put forward by the European political parties to take over as head of the European Commission are MEPs. The call by MEPs [7] for the greatest number of future commissioners to be chosen from amongst MEPs elected in May 2014 lends weight to the impression that "this time it will be different", at least from the point of view of political pressure.

A/ The importance of political groups and delegations

a. Political groups: the engines behind parliamentary work

MEPs are split amongst political groups within the institution: in 2009 there were 7 political groups and the non-attached. The European People's Party (EPP) comprises 275 MEPs, the Alliance of Progressive Socialists and Democrats (S&D) 194, the Alliance for Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) 85, the European Conservatives and Reformers (ECR) 58, the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA) 56, the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) 35, the Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group (EFD) 32. There are 31 (NI) non-attached MEPs. 25 MEPs are required to form a political group elected in at least a quarter of the EU's Member States [8]. It is not possible to join several political groups. Having a group is a guarantee of being attributed a specific budget, a secretariat, the ability to call on the European Parliament's services like translation, to have influence in being assigned reports and over the conference of

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9. *Votewatch.eu : European political groups cohesion rates on all policy areas (14.07.2009-13.03.2014)*

10. *Idem*

presidents which decides the agenda amongst other things. The creation of new groups will be one of the major issues in the election of May 2014 and notably amongst the populist parties if they obtain a sufficient number of seats.

Cohesion within the political groups is a major vector of influence during negotiations between groups. MEPs in certain parties follow the positions taken by their groups almost unanimously. This is the case with the Greens

(94.61%), the S&D (91.56%), and the EPP (92.50%) in all of the votes during the legislature taken by all of the parliamentary committees together [9]. However cohesion is weaker amongst the conservatives (86.73%) and the liberals (88.25%). Regarding the latter, this reflects internal splits, notably between the French and Germans. Finally other parties such as the GUE (69.62%) and EFD (46.16%) groups find it extremely difficult to adopt this mode of functioning which excludes them in part from compromise negotiations [10].

Average parliamentary activity of an MEP according to his/her political group (averages calculated out of a sample number of committees)

Political Group	Questions asked	Draft resolutions	Real reports	Shadow Reports	Real opinions	Shadow opinions	Intervention	Déclaration
Group Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)	119	80	3.8	11.8	3.5	10.02	122	3.16
Group European United Left Gauche /Nordic Green Left (GUE)	137.7	51.5	2.7	16.6	2.5	11.3	193,9	6.3
Group Alliance of Progressive Socialist and Democrats (S&D)	45.8	8.6	4.3	5.3	4	4.7	202.8	2.28
Group European Conservatives and Reformers (ECR)	90.2	43.4	1.7	15.5	2.5	9.7	102.8	2.2
Group Greens/ European Free Alliance	45	35.3	2.9	14.9	3.2	12.7	83.6	2.8
Group European People's Party (EPP)	72.1	35.9	3.4	3.6	2.8	3.4	186,3	2
Group Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD)	192.4	29.7	2.8	5.8	3.1	3.1	320.8	2
NI	164	7.6	2.6	9.3	2.65	4.	188.3	3.4

Updated by Victoria de Posson for the Robert Schuman Foundation - parliamentary activities of MEPs in the Foreign Affairs (AFET), Budgets (BUDG), Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON), Environment, public health and food safety (ENVI), International trade (INTA), Transport and tourism (TRAN) and Industry, research and energy (ITRE) parliamentary committees according to data issued by the European Parliament <http://www.europarl.europa.eu>, February 1st 2014.

*The European Parliament distinguishes between "questions asked" of the Council or the Commission, "draft resolutions", "reports", "opinions", "interventions in plenary" and "written declarations". Questions and proposals can be individual or joint, on behalf of a parliamentary committee or a political group. Interventions in plenary can be oral, written, represent a political group or an individual. Declarations can be joint or individual. Reports and opinions are attributed to one MEP only.

Considerations about MEPs' work according to their parliamentary group

As in the last assessment of the first part of the mandate [11], MEPs have individual stances linked to their political affinities. The study of our sample confirms that liberal, socialist and Christian Democrats write more reports than other groups (3.8, 4.3 and 3.4 on average out of the panel studied in comparison for example of 2.8 for the EFD). However we should be able to make a distinction between the reports in terms of their binding legislative weight. Indeed an initiative report does not have the same legal weight as a basic report on a draft regulation put forward by the Commission. It would then be possible to refine the analysis and see that the reports that are legally important are attributed most often to the EPP, the S&D and to the liberals thanks to the respective weight of their delegations in the assembly and to their ability to form "winning" coalitions [12].

