



The International Spectator

Italian Journal of International Affairs

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rspe20

The European Conservatives and Reformists Group: Cooperation or Opposition in Europe's Parliament?

Margherita de Candia & Edoardo Bressanelli

To cite this article: Margherita de Candia & Edoardo Bressanelli (19 Aug 2024): The European Conservatives and Reformists Group: Cooperation or Opposition in Europe's Parliament?, *The International Spectator*, DOI: [10.1080/03932729.2024.2387215](https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2024.2387215)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2024.2387215>



© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 19 Aug 2024.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

The European Conservatives and Reformists Group: Cooperation or Opposition in Europe's Parliament?

Margherita de Candia^a and Edoardo Bressanelli ^{b,c}

^aKing's Foundations, King's College London; ^bSant'Anna School of Advanced Studies, Pisa; ^cSchool of Politics and Economics, King's College London

ABSTRACT

The European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group has emerged as an important player in European Parliament (EP) decision-making. Drawing on about 1,300 EP plenary votes from July 2019 to June 2022, we demonstrate that the ECR group has played an active and often cooperative role in the politics of the EP, albeit not in the policy areas where its national conservative and soft Eurosceptic ideology comes to prominence, such as women's rights or institutional affairs. We complement the quantitative analysis with an in-depth investigation of the group's position on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum. Our investigation shows that the ECR group's unified stance against migration has often failed to translate into cohesive legislative actions by its national party delegations, aligning instead with national interests as defined by these parties.

KEYWORDS

European Conservatives and Reformists; New Pact on Migration and Asylum; radical right; European Parliament; National Conservatism

A key theme of the campaign to elect the 10th European Parliament (EP) was the potential majority that would guide the 2024-29 European legislature. Studies and polls (for example, Cunningham and Hix 2024) pointed to the significant growth of right-leaning parties, leading to speculation about the possible end of the 'grand coalition' between centre-right and centre-left groups. Such speculation gained credibility also due to the narrative in the European People's Party (EPP) manifesto (European People's Party 2024), which underscored, for instance, the need to reduce "EU bureaucracy" while opening the possibility for a European convention to reform the treaties and assess which competencies "should be possibly transferred back" to the Member States (MS). On migration policy, the EPP called for the externalisation of asylum centres and increasing returns of migrants to third countries. Such positions did not appear too different from those that the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group had traditionally endorsed: nationalist and conservative on the left-right spectrum, Eurosceptic but not anti-European on the EU integration dimension (Steven 2016). Although the pro-EU coalition has eventually remained at the helm of the EU, the groups on the right of the EP have gained ground. Conversely, in terms of seat share, the 'grand coalition' is the weakest ever in the history of the EP.

CONTACT Margherita de Candia  margherita.decandia@kcl.ac.uk

© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

This article analyses the position of the ECR group in the previous 9th EP (2019-24). Such an analysis is warranted for at least two reasons. First, the ECR became an important player in European Union (EU) politics, with its member parties successfully contesting elections and increasingly becoming parties of government. This was the case, for instance, for Brothers of Italy (Fdi) and the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) in the Czech Republic, and it was so until recently for the Polish Law and Justice Party (PiS) and the New Flemish Alliance (N-VA) in Belgium. It is therefore important to understand what the ECR and its member parties stand for, as their positions increasingly ‘matter’ at home and in the EU. Second, our knowledge of the ECR group remains somewhat rudimentary, notwithstanding increasing academic interest in the last few years (Steven and Szczerbiak 2023; Gaweda *et al.* 2023; Steven 2023). Empirical evidence is often derived from case studies and allows for limited generalisation. It is therefore timely and important to provide a more systematic and wide-ranging assessment of the positions of the ECR group and its member parties.

Specifically, we combine two different research designs and sets of data. First, by analysing all roll call votes in the 9th EP plenary, we map whether the ECR sided more with the centre-right EPP, or the far-right Identity and Democracy (ID) group; in which policy areas it was part of the winning coalition; and in which domains it was more (or less) internally coherent. To put it succinctly, we aim to understand whether the ECR was part of the winning coalition within the EP, or it was, rather, an ‘opposition’ group. Although the concept of ‘opposition’ should be applied *cum grano salis* in the context of EU politics – as, unlike the parliamentary democracies of the MS, there are no stable government/opposition dynamics – the major political groups do form winning majorities across different policy areas. Being part of the ‘core’ of the party system (Smith 1989), albeit in specific issue areas, means shaping the content of policies and legislation, thus contributing to the ‘governing’ (broadly understood) of Europe.

Second, delving deeper into the ECR to investigate internal tensions between the member parties, we focus on the issue of migration. This policy area is not only topical *per se*, given that migration has been and still is one of the major ‘crises’ faced by the EU; but also in relation to right-wing parties, given the contradictions posed by combining nationalist and closed-border positions with the need for transnational cooperation at EU level. By looking at the critical case of migration policy, we will better understand whether a common ideology underpins the ECR group, or whether national positions and internal disagreement resurface when the domestic political stakes are high.

We begin by offering an overview of the group’s development and the existing literature on the group’s ideology. Subsequently, we delineate the research design, conduct the empirical analysis and draw conclusions.

The European Conservatives and Reformists group: from underdog to significant player in EP politics?

The origins of the ECR group were intertwined with the United Kingdom (UK) Conservative Party’s (also known as the Tories/Tory Party) complicated relationship with the EU. Established in June 2009 in the aftermath of the 7th European elections (Conservative Friends of the ECR 2024), the ECR group became the Tories’ new home in the EP, after

leaving the Group of the European People Party and European Democrats (EPP-ED),¹ the main centre-right group in the EP. Seen to mitigate the hardening of positions about Europe within the party, the decision by the then leader of the Conservative Party, David Cameron, to leave the EPP-ED to join forces with, primarily, new EU members from Central and Eastern Europe – notably ODS and PiS – was received with scepticism and dismissal (Bale *et al.* 2010). Not only was the Conservative Party accused of turning its back on former EPP friends, thus relegating itself to an uninfluential position in Europe, but it was also reprimanded for joining ranks with extreme and often marginal parties. The cold reception that the Tories’ decision received in the UK mirrored reactions elsewhere in Western Europe (for example, *Euractiv* 2009), where the birth of the group was greeted with scepticism at best and outright dismissal at worst. It came therefore as a surprise that in the 2014 European elections, the second in which the group fielded candidates, the young group managed to become the third largest in the EP.

The acquired numerical strength, however, did little to convince many of the group’s long-term viability, especially considering the 2016 Brexit referendum outcome – a process that would eventually lead, on 31 January 2020 (the so-called Brexit day), to the departure of the Conservative delegation. Fifteen years since its inauguration, not only has the ECR group survived despite speculation about its fate in a post-Brexit EP (for example, Leruth 2017, 394),² it has thrived, strengthening its profile in terms of both geographical reach – with the inclusion of parties from Southern Europe – and political calibre of the member parties – considering the number of parties with government responsibilities (see Figure 1).

The lingering scepticism that has accompanied the group’s birth and early years has contributed, until recently, to attracting limited scholarly attention. Almost a decade since its foundation, the key concept of Eurorealism, which the group uses to define its position on Europe, was defined as an “oddly under-studied political notion” (Leruth 2016, 60). Still, early research, culminating in Martin Steven’s (2020) comprehensive monograph, contributed to a better understanding of the key concept of Eurorealism and, more generally, the group’s ideology (Cabada 2011; Akbaba 2014; Leruth 2016; Steven 2016; Leruth 2017). The latter body of literature is probably less known than the one emphasising the role of pragmatic considerations behind political group’s formation (for example, McDonnell and Werner 2018; 2020), an imbalance that has arguably supported the predominant narrative linking the establishment of the ECR to primarily tactical and strategic reasons, notably those catering to the UK Conservative Party’s needs.

Despite an upsurge of interest in the ECR in 2023 (see Steven and Szczerbiak 2023; Gaweda *et al.* 2023; Steven 2023) – the year before the elections for the 10th EP, where the strong rise in seats for forces on the right of the political spectrum was expected

¹The European Democrats (ED) was a conservative branch within the EPP. From 1999 until 2009, the ED label made it easier for the EPP to absorb new members not fully aligned with their Christian-Democracy tradition, such as *Forza Italia*, the French neo-Gaullists and, indeed, the British Conservative Party (see Kaiser and Mittag 2023).

