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# LINKING DOMESTIC AND EUROPEAN POLITICS

FINNISH MEPS AND THE VOTES THAT SHAPED THE  
7<sup>TH</sup> EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

It has long been acknowledged that the members of the European Parliament (MEPs) act in a complex political setting. They represent national parties and are elected nationally, and their campaigns are often built around domestic issues. However, in the European Parliament (EP), the MEPs mostly work within transnational party groups, which form the main channel through which they can influence European decision-making. Although most national parties have affiliated themselves to party groups with similar ideological leanings, the views of the MEPs' national parties and their European party groups do not always overlap. In such situations, the MEPs are forced to choose between their different 'principals'. This raises several questions: Who do the MEPs ultimately represent? To what degree do domestic political factors and national concerns condition their behaviour in the EP? And to what extent do the political cleavages in the EP reflect the conflict lines in national politics?

These questions are not only of fundamental importance for understanding how the EP and the political system of the European Union work as a whole. They are also highly relevant in view of the EU's democratic legitimacy. As the only directly elected institution of the EU, the European Parliament holds a special position within the Union's institutional set-up. It has the task of representing the EU's citizens and connecting them to the Union's decision-making process. But how do the MEPs go about this task? By maintaining close contacts with their national party and their constituency, or by loyally serving their European party group?

Finally, questions concerning the nexus between the national and the European political sphere are highly topical. The eurozone crisis has greatly increased the salience of EU issues in domestic politics, and European topics have recently been at the centre of several national elections. The link between domestic and European politics has thus become stronger and, above all, more visible than ever before in the history of the EU. How does this development affect the work of the MEPs? Does the growing relevance of EU issues in the national political arena mean that decision-making in the EP is more thoroughly scrutinised by the national media and the electorate? Do the national parties have a greater interest in controlling their representatives in Brussels? Are the incentives for the MEPs to take domestic political concerns and the views of their national parties into account stronger than before?

The main goal of this FIIA working paper is to analyse the interplay between domestic and European politics in the framework of the 7th European Parliament (2009–2014), focusing on the 13 Finnish members of the EP.<sup>1</sup> Finland provides an interesting subject for a case study, as the eurozone crisis has led to a marked politicisation of EU issues in the country's domestic political arena. Whether this has had any impact on the behaviour of the Finnish MEPs has thus far not been studied. The working paper proceeds on the basis of the questions posed above. It does not, however, intend to provide exhaustive answers to them, as that would require a study of much greater depth and scope. Instead, the paper should be understood primarily as an attempt to highlight some central characteristics of the Finnish case and thereby create a foundation for subsequent research to build on.

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<sup>1</sup> The 13 Finnish seats in the 7th EP have been occupied by a total of 17 different MEPs, as some of the parties have switched MEPs during the legislative term.

The working paper forms part of a larger European project, conducted jointly by VoteWatch Europe, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, and major think tanks and research institutes from 20 EU member states. The overall aim of the European-level project is to uncover the underlying European and national dynamics behind some of the key votes taken by the 7th European Parliament and thereby raise awareness of the MEPs' role in European decision-making. This working paper contributes towards that end by analysing 17 relevant EP votes from the Finnish perspective.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section will briefly outline the main findings of the existing body of research on the voting behaviour of MEPs. The emphasis will be on the factors that explain how the MEPs navigate between the national and the European political sphere. The third section will turn to the Finnish case. It portrays recent developments in Finland's political landscape and provides the backdrop against which the voting behaviour of the Finnish MEPs can be explored. The fourth part is dedicated to a detailed analysis of the voting decisions of the Finnish MEPs in 17 key votes that have taken place during the 7th EP's term. The fourth part also includes a few methodological remarks. The fifth and final section summarises the key findings of the paper and briefly discusses some areas that would benefit from further research.

## 2. VOTING IN THE EP: A BALANCING ACT

The gradual empowerment of the European Parliament over the last two decades has resulted in a growing scholarly interest in the EP. There is now an extensive body of academic literature dealing with different aspects of political life in the Parliament. One of the most viable strands of EP research, and the most relevant for the purposes of this paper, is the one that focuses on the voting behaviour of MEPs. The main goal of this line of research is to discover the factors that determine how MEPs vote. To begin with, the main arguments put forward in the literature on MEP voting will be presented below.

### 2.1 At the intersection of domestic and European politics

The starting point for most studies on the voting behaviour of MEPs is the difficult position that the MEPs occupy between the national and the European political arenas.<sup>2</sup> The European Parliament is a supranational organ, but EP elections are organised along national lines. Candidates for the EP are put forward by national parties and run for seats that have been specifically allocated to the member state in question. Even the electoral campaigns tend to revolve around domestic issues.<sup>3</sup> As a result, the MEPs, once elected, are primarily seen as representatives of their national party as well as of the member state from which they were elected.

However, the electoral link between the MEPs on the one hand, and their national parties and member states on the other, is balanced by the fact that within the EP the overwhelming majority of MEPs are organised in transnational party groups. It is practically impossible for MEPs to exert an influence in the Parliament without the backing of one of the party groups, as these groups control the allocation of leadership positions, committee assignments and speaking time. The MEPs are thus simultaneously dependent on both their national parties and their European party groups: on their national parties for electoral support – and eventual re-election – and on their party groups for resources that are necessary to attain influence within the EP. In other words, the MEPs have two different ‘principals’ they have to answer to (or three if one defines the MEPs’ voters as a principal of their own).<sup>4</sup>

This situation is not unique to the EP: the phenomenon emerges in other legislative organs as well. However, the related challenges are particularly pronounced in the framework of the EP. Having two ‘principals’ is largely unproblematic as long as the two have overlapping interests. However, this is not always the case. While national parties generally seek a European ‘parent party’ that would have similar political preferences,

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2 See e.g. Simon Hix, ‘Parliamentary behaviour with two principals: preferences, parties and voting in the European Parliament’, *American Journal of Political Science* (2002) 46:3, pp. 688–698; Thorsten Faas, ‘Why do MEPs defect? An analysis of party group cohesion in the 5th European Parliament’, *European Integration online Papers* (EIoP) (2002) 6:2; Anne Rasmussen, ‘Party soldiers in a non-partisan community? Party linkage in the European Parliament’, *Journal of European Public Policy* (2008) 15:8, pp. 1164–1183; René Lindstädt, Jonathan B. Slapin and Ryan J. Vander Wielen, ‘Balancing competing demands: position-taking and election proximity in the European Parliament’, *Legislative Studies Quarterly* (2011) 36:1, pp. 37–70.

3 For this reason, EP elections are often called ‘second-order national elections’. See Karlheinz Reif and Hermann Schmitt, ‘Nine second-order national elections: a conceptual framework for the analysis of European election results’, *European Journal of Political Research* (1980) 8:1, pp. 3–44.

4 See Hix 2002, p. 688.

there is no guarantee that the views of the two would be identical across the wide range of topics dealt with by the EP. The leadership of a national party, examining an EU issue from the perspective of domestic politics, might view it quite differently from the party group leaders operating in Brussels and Strasbourg. Consequently, the MEPs sometimes face contradictory pressures from their party group and their national party. Who do they obey in such a situation?