Moreover the data collated indicates that MEPs in the two biggest parties quite clearly produce less "shadow" reports. (5.3 for the S&D and 3.6 for the EPP in comparison with 16.6 for the GUE and 14.9 for the Greens). "Shadow" reports are assigned by parties to balance the weight of the rapporteur. Hence the groups that are not so well represented in the committees are

arithmetically "obliged" to have more of these reports.

Public-speaking is also a factor to take into consideration. Speaking time during plenary sessions is strictly controlled and attributed according to a specific order. The invective to be heard in some national parliaments does not exist in the European Parliament. Likewise it is extremely difficult just to make statements and work is focused on legislative areas. However it is possible to intervene in plenary session and to ask questions of the representatives of the European Commission. In this exercise – which has no legislative weight – EFD MEPs led by Briton Nigel Farage come out ahead with 192.4 questions asked and 320 interventions in plenary against 83.6 on average for the Greens for example. The non-attached MEPs find a means of expression in this with 164 questions set and 188.3 interventions which compensate for a much more modest amount of legislative activity.

Finally anecdotally there are ways to "improve" attendance statistics. We note that voting explanations are taken up as an intervention by the Parliament whilst in many cases this was just an e-mail justifying a position without any real intervention being made in plenary.

b. MEPs with national traits of character

11. *Op cit, Mid-mandate assessment of the 7th legislature of the European Parliament, p.5*

12. *Op cit Vote watch, European political groups cohesion rates on all policy areas (14.07.2009-13.03.2014)*

Average per party of activity of all MEPs (France, United Kingdom, Germany, Italy)

Averages per country	Participation in plenary votes	Parliamentary Questions	Speeches in Plenary	Reports written	Reports as « shadow » rapporteur	Opinion as rapporteur	Opinion as « shadow » rapporteur	Resolution proposals	Written declarations
France									
EPP	86,73	44,17	249,30	3,00	2,27	2,40	3,03	21,20	1,23
S&D	84,66	33,92	86,31	1,85	2,92	3,08	3,77	9,38	0,62
ALDE	85,25	73,83	242,50	1,83	7,67	1,83	4,67	107,67	1,83
G/EFA	83,96	32,31	47,00	1,56	7,88	4,31	9,06	46,25	1,38
GUE/NGL	78,30	66,20	363,00	0,00	10,80	1,40	11,00	122,00	1,40
EFD	48,08	29,00	41,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	4,00	1,00
NI	70,00	2,67	143,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,67	0,00
Total	83,88	41,81	176,93	2,03	4,49	2,69	4,97	37,30	1,16

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Average per party of activity of all MEPs (France, United Kingdom, Germany, Italy)