²Doubts harboured by some regarding the group’s survival in the post-Brexit era seem somehow unjust as they overlook the significant role played by the Central and Eastern Europe delegations, notably the Polish PiS and the Czech ODS, long before the group’s formal constitution (see Cabada 2011 for a historical overview of this process). The very conception of the ‘Eurorealism’ term, which lies at the heart of the group’s ideology, can be partly attributed to former Czech President Václav Klaus (Leruth 2017, 391).

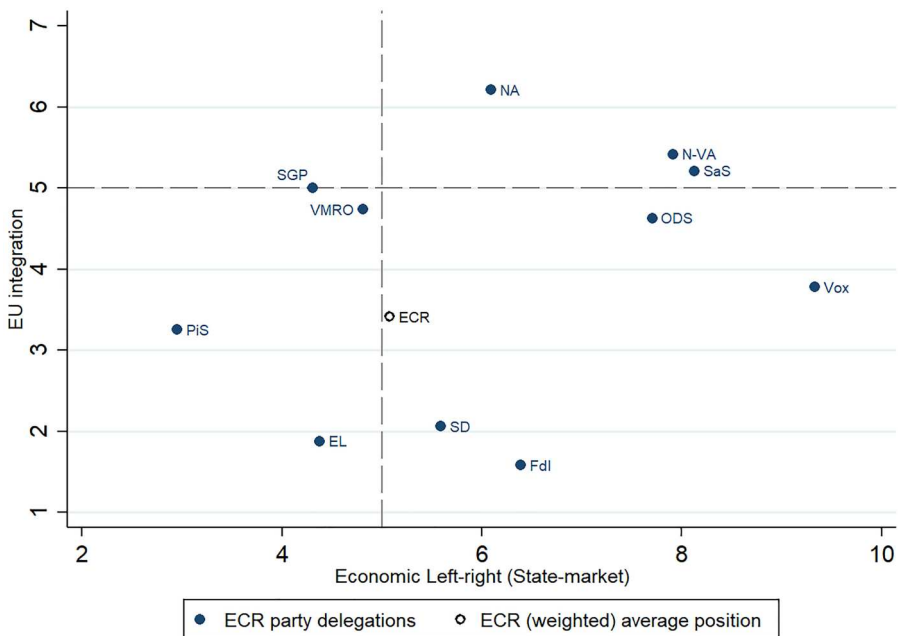


Figure 1. The ECR member parties on economic left-right and EU integration.

Note: Data from CHES (Jolly *et al.* 2022). EU integration rescaled (1-10); for economic left-right, 10 corresponds to the most right-wing position. The expert survey was administered in winter 2020.

(Cunningham and Hix 2024) – the ECR is still relatively unknown. Drawing on existing research and based on new empirical data, this article contributes to filling this gap. In doing so, it also speaks to the emerging literature on ‘national conservatism’, defined as “a new paradigm of right-wing politics on a global scale” (Altinors and Chrystogelos 2024, 2). Many key ECR representatives have indeed committed to this movement, as evidenced by their participation as speakers at various National Conservatism conferences – from the ECR group co-chairman, Ryszard Legutko, to the ECR Party President, Giorgia Meloni.

Before focusing on the ideological position of the ECR, it is worth considering some theoretical reflections from the most recent literature on comparative party politics. First, although the classic distinction between ‘hard’ Euroscepticism – as principled opposition against the EU – and ‘soft’ Euroscepticism – as qualified opposition against the current direction of integration – maintains its validity, the nature of such positions has changed over time. As Vratislav Havlik and Vít Hlouchek (2024) observed, on the one hand, hard Euroscepticism post-Brexit is no longer about exiting the EU, but demands a radical ‘reverse gear’ of integration, reverting to simple coordination between MS. On the other, there is an increased permeability between soft Euroscepticism and moderate pro-integration attitudes. Positions on the EU are not immutable, and parties move between them for a variety of reasons (4). Second, while there is generally a strong correlation between Euroscepticism and anti-establishment positions, this is far from being a perfect association. There are anti-establishment parties that are not Eurosceptic and Eurosceptic parties which are not anti-establishment (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2024). In other words, Euroscepticism is not only the “politics of opposition” (Sitter 2001, 22).

Against this background, Giovanni Sartori's (2005) concept of "coalition potential", which counts political parties that 'matter' in a party system, could offer interesting insights (107-8). In the EU system, the major political groups form different winning majorities across different policy areas. Therefore, the coalition potential of a political group in the EP cannot be assessed by its capacity to support a governmental majority on a stable basis. Yet, understanding their coalition potential more broadly, political groups have such a 'potential' when they are needed in the majorities to win votes on specific policies. Even a relatively minor group in terms of seats may 'matter' if, to rephrase Sartori, it finds itself in a position to determine, at some point in time, possible winning majorities. Given the conservative and soft Eurosceptic position embraced by the ECR, we propose that it may well use its coalition potential to shape EU legislation and policies, rather than embracing an outright opposition towards the EU and its mainstream parties. The EPP may also facilitate the ECR's 'mainstreaming', having shifted more to the right itself, as it is most evident on migration and environmental policies. In several European countries, EPP's member parties are in government with, or supported by, ECR member parties, as in the Czech Republic, Finland, Italy or Sweden (see Bale and Kaltwasser 2021; Brown *et al.* 2023).

The European Conservatives and Reformists group: Conservative first, (soft) Eurosceptic second?

Observing in depth the ideological position of the ECR, there seems to be consensus on the fact that its Euroscepticism is not driven by principled and anti-systemic hostility, but by a 'circumstantial' opposition to the EU's direction of travel (Steven 2016, 2020; Steven and Szczerbiak 2023; for a definition of soft-Euroscepticism, see Szczerbiak and Taggart 2000). This interpretation points at a '(very) critical friend' attitude toward the EU. Indeed, a recurrent criticism in the ECR's discourse is directed towards what they perceive as the federalist agenda implemented by the EU establishment, an agenda they seek to *reform* – hence the 'Reformists' in the name – via the implementation of policies aimed at de-centralising and democratically enhancing the European polity. A quick check of the ECR's official website confirms the centrality of these themes to the group's political programme, with slogans such as "Doing less, but better" and "Cooperation yes! Superstate no!" welcoming those who venture onto their homepage (ECR 2023a).

However, the ECR's scepticism does not stop at its disapproval of the EU governance and direction, also encompassing its policies and core values. Indeed, a great deal of rhetoric is directed towards the management of the EU's external border, which, to paraphrase the group's co-chairs in the 9th EP, are not safe and secure enough (Legutko and Procaccini 2023). Somehow differently from the ID group, whose anti-immigration positions are informed by racist undertones (notably against non-white, Islam migrants), the ECR emphasises the links between migration, globalisation and secularism (Steven 2023), phenomena that they deem threatening to traditional European values, norms and ways of life. It is important to note, however, that although the ECR group as a whole may project a more moderate image than the one displayed by the ID on the issue of migration, some of its member delegations have adopted positions close to the latter. To cite one example, key members of FdI, including its leader, Meloni, have on occasions

publicly embraced the ‘ethnic replacement’ conspiracy theory, according to which migratory pressure in Western countries is the result of a deliberate plan to erase ‘white civilisation’ (Donà 2022, 786). This crucial remark apart, overall the position on the EU and European integration expressed by the ECR group sets it apart both from the Eurosceptic group(s) on its right (in the 2019-24 term, the ID group; see Kaiser and Mittag 2023 for an overview) and from the Europhile group on its left, the EPP. The group itself adamantly likes to stress this distinction resorting to the Eurorealist label, whose suffix seemingly conveys a sense of ‘reasonableness’. Using data from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES), Figure 1 illustrates that the ECR national party delegations hold diverse opinions on EU integration, while the average position of the group is between 3 and 4 on the 10-point EU integration dimension.