The general finding of studies on MEPs' voting behaviour is that in the majority of recorded voting situations,<sup>5</sup> the MEPs vote in line with their European party group. Individual party groups are not equally cohesive, but the general rate of party group cohesion is, nevertheless, surprisingly high.<sup>6</sup> Voting behaviour in the EP is thus mainly based on ideological party competition between the party groups. If MEPs were grouped together on the basis of nationality, the cohesion of the resulting groups would generally be far below the level achieved by the existing party groups.<sup>7</sup>

Although nationality as such is not found to have a very significant impact on MEPs' voting behaviour, studies suggest that national parties are influential players in the EP. First of all, MEPs from the same national party, forming a national party delegation, generally vote together. More importantly, national parties have the means to turn their MEPs against the party group leadership if necessary. The potential power of the national parties over their MEPs derives from the fact that the primary goal of most MEPs is to be re-elected as an MEP or to return to domestic politics.<sup>8</sup> As national parties regulate the selection of candidates for the EP and also largely determine the future trajectory of the MEPs' careers on the domestic stage, the MEPs have a strong interest in demonstrating their loyalty to the national party and its leadership.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, survey results suggest that MEPs generally identify more closely with their national parties than with their party groups, even though the differences are not very significant.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, facing conflicting demands, the MEPs have stronger incentives to follow the national party line than to bow to pressure from their party group.

## 2.2 Determinants of MEP voting

What, then, determines when MEPs vote in line with their party group and when not? On the basis of the arguments outlined above, it has been concluded that the distance

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5 Recorded votes, so-called roll-call votes, represent roughly one-third of all votes cast by the EP. Recorded votes are all cast electronically. The rest of the EP votes are non-recorded ones. They are cast either by a show of hands or in some cases electronically, but are not registered. In roll-call votes, MEPs can vote either 'for', 'against', or 'abstain'. Sometimes MEPs sign the register of attendance, but do not take part in some or any of the votes. There may be various reasons for non-voting. The absence of MEPs from the votes is being documented as well.

6 Simon Hix, Abdul G. Noury and Gérard Roland, *Democratic Politics in the European Parliament*, (2007) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Faas 2002.

7 Faas 2002, p. 12.

8 Building on the work of Hix, Raunio and Scully, Faas argues that the three main goals of MEPs in order of importance are: 1) re-election, 2) gaining an influential office, 3) being able to shape policy. Re-election is the primary goal – without being re-elected, an MEP can neither hold an influential office nor shape policy. Office comes second, as it is an important precondition for being able to shape policy. See Faas 2002.

9 Hix 2002; Faas 2002.

10 Rasmussen 2008.

between the ideal policy position of an MEP's national party and the ideal policy position of his/her European party group is crucial. The greater the distance, the more likely it is that an MEP will follow his/her national party and defect from the European party group line.<sup>11</sup> Policy distance, however, is not the only important factor in the equation. Although national parties have the power to make their MEPs rebel against the party group, such a move can be detrimental as it potentially hurts the reputation of the defecting MEPs and the national party delegation within the party group. While MEPs are generally allowed to vote differently from their party group if they notify the group in advance,<sup>12</sup> most party groups strive for cohesion, which means that such behaviour is not desirable. MEPs are thus unlikely to incite a rebellion every time a difference of opinion between party and party group arises. Instead, they will pick their battles carefully, concentrating on issues of particular salience to their national parties.<sup>13</sup> The issues that the national parties see as central depend on the domestic political context.

Apart from the salience of the issue in question, studies suggest that the electoral cycle and the individual parties' position in domestic politics (i.e. whether they are in government or in opposition) as well as the nature of the legislative procedure also affect the extent to which national parties seek to control or consult their MEPs. National parties pay closest attention to their MEPs right before and after EP elections: before the elections in order to hinder the MEPs from deviating from the party line and thus hurting the party electorally, and after the elections in order to monitor the behaviour of possible new MEPs.<sup>14</sup> As for the domestic government-opposition divide, existing research argues that MEPs whose parties are represented in the national government are more likely to face political pressure from their home parties than MEPs from opposition parties. This has to do with the EU's institutional architecture. Governing parties are represented in the Council of Ministers, which is deeply involved in drafting EU legislation. Once the European Commission and the Council have reached an agreement on a legislative proposal, the governments have little interest in seeing the MEPs vote down or substantially amend the proposal. There is thus a strong incentive for the governing parties to ensure that 'their' MEPs follow the government's line.<sup>15</sup> This effect seems to be even stronger if the issue in question has been, or is, subject to domestic parliamentary scrutiny.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, national parties can be expected to observe their MEPs most closely when the EP has the most influence over the matter at hand. Consequently, from the point of view of national parties, issues dealt with within the framework of the consultation procedure should be the least interesting, as the EP's opinion in such cases is not binding. On the other hand, when an issue is subject to the ordinary legislative procedure or the consent

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11 Hix 2002.

12 Tapio Raunio, 'Losing independence or finally gaining recognition? Contacts between MEPs and national parties', *Party Politics* (2000) 6:2, pp. 211–223.

13 Heike Klüver and Jae-Jae Spoon 'Bringing salience back in: Explaining voting defection in the European Parliament', *Party Politics* (2013), published online 7 June.

14 Lindstädt et al 2011.

15 Simon Hix, Abdul G. Noury and Gérard Roland, 'Dimensions of Politics in the European Parliament', *American Journal of Political Science* (2006) 50:2, 494–520.

16 See Daniel Finke, 'Domestic-level parliamentary scrutiny and voting behaviour in the European Parliament', *Government and Opposition* (2013), published online on 11 September 2013.



procedure, national parties are likely to pay more attention to their MEPs' actions.<sup>17</sup> The power of national parties to control their MEPs varies according to the electoral rules applied in the different member states. The more a national party can influence the possibilities of its MEPs to be re-elected, for example through closed candidate lists or centralised candidate selection procedures, the more likely the MEPs are to take the views of their national party into account.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, the personal career plans of the individual MEPs also seem to count. Young MEPs are most likely to seek a move back to the domestic arena at some point in their career, which makes them more prone to follow their national party line.<sup>19</sup>

All in all, there is very little empirical research on the actual form(s) and degree of interaction between national parties and MEPs. A pioneering study on the subject suggests that contacts have both intensified and institutionalised as the EP has become more powerful. However, closer interaction is generally limited to situations where issues of national importance are at stake, and even then only a minority of national parties tries to control their MEPs by resorting to explicit voting instructions.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, such voting instructions might not be necessary anyway, as the MEPs generally have a strong 'attitudinal' link to their party.<sup>21</sup>

To summarise, the existing research suggests that in many ways the European Parliament functions similarly to the legislative organs at the national level, with cohesive parties that compete with one another on an ideological basis. However, national parties have the means to break this cohesion in questions that they consider to be salient from the domestic point of view. This is the way that national politics enter the European arena. As far as the nature of the party competition within the EP is concerned, two dimensions have been identified as crucial: the traditional left-right dimension, which generally structures national party politics as well, and, to a lesser extent, a pro-integration-anti-integration dimension, which is related to the speed and scope of European integration and the power and resources of the EU institutions.<sup>22</sup> However, as there is no government-opposition divide within the EP, coalitions and cleavages are bound to change constantly. As a result, parties that sit in the same coalition government in the national capital can easily find themselves on opposite sides of a tug of war in the EP.

This working paper does not attempt to systematically test or empirically apply the findings of previous research on MEP voting to the Finnish case. These findings will, nevertheless, guide the analysis of the 17 EP votes that will be undertaken in section 4. Before turning to the actual voting analysis, it is, however, important to look more closely at the Finnish political landscape, as an analysis of the interaction between national and European politics requires a thorough understanding of the domestic political context.

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17 See Simon Hix, Tapio Raunio, Roger Scully, *An Institutional Theory of Behaviour in the European Parliament*, EPRG Working Paper No. 1 (1999), pp. 18–19.

18 Simon Hix, 'Electoral institutions and legislative behavior: Explaining voting defection in the European Parliament', *American Journal of Political Science* (2004) 50:2, pp. 494–520.