Averages per country	Participation in plenary votes	Parliamentary Questions	Speeches in Plenary	Reports written	Reports as « shadow » rapporteur	Opinion as rapporteur	Opinion as « shadow » rapporteur	Resolution proposals	Written declarations
UK									
S&D	84,63	88,00	240,92	4,85	2,54	1,92	2,77	26,00	2,00
ALDE	88,25	115,58	100,58	2,58	7,92	2,75	5,42	52,67	2,92
G/EFA	83,43	101,00	182,80	1,60	8,60	1,00	8,00	35,00	3,00
ECR	81,27	96,52	133,30	2,11	19,37	2,42	12,41	30,00	0,67
GUE/NGL	88,37	32,00	96,00	0,00	5,00	1,00	3,00	11,00	1,00
EFD	68,39	135,25	170,50	0,13	1,38	0,38	1,38	1,00	0,13
NI	69,67	93,14	130,14	0,29	0,86	0,00	1,00	0,29	0,71
Total	<i>80,74</i>	<i>101,48</i>	<i>153,74</i>	<i>2,22</i>	<i>9,81</i>	<i>1,81</i>	<i>6,81</i>	<i>27,07</i>	<i>1,38</i>
Germany									
EPP	89,34	30,71	71,74	3,10	2,36	2,21	2,14	26,98	0,71
S&D	85,88	23,61	57,13	3,04	3,17	4,61	3,43	8,48	0,39
ALDE	83,02	41,83	73,50	2,92	11,42	3,92	13,25	24,08	1,42
G/EFA	88,33	44,29	59,07	2,36	14,43	2,43	14,71	51,43	1,29
GUE/NGL	87,73	38,38	53,88	1,50	21,00	2,25	14,88	42,13	1,50
Total	87,50	32,95	65,32	2,83	6,86	3,01	6,60	27,01	0,87
Italy									
EPP	79,80	169,21	265,32	3,97	1,47	2,62	1,79	27,44	1,68
S&D	79,82	50,14	72,23	2,64	2,32	2,18	3,64	14,59	1,23
ALDE	79,54	185,80	67,60	1,20	7,80	2,00	4,60	77,00	4,40
ECR	75,23	295,50	70,00	0,50	2,00	1,50	2,50	39,50	4,00
EFD	86,86	343,63	246,50	1,25	14,63	0,38	15,50	35,00	2,38
NI	91,36	198,00	62,00	0,00	0,50	0,50	0,00	6,50	3,00
Total	80,75	157,82	180,60	2,88	3,59	2,11	4,01	27,55	1,90

Sources : European Parliament and votewatch .eu, data collated and formatted by Claire Taglione-Darmé for the Robert Schuman Foundation, February 2014

13. Votewatch.eu, Ranking of Member States by average scores of participation in (roll call) vote (14.07.2009-13.03.2014)

MEP behaviour also falls in line with national customs. As we observe MEPs work in four main countries all parties taken together and over the entire legislature, we see similarities whatever their political leaning.

Attendance in plenary and during voting is quite homogeneous. Although the Austrians dominate the ranking with participation totalling 91.18% and the Maltese are last in line with 75.51% [13], the average

is stable at around 80% attendance rate. In the table above variations in attendance rates can be explained notably by the low number of MEPs in some parties, which affects statistics.

Italian and British delegations asked many questions (157.2 and 101.48 on average) in comparison with the French or the Germans (41.48 and 32.95 respectively). Of course both countries have more MEPs within the political parties using this procedure. However German MEPs distinguish themselves by their lack of appetite for speeches in plenary in contrast to their British, French or Italian colleagues all groups together. They submit fewer written declarations (0.87 on average) and are just behind the Italians in terms of numbers of reports written (2.83 against 2.88), since the latter are carried by the EPP members with 3.97 reports written on average since July 2009. However we should distinguish between reports with binding legal content and those of less legislative influence.

Finally the table show that the non-attached's parliamentary activity is similar whatever the country. The French write nearly no reports and focus speeches in plenary, as do their Italian and British counterparts (there are no German NI). Only the attendance rate differs significantly with the Italian non-attached attending 91% of the plenary sessions in comparison to 70% of the French!

The dispersion of MEPs amongst the delegations changes the balance of power within the Parliament. French MEPs are present in all of the groups (except for ECR) which limit their number in the major parties. Hence 30 French MEPs are in the EPP, against 42 Germans and 34 Italians (13, 23 and 23 in the S&D). This logically leads to reduced influence in the major groups. This feature may very well grow more acute in the upcoming elections and the creation of small groups which will struggle to organise themselves against the main political groups.

c. Analysis of national delegations

The weight of roles to influence the institution Traditionally the work of the first month of a new Parliament focuses on the distribution of posts and

roles within the institution. Appointment to certain posts depends on the individual and collective audience of the representatives elected in each country, on their political affinity to the biggest groups and on their experience. On observing criteria like the accumulation of mandates, longevity in parliament, responsibilities undertaken and other less well known criteria such as the fluency in foreign languages reveals trends per Member State [14].

If we look at the mandates and responsibilities per country within the European Parliament in 2014 we can distinguish three categories.

The first comprises Germany, France, the UK and Italy which occupy 14.8%, 11%, 10.8% and 7.5% of all 'executive posts' [15]. Naturally these States are amongst the most represented in the institution but all undertake different influencing strategies: 21 Britons and 25 Germans are coordinators in comparison with 9 Frenchmen and 4 Italians. This post – which is not very well known – is a vital cog in the committees' work and enables the person to play a major role in negotiating between political groups.

