

Is there really a political difference in the EU Parliament between the big groups?



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Project leader: Jan A Johansson
Research assistance: Ewout Ramon
Expert advisers: Björn Jonasson and Richard Byfält

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Political groups in the European Parliament

PPE - Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats), changed in 2009 name from PPE-DE - Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats.

S&D - Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, changed in 2009 name from PSE - Socialist Group in the European Parliament

ALDE - Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

Greens/EFA - Greens/European Free Alliance (Regionalists)

ECR - European Conservatives and Reformists

GUE/NGL - European United Left - Nordic Green Left

EFD - Europe of freedom and democracy Group (EU critical)

NI - Non-attached Members (not a group and therefore their voting is not recorded in this report)

IND/DEM - Independence/Democracy Group (EU critical), existed from 2004 to 2009

INTRODUCTION

This research intends to show the lack of left-right perspectives in the European Parliament. In some, but not all, EU Member States, election campaigns to the European Parliament include a focus on the difference between the centre-right and the centre-left. But in reality, a large governing coalition exists in the European Parliament, consisting mainly of the Christian Democrats (PPE) and the Socialists (S&D), with the Liberals (ALDE) and the Greens/EFA (Regionalists) willing to make deals in general. Even the Conservatives (ECR) and the Left (GUE/NGL) get their piece of the pie through compromises in committees, in exchange for supporting deals such as approving the Barosso II Commission.

This report seeks to present a picture of how this large governing coalition works in practice at final votes in the plenary sessions. It includes political deals made in the Parliament and looks at the kinds of issues that really differentiates the political groups.

The general political work in the European Parliament

As former European Commissioner Ritt Bjerregaard once said; „This is not a real Parliament“. The European Parliament first and foremost seeks to promote increased political power for the European Union and of course for the European Parliament itself.

No limitations have been specified on how far the Union should take over political power from the Member States. On the contrary the preamble of the Treaty of Rome specifically calls for an “*ever-closer union*”, meaning endless transfers of competences to the community level. Thus the European Parliament tries to suggest that it should assume power over every political area it can, from the environment and education to traffic and culture etc. No policy area is too remote for it to have an opinion on it.

The approved texts of the European Parliament are compromises negotiated mainly between the PPE and the S&D as well as ALDE and the Greens/EFA, because the Parliament wishes to acquire more power in relation to the Council and for the Commission to take into account the Parliaments view in their proposals for legislation.

This inter-institutional power struggle has created a culture of compromise in the European Parliament. One glaring example of this is the election of the Speaker of the European Parliament, where in general PPE and S&D (previous named the PSE group) share the post over the five year term of the Parliament. During the current term, 2009-2014, the European Parliament first had a PPE speaker for 2½ years who was later replaced by a S&D member for the remaining 2½ years. In the previous term the same system operated, with the order reversed.

To vote the same – the culture of compromises

According to the European Parliament, EU institutions should be involved in everything from action programmes for taking measures against bullying at work to common security and defence policy. The European Parliament also continually puts up demands for new policy areas for the Union to work with, with inevitable increases in expenditures for the EU budget as a consequence. Every year the European Parliament demands an increase in the EU budget

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for the following year. For example when the 2011 budget came up for decision the European Parliament wanted an increase of around 6.5%. In general, member states in the Council sought an increase in line with inflation, with some even seeking a complete budget freeze. After negotiations the budget was increased by 2.9% from 2010 to 2011. This has been quite a common outcome over the years in which the European Parliament and the Council have disagreed on figures.

Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) take care to safeguard and maintain the special interests of their Member States and constituencies like subsidies from regional and structural funds, subsidies to the fishing industry and of course, subsidies to farmers through the Common Agriculture Policy. Compromises between MEPs are made in the spirit of “you get this today and I will get that tomorrow”. This reasoning leads the European Parliament to ask continually for increases to the EU budget, with very few examples of a desire to cut back expenses at the EU level.

As a consequence of the above described deal-making, the EU budget consistently, needs more money, but the Member States’ representatives in the Council do not want to pay up. This is why the large groups in the European Parliament all agree that the European Union needs new powers to directly raise EU taxes from the citizens of the union, for example through a VAT or from companies inside the EU, for example a Financial Transaction Tax collecting revenue from banks and financial institutions.

Also, a vast majority of MEPs from the biggest groups in the European Parliament agree that the EU treaties should give even more political power to the European Union and that it should be seen as a “federal union of European citizens”¹. The biggest groups of the European Parliament also agree that the Union should talk with one single voice in the world and have a single seat in the United Nations Security Council and in other international institutions like the International Monetary Fund.