19 Stephen A. Meserve, Daniel Pemstein, William T. Bernhard, 'Political ambition and legislative behaviour in the European Parliament', *Journal of Politics* 71:3, pp. 1015–1024.

20 Raunio 2000.

21 Rasmussen 2008.

22 Hix 2002; Hix et al 2006.

### 3. FINNISH POLITICS AND THE EU: CONSENSUS AND CONFRONTATION

Finland forms a very interesting case for exploring the links between national and European politics. The EP's 7th term coincided with the outbreak of the eurozone crisis, which has increased the salience and visibility of EU issues in domestic politics all over Europe. This has been particularly evident in Finland. After a decade and a half of relatively little domestic contestation over EU issues and a general disinterest in European affairs on the part of the electorate, the EU dimension forcefully entered the domestic political arena in the 2011 parliamentary election, as the Eurosceptic Finns Party won 19.1 per cent of the vote and established itself as a major player in Finland's party-political landscape. The Finnish case is described in more detail below.

#### 3.1 Non-politicised cleavage

To begin with, the divisiveness of integration matters is not a new phenomenon in the Finnish context. In the non-binding referendum on Finnish EU membership, held before Finland joined the Union in 1995, the 'yes' camp won by a rather narrow margin.<sup>23</sup> A split was also visible among and within the Finnish parties. Membership was strongly supported by the centre-right National Coalition Party and the centre-left Social Democratic Party as well as by the smaller Swedish People's Party. By contrast, the Centre Party, which has a strong rural voter base, struggled to define a unitary position. The Green League and the Left Alliance were also initially divided on integration matters. Finally, two Finnish parties positioned themselves against EU membership: the Finnish Christian League and the Finnish Rural Party.<sup>24</sup>

Despite the existence of an EU-critical minority within Finnish society, the membership question did not lead to significant changes within Finland's party-political landscape. Apart from two short-lived and unsuccessful anti-EU movements, no EU-critical party was formed and there were no notable migratory movements between the parties because of the issue. Instead, conflicts over European integration were mostly dealt with by the parties internally. EU-critical or Eurosceptic positions have generally been represented by individual party members, with some Finnish parties deliberately choosing individual EU-critical candidates for their lists in order to attract EU-critical voters. More often, however, Finnish parties have preferred to confine EU issues to the margins of the electoral debates.<sup>25</sup>

Until recently, the pro-integration-anti-integration cleavage has thus not been reflected in the domestic party competition, which has revolved mainly around the traditional left-right dimension. Correspondingly, to the extent to which Finnish parties have incorporated EU issues into their profile, they have mostly done so by choosing topics that are close to their traditional position on the left-right axis. The centre-left parties (the Social Democrats, the Green League and the Left Alliance) have highlighted social and environmental issues, the Centre Party agricultural and regional policies, and the National Coalition Party questions related to the single market and the Economic

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23 56.9 per cent of the electorate voted in favour of membership and 43.1 per cent voted against.

24 Tapio Raunio and Teija Tiilikainen, *Finland in the European Union* (2003), London: Frank Cass.

25 Raunio and Tiilikainen 2003, pp. 55-57.

and Monetary Union (EMU).<sup>26</sup> While there have been, and are, differences between the Finnish parties as to their views on the preferred speed and scope of European integration, a defining characteristic of Finnish EU policy has been the existence of a broad cross-party consensus favouring a constructive approach towards the EU.<sup>27</sup>

### 3.2 Parliamentary election of 2011 as a watershed

Against this background, the 2011 parliamentary election represented a significant break. The election took place at a time when the EU and the member states were formulating their response towards the unfolding eurozone crisis. As a result, EU issues turned into a major election campaign theme for the first time in Finland's history. The party most actively pushing European issues to the centre of the electoral debate was the Eurosceptic Finns Party.<sup>28</sup>

Formed as a successor to the populist Finnish Rural Party, the Finns Party's biggest success prior to 2011 came in the 2009 EP elections when it won a surprising 9.8 per cent of the vote. In the 2009 EP election campaign, the Finns Party presented itself as an alternative to the pro-European mainstream parties and their alleged 'one-truth policies'.<sup>29</sup> This strategy was also successfully employed by the party in the 2011 campaign. However, the main focus of the latter was on the planned bailout package for Portugal, which the party fiercely opposed, as well as on the EU's and the Finnish government's management of the eurozone crisis in general. The Finns Party thus managed to push the latent pro-integration-anti-integration cleavage to the forefront of the national electoral contest.

The 2011 election was followed by very complicated coalition negotiations. The Finns Party's unconditional opposition to the Portuguese rescue package and any future bailouts meant that the party was unable to find common ground with the other major parties. In the end, the two biggest parties, the National Coalition Party and the Social Democrats, opted for a broad coalition with four smaller parties from across the political spectrum.<sup>30</sup> Despite programmatic differences, the six government parties agreed in principle on the need to provide financial assistance to ailing eurozone economies.

Meanwhile, the Centre Party, which suffered a major defeat at the ballot box, was left in opposition together with the Finns Party. Although the Centre Party had led the previous government and defended the rescue packages for Greece, Ireland and Portugal, it quickly adjusted its views and moved towards the Finns Party's position. Together, the two parties voted against the second rescue package for Greece as well as against the

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26 Raunio and Tiilikainen 2003, pp. 50–54.

27 See Teija Tiilikainen, 'Finland: from model pupil to troublemaker?', in Jan Zielonka and Nicholas Walton (eds.), *The new political geography of Europe* (2012), London: European Council on Foreign Relations, pp. 77–82.

28 At that time, the Finns Party was still officially known as the True Finns.

29 Tapio Raunio, European Parliament Election Briefing No 26: *The European Parliament Election in Finland* (2009), European Parties Elections and Referendums Network, p. 5.

30 Apart from the centre-right National Coalition Party and the centre-left Social Democratic Party (SDP), the coalition consists of the left-wing Left Alliance, the Green League, the liberal Swedish People's Party (RKP) and the Conservative Christian Democrats (KD).

bailout for Cyprus. They also filed a joint interpellation concerning the Finnish liabilities in the eurozone crisis. After the election, the main fault line between the government and the opposition thus ran along the pro-integration-anti-integration cleavage, with the management of the euro crisis forming the major bone of contention.

The divide has, however, not been a clear-cut one. Although the Finns Party was unable to directly shape the Finnish government's EU policy, the party's electoral success and the cautious attitudes of the Finnish voters towards the EU's rescue policies nevertheless compelled the government to adopt a tougher stance on the crisis countries. Consequently, the government rejected any form of debt mutualisation and announced that it would agree to rescue loans in the framework of the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) only in exchange for collateral on the part of the debtor states. The collateral demand was later dropped after the establishment of the permanent European Stability Mechanism (ESM). At the same time, the Centre Party and the Finns Party have gradually softened their EU criticism in the course of the legislature. Under its new leadership, the Centre Party has clearly expressed its continuing commitment to the EU and the euro, whereas the Finns Party has actively sought to present itself as a potential governing party, adopting more cautious rhetoric.<sup>31</sup>

In view of the rapid politicisation of EU issues in Finland and the subsequent establishment of a government-opposition divide over the management of the eurozone crisis, one would expect EU affairs to attract more attention in the Finnish media. This should also apply to issues dealt with by the European Parliament, particularly when these are related to European economic governance and the EU's rescue policies. Furthermore, the domestic salience of EU issues could provide a stronger incentive for the Finnish parties to control their MEPs and, conversely, for Finnish MEPs to pay attention to the domestic debate. Whether such trends can be identified in the 17 EP votes analysed in this working paper is one of the principal questions addressed in the next section. However, before that, a few words are in order on the Finnish delegations in the EP, as well as their affiliation with European party groups.