The distinction in the choice of executive post scan be found in the second group comprising the Netherlands, Spain and Poland. Although the Dutch follow the British strategy with 8 coordinators, the Poles have shown they are more attached to posts of prestige with 8 Committee Vice-Presidents and the presidency of Parliament in the first half of the legislature. This reflects their place as the "biggest" country amongst those included in the most recent enlargements. The Italians are also represented in these posts with 4 committee presidents and 11 vice-presidents which make it the second State holding the most portfolios after Germany.

The third group in terms of mandates and responsibility comprises the countries represented by the smallest number of MEPs but which are extremely active in parliament. This is the case with the Portuguese (notably with 8 coordinators) Swedish, Danish, Belgian and Czech delegations.

14. Cf. Thierry Chopin and Anouk Richard « L'influence de la France au Parlement européen, l'enjeu du choix des candidats », Robert Schuman Foundation, 13th January 2014

15. Of course all of these posts are not qualitatively equal. However this data enables a definition of Member States' overall strategies and the national approach to parliamentary work.

Finally existence of inter-groups shows the interest of some in focusing on issues of general interest by involving MEPs from various political parties and the members of different committees.

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Mandates and responsibilities per country in the European Parliament on 1st March 2014

Country	Presidency EP	VP EP	Presidency Commission	VP Commission	Presidency group	VP group	Coordinator	Deputy coordinators	Intergroup	Total
Germany	1	2	6	9	2	3	25	5	2	55
Austria		1		1	1		3	1	4	11
Belgium		1		2	1	4	4		1	13
Bulgaria				3		2	3			8
Cyprus				1		1	1			3
Croatia										
Denmark				3		1	6		1	11
Spain		2	2	5		3	6		4	20
Estonia								1	1	2
Finland				2		2	3	1		8
France			4	10	2	5	9	5	6	41
Greece		2		4		1	3			10
Hungary		1		5		1	1		2	10
Ireland						1	1	1		3
Italy		2	4	11	1	4	4	1	1	28
Latvia							4			4
Lithuania				1		1	1			3
Luxembourg						1	2		1	4
Malta				1						1
Netherlands				3		5	8		4	20
Poland		1	1	8		3	6	2	2	23
Portugal			1	2		2	8			13
Czech Rep		1		1		3	4		2	11
Romania				7		3	3	2		13
UK		1	3	6	2	3	21		4	40
Slovakia						1		1	1	3
Slovenia							1	1		2
Sweden			1	2		3	3	1		10
Total	1	14	22	84	9	53	130	22	36	370
			<i>Including sub-committee</i>				<i>* ELD not included</i>	<i>*only identified for the EPP and ALDE</i>		

Source: European Parliament data collated and formatted by Claire Taglione-Darmé for the Robert Schuman Foundation. ELD coordinators are not shown. Identification for EPP and PES vice-coordinators only

B/ Sustained overall activity

Quantitatively, the study of MEP activity during plenary session highlights the differences with the previous legislature in the methods used.

a. Comparison between activity of the 6th and 7th legislatures

	2009 (July to December)	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014 (January and February)	Total 7e legislature 2009/2014	Total 6th legislature
No of draft resolutions recorded in session	219	564	565	458	481	69	2356	2628
No of legislative procedures voted on in plenary*	70	155	152	134	188	33	749	1469
No of non-legislative procedures voted on in plenary	61	342	401	350	390	72	1616	1449
No of votes in plenary	995	3838	4259	3945	6639	1089	20696	25467
No of amendments registered in session	1658	6914	4565	6609	13272	1370	35295	51761

*Initiative, resolution, immunity

Source : European Parliament formatted by the Robert Schuman Foundation

We note the ratification of 749 legislative acts since July 2009 whilst 1469 acts were recorded under the 6th legislature. This decline of nearly 50% finds explanation in the reduced number of texts submitted by the European Commission and especially in the desire for administrative and legislative simplification in line with the theory of "smart regulation" fostered by the second Barroso Commission. Moreover it has become common place for a directive or regulation to "replace" several existing legal texts like the "legislative packages" or a series of texts. For example even though it was rejected during the plenary session of March 2014 on first reading the Commission's proposal planned for the merger of 12 directives in one regulation directly applicable to seeds [16]. As a result fewer laws have been ratified but their content is still as important.