All the above examples are supported by the Christian Democrats, the Socialists, the Liberals and most of the Greens in the European Parliament and many of these views are contrary to the opinions held by many of their party colleagues in national politics.

The votes in the European Parliament

The votes at the session are divided in three stages.

- First is the voting by *Show of Hands*. This is the most common way of voting.
- The Second stage - *Electronic Vote* (EV) is used to check if the sitting chairman of the vote interpreted the result correctly. During EV, only the result is recorded, and not how individual MEPs or groups voted.
- The third stage is a so called *Roll Call Vote* (RCV), which takes place following a request in writing by a political group or by at least 40 Members.

Some votes are also taken by secret ballot. In the case of appointments, voting shall be conducted by way of secret ballot. Voting may also be conducted by secret ballot if this is requested by at least one-fifth of the Members of Parliament. The names of Members who have taken part in a secret ballot are recorded in the minutes of the sitting at which the vote was held.

¹ The term “federal union of European citizens” was for example used by the ALDE group leader Guy Verhofstadt in the European Parliament the 12th of September 2012. The exact words can be a little bit different, for example José Manuel Barroso, President of the Commission, used the words “federation of nation states” during the same debate.

The rules of procedure in the European Parliament have changed over the years in order to shorten the voting time at the sessions. For example, if very little opposition is encountered in the Committee vote before a session, some reports are handled in a single vote at the session itself.

In 2010 there were 1059 RCVs in total. They range in content from whether or not a certain subject should be taken up on the agenda of the session to the important final votes on economic- and financial issues, where the European Parliament shares co-decision rights with the Council.

Final votes were held 484 times on different resolutions, reports and various texts. Of these 484 final votes there were 266 RCVs. For the other 218 final votes for which RCV was not requested, it is very likely that the four biggest groups voted the same way, and most likely all the other groups as well, with the exception of the EU-critical EFD, in part consisting of the British UK Independence Party, which usually abstains or votes against.

The 484 final votes on reports and resolutions during 2010

The question arises of, whether RCV took place for the most important final votes or not. The table below clearly shows that it is much more common for RCV to be requested at final votes that are part of a legislative procedure, than for votes on reports and resolutions outside the legislative procedure. These are usually approved without an RCV.

Table 1. Final votes with RCV or no RCV in the different procedures – percentage

Procedure	Number of final votes	Number of RCVs	Percentage RCVs of the votes in that procedure
Final Votes	484	266	54.96%
Consultation Procedure	22	21	95.45%
Consent Procedure	21	4	19.5%
Co-decision Procedure, First Reading²	71	71	100%
Budgetary Procedure	50	48	96%
Discharge Procedure	39	32	82.05%
Initiative Reports	107	35	32.71%
Resolutions	137	51	37.23%

In order to increase transparency, accountability and awareness of the political groups and the individual MEPs positions on issues, the number of RCVs at final votes should be increased. As illustrated above, it would not be that much more of an effort, at least not based on the 2010 figures, to make RCV mandatory for consultation, budgetary and discharge procedures.

² Since 2009 Rule 166 in the Rules of Procedure states that; "When voting on any proposal for a legislative act, whether by way of a single and/or final vote, Parliament shall vote by roll call using the electronic voting system". There is no final vote at the 2nd reading of the Co-decision Procedure.

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The political groups compromise and vote in a similar fashion

Voting statistics in the tables below show how (in the main) the three biggest political groups compromise with one another on the content of the texts and then vote the same in the final votes.

Table 2. How frequently the groups vote the same as one other in the 266 final votes requiring RCV in 2010. Commonality in percentages:

	ALDE	ECR	EFD	GUE/NGL	PPE	S&D	Greens/EFA
ALDE							
ECR	56.39%						
EFD	61.65%	48.87%					
GUE/NGL	57.89%	48.12%	45.86%				
PPE	95.49%	58.65%	62.41%	55.64%			
S&D	96.62%	56.02%	60.90%	60.53%	94.74%		
Greens/EFA	89.10%	52.63%	59.02%	63.16%	86.09%	90.23%	

S&D and ALDE have the highest voting cohesion, in the final votes – 96.62%. Second is the link between PPE and ALDE (95.49%) and, in third, there is a 94.74% overlap between the PPE and S&D. This is not surprising, as these three large groups are the main actors in compromises made.