### 3.3 Finnish parties and the European Parliament

As explained above, the 2009 EP elections, which defined the political composition of the current EP, had already taken place before the recent shake-up in Finland's political landscape. Although the Finns Party gained 9.8 per cent of the vote in the EP election, it had not yet established itself as one of the major forces in the Finnish party system. The National Coalition won the biggest share of the votes, 23.2 per cent, in the 2009 election, gaining three of the 13 Finnish seats in the EP. The Centre Party came in second with 19 per cent of the votes, thus gaining three seats as well. The Social Democratic Party and the Green League secured two seats each. The Finns Party, the Swedish People's Party and the Christian Democrats all gained one seat, the Christian Democrats mainly due to a successful electoral alliance with the Finns Party. Finally, the Left Alliance lost its only seat, leaving the Social Democrats and the Green League MEPs as the only representatives of the Finnish centre-left in the EP.

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31 Juha Jokela, *Despite the rise of the True Finns in 2011, Finland continues to be a pro-European member state* (2013), EUROPP – European Politics and Policy blog, London School of Economics, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2013/09/24/despite-the-rise-of-the-true-finns-in-2011-finland-continues-to-be-a-pro-european-eu-member-state/>.

As for the party group affiliations of the Finnish parties, the moderately Conservative National Coalition Party has found its natural home in the European People's Party (EPP). The other Finnish party represented in the EPP group is the Christian Democrats. However, the party only has the status of an associate member. As its electoral alliance with the Finns Party in the 2009 EP election demonstrates, the Christian Democrats – and above all the party's sole MEP Sari Essayah – have a rather cautious attitude towards European integration, which often sets them apart from the EPP mainstream in questions concerning the EU's powers.

The Centre Party, for its part, is affiliated with the Alliance for Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE). However, the party's relationship with the group is a difficult one. The ALDE mainstream is very favourable towards far-reaching integration and there are strong federalist voices within the group. The Centre Party, on the other hand, remains internally divided over integration matters and at least one of the party's MEPs has traditionally represented the EU-critical or Eurosceptic elements within the party. In the 7th EP, two of the party's three MEPs, Hannu Takkula and Riikka Pakarinen, have a more critical attitude towards the EU than the party's national leadership.<sup>32</sup> The Swedish People's Party also belongs to the ALDE group. As a generally pro-European party with a liberal outlook, it sits more comfortably with the ALDE group than the Centre Party. Turning to the centre-left parties, the Social Democratic Party forms part of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D). The Green League, on the other hand, belongs to the Greens-European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA). Finally, the Finns Party is affiliated with the Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD) group together with other EU-critical and Eurosceptic parties such as the Danish People's Party, Italy's Northern League and the UK Independence Party.<sup>33</sup>

All in all, the Finnish national party delegations in the EP are very small, with three of them consisting of just one member. Even the two biggest Finnish delegations – with three MEPs each – have very limited voting power. This might reduce the incentives of the national parties' leaderships to control their MEPs, as they know that their impact on the final voting result is rather small in any case.<sup>34</sup> Another notable characteristic of the Finnish case is Finland's electoral system. Finland is one of the member states where voters choose directly between individual candidates that parties have put forward. This reduces the possibilities of the Finnish parties to control the re-election of their MEPs: while the parties have complete control over the selection of the candidates, they cannot sanction less desirable candidates by placing them at the bottom of the party list. Both of these factors potentially play a role in determining the voting behaviour of the Finnish MEPs.

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32 Raunio 2009, pp. 6–7

33 The complete list of Finnish MEPs at the beginning of the 7th EP's term reads as follows: Ville Itälä, Eija-Riitta Korhola, Sirpa Pietikäinen (National Coalition Party/EPP), Anneli Jäätteenmäki, Riikka Pakarinen, Hannu Takkula (Centre Party/ALDE), Liisa Jaakonsaari, Mitro Repo (Social Democratic Party/S&D), Satu Hassi, Heidi Hautala (Green League/Greens/EFA), Timo Soini (Finns Party/EFD), Carl Haglund (Swedish People's Party/ALDE) and Sari Essayah (Christian Democrats/EPP). Some personnel changes took place within the Finnish delegations during the 7th EP term. Most notably, the Green League's Heidi Hautala and the Swedish People's Party's Carl Haglund left the EP after they were called to join the Finnish government and were replaced by Tarja Cronberg and Nils Torvalds, respectively. Timo Soini, the chairman of the Finns Party, also returned to domestic politics after the 2011 parliamentary election and his seat was taken over by Sampo Terho. Finally, Ville Itälä of the National Coalition Party left his EP seat after being appointed to the European Court of Auditors in 2012 and was replaced by Petri Sarvamaa.

34 Roger Scully, *National Parties and European Parliamentarians: Developing and Testing an Institutional Theory*, EPRG Working Paper No. 6. (2001). Here pp. 17–18.

## 4. FINNISH MEPS AND 17 KEY EP VOTES IN 2009–2014

This section looks at the voting behaviour of Finnish MEPs in a total of 17 EP votes. Fifteen of these votes were chosen together with VoteWatch Europe, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, and the project partners from the individual EU member states. These 15 votes are considered to be of particular importance from the European perspective. The way in which the votes have been dealt with in Finland provides insights into crucial aspects of the interplay between Finnish and European politics. At the same time, choosing a common set of votes to be analysed by all the project partners will allow cross-country comparisons once all partners have conducted their individual analyses. Apart from the 15 votes that are viewed as relevant from the European perspective, two votes of special national relevance complement the analysis. Whereas these two votes were deemed somewhat less important in most member states, they were extensively covered by the Finnish media and heatedly debated in Finland. As such, they add an interesting dimension to the analysis.

The main objective of the analysis is to reflect on the voting behaviour of the Finnish MEPs in the light of both the general findings of studies dealing with MEP voting and the recent developments in Finnish politics. What kinds of issues have received the most attention in Finland? Can voting patterns be explained on the basis of the findings of previous studies on MEP voting and/or the domestic political context? To what extent do voting patterns reflect domestic and European cleavages?

Seventeen votes represent a very minor proportion of the thousands of votes taken during the 7th EP's five-year term. Consequently, the scale of this study does not lend itself to testing hypotheses or making generalizable statements. Furthermore, all seventeen votes analysed here are recorded (roll-call) votes, which might differ in nature from other, non-recorded voting situations, thus leading to methodological bias when used for conducting quantitative studies. However, this analysis, as suggested in the introduction, should be first and foremost understood as an explorative study. Concentrating on 17 votes makes it possible to provide more detailed information about the individual votes, thus making it easier to understand the European and national dynamics guiding the voting process.

The material used for this analysis has been collected by VoteWatch Europe, which maintains up-to-date statistics of all recorded EP votes.<sup>35</sup> The list of the 17 votes analysed here includes the following:<sup>36</sup>

1. *Should the minimum length of the maternity leave on full pay be extended from 14 to 20 weeks throughout the EU?* (October 2010 EP plenary session)
2. *Should nuclear energy be phased out in the EU?* (November 2011 EP plenary session)

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35 All data are accessible on VoteWatch Europe's homepage: <http://www.votewatch.eu/>.

36 The titles of the votes are presented in a simplified form. The titles of the votes 1–15 were chosen by VoteWatch Europe and Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, and the titles of the votes 16 and 17 were chosen by the author of this working paper.