In addition to this one of the consequences of the reduction in the number of "basic" reports [17] is that the "battle" for their drafting requires major skills in

terms of influence and visibility. Indeed this rarity turns the attribution of reports into a strategic matter and requires a great deal of energy by the delegations for them to be attributed. Of course the figures do not reflect the opinion reports attributed to parliamentary committees. However the limited number of basic reports, the determination to come to a rapid inter-institutional agreement and the wish on the part of MEPs to be appointed as rapporteur highlights the importance of being assigned a report more than ever before in terms of influencing parliamentary work. Moreover although legislative procedures are declining those which are non-legislative have risen by 11.52% in comparison with the previous legislature (1616 against 1449) and allow for slight statistical compensation.

The study of the number of amendments made in plenary during the 7th legislature reminds us that there is greater prior cohesion within the parliamentary committees and this therefore reduces the need to

16. 2013/0137(COD)

17. Referral to a committee so that the latter gives an opinion on a legislative text generally takes place at the beginning of the procedure which takes place in the European Parliament. Regarding legislative texts opinions take the shape of amendments which it is suggested to be made to the report set out by the competent committee. Regarding the latter we then speak of a basic report..

deliver additional amendments in plenary. Since July 2009, 35,295 amendments were registered in comparison with 51,761 over the same period in the previous legislature. 46.6% of parliamentary amendments have been accepted in plenary, against 30.2% of those lodged by political groups. (46.4% of all amendments have been accepted and this figure has been stable during the entire legislature). There are two ways to explain these figures. Firstly the many minority parties in some parliamentary committees try to influence the rapporteur again during the plenary vote. However these amendments are traditionally rejected. Secondly this shows that political splits within the parliamentary committees are upheld in the hemicycle during the final vote. Greater cohesion within the parliamentary committees would also enable political parties to rally behind compromises drawn up between the committees and which would then be better supported by parliament. However it seems that under this legislature real splits between parties have become apparent during committee debates and which have lasted into plenary [18]. The number of amendments lodged by 20 MEPs and more is still marginal with 459 depositions and a positive vote in only 20.6%, which shows the political, divisive nature of the institution to the detriment of personal initiatives.

b. First reading agreement – the norm?

Thanks to the Lisbon Treaty the European Parliament has witnessed an increase in its legislative powers. More than 40 areas have come under the so-called co-decision procedure whereby parliament is on an equal footing with the Council. Now called the "ordinary

legislative procedure" it covers 85 areas of activity. During the 2009-2014, issues in agriculture, energy security, immigration, justice and interior, health, structural funds and especially during negotiations over the budget [19], have illustrated the importance of this new order. However the total number of ordinary legislative procedures has been relatively stable in comparison with the previous legislature (410 in comparison with 417). However we note that under the present mandate there has been a clear decline in issues which reach conciliation and even second reading: 90% of conciliation procedures are the subject of an agreement between Parliament and the Council before formal second reading which (regarding the high number of rapid agreements) "shows that institutions want to cooperate, to achieve results and be effective. It shows the flexibility of the procedure and the political dynamic in the active quest for results." [20]

The decisive weight of first reading highlights two aspects. The first is the increasing importance of committee work and the drafting of compromises between political groups which is arises in plenary session to ratify the vote. The second is the quality of the negotiators – the rapporteur and a delegation – and of the mandate that is given. These agreements reduce both the time of negotiation on second reading and mobilises all institutional players at an earlier stage. Parliamentary committee work and the influence of the coordinators is not reduced however even though experience shows that "the committees do not have a uniform strategy in this and they adopt different cultures and habits regarding when negotiations are concluded." [21].

18. On this issue see the 2013 Annual Report by Vote watch : 10 votes that shaped the 7th European Parliament

19. Since the Parliament is no longer restricted to "non-obligatory spending" but decides the entire annual EU budget with the Council negotiations have lasted several months.