The differences are shown inverted in the table below:

Table 3. How often the groups vote differently to each other in the 266 final votes with RCV in 2010. Difference in percentages:

	ALDE	ECR	EFD	GUE/NGL	PPE	S&D	Greens/EFA
ALDE							
ECR	43.61%						
EFD	38.35%	51.13%					
GUE/NGL	42.11%	51.88%	54.14%				
PPE	4.51%	41.35%	37.59%	44.36%			
S&D	3.38%	43.98%	39.10%	39.47%	5.26%		
Greens/EFA	10.90%	47.37%	40.98%	36.84%	13.91%	9.77%	

The three biggest groups PPE, S&D and ALDE negotiate amongst themselves and ultimately more or less always vote in the same way. The „big three“ are quite closely joined by the Greens/EFA in their compromises. The opposition comes from ECR, GUE/NGL and EFD. From a right-left political perspective it is interesting to note that ECR and GUE/NGL vote in the same way in 48.12% of the final votes with RCV.

In October 2012 there were rumours in the media that ALDE and Greens/EFA might merge. The substance and depth in these discussions can be questioned but as can be seen above the Greens/EFA and S&D in 2010 voted more closely to one other than the Greens/EFA and ALDE, even if the difference is small.

If the 266 RCVs and the 218 final votes (where it is unlikely that the large groups voted differently due to the issues being uncontroversial as no group or other constellation of MEPs asked for RCV) are tallied up:

- Then it is very likely that PPE and S&D in total voted the same way 470 times in 484 votes which amounts to 97.11% voting cohesion.
- It is also very likely that PPE and ALDE voted in the same way 472 times in 484 votes which amounts to 97.52% voting cohesion.
- And S&D and ALDE then very likely voted in the same way 475 times out of 484 which amounts to 98.14% voting cohesion.
- Finally, larger differences appear when comparing voting cohesion with the smaller groups. Still, S&D and the Greens/EFA voted in the same way on 458 occasions out of 484 which amounts to 94.63%.

Comparison with a study of voting behaviour 2008

Research of the final votes in the European Parliament during 2008 gave more or less the same result.³

In 2008 there were 535 RCVs at final votes. It must be noted that there were more or less RCVs at nearly all final votes in the EP that year, asked consequently by the now dissolved EU critical IND/DEM group.

In 28 out of 535 RCVs (5%) for the final votes during 2008, the PPE-DE, PSE and ALDE were unable to reach agreement. However, these 28 RCVs only relate to 23 dossiers, as there were separate RCVs on different group resolutions for two of these dossiers. In the cases where the PPE-DE, PSE and ALDE did not agree in the final vote on a dossier, the Groups were often divided internally.

The two largest groups, the PPE-DE and PSE, only disagreed in 18 out of 535 RCVs (3%) in the final votes during 2008. In 7 of these 18 RCVs one of the groups chose to abstain from the final vote, and in another case one group did not vote at all. This therefore leaves 10 RCVs out of 535 (1.9%) in which the PPE-DE and PSE were completely at odds with each other and broke the principle of consensus at the EP.

Of the 23 dossiers on which there was disagreement between the three large party Groups, 18 were non-legislative own-initiative procedures (i.e. just ideas), three were under the consultation procedure (in principle also just a statement to the Council) and two were dossiers under the first reading of the co-decision procedure.

The 10 RCVs upon which the PPE-DE and PSE did not agree cover nine dossiers. Of these nine, seven were non-legislative own-initiative procedures (i.e. just ideas), one was under the consultation procedure (also, in principle, no more than a statement to the Council) and one came under the co-decision procedure, first reading (a report on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning third-country nationals staying illegally).

The Christian Democratic/Conservative Group (PPE-DE) and the Socialist Group (PSE) thus managed to reach a compromise on 97% of the 535 RCVs in the final votes that took place in the European Parliament in 2008.

³ See the document "Dossiers in 2008 on which the PPE-DE and PSE *disagreed* in the final vote (RCV)" http://www.oceurope.com/attachment/Final_votes_2008_EN.pdf

Political issues where the four largest groups disagreed at the final RCV vote 2010 (for those with a difference marginal less than 10%)

Listed below are the issues with the largest cohesion between different constellations of the four largest groups are listed. Also mentioned are votes when the groups have been split. We define a split vote as an occasion when $\geq 10\%$ of the political group deviates from its majority, although it very often happens that at least one MEP votes differently to majority of their group.

Disagreements between PPE and S&D (5.26% of the 266 RCV):

11/2. RC-B7-0093/2010 – RESOLUTION – Venezuela:

ALDE voted yes (only 3 MEPs present), PPE voted yes (only 32 MEPs present), S&D voted no (only 14 MEPs present) Greens/EFA voted no (only 1 MEP present).