3. *Should the Eurozone Member States pool their public debts by creating Eurobonds?* (February 2012 plenary session)
4. *Should there be a new tax (of between 0.01 and 0.05) on all financial transactions in the EU?* (May 2012 EP plenary session)
5. *Should the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) be adopted?* (July 2012 EP plenary session)
6. *Should the EU budget be increased and be made more flexible?* (November 2013 EP plenary session)
7. *Should the agricultural subsidies remain a budgetary priority for the EU?* (November 2013 EP plenary vote)
8. *Should the EU increase the costs of economic activities that pollute?* (July 2013 EP plenary session)
9. *Should the European Commission strengthen the supervision of budgets and economic policies of the Eurozone Member States?* (March 2013 EP plenary session)
10. *Should the EU create a banking union?* (September 2013 EP plenary session)
11. *Should the EU strengthen and extend its internal market for services?* (September 2013 EP plenary session)
12. *Should the EU have its own diplomatic service?* (July 2010 EP plenary session)
13. *Should the EU have a genuine system of own resources for its budget (instead of relying mainly on contributions from Member States)?* (March 2013 EP plenary session)
14. *Should the EU create a single market with the United States?* (May 2013 EP plenary session)
15. *Should the EU allow temporary reintroduction of border controls at internal borders?* (June 2013 EP plenary session)

Additional votes:

16. *Should the EU limit the sulphur content of marine fuels?* (September 2012 EP plenary session)
17. *Should the EU limit the working time of road transport personnel?* (June 2010 EP plenary session)

On the basis of the salience of these votes in Finland and the way the issues were dealt with in the domestic context, the votes can be divided into three categories: 1) issues of national importance, 2) issues with links to domestic politics, and 3) European issues. The first category covers those votes that were considered most salient to Finland and

that were visibly covered by the national media. These votes were often also framed in national terms, meaning that Finland's interests were seen to be directly at stake. Issues with links to domestic politics were issues that were discussed at some level in the domestic setting. However, these issues – and particularly the related EP votes – were less visible in the national media. Finally, European issues were questions that were deemed less important or were largely seen as matters to be dealt with at the European level. As such, they received very limited coverage in the Finnish media.

#### 4.1 Issues of national importance

In view of the heated domestic debates over the EU's management of the eurozone crisis, it is interesting to note that none of the EP votes that attracted most media attention in Finland during the 7th EP's term dealt with these issues. Instead, the single most prominent vote in Finland was the vote on a directive limiting the sulphur content of marine fuels (16). The directive demands that the maximum level of sulphur content in shipping fuels be reduced from 3.5 per cent to 0.5 per cent in all EU waters by 2020. However, the limits are stricter within the so-called sulphur emission control areas, including the Baltic Sea, the North Sea and the English Channel. In these areas, the sulphur limit should be reduced from 1 per cent to 0.1 per cent by 2015. Although the directive is a piece of EU legislation, the restrictions were originally agreed within the International Maritime Organization.

In Finland, the whole issue was framed in national terms. Representatives of Finnish industry argued that the adoption of the directive would significantly increase the cost of shipping, thus reducing the competitiveness of the Finnish export sector, which is highly dependent on maritime transport. The fact that the limits imposed on Baltic Sea shipping were stricter than those applied in the Mediterranean also caused controversy.<sup>37</sup> The importance of the vote at the national level – and the gap between the views of the Finns and their European party groups – was clearly reflected in the voting behaviour of the Finnish MEPs. While the directive was passed in the EP by an overwhelming majority of 606 votes to 55 (with 13 abstentions), only four Finnish MEPs voted in favour.<sup>38</sup> A total of eight Finnish MEPs from across the political spectrum voted against the directive. Notably, seven of the eight MEPs defected from their European party groups to do so.<sup>39</sup> The group of defectors included all three Centre Party MEPs, Eija-Riitta Korhola and Petri Sarvamaa of the National Coalition Party, Mitro Repo of the Social Democratic Party

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37 Kimmo Pentikäinen, 'Rikin katkua', *Helsingin Sanomat* (15 September, 2012); Olli Pohjanpalo, 'Suomi joutui tyytymään rikkidirektiiviin', *Helsingin Sanomat* (30 May, 2012).

38 VoteWatch Europe: Sulphur content of marine fuels, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/sulphur-content-of-marine-fuels-draft-legislative-resolution-vote-legislative-resolution-ordinary-le.html>. Interestingly, the rapporteur who presented the dossier in the EP was Satu Hassi of the Green League. She was one of four Finnish MEPs to vote in favour of the directive. Her Green League colleague, Tarja Cronberg, did not participate in the vote, although she was not formally registered as being absent.

39 The definition of defection used here draws on the definition developed by VoteWatch. VoteWatch ranks MEPs according to whether they are 'loyal' to their political group or whether they 'rebel'. In situations in which an MEP votes against the majority of his/her party group, he/she is considered a 'rebel'. This does not mean that the party group in question would have defined an official position towards the issue in question or issued explicit voting instructions to its MEPs. Some party groups, such as the Eurosceptic EFD, do not impose any kind of party discipline on their MEPs. Thus, in the case of EFD MEPs, defining the behaviour of an MEP as 'defection' simply indicates that the MEP in question has voted differently than most members of his/her group.



and Sari Essayah of the Christian Democrats. The vote thus brought together Finnish MEPs across party lines to oppose the directive, showing that nationality can prevail over ideology in votes that are defined as nationally salient and closely followed by the national media.

A second EP vote that was of particular importance for Finland and visibly covered by the Finnish media was the vote on a directive restricting the working time of road transport personnel (17). From the Finnish perspective, the key question was whether the restrictions imposed by the directive would apply to self-employed drivers. Due to the fact that a major proportion of Finnish truck drivers are self-employed, Finland had actively lobbied for them to be left outside the scope of the directive.<sup>40</sup> However, a narrow majority in the EP favoured extending the restrictions to self-employed drivers as well. The winning coalition at the EP level consisted of centre-left MEPs from the S&D group, the European United Left- Nordic Green Left (GUE-NGL) and the Greens/EFA, as well as a sizeable group of EPP MEPs, who defected from their political group.

Among the Finnish MEPs, the major conflict line also ran along the left-right axis. The Social Democrats and the Greens voted in favour of the restrictions, whereas all the rest voted against.<sup>41</sup> It is notable that by voting in favour of extending the restrictions to self-employed drivers, the Green League MEPs effectively chose a different position from the Finnish government of the time in which the party was also represented. All other MEPs representing governing parties voted against the extension. In the vote, all Finnish MEPs were loyal to their party groups. In stark contrast to the vote on the sulphur content of marine fuels, the winning margin of the 'yes' camp was very narrow, meaning that defections could have changed the end result. It is thus conceivable that the MEPs faced more pressure to follow the party group line.

Of the 15 votes considered to be of European-wide significance, the most salient and visible one in the Finnish context was the vote on agricultural subsidies (7). Finland has consistently defended its right to pay national subsidies to Southern Finnish farms, a privilege anchored in Article 141 of Finland's accession treaty. The new CAP agreement changed the subsidies system considerably, reducing the overall number of subsidies and replacing part of the national subsidies with European ones.<sup>42</sup> Despite the changes, the National Coalition Party (which played an important role in the CAP negotiations both in the Council and in the EP) prided itself on having secured a good deal for Finland. The Centre Party, a traditional agrarian party, was rather critical of the agreement, directly attacking the National Coalition Party over the issue.<sup>43</sup> However, all Finnish MEPs with the exception of the Green League MEPs voted in favour of the resolution in the EP. The

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40 *Turun Sanomat*, 'Ääni ei kuulunut' (18 June 2010); Annamari Sipilä, 'EU: Yrittäjäkuljettajien työaika ei rajoiteta', *Helsingin Sanomat* (30 September 2009).