Yet, it would be hasty to dismiss Eurorealism as a sugar-coated disguise for the group’s soft Euroscepticism. As Martin Steven makes clear (2016, 1-2; 2020), the ECR’s ideological essence lies more in its conservatism than its soft Eurosceptic stance. Deviating from the literature that sees the ECR as a device for chasing votes and offices (for example, McDonnell and Werner 2018; 2020), Martin Steven and Aleks Szczerbiak (2023) assert that the group is relatively coherent and its purpose goes beyond short-term goals – for example, Cameron’s attempt to quell party infighting over Europe. Accordingly, the soft Eurosceptic positions the party assumes, such as asking for the repatriation of certain policy-making powers to the MS, are driven by their faith in “small state conservatism” (587) – their “overarching *raison d’être*” (Steven 2020, 2) – more than their Euroscepticism. Recent international events confirm the distinctiveness of the group’s position on foreign policy too. This is centred on a passionate support for the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the United States (US), and a rejection of the idea of an EU joint military (8). Again, though, the latter does not translate into principled rejection of European cooperation, as demonstrated by the group’s approval, in September 2023, of the European Defence Industry Reinforcement through the Common Procurement Act (ECR 2023b), or, more tellingly, by the group’s passionate support for the Ukrainian cause following its invasion by Russia. On the economic left-right spectrum, most of the group members adopt a typically conservative pro-market position. However, as captured in Figure 1, there is considerable variation. This variation is epitomised by the position of its founding delegations, ODS and PiS, with the former representing a liberal-conservative position and the latter embodying a social-conservative one that is more supportive of state intervention.

Still, it is important to qualify the group’s conservatism given its pronounced inclination toward the right of the political spectrum. Using ‘gender’ lenses and critical discourse analysis, Barbara Gaweda *et al.* (2023, 3) describe the ECR group as an ultra-conservative party that has shifted considerably to the right since the Tories’ departure. In fact, they argue that the label of conservative misleadingly waters down the degree of social conservatism endorsed by the group, enabling their presentation as ‘respectable’. Accordingly, this shift to the right is epitomised by the entry of new parties, notably FdI, a far-right party born from the ashes of post-fascism and now constituting the group’s second delegation in terms of both size and political weight (the party holds one of the two co-chairs within the group and the presidency of the associated Euro-party, a position occupied by Meloni herself).

Nevertheless, while both the Tories' departure and the subsequent entry of new far-right parties were emblematic of the group's ideological direction of travel, one should bear in mind that the group's ultra-conservative positions are confined to specific policy areas. In their analysis of FdI in the 9th EP, Edoardo Bressanelli and Margherita de Candia (2023) demonstrate that the party, which aligned with the majority of the ECR group in 91 per cent of final votes from 2019-22, showed a remarkably high voting agreement with the EPP group (74 per cent), while agreeing with the group to its right, the ID, in 53 per cent only of final votes. Still, when it comes to areas that touch on socio-cultural issues placed on the 'GAL-TAN' (Green, Alternative and Libertarian vs. Traditional, Authoritarian and Nationalist) scale, such as EU constitutional matters and identity issues pertaining to sexuality, gender and family subjects, the position taken is, indeed, very much to the right. This is captured in Figure 2, which plots the group and its delegations on two axes: 'multiculturalism', which can also be used as a proxy variable for their stances toward migration; and 'GAL-TAN'. Clearly, both the group as a whole and most of its party delegations are located at the upper end of both axes, indicating a typically (far) right-wing position. This stance is reflected in the group's religious leanings. Currently constituting the louder voice in the EP in defence of traditional Christianity, the ECR (and, in particular, PiS) considers the latter an expression of European identity and a quintessential element of nationhood (Steven 2023, 334). This stance transfers into the fight against the socially liberal values allegedly pursued by the EU around personal identity and social issues (335).

All in all, the literature review and the complementary graphs suggest that the ECR group constitutes a soft-Eurosceptic, (very) conservative group.

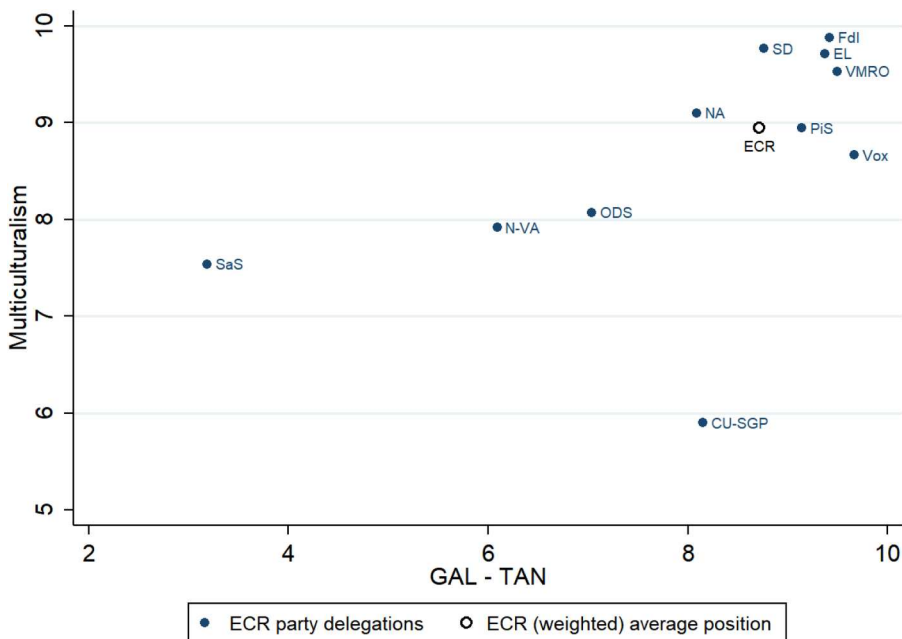


Figure 2. The ECR member parties on multiculturalism and the GAL-TAN dimension.

Note: Data from CHES (Jolly *et al.* Forthcoming). For GAL-TAN and multiculturalism, 10 corresponds to the most TAN and the least multicultural position. The expert survey was administered in winter 2020.

Research design

To address our research question, we combine quantitative and qualitative data. To start, based on the analysis of all final plenary votes on both legislative and non-legislative dossiers in the period between July 2019 and June 2022, we assess the voting coalitions and internal cohesion of the ECR group. The earliest votes included in the dataset are the plenary votes on 15 July 2019 – the first plenary of the newly constituted EP after the 2019 EU elections – and the latest ones are the plenary votes on 9 June 2022. We are thus able to cover three years of plenary sittings, with a total of 1,223 final votes, which we extracted from the VoteWatch dataset created by Simon Hix *et al.* (2022). According to Rule of Procedure 188 of the EP, all final votes are by roll call, differently from the other (previous) votes which could be by a show of hands, an electronic vote or – if requested in writing by a political group or by at least one-twentieth of MEPs (Rule 190) – a roll call. Moreover, final votes provide us with the position of the group – in favour, against, or abstaining – on the whole text, rather than on parts of it (that is, amendments).

We complement the quantitative analysis with a qualitative focus on migration. Migration is the primary responsibility of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) in the EP. As highlighted below, the ECR group demonstrates significant cohesion on such matters. However, the scope of this policy area extends far beyond migration alone. Therefore, a qualitative approach clarifies how the group behaves on the specific facet of migration. Considered as one of ‘Europe’s crises’ (Hooghe *et al.* 2018), migration represents a crucial issue both *per se* and, specifically, for the analysis of the ECR, a group that consists of nationalist, anti-migrant parties. Drawing on key committee and plenary votes, as well as on declarations from ECR representatives and official documents, we focus on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum of the EU, which was voted on by the EP plenary in April 2023 and 2024 (being therefore outside the scope of the quantitative analysis conducted below). Due to the ideological tensions that may arise when nationalist parties engage in transnational cooperation, the Pact can be considered a seminal case study for delving into the behaviour and policy positioning of the ECR group. Anti-immigrant parties belonging to the same political group in the EP are, indeed, confronted with conflicting interests on the matter of migration because, while on paper they may agree on the need for a tough approach to migration, their factual policy position may be dictated by their country’s circumstances, such as those concerning national interests and public opinion. Arguably, political parties from external borders’ countries can be expected to be more supportive of EU policies purporting common migration management. Conversely, parties from countries that are only marginally touched by the migratory phenomenon can be expected to take on an adversarial position to any responsibility-sharing proposal in the field of migration. Such conflict seems captured by the opinions presented to the LIBE committee in 2021 by the Hungarian, Italian and Slovak parliaments on the alleged non-compliance of the EU Commission’s proposal with the subsidiarity principle. Tellingly, while the Slovak and the Hungarian parliaments ground their cases on the perceived violation of national sovereignty, a stance that is plausibly common among Visegrad countries, for the Italian Senate the level of EU intervention is deemed insufficient.