10/3. Report: Klaus-Heiner Lehne (A7-0011/2010) – LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION – Annual accounts of certain types of companies as regards micro-entities ***I:

ALDE was split (57 yes, 20 no, 2 abstained), PPE voted yes, S&D was split (37 yes, 125 no, 7 abstained), Greens/EFA voted yes.

10/3. B7-0135/2010 – RESOLUTION – Implementation of Goldstone recommendations on Israel/Palestine

ALDE voted no, PPE voted yes, S&D voted no, Greens/EFA voted no.

10/3. RC-B7-0181/2010 – RESOLUTION – Regulation applying a scheme of generalised tariff preferences:

ALDE voted yes, PPE was split (9 yes, 191 no, 34 abstained), S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA voted yes.

19/5. B7-0264/2010 – RESOLUTION – Food additives other than colours and sweeteners (bovine and/or porcine thrombin):

ALDE was split (50 yes, 24 no, 5 abstained), PPE was split (44 yes, 187 no, 12 abstained), S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA voted yes.

20/5. Report: Liem Hoang Ngoc (A7-0147/2010) – RESOLUTION – Long-term sustainability of public finances for a recovering economy:

ALDE voted yes, PPE voted yes, S&D voted no, Greens/EFA voted no.

15/6. Report: Michael Cashman (A7-0165/2010) – RESOLUTION – Progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals: mid-term review in preparation of the UN high-level meeting in September 2010:

ALDE voted yes, PPE was split (37 yes, 186 no, 12 abstained), S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA voted yes.

16/6. Report: Edit Bauer (A7-0137/2010) – LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION – The organisation of the working time of persons performing mobile road transport activities ***I:

ALDE was split (13 yes, 60 no, 5 abstained), PPE was split (108 yes, 122 no, 10 abstained), S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA voted yes.

17/6. Report: Raül Romeva i Rueda (A7-0155/2010) – RESOLUTION – Gender aspects of the economic downturn and financial crisis:

ALDE voted yes (66 yes, 2 no), PPE was split (35 yes, 19 no, 164 abstained), S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA voted yes.

8/7. RC-B7-0414/2010 – RESOLUTION – Venezuela:

ALDE voted yes (only 3 MEPs present), PPE voted yes (only 35 MEPs present), S&D voted no (only 16 MEPs present) Greens/EFA voted no (only 3 MEPs present).

22/9. Report: Marielle Gallo (A7-0175/2010) – JURI RESOLUTION – Enforcement of intellectual property rights in the internal market:

ALDE was split (27 yes, 39 no, 8 abstained), PPE was split (216 yes, 28 abstained), S&D was split (15 yes, 118 no, 28 abstained), Greens/EFA was split (4 yes, 45 no, 2 abstained).

7/10. Report: Véronique De Keyser (A7-0245/2010) – RESOLUTION – Health care systems in Sub-Saharan Africa and Global Health:

ALDE voted yes, PPE was split (54 yes, 154 no, 5 abstained), S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA voted yes.

24/11. RC-B7-0617/2010 – RESOLUTION – Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA):

ALDE was split (61 yes, 11 no, 5 abstained), PPE voted no, S&D was split (152 yes, 13 no, 9 abstained), Greens/EFA voted yes.

16/12. B7-0728/2010 – RESOLUTION – Eritrean refugees held hostage in Sinai:

ALDE voted no (only 4 MEPs present), PPE voted yes (only 30 MEPs present), S&D was split (1 no, 10 abstained), Greens/EFA voted no (only 5 MEPs present).

The two largest groups disagreed in final votes just 14 times during 2010, based on the reasonable assumption that they agreed in all final votes not conducted using RCV.

Of the 14 issues on which PPE and S&D disagreed only two were legislative proposals. But in one of these two votes S&D was split with a minority voting with PPE and in the other vote PPE was split nearly in half with a large minority voting with S&D. The other twelve resolutions on which the two largest groups disagreed were outside legislation and led simply to statements from the European Parliament. In these issues European Parliament groups do not feel the same need to find a compromise since the issues are not up for immediate negotiation with the Council or the Commission. As can be seen above, when three of the resolutions were voted on there was a very low presence in the Parliament (Thursday late afternoons at the end of the Strasbourg week sessions). This also says a little bit about the priority of these issues were disagreement between the groups are accepted as an exception from the “compromise culture”.