41 VoteWatch Europe: The organisation of the working time of persons performing mobile road transport activities, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/the-organisation-of-the-working-time-of-persons-performing-mobile-road-transport-activities-draft-le.html###vote-tabs-list-2>.

42 Virve Kähkönen, 'Etelä-Suomen kansallisista maataloustuista syntyi sopu', *Helsingin Sanomat* (21 November 2013).

43 *Turun Sanomat*, 'Mepit kiistelevät Etelä-Suomen maataloustuista' (20 November 2013).

only one to vote differently from the majority of his political group was Sampo Terho of the Finns Party.<sup>44</sup>

A further nationally salient vote was the one on the Multiannual Financial Framework (6). The budget negotiations are generally very closely followed in Finland, and the Finnish media were particularly interested in the size of the Finnish contributions to the EU budget.<sup>45</sup> Before the budget negotiations, the Finnish government announced that it would aim at reducing the size of the EU budget, arguing that its total size was the single most important factor in determining the size of Finland's own contribution. At the same time, the government emphasised that it would try to ensure that Finland maintained its previous share of agricultural subsidies and that Eastern and Northern Finland would receive structural funds in the future as well.<sup>46</sup>

After the Council negotiations, the government defended the result, even though Finland's contributions are set to rise in the next budget period.<sup>47</sup> In the EP, the financial framework was adopted after long negotiations by 537 votes in favour and 126 against, as well as 19 abstentions. All Finnish MEPs followed the line of their political groups in the final vote. Only the Green League MEPs and Sampo Terho of the Finns Party voted against the agreement.<sup>48</sup> Despite sitting in the domestic government that negotiated the financial framework in the Council, the Green League thus chose to oppose it in the EP.

The vote on the extension of maternity leave to 20 weeks on full pay (1) also gained visibility in Finland, as individual Finnish MEPs took a particular interest in the issue. Finland already had maternity leave of 17.5–18 weeks, but the resulting costs as well as the potential changes to the existing practices in organising maternity leave were a major concern in Finland. In addition, the extension was criticised for potentially having a negative impact on women's career opportunities.<sup>49</sup>

Among the Finnish MEPs, the main dividing line ran along the left–right axis, as it did in the EP as a whole.<sup>50</sup> In the EP, a narrow majority emerged in favour of the proposal, whereas among the Finnish MEPs, the opponents outnumbered the supporters by 7 to 6. The Green League and the Social Democratic MEPs voted in favour of the extension, whereas the MEPs of the Swedish People's Party, the Christian Democrats and the Finns Party all voted against, the last thus opposing the majority of this European political group. The votes of the Centre Party and the National Coalition Party were split, with

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44 VoteWatch Europe: Financing, management and monitoring of the CAP, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/financing-management-and-monitoring-of-the-cap-draft-legislative-resolution-vote-legislative-resolut.html>.

45 *Helsingin Sanomat*, 'EU-maksujen pitää täsmätä' (14 February 2013).

46 Valtioneuvoston viestintäosasto, *Hallitus täsmäsi Suomen tavoitteet EU:n rahoituskehysneuvotteluissa*, Tiedote 345/2012 (9 November 2012), <http://valtioneuvosto.fi/ajankohtaista/tiedotteet/tiedote/f.jsp?oid=369082>.

47 *Helsingin Sanomat*, 'Stubb puolustaa EU-maksusopua', (11 February 2013).

48 VoteWatch Europe: Multiannual financial framework 2014–2020, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/multiannual-financial-framework-2014-2020-draft-legislative-resolution-vote-consent-consent.html#/##vote-tabs-list-1>.

49 Olli Pohjanpalo, 'EU esittää pitkää äitiyslomaa', *Helsingin Sanomat* (2 September 2010).

50 VoteWatch Europe: Improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/improvements-in-the-safety-and-health-at-work-of-pregnant-workers-and-workers-who-have-recently-give-12.html>.

one MEP from each group defecting from the line of their European political group and voting in favour. Anneli Jäätteenmäki, the Centre Party MEP who defected, was particularly vocal in her support of the extension and published op-eds in major Finnish newspapers to underline her position.

## 4.2 Issues with links to domestic politics

Considering the domestic salience of questions related to the management of the euro crisis, it is somewhat surprising that the EP votes on strengthening the supervision of budgets and economic policies of the eurozone members (9), Eurobonds (3) and the banking union (10) were hardly visible in the Finnish media. The domestic importance of these issues was, however, apparent in some of the voting patterns.

In the vote on budget supervision, the Finnish MEPs' votes reflected the domestic government-opposition divide.<sup>51</sup> All the MEPs representing the governing parties voted in favour of the legislative package with the exception of the Christian Democrat MEP Sari Essayah, who did not vote, and the Green League MEP Tarja Cronberg, who was absent. The two Centre Party MEPs present in the vote, on the other hand, defected from their ALDE group and, together with the Finns Party MEP, voted against the proposal. The vote hints at the cautious attitude of the Centre Party MEPs towards deepening eurozone integration. The EP's resolution demanded that the Commission set up an expert group to analyse the possibilities and obstacles of the joint issuance of debt, which might have been a particular concern for the Centre Party.<sup>52</sup>

The vote on Eurobonds, by contrast, revealed the reservations about debt mutualisation schemes across Finland's political landscape. The vote was the EP's response to a Green Paper by the European Commission, which had proposed the introduction of stability bonds. The EP's non-binding resolution was supportive of the Commission's idea. Both the S&D and the Greens/EFA voted in favour of the resolution and the majority of EPP and ALDE MEPs were also in favour of the bonds.<sup>53</sup> The main resistance within the EPP came from German and Swedish MEPs. Many German ALDE members also abstained from the final vote. Among the Finnish MEPs, the issue proved divisive as well. A total of four MEPs defected from the line of their European party groups and either voted against Eurobonds or abstained. The defectors included two Centre Party MEPs (the third being absent) as well as the MEPs of the Swedish People's Party and the Christian Democrats. The Finns Party MEP also voted against, whereas Social Democrat MEP Mitro Repo, who had previously publicly opposed Eurobonds,<sup>54</sup> did not vote at all. On the other hand, all

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51 VoteWatch Europe: Economic and budgetary surveillance of Member States with serious difficulties with respect to their financial stability in the euro area, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/economic-and-budgetary-surveillance-of-member-states-with-serious-difficulties-with-respect-to-their-2.html>.

52 *Green light for economic governance two-pack*, European Parliament News (12 March 2013), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20130312IPR06439/html/Green-light-for-economic-governance-two-pack>.

53 VoteWatch Europe: Motions for resolutions – Feasibility of introducing stability bonds, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/motions-for-resolutions-feasibility-of-introducing-stability-bonds-motion-for-a-resolution-vote-reso.html>.

54 Niklas Holmberg, 'Suomalaismepit erimielisiä eurobondeista', *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus* (7 October 2011), <http://www.maaseuduntulevaisuus.fi/politiikka-ja-talous/suomalaismepit-erimielisi%C3%A4-eurobondeista-1.4294>.

three MEPs of the National Coalition Party, both Green League MEPs as well as the other Social Democrat MEP all voted in favour.

The vote on the banking union concentrated on one of the banking union's three pillars, the Single Supervisory Mechanism (SSM). In the EP, only one group, the GUE-NGL, and parts of the ECR and EFD voted against the proposal.<sup>55</sup> Among the Finnish MEPs, the SSM was also supported by a very large coalition. Even the Finns Party MEP Sampo Terho voted in favour, thus voting differently from the majority of his political group. The only 'no' vote came from Anneli Jäätteenmäki of the Centre Party, with the other Centre Party MEP present at the vote voting in favour.