The ECR: Voting agreement and cohesion in the 9th EP

By analysing all final votes, we calculate the voting agreement – that is, when the majority of any two political groups vote in the same way (in favour, against or abstaining) – between the three political groups on the right of the EP policy space in the 9th EP. Figure 3 shows that the EPP and the ECR group vote together in more than 70 per cent of the (final) votes. Both the agreement between the ECR and ID, and that between the EPP and the ID, were considerably less frequent. The alliance between the two most right-wing groups occurred in about 50 per cent of the votes; even less frequent was the convergence between the EPP and the ID, taking place in about 40 per cent of the votes. This finding is well worth highlighting, as it shows that the two groups placed at the far-right of the policy spectrum tend to vote differently. In particular, the EPP tends to vote more with the ECR, rather than with the ID, by about 30 percentage points. This was significant in a context where there was a very large share of lopsided votes and, therefore, cross-party agreement (Bowler and McElroy 2015). This shows that the groups on the right of the EPP cannot be considered ‘in-block’, as they have a different ‘coalition potential’.

To delve deeper into the behaviour of the ECR group, Figure 4 breaks down its voting behaviour by policy area (or, as in the vertical axis in the figure, by the responsible committee in the EP). Was the ECR part of the winning majority and, if so, in what policy areas? Incidentally, it should be remembered that the Ursula von der Leyen’s Commission was supported in 2019 by a grand-coalition including the EPP, the Socialists & Democrats (S&D) and the Renew Europe groups, with only some members of the ECR voting for the President (by secret vote) on 16 June 2019, and that a majority of the ECR endorsed (by roll-call vote) the whole Commission on 27 November 2019. The figure shows that the ECR found itself more frequently ‘in opposition’ in six policy areas only. These were, starting from the bottom of the figure, gender, development, institutional affairs, employment, economic and monetary affairs, and justice and home affairs. In the case of gender, the ECR had a principled opposition, as it is seldom in agreement with the majority in the EP. In the broad policy areas covered by the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON) and LIBE, the ECR voted

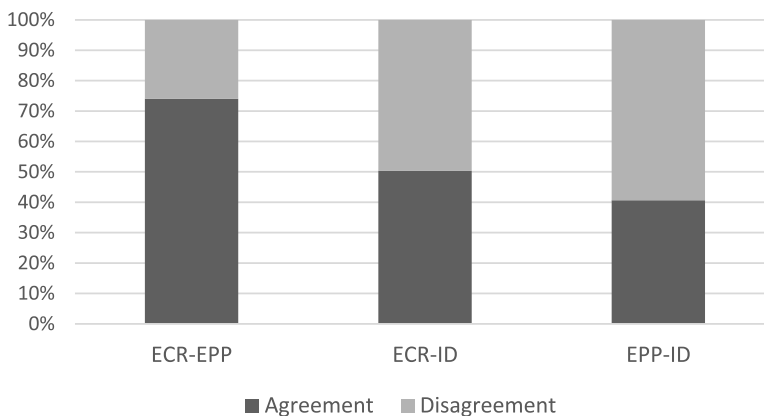


Figure 3. Voting agreement between the (centre)-right political groups.

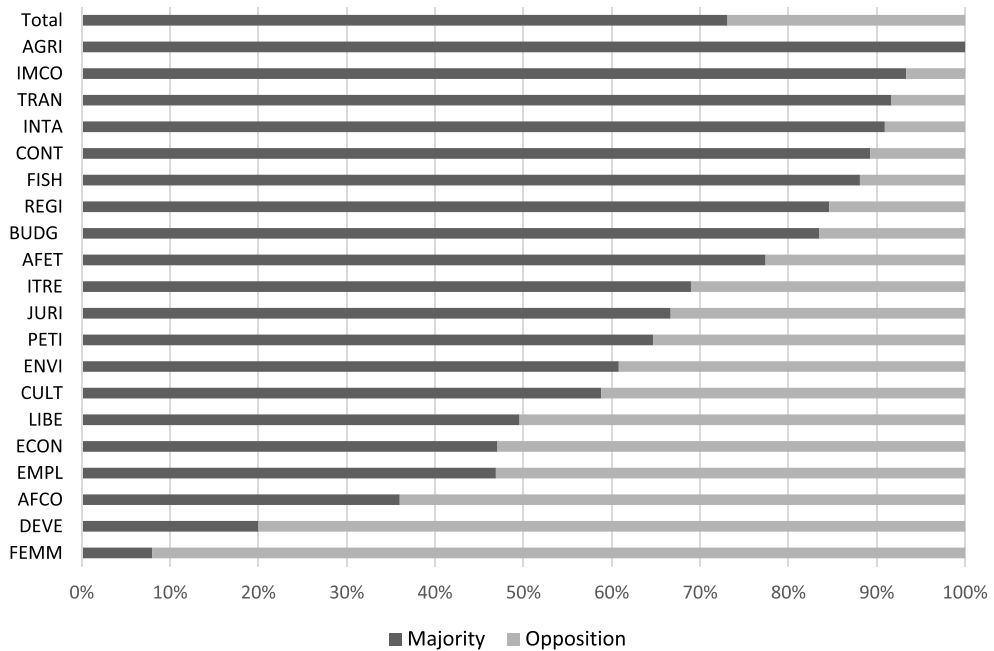


Figure 4. The ECR and winning majorities in the EP.

Note: AGRI - Agriculture; IMCO – Internal Market and Consumer Protection; TRAN – Transport; INTA – International Trade; CONT – Budgetary Control; FISH – Fisheries; REGI – Regional Affairs; BUDG – Budgets; AFET – Foreign Affairs; ITRE – Industry, Research and Energy; JURI – Legal Affairs; PETI – Petitions; ENVI – Environment and Public Health; CULT – Culture and Education; LIBE – Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs; ECON – Economic and Monetary Affairs; EMPL – Employment and Social Affairs; AFCO – Constitutional Affairs; DEVE – Development; FEMM – Women’s rights and Gender equality.

against the majority in about half of the votes. However, in the other policy areas and particularly on regulatory domains such as agriculture, the internal market and transport policy, the ECR was almost always part of the winning coalition. A very high agreement was also noticeable in foreign affairs and budgetary policies. This shows that it was not only in more technical and arguably less salient policy domains that the ECR finds itself siding with the winning majority.

So far, we have looked at the voting behaviour of the groups, observing how a majority of their MEPs voted. Of course, this means that the more cohesive the groups were, the more meaningful the calculation is. If groups were regularly and heavily divided, the majority position would not really represent the group’s position but, rather, that of the national party delegations that happen to be on the majority side. In what follows, we therefore focus on the voting patterns *within* the political groups and, specifically, within the ECR. To do so, we have calculated the voting cohesion of the groups, based on the Agreement Index (AI) as in Hix *et al.* (2007, 91).³ The AI equals 1 if all group members vote the same way and 0 if MEPs are equally divided among the three voting options. Figure 5 shows that the groups were clustered in three categories. First, the G-EFA, the S&D, the EPP, and Renew Europe all have cohesion scores – on final votes – above 0.9. This means that they were all very highly cohesive and recorded

³The AI is calculated – using the number of votes (Yes, No, Abstain) in a given parliamentary vote for a political group i – as follows: $AI_i = \{ \max(Y_i, N_i, A_i) - \frac{1}{2} [(Y_i + N_i + A_i) - \max(Y_i, N_i, A_i)] \} / (Y_i + N_i + A_i)$.

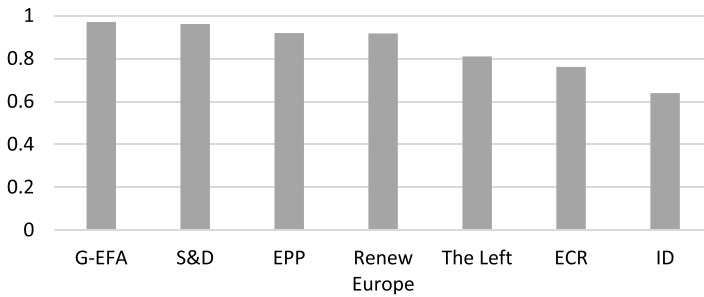


Figure 5. The voting cohesion of the political groups in the 9th EP.

on average only a handful of defections from the group’s line. The second category was represented by The Left and the ECR groups, whose AI is between 0.75 and 0.81. Within such groups, it was not uncommon to observe MEPs or party delegations voting differently from the majority. Finally, the ID group’s AI was just above 0.6, making it the least cohesive group in the 9th EP (and, incidentally, confirming the difficulties faced by the most right-wing parties in finding common policy positions. See Diermeier *et al.* 2021).