Therefore it is easy to conclude that in general the two major groups PPE and S&D, who want to be seen as the two main competitors about power in the Union, agreed with each other in the final votes for 2010, with the exception of a couple of issues on which they were internally divided and some minor issues.

Disagreements between PPE and ALDE (4.51% of the 266 RCV):

10/3. B7-0135/2010 – RESOLUTION – Implementation of Goldstone recommendations on Israel/Palestine

ALDE voted no, PPE voted yes, S&D voted no, Greens/EFA voted no.

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10/3. RC-B7-0181/2010 – RESOLUTION – Regulation applying a scheme of generalised tariff preferences:

ALDE voted yes, PPE was split (9 yes, 191 no, 34 abstained), S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA voted yes.

5/5. RC-B7-0238/2010 – RESOLUTION – Ban on use of cyanide mining technologies:

ALDE was split (21 yes, 10 no, 40 abstained), PPE was split (191 yes, 25 no, 9 abstained), S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA voted yes.

19/5. B7-0264/2010 – RESOLUTION – Food additives other than colours and sweeteners (bovine and/or porcine thrombin):

ALDE was split (50 yes, 24 no, 5 abstained), PPE was split (44 yes, 187 no, 12 abstained), S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA voted yes.

15/6. Report: Michael Cashman (A7-0165/2010) – RESOLUTION – Progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals: mid-term review in preparation of the UN high-level meeting in September 2010:

ALDE voted yes, PPE was split (37 yes, 186 no, 12 abstained), S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA voted yes.

17/6. Report: Raül Romeva i Rueda (A7-0155/2010) – RESOLUTION – Gender aspects of the economic downturn and financial crisis:

ALDE voted yes, PPE was split (35 yes, 19 no, 164 abstained), S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA voted yes.

22/9. Report: Marielle Gallo (A7-0175/2010) – JURI RESOLUTION – Enforcement of intellectual property rights in the internal market:

ALDE was split (27 yes, 39 no, 8 abstained), PPE was split (216 yes, 28 abstained), S&D was split (15 yes, 118 no, 28 abstained), Greens/EFA was split (4 yes, 45 no, 2 abstained).

7/10. Report: Véronique De Keyser (A7-0245/2010) – RESOLUTION – Health care systems in Sub-Saharan Africa and Global Health:

ALDE voted yes, PPE was split (54 yes, 154 no, 5 abstained), S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA voted yes.

23/11. Report: Bernhard Rapkay (A7-0324/2010) – LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION – State aid to facilitate the closure of uncompetitive coal mines *

ALDE was split (9 yes, 61 no, 1 abstained), PPE voted yes, S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA voted no.

24/11. RC-B7-0617/2010 – RESOLUTION – Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA):

ALDE was split (61 yes, 11 no, 5 abstained), PPE voted no, S&D was split (152 yes, 13 no, 9 abstained), Greens/EFA voted yes.

25/11. Report: BELET A7-0286/2010 – RESOLUTION – Public service broadcasting in the digital era: the future of the dual system:

ALDE was split (20 yes, 47 abstained), PPE was split (225 yes, 4 no), S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA voted yes.

16/12. B7-0728/2010 – RESOLUTION – Eritrean refugees held hostage in Sinai:
ALDE (only 4 MEPs present) voted no, PPE (30 MEPs present) voted yes, S&D was split (1 no, 10 abstained), Greens/EFA (only 5 MEPs present) voted no.

In total PPE and ALDE disagreed in only twelve final votes during 2010. Only one was a legislative issue, but according to the consultation procedure where the Council is not bound by Parliament's position.

Of the twelve issues above both ALDE and PPE were divided six times each but not at exactly the same votes. Furthermore, of the issues above a majority of ALDE abstained twice and PPE once.

Therefore, the conclusion is that ALDE and PPE disagreed only on minor issues in the final votes for 2010.

Disagreements between S&D and ALDE (3.38% of the 266 RCV):

11/2. RC-B7-0093/2010 Venezuela – RESOLUTION:
ALDE voted yes, PPE voted yes, S&D voted no, Greens/EFA (1 MEP present) voted no.

10/3. Report: Klaus-Heiner Lehne (A7-0011/2010) – LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION – Annual accounts of certain types of companies as regards micro-entities ***I:
ALDE was split (57 yes, 20 no, 2 abstained), PPE voted yes, S&D was split (37 yes, 125 no, 7 abstained), Greens/EFA voted yes.