20. http://www.europarl.europa.eu/code/information/activity_reports/activity_report_2009_2011_fr.pdf

Activity Report by the Delegations in the conciliation committee, 14th July 2009 – 31st December 2011

21. Op.cit p.5

7e Legislature – Data available on 14th July 2009 to 11th March 2014

1st reading	« Early » second reading	2nd reading	3rd reading (conciliation)	All files COD
344	32	26	8	410
84%	8 %	6 %	2 %	100 %
18	28	35	30	Average duration of procedures (in months)

Source : European Parliament

6th Legislature – 1st May 2004 – 13th July 2009

1st reading	« Early » second reading	2nd reading	3rd reading (conciliation)	All files COD
321	42	61	23	447
72 %	9 %	14 %	5 %	100 %
17	27	34	45	Average duration of procedures (in months)

Source : European Parliament [22]

II/ ACTIVITY FOCUSED ON CRISIS MANAGEMENT AND CITIZEN PROTECTION

The first thirty months of the 7th legislature were devoted to the European response to the settlement of the financial and budgetary crises. The completion of the single market was the focus of particular attention, notably as part of the strengthening of the protection of consumer, passenger, patient rights and even users of new technologies. Citizen protection in the wide sense of the term including from the point of view of fundamental rights was the focus of concern. In the form debates were constructive with the Commission and the Council but some issues revealed major fault lines. The new budgetary prerogatives were the opportunity for a testing negotiation marathon. Although the final compromise might not include everything MEPs had wanted, many considerations were taken into account. The conclusion of these five years is that parliamentary work, more than in previous mandates, has never been as technical, political and pragmatic!

a/ Response to the crises, the focus of parliamentary work

Responses to the economic and financial crises [23] marked the exercise of this mandate: the creation of three supervisory authorities (ESA), of the European Systemic Risk Board (ESRB), of the "six pack", and the "two pack".

The end of the legislature reminds us that MEPs have defended positions that highlight their role as the representatives of citizens hit hard by austerity measures. Hence MEPs attached importance to promoting new rules for ratings agencies, to asking for limits on bankers bonuses and for the guarantee of more own funds

and at the same time they supported the economy by simplifying, for example, loans grants to SME's. The fight to counter fraud, tax evasion, money laundering and even banking secrecy had major effect amongst citizens and has placed Parliament at the heart of the institutional triangle in the face of positions adopted by the States.

The distinction between the community method and the intergovernmental dimension of the Economic and Monetary, then Banking Union has been constant. MEPs have always tried to strengthen the community method. Negotiations about the introduction of a Single Resolution Mechanism (SRM) illustrate the differing positions of the institutions. In the future the SRM is supposed to implement the dismantling of major defaulting banks. This instrument completes banking union after the creation of a single supervisory mechanism under the aegis of the European Central Bank and the adoption of a body of common rules [24]. After several weeks of negotiation the Council and the Parliament came to an agreement over banking union on 20th March. This political agreement focuses on the orderly liquidation of banks in the euro zone, and aims to place the financial burden on the banking sector and not on the tax payer. Positions were so set that it seemed that no compromise would be found [25] : a victory for Parliament! In this case the unity and internal cohesion of the groups helped form a front against the Council and to defend "real protection against bank defaults". [26]

Budget

The multi-annual financial framework (MFF) [27] establishes the Union's mid-term financial perspectives (2014-2020) by setting strategic priorities and defi-

22. http://www.europarl.europa.eu/code/about/statistics_fr.htm

23. See the text on the first part of the 7th legislature and the reports supported by the European Parliament. For a general understanding and specific information, we advise readers to consult the information file by the Robert Schuman Foundation <http://www.robert-schuman.eu/fr/comprendre-la-crise-economique-et-financiere>

24. <http://trends.levif.be/economie/actualite/politique-economique/l-union-bancaire-coince-au-parlement-europeen/article-4000499760168.htm>

25. http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2014/01/16/union-bancaire-il-faut-une-autorite-de-resolution-unique-par-martin-schultz_4348774_3232.html

26. http://www.lepoint.fr/economie/le-parlement-europeen-adopte-un-accord-commun-sur-l-union-bancaire-20-03-2014-1803345_28.php

27. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/thematicnote.do?id=2054000&l=fr>

ning the maximum amounts available for each sector of spending. It means ensuring that European spending can be planned for and subject to strict budgetary discipline. The MFF defines the overall annual budget expenditure of the European Union.