Looking inside the ECR group (Figure 6), the group was never fully cohesive in any policy area. Yet, there are some areas where its AI was close to, or above, 0.8: transport and tourism, fisheries and, more surprisingly, the broad set of policies under the remit of the LIBE committee (including migration). Instead, its overall cohesion was close to, or

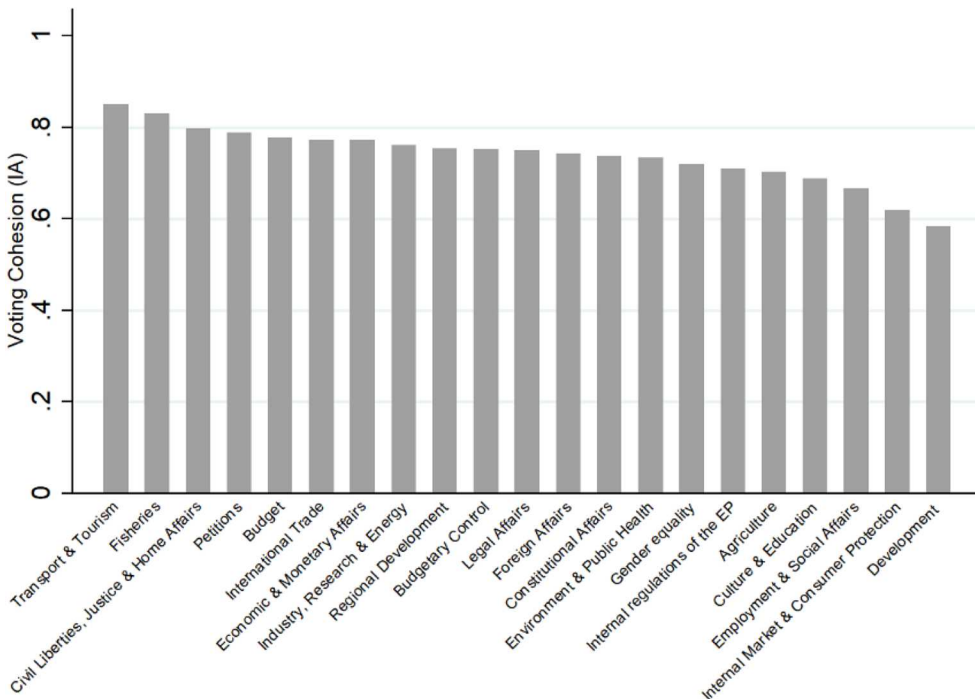


Figure 6. The voting cohesion of the ECR by policy area.

Table 1. Overview of the national delegations in the ECR group in 2024 (at the end of the 9th EP).

Party name	Country	No. of MEPs	Joined group in	Currently in government in national arena? (Years indicate previous government experience)
Law and Justice Party (PiS)	Poland	25	2009	No (2005-07; 2015-23)
Brothers of Italy (FdI)	Italy	10	2019	Yes (2022-)
Civic Democratic Party (ODS)	Czech Republic	4	2009	Yes (2021-) (1992-96; 2006-10)
Vox	Spain	4	2019	No
New Flemish Alliance (N-VA)	Belgium	3	2014	No (2014-18)
Sweden Democrats (SD)	Sweden	2	2018	Yes (2022-, 'Confidence and Supply' deal)
Bulgarian National Movement (VMRO)	Bulgaria	2	2014	No (1997-2001; 2017-21)
Sovereign Poland (known as United Poland until 2023) (SP)	Poland	2	2019	No (2015-19)
Finns Party (PS)	Finland	1	2014	Yes (2023-) (2015-17)
Folklistan	Sweden	1	2024	No
Alliance Germany (BD)	Germany	1	2021	No
Croatian Sovereignists (HS)	Croatia	1	2022	No
Dutch Reformed Party (SGP)	Netherlands	1	2014	No
Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania (LLRA-KŠS)	Lithuania	1	2009	No (2000-01; 2012-14; 2019-20)
Freedom and Solidarity (SaS)	Slovakia	1	2014	No (2010-12; 2020-22)
Greek Solution (EL)	Greece	1	2019	No
JA21	Netherlands	1	2021	No
More direct democracy (EAFD)	Netherlands	1	2021	No
National Alliance (NA/LNKK)	Latvia	2	2009	No (2011-23)
Reconquest (R!)	France	1	2024	No
Romanian National Conservative Party (PNCR)	Romania	1	2023	No

Note: As of May 2024. Three independent members not included.

under 0.6 for international development and internal market policies.⁴ Of course, the behaviour of the largest national party delegations had a huge impact on overall cohesion scores. Within the ECR, the Polish PiS and the Italian FdI together account for more than half of the MEPs shaping, to a large extent, the policy position of the group. Yet, their voting agreement was close to 90 per cent and there was not a single policy area where they disagree more than they agree.

Finally, restricting our focus to those national delegations with at least 3 MEPs – PiS, FdI, ODS, Vox, the Sweden Democrats and N-VA (Table 1) – we can appreciate to what extent they were internally coherent. Figure 7 indicates that the national party delegations were in general more cohesive than their transnational group. There was hardly any national party, in any policy area, with an AI below 0.8 (as a reminder, the AI for the ECR is 0.76). The national party delegations cluster in the highest fifth percentile, between 0.95 and 1. Aside from some individual outliers, the only area where the spread was higher was that of employment and social affairs. Such an analysis confirms that the position of the ECR group depended on the agreement of the national party delegations, which are highly cohesive and the primary reference point for MEPs.

⁴Until 31 January 2020 – or 'Brexit day' – a small contingent of 4 Conservative MEPs was part of the ECR group. In December 2019, for less than two months, they were joined by 4 MEPs elected among the ranks of the Brexit Party. Comparing the mean AI of the ECR group with or without the British Tories, changes are very small, almost negligible, in most policy areas.

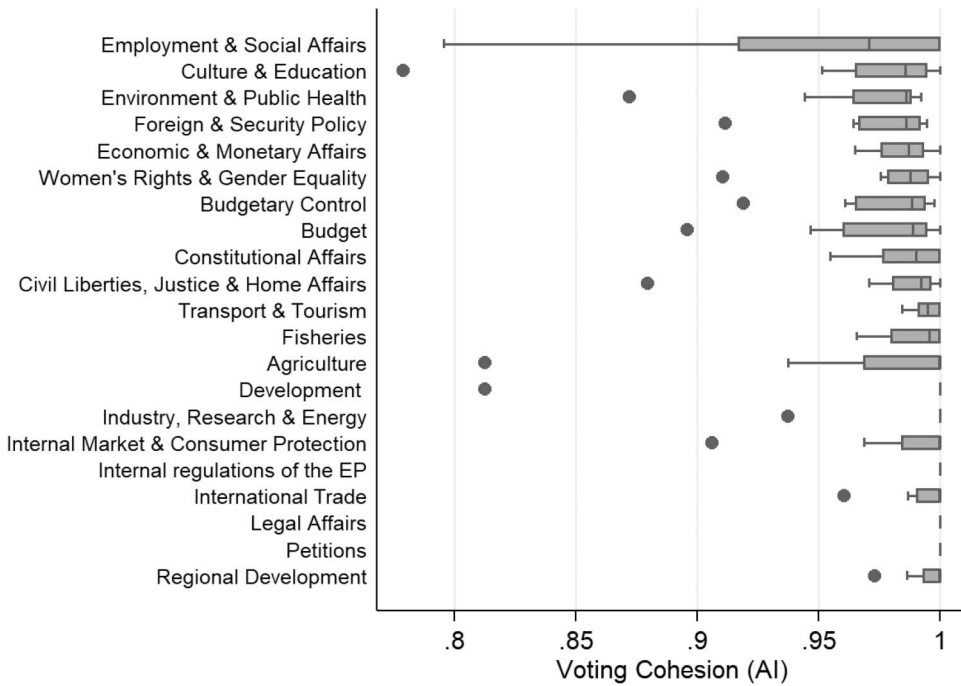


Figure 7. The voting cohesion of the largest national delegations (at least 3 MEPS) of the ECR.