5/5. RC-B7-0238/2010 – RESOLUTION – Ban on use of cyanide mining technologies:
ALDE was split (21 yes, 10 no, 40 abstained), PPE was split (191 yes, 25 no, 9 abstained), S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA voted yes.

20/5. Report: Liem Hoang Ngoc (A7-0147/2010) – RESOLUTION – Long-term sustainability of public finances for a recovering economy:
ALDE voted yes, PPE voted yes, S&D voted no, Greens/EFA voted no.

16/6. Report: Edit Bauer (A7-0137/2010) – LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION – The organisation of the working time of persons performing mobile road transport activities ***I:
ALDE was split (13 yes, 60 no, 5 abstained), PPE was split (108 yes, 122 no, 10 abstained), S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA voted yes.

8/7. RC-B7-0414/2010 – RESOLUTION – Venezuela:
ALDE voted yes (only 3 MEPs present), PPE voted yes (only 35 MEPs present), S&D voted no (only 16 MEPs present) Greens/EFA voted no (only 3 MEPs present).

23/11. Report: Bernhard Rapkay (A7-0324/2010) – LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION – State aid to facilitate the closure of uncompetitive coal mines *
ALDE was split (9 yes, 61 no, 1 abstained), PPE voted yes, S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA voted no.

25/11. Report: BELET A7-0286/2010 – RESOLUTION – Public service broadcasting in the digital era: the future of the dual system:
ALDE was split (20 yes, 47 abstained), PPE voted yes, S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA voted yes.

16/12. B7-0728/2010 – RESOLUTION – Eritrean refugees held hostage in Sinai:
ALDE voted no (only 4 MEPs present), PPE voted yes (only 30 MEPs present), S&D was split (1 no, 10 abstained), Greens/EFA voted no (only 5 MEPs present).

As can be noted above there were only nine issues on which S&D and ALDE did not agree with each other during 2010 in the plenary. Among the groups in the Parliament S&D and ALDE were the closest to each other in 2010.

There is quite a plausible explanation for the disagreement between the S&D and ALDE on the nine issues above. Six of the nine issues were resolutions made outside of the legislative procedure and as such are purely political statements. That S&D and ALDE disagreed on the wording of the situation in Venezuela is hardly surprising.

Of the three issues that were legislative procedures, one was according to the consultation procedure (where the Council is not bound by Parliament's position). ALDE was split on all three of these issues and S&D was split once.

In total of the nine issues where S&D and ALDE disagreed, ALDE was divided five times and in two of those cases a majority of the group abstained. Furthermore, in two of the nine issues above there was low turnout of MEPs due to the vote taking place during the late Thursday afternoon sessions in Strasbourg. With such a close voting pattern at the final votes 2010 you can question why S&D and ALDE, politically effectively aligned, do not merge their two groups?

Disagreements between S&D and Greens/EFA (9.77% of the 266 RCV):

11/2. Report: Kinga GÖNCZ (A7-0049/2009) – LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION – Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity – Progress ***I:
ALDE voted yes, PPE voted yes, S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA voted no.

25/2. Report: Maria do Céu PATRÃO NEVES (A7-0014/2010) – RESOLUTION – Green Paper on reform of the common fisheries policy:
ALDE voted yes, PPE voted yes, S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA was split (5 no, 37 abstained).

9/3. Report: Róza Gräfin Von Thun Und Hohenstein (A7-0084/2010) – RESOLUTION – Internal Market Scoreboard:
ALDE voted yes, PPE voted yes, S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA were split (14 yes, 34 no, 1 abstained).

10/3. Report: Klaus-Heiner Lehne (A7-0011/2010) – LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION – Annual accounts of certain types of companies as regards micro-entities ***I:
ALDE was split (57 yes, 20 no, 2 abstained), PPE voted yes, S&D was split (37 yes, 125 no, 7 abstained), Greens/EFA voted yes.

10/3. RC-B7-0151/2010 – RESOLUTION – EU 2020 – Follow-up of the informal European Council of 11 February 2010:

ALDE voted yes, PPE voted yes, S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA voted no.

10/3. Report: Arnaud Danjean (A7-0026/2010) – RESOLUTION – The implementation of the European Security Strategy and the Common Security and Defence Policy:

ALDE voted yes, PPE voted yes, S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA abstained.

11/3. B7-0148/2010 – RESOLUTION – Investing in low-carbon technologies:

ALDE voted yes, PPE voted yes, S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA voted no.

11/3. RC-B7-0139/2010 – RESOLUTION – Major natural disaster in the Autonomous Region of Madeira and effects of storm Xynthia in Europe:

ALDE voted yes, PPE voted yes, S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA was split (5 yes, 35 abstained).