Finally, the EP vote on the financial transaction tax (4) went virtually unnoticed in the Finnish media. The issue as such was, however, heatedly debated at the national level and divided the government ranks. In its programme, the six-party government had promised to work towards the introduction of a financial transaction tax. There were, however, notable differences among the governing parties regarding the issue and in the end Finland stayed outside the group of EU member states developing the tax. The Social Democratic Party, the Green League and the Left Alliance wanted Finland to participate in the group, but the opposition of the National Coalition Party, the Swedish People's Party and the Christian Democrats was enough to halt the process.<sup>56</sup> In the EP vote, which took place before Finland's decision to opt out of the financial transaction tax, the vast majority of the Finnish MEPs gave their support to the proposal.<sup>57</sup> Those who supported the tax included both Green League MEPs, both Social Democrat MEPs and all three National Coalition Party MEPs. All three Centre Party MEPs also voted in favour, collectively defecting from the line of their ALDE group. The Finns Party's MEP as well as the Swedish People's Party's MEP followed their European political groups and voted against the proposal. The Christian Democratic MEP, Sari Essayah, abstained, thus defecting from her EPP group.

#### 4.3 European issues<sup>58</sup>

The rest of the votes were hardly visible in the media and the public debate, even though some were of relative salience from the Finnish point of view. As far as the conflict lines in the remaining votes are concerned, these differed from issue to issue. Nevertheless, two general patterns can be identified: a left-right divide or a large cross-party coalition. The contours of a left-right divide were visible in the votes on phasing out nuclear energy (2), internal market for services (11) and economic activities that pollute (8). A large cross-party coalition emerged in the votes on the establishment of the European External Action Service (12), the introduction of a system for the EU to collect its own

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55 VoteWatch Europe: Specific tasks for the European Central Bank concerning policies relating to the prudential supervision of credit institutions, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/specific-tasks-for-the-european-central-bank-concerning-policies-relating-to-the-prudential-supervis.html>.

56 Teija Sutinen, 'Hallitus jakautui rahoitusmarkkinaverossa', *Helsingin Sanomat* (1 December, 2012).

57 VoteWatch Europe: Common system for taxing financial transactions, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/common-system-for-taxing-financial-transactions-draft-legislative-resolution-vote-legislative-resolu.html>.

58 The general descriptions of the votes presented in Section 4.3 partly draw on material provided by VoteWatch Europe to all project partners.

resources (13), the creation of a single market with the United States (14) and the rules regulating the temporary reintroduction of border controls (15). These were votes that saw the establishment of large coalitions at the European level as well.

First, the controversy surrounding the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) (5) did not go unnoticed in Finland, but the issue caused less of a stir in Finland than in some other member states. In the vote, most of the Finnish MEPs followed the policy line of their European political groups, with the MEPs belonging to ALDE, Greens/EFA, the S&D and the EFD voting against the agreement, and the EPP MEPs abstaining. The only exceptions were Eija-Riitta Korhola from the National Coalition Party (EPP), who did not vote, and Hannu Takkula from the Centre Party (ALDE), who voted differently from both his national party and his European political group, being the only Finnish MEP to support ACTA.<sup>59</sup>

The amendment proposing the phasing out of nuclear energy in the EU was put forward by the Greens/EFA and also received the support of the GUE-NGL group, the majority of the S&D MEPs, as well as a large number of ALDE MEPs. However, the votes of the EPP, ECR and EFD were enough to thwart the amendment.<sup>60</sup> Most of the Finnish MEPs again followed the line of their European political groups. The MEPs of the Swedish People's Party, the Christian Democrats and the Finns Party all voted against the amendment, whereas the sole Green MEP participating in the vote as well as one of the two Social Democrat MEPs voted in favour. However, there were also three defectors. Anneli Jäätteenmäki from the Centre Party and Sirpa Pietikäinen from the National Coalition Party both voted in favour of the amendment, thus going against the majority of their party groups. Social Democrat Mitro Repo, on the other hand, chose to abstain from the vote, which also represented a break from his European political group's line.

The vote on strengthening the internal market for services was a vote on a non-binding EP report, which urged the Commission as well as some member states to ensure the enforcement of the 2006 Services Directive. A narrow minority emerged in favour of the motion, with 366 'yes' votes, 292 'no' votes and 14 abstentions.<sup>61</sup> The left-right divide in the EP was also reflected in the votes of the Finnish MEPs. All Finnish EPP and ALDE MEPs who were present at the vote supported the motion. Sampo Terho of the Finns Party also expressed his support of the text, thus voting differently from the EFD majority. Both of the Green MEPs as well as Mitro Repo of the SDP voted against, whereas the latter's Social Democrat colleague, Liisa Jaakonsaari, did not vote at all.

The vote on economic activities that pollute revolved around a Commission proposal on the timing of greenhouse gas emissions. The resolution was passed by a very narrow

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59 VoteWatch Europe: Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement between the EU and its Member States, Australia, Canada, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mexico, Morocco, New Zealand, Singapore, Switzerland and the USA, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/anti-counterfeiting-trade-agreement-between-the-eu-and-its-member-states-australia-canada-japan-the--2.html>.

60 VoteWatch Europe: Framework Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community for nuclear research and training activities, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/framework-programme-of-the-european-atomic-energy-community-for-nuclear-research-and-training-acti-10.html>.

61 VoteWatch Europe: Internal market for services, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/internal-market-for-services-motion-for-resolution-vote-resolution-as-a-whole.html>.

majority, with 344 votes in favour and 311 against, as well as 46 abstentions.<sup>62</sup> Most of the Finnish MEPs stuck to their European political group line, with the Green League MEPs, one of the Social Democratic MEPs as well as the Swedish People's Party's representative voting in favour, and most of the EPP MEPs (two of the National Coalition Party MEPs as well as the Christian Democrat MEP) voting against. There were also two defectors. The Centre Party's Hannu Takkula (ALDE) voted against the proposal, whereas Sirpa Pietikäinen from the National Coalition Party supported the resolution. It is also notable that a total of three Finnish MEPs were absent from the vote.

The resolution on the organisation and accountability of the EEAS received the support of all major political groups, with only the GUE-NGL and the EFD opposing it. All in all, 579 votes were cast in favour of the resolution and only 78 against. All Finnish MEPs except for Timo Soini of the Finns Party and Sari Essayah of the Christian Democrats voted in favour of the resolution, the latter thus being one of the very few EPP members to vote against the text.<sup>63</sup>

The proposal for setting up a system for the EU to collect its own resources was supported by an even larger coalition, formed by the EPP, S&D, ALDE, the Greens/EFA and GUE-NGL.<sup>64</sup> However, many of the Danish and Swedish MEPs from the above-mentioned groups voted against the resolution. Most Finnish MEPs, by contrast, were supportive of the proposal. The only 'no' votes came from the two MEPs most critical of extending the EU's powers, Sampo Terho of the Finns Party and Sari Essayah of the Christian Democrats, the latter again voting against the majority of her European political group. In addition, Anneli Jäätteenmäki of the Centre Party abstained, also voting differently from her European political group.

In May 2013, the EP voted on its position on negotiations for a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership with the US. The final text was supported by the majority of the MEPs across the political spectrum. The same goes for the Finnish MEPs. With the exception of the representatives of the Green League, all Finnish MEPs who were present in the session voted in favour of the EP's position, all thus staying loyal to their party groups.<sup>65</sup>

Finally, the legislative resolution on the rules governing the temporary reintroduction of border controls at the internal borders of the Schengen area was also passed by a comfortable majority, with 506 votes in favour and 121 against. The Greens/EFA as well as the GUE-NGL voted against the resolution, arguing that the possibility to reintroduce border controls contradicted the principle of free movement of citizens. Many EFD members also opposed the agreement. However, their reasons were quite different, as the EFD MEPs were generally dissatisfied with the fact that the reintroduction of border

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62 VoteWatch Europe: Timing of auctions of greenhouse gas allowances, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/timing-of-auctions-of-greenhouse-gas-allowances-draft-legislative-resolution-vote-legislative-resolution.html>.