Do national interests trump transnational cooperation in the EP? The ECR and the New Pact on Migration and Asylum

September 2020 and April 2024 marked crucial months in the EU's approach to migration, as it was when, respectively, the European Commission proposed the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, and the EP majority gave it the green light. Designed around the assumption that migration is a common European challenge and that the obligation for managing migrant arrivals should not fall solely on the countries of first-entry, the pact introduces an enhanced asylum and migration management system in Europe that encompasses pivotal policy areas, from asylum and return procedures, to the enhancement of Schengen security through the European Asylum Dactyloscopy Database (EURODAC), and relations with third countries (European Commission 2024). The proposal's groundbreaking nature lies in its foundational principles of solidarity and shared responsibility. In a borderless EU, MS are collectively responsible for managing migration by virtue of the solidarity principle at the heart of EU membership. These principles are far from being mere rhetorical devices. Breaking with the Dublin III Regulation,⁵ the Asylum Migration Management Regulation is centred around a compulsory contributory system whereby MS may be asked to help first entry countries facing overwhelming migratory pressure. Contributions may

⁵The EU Dublin III Regulation designated the responsible MS for asylum claims primarily based on the principles of the first country of entry and family connections. The first-entry criterion was often criticised by border MS, and particularly by anti-migrant parties within those states, for its alleged disproportionate impact on their migration and asylum systems.

range from operational assistance, to accepting relocated asylum seekers and assuming responsibility for repatriation operation.

Consistent with these expectations, the ECR majority – which comprised mostly of delegations from states seldom constituting initial points of entry for migrants and asylum seekers – rejected the principle of solidarity and responsibility-sharing set out in the Commission’s proposal and approved by the LIBE committee. On 20 April 2023, during the Strasbourg plenary debate, Swedish MEP Charlie Weimers, speaking on behalf of the ECR group, denounced the proposal’s “forced solidarity” principle and its alleged inability to tackle illegal migration at its roots by embracing what they call “mass migration” (European Parliament 2023c). Arguing that the “pact’s solution is to force Member States to accept migrants against their will” and that “we do not accept migrant quotas dictated from Brussels” (Ibid.), the ECR clearly lamented what they considered to be a violation of MS’ sovereignty. This position appears in line with the ‘small-state conservatism’ stance dissected earlier, which questions the legitimacy of EU action in certain policy domains. Their soft-Euro sceptic/Euro realist approach – that is, being in favour of integration but not as currently conceived – was testified by Spanish VOX MEP, Jorge Buxade Villalba, acting as the rapporteur of the Recast Regulation on EURODAC. Furthermore, the ECR group declared itself “ready to cooperate on delivering future-proof solutions” – a formulation that seemingly communicates a sense of ‘pragmatism’ and, in their eyes, ‘responsibility’. One of these alleged ‘future-proof’ solutions was the relocation of “the entire asylum system to third-country reception centres” (Ibid.).

The ECR website offers further insight into the group’s stance, starting from the very framing of migration as a matter related to “Safeguarding citizens & Borders” – a framing centred on the association between migration, national security and, therefore, crime (ECR 2023c). The purported connection between security and migration was behind the group’s favourable stance toward some degree of EU intervention, such as consolidating the joint protection of the bloc’s external borders and enhancing the EU’s external dimension as a preventive measure against migration. However, the group clearly expressed its opposition to any attempt to replace voluntary cooperation with a compulsory contributory system.

All in all, the ECR’s position on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum seemed clear: it shall not pass. Yet, were there any internal nuances in the positions taken by its national delegations? The analysis of the roll call votes in the LIBE committee and the EP plenary, summarised in Table 2, partially supports our working hypothesis: when a highly salient matter like migration is at stake, national interests do trump transnational cooperation within the ECR.

By examining the ECR’s behaviour on the 10 files comprising the Pact, a division on geographical lines, with PiS on one side and FdI on the other, emerges clearly. The fact that these are the parties holding the two co-chairs clearly highlights the group’s inner tensions on the issue of migration. Consistent with its nature of nationalist, anti-migrant party from a country less affected by migratory pressure, PiS, the biggest ECR delegation, said ‘No’ to all files, including the three concerning the screening of third-country nationals and the establishment of biometric and conviction databases (no. 1, 2, 3 in Table 2), which were instead approved by a majority within the group. This division was well captured by the speeches delivered during the April 2024 plenary session.

Table 2. The voting behaviour of the ECR party delegations on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum.

Legislative file	LIBE vote on the proposal (28/03/23)	LIBE vote on interinstitutional negotiations (28/03/23)	Plenary vote on interinstitutional negotiations (20/04/23)	LIBE vote on provisional agreement (14/02/24)	Plenary vote on final acts (10/04/24)
1. Screening of third country nationals at the external borders A9-0149/2023	All against	Majority against Rebels: Fdl (1+)	Majority against Rebels: Fdl (6+)	Majority in favour Rebels: PIS (1-) and SP (1-)	Majority in favour Rebels: PIS (21-) and SP (2-) Abstention: Independent (2)
2. Establishing a centralised system for the identification of Member States holding conviction information on third-country nationals and stateless persons (ECRIS-TCN) A9-0148/2023	All against	Majority against Rebels: Fdl (1+)	Majority against Rebels: Fdl (6+) and ODS (4+) Abstention: SaS (1)	Majority in favour Rebels: PIS (1-) and SP (1-)	Majority in favour Rebels: PIS (21-) and SP (2-)
3. 'Eurodac' (recast) A8-0212/2017	8 th EP			Majority in favour Rebels: PIS (1-) and SP (1-)	Majority in favour Rebels: PIS (21-) and SP (2-)
4. Asylum and migration management A9-0152/2023	All against	Majority in favour Rebels: N-VA (1-)	Majority against Rebels: Fdl (6+) and EL (1+)	Majority against Rebels: Fdl (1+) and N-VA (1+)	Majority against Abstention: N-VA (3) and SDP (1)
5. Addressing situations of crisis and force majeure in the field of migration and asylum A9-0127/2023	All against	Majority against Rebels: Fdl (1+)	Majority against Rebels: Fdl (6+)	Majority against Rebels: N-VA (1+) Abstention: Fdl (1)	Majority against Rebels: Fdl (6+) and SDP (1+) Abstention: Fdl (2) and N-VA (2)
6. Qualification standards for international protection A8-0245/2017	8 th EP			Majority against Rebels: N-VA (1+)	Majority against Abstention: SaS (1) and ODS (3)
7. Common procedure for international protection in the Union A8-0171/2018	LIBE updates 8 th EP's negotiating mandate Majority abstains Rebels: Fdl (1-) and VOX (1-)	-	-	Majority against Rebels: N-VA (1+) Abstention: Fdl (1)	Majority against Rebels: SGP (1+) Abstention: Fdl (8), SaS (1), N-VA (1) and ODS (4)

(Continued)

**Table 2.** Continued.

Legislative file	LIBE vote on the proposal (28/03/23)	LIBE vote on interinstitutional negotiations (28/03/23)	Plenary vote on interinstitutional negotiations (20/04/23)	LIBE vote on provisional agreement (14/02/24)	Plenary vote on final acts (10/04/24)
8. Standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (recast) A8-0186/2017	8 th EP			Majority against <i>Rebels:</i> N-VA (1+)	Majority against <i>Abstention:</i> SaS (1) and ODS (3)
9. Union Resettlement Framework A8-0316/2017	8 th EP			Majority against <i>Rebels:</i> N-VA (1+)	Majority against <i>Rebels:</i> ODS (3+) <i>Abstention:</i> SaS (1)
10. Return border procedure A9-0164/2024	File originally comprised within A8-0171/2018 (procedure no. 7 above)			Majority against <i>Rebels:</i> FdI (8+), SaS (1+) and SGP (1+)	Majority against <i>Abstention:</i> Independent (1), PS (1) and ODS (3)

Notes: 'Rebels' indicates MEPs voting contrary to the majority within the group. We use '+' to denote a vote in favour and '-' to indicate a vote against. Within LIBE, ECR is represented by 12 MEPs from eight national delegations and one independent (as of May 2024). Sources: European Parliament 2023a and European Parliament 2024a (LIBE votes); European Parliament 2023b and European Parliament 2024b (plenary votes).

Speaking on behalf of the ECR group, Italian MEP Nicola Procaccini affirmed: “Improving the current situation: this is the only reason to vote in favour of some of the regulations in the new Pact. A few steps in the right direction, few but important” (European Parliament 2024c). However, these words would be soon contradicted by Polish MEPs from PiS and SP, who argued that the “migration pact does not solve any problems” and labelled it as “a love letter to human traffickers” taking “money from countries like Poland” (Ibid.).