According to the Lisbon Treaty the MFF is adopted by a unanimous Council decision after European Parliament has given its green light. The MFF takes the legal shape of a regulation and not just a simple annex to the inter-institutional agreement, as was the case before the Lisbon Treaty entered into force. After a year of fierce negotiations an agreement that took on board various parliamentary demands was finally concluded and the MFF was approved by the Parliament in November 2013. However although Parliament used its new prerogatives and pushed politically in the direction of an ambitious agreement the final result was far from satisfying to the parties involved. [28]

On all issues the technical, financial and stock exchange expertise that was required to be able to understand fully was considerable. In this regard we note the creation of an observatory in 2010, finance-watch – which was supported by several MEPs so that they could benefit from the expertise of civil society in addition to that provided by the banking sector [29]. Parliament also formed an internal think-tank [30]. Indeed although nor the Member States or the Commission have extensive expertise available within their respective administrations this was not the case for MEPs who had two or three assistants, political advisors of the groups or committees. These teams are not enough from a quantitative point of view given the number of texts being addressed.

b/ Protecting citizens

During this mandate the European citizen has received greater protection against threats, abuse and dangers from various quarters.

The right to the suppression of personal data and greater protection during the transfer of data to third countries is part of the reform of rules governing the protection of personal data [31]. MEPs have sometimes been tougher than the Member States themselves when for example they warned of the

free trade agreement between the EU and the USA (TTIP) which might be compromised if the NSA's surveillance of communications is extended. The wish to interview Edward Snowden illustrates this trend [32]. Other issues were the focus of greater consensus such as improving the protection of children on the internet.

Rejection of Acta, an emblematic victory

The Anti-Counterfeit Trade Agreement (Acta) is a treaty negotiated by the EU and ten third states which was rejected by the European Parliament on 4th July 2012 after several months of debate: five EP committees voted against its ratification. This treaty's declared goal was to strengthen the signatories' legal tools to counter digital or material counterfeiting. However the doubts expressed by the text's opponents about the procedure, qualified as opaque, as well as the legal uncertainty of the scope of the measures that had been signed for, encouraged MEPs to vote against the Commission's position. This stance marked the legislature since it was the first time that the Parliament had exercised its power, conferred to it by the Lisbon Treaty, to reject an international trade agreement. [33]

Strengthening public healthcare

The European Parliament in line with its previous mandates has placed importance on strengthening patients' rights. In response to certain infringements which have marked recent events the standards governing breast implants, the regulations governing generic medicines and the promotion of binding rules to guarantee access to books on the part of those with impaired vision have been approved. Well-being was also an angle of debate between parliamentary committees in defence of the food chain and the authorisation for the development of certain kinds of GMOs.

Finally, "as MEPs, co-legislators with the Council we want to assume our responsibilities to the full in this legislature. This is why we cannot say rapidly what we think of this proposal, which is vital for many manufacturing associations, for businesses and citizens. The high number of "delegated acts" would give the

28. <http://www.alainlamassoure.eu/2013/11/budget-le-pe-a-approuve-enfin-le-cadre-financier-pluriannuel-de-lue-2014-2020-article-publie-dans-lagence-europe-le-20-novembre-2013/>

29. In June 2010, a group of MEPs raised concern that they were being inundated with requests for appointments on the part of representatives from the financial industry. At the same time the same MEPs faced increasing technical nature of regulations coming from the European Commission in response to the financial crisis. This group, which comprised 22 MEPs from all political trends, was concerned about the imbalance between the representation of the interests of the financial industry and those of the rest of society stressing that this was a danger to the democratic process. www.finance-watch.org

30. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/fr/documents.html>

31. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/fr/top-stories/content/20130901TST18405/html/Protection-des-donn%C3%A9es>

32. http://www.lepoint.fr/monde/l-audition-de-snowden-par-le-parlement-europeen-ne-plait-pas-aux-etats-unis-17-12-2013-1770842_24.php

33. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/fr/news-rooms/content/20120703IPR48247/html/Le-Parlement-europ%C3%A9en-rejette-l%27ACTA-478-MEPs-voted-against-ACTA,-39-in-support-and-165-abstained>