5/5. Report: Evgeni Kirilov (A7-0055/2010) – LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION – General provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund as regards simplification of certain requirements and as regards certain provisions relating to financial management ***I:

ALDE voted yes, PPE voted yes, S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA was split (6 yes, 42 no).

6/5. Report: Íñigo Méndez de Vigo (A7-0116/2010) – DECISION – Decision not to convene a Convention for the revision of the Treaties with regard to transitional measures concerning the composition of the European Parliament:

ALDE voted yes, PPE voted yes, S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA voted no.

6/5. Report: Íñigo Méndez de Vigo (A7-0115/2010) – RESOLUTION – Revision of the Treaties – Transitional measures concerning the composition of the European Parliament:

ALDE voted yes, PPE voted yes, S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA voted no.

18/5. Report: Toine Manders (A7-0122/2010) – LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION – Textile names and related labelling of textile products ***I:

ALDE voted yes, PPE voted yes, S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA voted yes.

19/5. Report: Ryszard Czarnecki (A7-0096/2010) – DECISION – 2008 discharge: EU general budget, Council:

ALDE voted no, PPE voted no, S&D voted no, Greens/EFA voted yes.

20/5. Report: Rebecca Harms (A7-0142/2010) – LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION – Community financial assistance with respect to the decommissioning of Units 1 to 4 of the Kozloduy Nuclear Power Plant in Bulgaria ‘Kozloduy Programme’ *:

ALDE voted yes, PPE voted yes, S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA voted yes.

17/6. Report: Wolf Klinz (A7-0102/2010) – LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION – Securities to be offered to the public and harmonisation of transparency requirements (amendment of Directives 2003/71/EC and 2004/109/EC) ***I:

ALDE voted yes, PPE voted yes, S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA abstained.

Is there really a political difference in the EU Parliament between the big groups?

8/7. Recommendation: Alexander Alvaro (A7-0224/2010) – LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION – Agreement between the EU and the USA on the processing and transfer of Financial Messaging Data from the European Union to the United States for purposes of the Terrorist Finance Tracking Program ***:

ALDE voted yes, PPE voted yes, S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA voted no.

22/9. Report: Christa Kläß (A7-0239/2010) – LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION – Placing on the market and use of biocidal products ***I:

ALDE voted yes, PPE voted yes, S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA abstained.

7/10. B7-0536/2010 – RESOLUTION – Conference on Biological Diversity – Nagoya 2010:

ALDE voted yes, PPE voted yes, S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA was split (15 yes, 1 no, 24 abstained).

20/10. Report: Edite Estrela (A7-0032/2010) – LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION – Improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding ***I:

ALDE was split (36 yes, 29 no, 9 abstained), PPE was split (148 yes, 64 no, 25 abstained), S&D was split (145 yes, 15 no, 6 abstained), Greens/EFA was split (3 yes, 28 no, 9 abstained).

21/10. Report: Helmut Scholz (A7-0277/2010) – RESOLUTION – Trade relations with Latin America:

ALDE voted yes, PPE voted yes, S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA voted no.

11/11. Report: Jean-Paul Gauzès (A7-0171/2010) – LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION – Alternative Investment Fund Managers ***I:

ALDE voted yes, PPE voted yes, S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA voted no.

23/11. Report: Bernhard Rapkay (A7-0324/2010) – LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION – State aid to facilitate the closure of uncompetitive coal mines *

ALDE was split (9 yes, 61 no, 1 abstained), PPE voted yes, S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA voted no.

25/11. Report: Lena Kolarska-Bobińska (A7-0313/2010) – RESOLUTION – A new Energy Strategy for Europe 2011 – 2020:

ALDE voted yes, PPE voted yes, S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA was split (5 yes, 43 abstained).

14/12. Report: Petru Constantin Luhan (A7-0309/2010) – RESOLUTION – Territorial, social and economic cohesion:

ALDE voted yes, PPE voted yes, S&D voted yes, Greens/EFA voted no.

15/12. Report: Sidonia Elżbieta Jędrzejewska and Helga Trüpel (A7-0369/2010) – RESOLUTION – Parliament's position on the new 2011 draft budget as modified by the Council:

ALDE voted yes, PPE voted yes, S&D was split (150 yes, 12 no, 13 abstained), Greens/EFA voted no.