As for Meloni’s party, it often featured among the rebels. Remarkably, FdI voted in favour of the controversial ‘Addressing Situation of Crisis and Force Majeure File’ (no. 5), which prescribes solidarity measures to aid MS under significant migratory pressure – a situation Italy often finds itself in. As a FdI MEP commented following the vote, Italy has “a maritime border” and so national delegations have “different sensitivities” (Carlo Fidanza, cited in Maggi 2024). After all, the FdI leader herself had welcomed the New Pact as a step forward following the April 2023 plenary, despite stressing the need for more action on the external dimension to stop ‘illegal’ migrants from coming in the first place (Meloni 2023). This position was echoed by the ECR group co-chair and fellow party member following the conclusions of the European Council meeting of 29-30 June 2023. Procaccini (2023) remarked that while “the solution is not the relocation among European states” but rather “[stopping] departures from Africa”, the pact represented “the first step in the EU’s long journey to tackling illegal migration”. Therefore, while being a distinctively anti-immigrant party,⁶ FdI’s voting behaviour in the EP was arguably influenced by its status as the largest party in the government of a country that faced intense migratory pressure and where the public demanded a better and higher involvement by the EU in the management of borders and migration.

The stark contrast between the Polish and Italian delegations was further captured by the (non-binding) referendum on the EU migration policy called in August 2023 by former PiS Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki. When asked in a referendum whether they supported “the admission of thousands of illegal immigrants from the Middle East and Africa, in accordance with the forced relocation mechanism imposed by the European bureaucracy?”, nearly 97 per cent of Polish voters, or about 11 million people (with a turnout of 41 per cent), answered ‘No’ (National Electoral Commission 2023).

Overall, the qualitative analysis reveals that the ECR group’s unified stance against migration failed to consistently translate into cohesive legislative actions by its delegations. This discrepancy was exemplified by the limited internal cohesion on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum and by the contrasting positions taken by the group’s two largest delegations, when FdI endorsed European solidarity in managing migration and asylum in situations of crisis and PiS opposed the Pact altogether. We argue that these intra-group divisions were primarily driven by national interests and the varying degrees of exposure to migratory trends within each country. Increased transnational cooperation apart, the national hat continued to be the one ECR MEPs treasured the most.

⁶Incidentally, a remarkable total of 140 amendments on the Asylum and Migration Managing Regulation (procedure no. 4 in the table) were presented by the ECR co-chair.

Conclusion

The analysis of about 1,300 final votes in the EP plenaries (from July 2019 to June 2022) reveals that, despite the notable exceptions summarised below, the ECR group played an active and often cooperative role in the politics of the EP. First, our data shows that the ECR found itself in agreement significantly more with the EPP (in more than seven votes out of ten) than with the ID group (only half of the votes). Second, the ECR was part of the winning majority – shaping legislation or defining the EP’s position through resolutions – in more than 70 per cent of the votes. This is an important finding as it shows, ahead of the 2024 EP elections, that the ECR has already been closely cooperating with the ‘grand coalition’ in a broad array of policy domains. In other words, there was evidence of clear differences between ECR and ID, the latter being a principled Eurosceptic group and the former critical but not in principle opposed to EU integration and/or its policies. The label of soft-Eurosceptic – or, as they put it, Eurorealist – seems, therefore, appropriate. It follows that a more structured agreement between all groups on the right seems unlikely. On the one hand, the EPP and the ID groups found themselves on the opposite side in most votes; on the other, the agreement between the ECR and the ID groups was tenuous. In addition, our analysis indicates that the voting cohesion of the ECR was lower than that of the largest political groups, but higher than that of the ID group. Its national delegations were, instead, internally very cohesive.

Taking stock of the above, what are the prospects for the ECR in the 10th EP regarding its ‘coalition potential’? The possibility for the ECR to form policy coalitions with the EPP was repeatedly tested in the 9th EP and, consequently, may gain further traction in a more right-wing Parliament. Whether this will give the group leverage to infuse their Eurorealist positions – rooted in a preference for minimal state intervention and social conservatism – into key policy areas, from environmental policies to possible EU treaty reforms, remains to be seen. Based on the evidence discussed here, we expect the ECR’s ‘coalition potential’ to fluctuate across policy areas, depending on (i) their distance from the EPP’s position and (ii) internal divisions.

Concerning the former, while the degree of agreement with the EPP was remarkably high in 15 out of 21 policy areas, the ECR’s cooperative behaviour waned when it came to constitutional affairs, international development and gender issues. This is unsurprising given the deep connection of these three policy areas – whose remit ranges from the rule of law to reproductive rights, from gender identity to humanitarian aid – to values and priorities that do not align with the ideology of the ECR member parties. The latter very often opposes the EP majority on these policy matters, frequently challenging the political and legal supremacy of EU law. They do so not just due to formal reasons, believing these issues fall under national jurisdiction but, more fundamentally, because of the innate tensions with the group’s worldview: a traditionalist – some would say retrograde – perspective that clashes with the core principles of cultural, social and political liberalism underpinning the EP majority’s stance on these issues.

As for the latter point, our assessment of the group’s position on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum suggests that tensions are likely to arise when the issue at stake affects the member parties differently depending on their (perceived) national interests. Analysing the voting behaviour of the party delegations of the ECR at the committee level and in the EP plenaries, we have captured significant differences between its largest

delegations. The New Pact was welcomed as a considerable improvement of the *status quo* by the Italian PM and FdI leader (and ECR Party President), while being very negatively received by the former Polish PM and PiS leader. Thus, the cohesion of the ECR party did not withstand the (tough) test of a highly salient and divisive legislative package regulating migration in the EU, with its two largest national party delegations taking different positions. Given the quintessentially nationalistic identity of the ECR's member parties, we can expect similar internal quarrels to arise in the 10th EP legislature.

While several questions remain regarding the future EP balance and the ECR's position on the cooperation-opposition spectrum, it seems safe to assume that the ECR has come a long way since its dubious start. Starting as Cameron's underdog, the group has become important not just in European politics but also in the politics of the MS, given the number of its members with current or past government responsibilities. Whether this is a testament to the strength of the new 'national conservatism' paradigm is something worthy of further empirical analysis. Such analysis could draw on qualitative data, such as interviews with ECR members and ethnographic observations, to gain deeper insight into the tactical and strategic motivations behind the voting behaviour of ECR members. It could also consider other fundamental issues, such as rule of law violations and breaches of fundamental EU values, to investigate to what extent ECR members are cohesive, in the name of national sovereignty defence, in resisting the EU's sanctioning approach on this matter. What is certain is that studying the behaviour of the ECR in the EP provides indeed a very insightful illustration of the nature and potential future developments of (national) conservatism in Europe and beyond.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to thank Marianna Griffini, Matilde Rosina and Leila Simona Talani, who coordinated the Special Issue "Right Move? Populist Radical Right Parties and Europe", and the two anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and helpful suggestions.

Notes on contributors

Margherita de Candia is Lecturer in Political Science Education at King's College London and Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, both in the United Kingdom.

Edoardo Bressanelli is Associate Professor of Political Science at the Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies, Pisa, Italy, and Senior Visiting Research Fellow at King's College London, London, United Kingdom.

ORCID

Edoardo Bressanelli  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9906-4949>

References

Akbaba, Sertan. 2014. A Critical Assessment of a Eurosceptic Party Group on European Integration: A Case Study of the European Conservatives and Reformists Group. *TalTech Journal of European Studies* 4 (1): 97-118.