Commission too much power regarding certain issues related to areas, which, because of their sensitive nature, should be defined in a legislative text," [34], explained rapporteur Paolo Francesco Silvestris (EPP, IT) about the proposal on seeds which was rejected by MEPs. The multiplication of procedures – which were formerly called comitologies or delegated acts – complicates MEPs work, which seems to question the application of measures that have been approved whilst part of the legislation is beyond their influence. The new procedures which are sometime complicated call for greater care.

c/ Protecting the environment, developing new energies

The reduction of CO2 emissions was on the agenda in this legislature as in the previous ones. CO2 quotas and restrictive norms were stepped up on vehicles, light goods vehicles and boats. Compromises between industry and the desire to protect the environment were achieved regarding the management of waste (plastic, electrical and electronic etc) and action to counter climate change.

Highly contentious debate on the diversification of energy sources led to the strengthening of rules on fracking. In line with the previous legislature and the direction taken since 2000 Parliament continued to support renewable energies.

The fight to counter over-fishing was one of the priorities in the compromise found with the States whilst the revision of the Common Agricultural Policy – although greener and fairer in the future – showed however that this area was still very much the preserve of the States and the European Commission in terms of their power of initiative. The CAP reform process in 2010 in Parliament reached its final phase in June 2013 when Parliament, Council and Commission negotiators came to a political agreement on the main themes. The first source of spending in the community budget, the parliamentary agricultural committee received a record 7,400 amendments to the draft reform [35] !

d/ Non-legislative but symbolic action

The European Parliament's legislative power is quite restricted in terms of diplomatic issues. However

thanks to its delegations it has tried to recall the respect of human rights and support to democracy. Many resolutions, without any binding legal authority but enjoying a certain amount of political weight, have highlighted situations in many third countries. The European Parliament also played its role in the EU's relations with Russia, but also with countries in the Eastern Partnership (Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan) as it took up firm stances. The repeated demands for the liberation of Yulia Tymoshenko before any possible signature of a partnership agreement helped put pressure on the Ukrainian government.

Finally the annual award of the Sakharov Prize [36] illustrates that Europe intends to show its support to the defence of human rights and the freedom of expression as it awarded the prize to Malala Yousafzai (2013), Nasrin Sotoudeh and Jafar Panahi (2012) and to five supporters of the Arab Spring in 2011. On 22nd October 2013 the intervention in plenary by Aung San Suu Kyi, who came to collect her prize 23 years after it had been awarded, will remain high in people's minds in this legislature.

CONCLUSION

Although no revolution has taken place in Strasbourg during the plenary sessions or in Brussels during the committee meetings over the last five years parliamentary work has undergone some lasting changes. New competences fostered by successive reforms of the treaties have been implemented on a regular basis. However progress has only been the result of a legal process. The need for responsiveness, the need to mobilise in the face of economic or political crises – sometimes unexpected, as was the case in Ukraine, requires a faster decision making process, as highlighted by the increasing use of first reading agreement. The technicality of some issues, the lack of transparency in some procedures, the influence of representatives of interests compensating for a lack of means, are parameters that we have to bear in mind when we assess the 7th legislature. Moreover the study of MEPs work shows splits

34. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/fr/news-room/content/20140307IPR38202/html/Les-d%C3%A9put%C3%A9s-rejettent-le-projet-de-r%C3%A8glement-sur-les-senences>

35. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/fr/news-room/content/20110526FCS20313/5/html/7-400-amendements-d%C3%A9pos%C3%A9s-au-Parlement-europ%C3%A9en>

36. *The Sakharov Prize rewards exceptional people who fight to counter intolerance, fanaticism, and oppression. In the wake of Andrey Sakharov, the winners of this prize bear witness to how much courage is needed to defend human rights and the freedom of expression.* <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/fr/00f3dd2249/Prix-Sakharov-pour-la-libert%C3%A9-de-l%E2%80%99esprit.html>

between political groups and also between States. However it is the determination and the personal qualities of an MEP which will enable his/her involvement and earn the respect of his/her peers in order to be appointed to positions of influence. However the accumulation of mandates, the dispersion of delegations within several groups and the lack of reports reduce the possibility of contributing to compromise negotiations. These are the lessons that the 751 MEPs should take on board as they take their seats in July 2014.



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