16/12. B7-0728/2010 – RESOLUTION – Eritrean refugees held hostage in Sinai:

ALDE (only 4 MEPs present) voted no, PPE (only 30 MEPs present) voted yes, S&D was split (1 no, 10 abstained), Greens/EFA (only 5 MEPs present) voted no.

When the Greens/EFA is included in the equation more differences start to occur. Of the final votes with RCV the Greens/EFA disagreed at around 10% versus S&D and ALDE and around 14% with PPE. But the Greens/EFA are obviously included in around 92% to 95% of the compromises in the final votes, included even the final votes without RCV. In total there are 26 issues above where S&D and the Greens/EFA disagreed at the final vote. Some of the issues above were there where disagreements are rather easy to explain though. At three of the issues S&D was divided, in one of them the Greens/EFA was also divided, at four other issues in turn the Greens/EFA was quite divided and at yet three issues a majority of the Green/EFA group abstained.

So tallied up the Green/EFA group does not stand out particularly from the three larger groups in the European Parliament.

CONCLUSIONS

The main question after reading this report is; does it matter which one of the three large European parties you vote for when they are acting as a bloc in their votes in the European Parliament? In election campaigns they say that it makes a difference who you as voter send to Brussels/Strasbourg. But in reality it is not the case.

The report above has examined all final votes with Roll Call in the European Parliament during 2010. The result is very clear, of all 484 final votes at resolutions and reports the Christian Democrats (PPE) and the Socialists and Democrats (S&D) disagreed in only 2.9% of cases. That means they agreed in 97.1% of all final votes.

The PPE and the Liberals in ALDE disagreed in 2.5% of the final votes while S&D and ALDE disagreed in 1.9% of all final votes. Similar previously published research from 2008 gave more or less the same result.

The few issues on which PPE, S&D, and ALDE disagree are almost all resolutions outside the legislative procedure, where the European Parliament simply makes a political statement. Often the three groups are also internally divided in those issues where they do not reach agreement between the groups.

When analysing the European Parliament as a political and legislative institution it is important to emphasise the large political coalition in existence consisting of the Christian Democrats, Socialists and Democrats and the Liberals. More than anything, these groups of MEPs act as a common “European Parliament Political Group” concerned first and foremost with safeguarding the interest of *their* EU institution. This means consistently calling for more powers and funds for the EU, often against the wishes of national party colleagues represented in the Council and in national and regional parliaments. Differences in opinions between voters are not visible in the work in the European Parliament.

One glaring and recent example of how Brussels-based institutions work together to increase their funds and power is the Commission’s proposal⁴ for a 6.8% increase of the 2013 EU budget. Member State’s represented in the European Council countered by agreeing on a compromise counter-proposal that would have allowed for an increase of 2.79%. The UK, Sweden and Netherlands still voted against it, and Austria abstained⁵. The European Parliament chose to side with their fellow Brussels based institution and voted in favour of the Commission’s position on the 2013 budget (Resolution: A7-0311/2012⁶ passed with 492 votes in favour, 123 against and 82 abstentions)⁷. On this resolution Finnish⁸, Dutch and German MEPs from right of centre, traditionally fiscally conservative, parties voted against their own governments in Helsinki, den Haag and Berlin.

⁴ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-12-393_en.htm?locale=en

⁵ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ecofin/132710.pdf

⁶ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+REPORT+A7-2012-0311+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN>

⁷ Page 87, vote 41. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-%2f%2fEP%2f%2fNONSGML%2bPV%2b20121023%2bRES-RCV%2bDOC%2bPDF%2bV0%2f%2fEN&language=EN>

⁸ The lone exceptions were Finnish MEP Sari Essayah (CD) Dutch MEP Johannes van Baalen (VVD) and Bavarian MEP Bernd Posselt (CSU).

EU Member States that to this day provide the funds for the EU budget are under severe pressure from Brussels to make domestic savings. At the same time EU institutions keep asking for more. This fact should be highlighted more often. In general the biggest groups of the European Parliament seem to belong to a “European Party.” The biggest groups in the European Parliament all want to increase the EU budget in opposition to at least ten national parliaments. They also want to abolish the national rebates on membership fees that some countries have and even MEPs from countries that would be affected by this have voted with their groups against their national parties.

Suggestions that would improve transparency of European Parliament votes

- There ought to be RCV at *all* final votes.
- In second hand there ought to be at least automatic RCV at not only co-decision procedures but also at consult, consent, budgetary, and discharge procedures.
- Finally, the PPE, S&D and ALDE should scrutinize their own work in the European Parliament and think about either mergeing, since they act so much as a bloc, *or* consider how they can profile themselves against each other.