- Altinors, Gorkem, and Chrysosgelos, Angelos. 2024. Beyond Populism and into the State: The Political Economy of National-conservatism. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/13691481241246538>
- Bale, Tim, Hanley, Seán, and Szczerbiak, Aleks. 2010. 'May Contain Nuts'? The Reality behind the Rhetoric Surrounding the British Conservatives' New Group in the European Parliament. *The Political Quarterly* 81 (1): 85-98.
- Bale, Tim, and Kaltwasser, Cristóbal Rovira. 2021. *Riding the Populist Wave: Europe's Mainstream Right in Crisis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bowler, Shaun, and McElroy, Gail. 2015. Political Group Cohesion and 'Hurrah' Voting in the European Parliament. *Journal of European Public Policy* 22 (9): 1355-65.
- Bressanelli, Edoardo, and de Candia, Margherita. 2023. Fratelli d'Italia in the European Parliament: Between Radicalism and Conservatism. *Contemporary Italian Politics* 1-20.
- Brown, Katy, Mondon, Aurelien and Winter, Aaron. 2023. The Far Right, the Mainstream and Mainstreaming: Towards a Heuristic Framework. *Journal of Political Ideologies* 28 (2): 162-79.
- Cabada, Ladislav. 2011. The Role of Central European Political Parties in the Establishment and Operation of the European Conservatives and Reformists Group. *Politics in Central Europe* 7 (2): 5-18.
- Conservative Friends of the ECR. 2024. The ECR's History. Accessed 12 January 2024. <https://www.cfecr.org.uk/ecrs-history>
- Cunningham, Kevin, and Hix, Simon. 2024. A Sharp Right Turn: A Forecast for the 2024 European Parliament Elections. European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), January. <https://ecfr.eu/publication/a-sharp-right-turn-a-forecast-for-the-2024-european-parliament-elections/#:~:text=Fran%C3%A7ais-,Summary,parties%20losing%20votes%20and%20seats>.
- Diermeier, Matthias, Frohwein, Hannah, and Nau, Aljoscha. 2021. One for One and None for All: The Radical Right in the European Parliament. LSE 'Europe in Question' Discussion Paper Series. April. <https://www.lse.ac.uk/european-institute/Assets/Documents/LEQS-Discussion-Papers/LEQSPaper167.pdf>
- Donà, Alessia. 2022. The Rise of the Radical Right in Italy: The Case of Fratelli d'Italia. *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 27 (5): 775-94.
- ECR (European Conservatives and Reformists). 2023a. ECR Group Homepage. Accessed 12 January 2024. <https://www.ecrgroup.eu/>
- ECR. 2023b. Zdzisław Krasnodębski (ECR Group): EDIRPA is the Start of more Realism. https://ecrgroup.eu/article/zdzisaw_krasnodbski_ecr_group_edirpa_is_the_start_of_more_realism
- ECR. 2023c. Visions for Europe. Safeguarding Citizens & Borders. Accessed 12 January 2024. https://ecrgroup.eu/vision/safeguarding_citizens_borders
- Euractiv. 2009. Parliament's New Anti-federalist Group: A Fragile Coalition? 23 June. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/eu-priorities-2020/news/parliament-s-new-anti-federalist-group-a-fragile-coalition/>
- European Commission. 2024. What Is the New Pact on Migration and Asylum of the EU? 21 May. https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/new-pact-migration-and-asylum_en
- European Parliament. 2023a. Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs. Results of (roll-call) Votes. 28 March. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/267562/Vote%20results_28%20March.pdf
- European Parliament. 2023b. Results of Roll-call Votes. 20 April. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/PV-9-2023-04-20-RCV_EN.pdf
- European Parliament. 2023c. Verbatim Report of Proceedings. 20 April. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-04-20_EN.html
- European Parliament. 2024a. Results of Roll-call Votes. 14 February. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/280877/Vote%20results_14%20February%202024.pdf
- European Parliament. 2024b. Results of Roll-call Votes. 10 April. PV-9-2024-04-10-RCV_EN.pdf (europa.eu)
- European Parliament. 2024c. Verbatim Report of Proceedings. 10 April. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2024-04-10-ITM-017_EN.html

- European People's Party. 2024. EPP Manifesto 2024. <https://www.epp.eu/papers/epp-manifesto-2024>
- Gaweda, Barbara, Siddi, Marco, and Miller, Cherry. 2023. What's in a Name? Gender Equality and the European Conservatives and Reformists Group in the European Parliament. *Party Politics* 29 (5): 829-39.
- Havlík, Vratislav, and Hlousek, Vít. 2024. Where Have All the 'Exiters' Gone? Contextualising the Concept of Hard Euroscepticism. *Journal of Common Market Studies* 1-18. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13602>
- Hix, Simon, Frantescu, Doru, and Hagemann, Sara. 2022. VoteWatch Europe European Parliament and EU Council Voting Data. September. <https://simonhix.com/projects/>
- Hix, Simon, Noury, Abdul G., and Roland, Gérard. 2007. *Democratic Politics in the European Parliament*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hooghe, Liesbet, Laffan, Brigid, and Marks, Gary. 2018. Introduction to Theory Meets Crisis Collection. *Journal of European Public Policy* 25 (1): 1-6.
- Jolly, Seth, et al. 2022. Chapel Hill Expert Survey Trend File, 1999-2019. *Electoral Studies* 75.
- Kaiser, Wolfram, and Mittag, Jürgen. 2023. Seventy Years of Transnational Political Groups in the European Parliament: Origins and Trajectories. Briefing. European Parliamentary Research Service. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/757568/EPRS_BRI\(2023\)757568_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/757568/EPRS_BRI(2023)757568_EN.pdf)
- Legutko, Ryszard, and Procaccini, Nicola. 2023. Who We Are? Accessed 12 January 2024. <https://ecrgroup.eu/ecr>
- Leruth, Benjamin. 2016. Is 'Eurorealism' the New 'Euroscepticism'? Modern Conservatism, the European Conservatives and Reformists and European Integration. In John FitzGibbon, Benjamin Leruth and Nicholas Startin, eds. *Euroscepticism as a Transnational and Pan-European Phenomenon*: 60-76. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Leruth, Benjamin. 2017. Transnational and Pan-European Euroscepticism: The Case of the European Conservatives and Reformists. In Benjamin Leruth, Nicholas Startin and Simon Usherwood, eds. *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*: 384-96. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Maggi, Alberto. 2024. 'Passo avanti, ma insufficiente'. Migranti, su Affari la linea di Meloni ['Step forward, but insufficient'. Migrants, Meloni's stance on Affari]. *Affari Italiani*, 11 April. <https://www.affaritaliani.it/politica/passo-avanti-ma-insufficiente-migranti-su-affari-la-linea-di-meloni-911595.html>
- McDonnell, Duncan, and Werner, Annika. 2018. Respectable Radicals: Why some Radical Right Parties in the European Parliament Forsake Policy Congruence. *Journal of European Public Policy* 25 (5): 747-63.
- McDonnell, Duncan, and Werner, Annika. 2020. *International Populism: The Radical Right in the European Parliament*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Meloni, Giorgia. 2023. Meloni: "Il Patto Europeo sui migranti migliora il precedente, ma le partenze vanno bloccate" [Meloni: "The European Pact on migrants improves on the previous one, but departures must be stopped"]. *Vista Agenzia Televisiva Nazionale*, 5 October. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7Nww9-CD1M>
- National Electoral Commission. 2023. Results of Voting in the Nationwide Referendum 2023. <https://referendum.gov.pl/referendum2023/en/wyniki/pl>
- Procaccini, Nicola. 2023. EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum Is only a First Initial Step in a Long Journey. ECR website, 12 July. https://ecrgroup.eu/article/eus_new_pact_on_migration_and_asylum_is_only_a_first_initial_step_in_a_long
- Sartori, Giovanni. 2005. [1976]. *Parties and Party Systems. A Framework for Analysis*. Colchester: ECPR Press.
- Sitter, Nick. 2001. The Politics of Opposition and European Integration in Scandinavia: Is Euroscepticism a Government-opposition Dynamic? *West European Politics* 24 (4): 22-39.
- Smith, Gordon. 1989. Core Persistence: Change and the People's Party. *West European Politics* 12 (4): 157-68.
- Steven, Martin. 2016. 'Euro-Realism' in the 2014 European Parliament Elections: The European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and the Democratic Deficit. *Representation* 52 (1): 1-12

- Steven, Martin. 2020. *The European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR). Politics, Parties and Policies*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Steven, Martin. 2023. The Right and Religion in European Union Politics: From ‘Confessionalism’ to ‘Conservatism’. *Religion, State and Society* 51 (4-5): 331-44.
- Steven, Martin, and Szczerbiak, Aleks. 2023. Conservatism and ‘Eurorealism’ in the European Parliament: The European Conservatives and Reformists under the Leadership of Poland’s Law and Justice. *European Politics and Society* 24 (5): 585-602.
- Szczerbiak, Aleks, and Taggart, Paul. 2000. Opposing Europe: Party Systems and Opposition to the Union, the Euro and Europeanisation. *SEI Working Paper* No. 36. Opposing Europe Research Network Working Paper No. 1. Sussex European Institute. <https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=sei-working-paper-no-36.pdf&site=266>
- Szczerbiak, Aleks, and Taggart, Paul. 2024. Euroscepticism and Anti-establishment Parties in Europe. *Journal of European Integration*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2024.2329634>