63 VoteWatch Europe: European External Action Service, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/european-external-action-service-draft-legislative-resolution-vote-legislative-resolution-consultati.html>.

64 VoteWatch Europe: Guidelines for the 2014 budget – Section III, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/guidelines-for-the-2014-budget-section-iii-motion-for-a-resolution-paragraph-15.html>.

65 VoteWatch Europe: EU trade and investment agreement negotiations with the US, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/eu-trade-and-investment-agreement-negotiations-with-the-us-motion-for-resolution-vote-resolution-as-.html>.

controls would only be possible under strictly defined circumstances. All Finnish MEPs were loyal to their party groups, with Sampo Terho of the Finns Party and Satu Hassi of the Green League voting against and the rest of the MEPs who were present at the vote voting in favour.<sup>66</sup>

#### 4.4 Voting patterns among the Finnish MEPs

In general, the 17 votes analysed in the framework of this working paper underline the central role of the European party groups in the EP. As the findings of previous studies on MEP voting suggest, in the majority of the recorded voting situations most MEPs follow their party group line. This also applies to the Finnish MEPs. Particularly in the votes on those issues with little or no links to domestic politics (categorised here as ‘European issues’), most MEPs voted together with their party groups and none of the Finnish party delegations with more than one MEP defected as a whole. Instead, the rebels were generally individual MEPs. However, as previous research on MEP voting demonstrates, party group cohesion can break down if an issue is considered to be of high national salience and receives broad attention in the domestic setting. Even in such cases, defections occur only when the national party’s and the European party group’s position differs markedly. In the Finnish case, this was most evident in the vote on the directive limiting the sulphur content of marine fuels, as seven MEPs in all defected from their respective party groups to oppose the directive. Quite differently, in the vote on the working time of transport personnel, no Finnish MEP defected, even though the issue was considered of particular national importance. Whether explicit voting instructions were used in either of these votes by the Finnish parties or the European party groups remains an open question.

Considering the recent politicisation of issues related to the management of the eurozone crisis in Finland, one would have expected the EP votes on these matters to best exemplify the challenges that the MEPs’ intermediary role between domestic and European politics entails, as the Finnish parties’ views on some of the proposed rescue measures are much more cautious than those of their European party groups. However, this was true only to some extent. Notably, the votes on budget supervision, Eurobonds and the banking union were, somewhat surprisingly, not extensively covered by the Finnish media, which unquestionably reduced their salience in the domestic political context. Nevertheless, the differences between the positions of some Finnish MEPs and their respective political groups on mutual debt were clearly visible in the vote on Eurobonds, even though the EP’s resolution on the matter was non-binding. Equally interestingly, the vote on budget supervision saw the votes of the Finnish MEPs follow the domestic government-opposition divide.

However, it was the only example of a case in which the domestic government-opposition division was visible in the voting result. This finding strengthens the image of the EP as a legislative organ with varying issue-based coalitions and multiple cleavages. In several key votes, the biggest governing parties of Finland, the National Coalition Party and the Social Democratic Party, represented opposing political blocs in the EP.

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66 VoteWatch Europe: Temporary reintroduction of border control at internal borders, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/temporary-reintroduction-of-border-control-at-internal-borders-draft-legislative-resolution-vote-leg.html>.

Furthermore, the Green League MEPs voted several times against a proposal that had formerly been sealed by the Council, in which they – through their representation in the domestic government – at least formally participate.

As for the defections of individual MEPs and national party delegations, the results of the voting analysis strongly correlate with the views presented in section 3 above about the Finnish parties' affiliations with their European party groups. As indicated, the Centre Party MEPs in particular often struggle to follow the line of their party group, with at least one of the party's three MEPs defecting in 10 of the 17 votes analysed here. The same goes for the Christian Democrats' Sari Essayah, who opposed the EPP majority four times, particularly in questions revolving around the scope of the EU's powers. Sampo Terho of the Finns Party also voted differently from the majority of his party group on a number of issues. However, Terho's party group, the EFD, does not seek to establish any kind of party discipline, which means that the EFD MEPs are free to vote as they choose.

Correspondingly, the general voting statistics of VoteWatch Europe reveal that the Finns Party's one-man delegation was the Finnish party with the lowest level of loyalty towards its party group, voting together with the party group majority in only 64.93 per cent of all roll-call votes.<sup>67</sup> The second lowest scores were those of the Christian Democrats (81.64 per cent) and the Centre Party (93.14). However, somewhat surprisingly, the difference between the Centre Party and the National Coalition Party (94.60 per cent) was not very significant. The Finnish parties that are most loyal to their political groups are the Green League (98.85 per cent) and the Social Democratic Party (98.65). Indeed, no Green League MEP rebelled against the Greens/EFA group in the votes analysed in this paper.<sup>68</sup> The Social Democrat MEPs were also loyal to their party group in almost all votes. Mitro Repo was the only one of the two Social Democrat MEPs to explicitly rebel against the S&D group, abstaining in the vote on the phasing out of nuclear energy and voting against the directive limiting the sulphur content of marine fuels. Taking into account that it is often only by acting cohesively that the groups can influence European policies, the question of party group membership of the MEPs is no secondary issue.

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67 As of 28 March, 2014.

68 With the exception of Satu Hassi, who accidentally voted against the guidelines organising the EEAS, later adding a statement to the plenary minutes to the effect that this had not been her intention.



## 5. SUMMARY

This working paper has taken a closer look at how Finnish and European politics have interacted in the 7th EP, whose term is coming to an end in May 2014. As MEPs depend on their national party for electoral support and eventual re-election and on their European party group for the means to influence EU policies, they act in a challenging intermediary position between the domestic and the European level. Existing research suggests that in the majority of voting situations, MEPs vote in line with their party groups. However, national parties have the means to turn their MEPs against the party group and thus break down the cohesion of the groups. National parties are, however, likely to do so only if their own position is very far from that of the party group and if the issue in question is particularly salient to them. The salience of an issue for a national party, on the other hand, depends mostly on the domestic framework. This is how domestic concerns and national party politics get channelled into the EP. However, nationality as such is not found to play a very significant role. All in all, voting in the EP generally takes the form of ideological competition between the party groups. The main cleavages in the EP run along the left-right axis and the pro-integration-anti-integration divide.

Although there has been an EU-critical minority within several Finnish parties as well as within the electorate, the pro-integration-anti-integration cleavage has traditionally not been reflected in the Finnish party competition. Furthermore, EU issues have generally been kept at the margins of the electoral debates. This changed in the 2011 Finnish parliamentary election, as the Eurosceptic Finns Party campaigned against the Portuguese bailout as well as the EU's management of the eurozone crisis, managing to become the third biggest party in the Finnish parliament. The different parties' attitudes towards the eurozone rescue policies formed one of the key criteria when the new government was formed. One of the main cleavages between the government and the opposition has thus run along the pro-anti-integration divide. While the opposition parties have softened their EU-critical rhetoric and positions in the course of the legislature, this development gives reason to assume that the heightened conflict over EU issues would have increased the salience of individual EP votes, especially on the management of the eurozone crisis, and also had an impact on voting patterns.

Somewhat surprisingly, none of the most visible EP votes in Finland during the 7<sup>th</sup> EP's term had to do with the eurozone crisis. Instead, two of the most visible votes revolved around directives that were believed to have an impact on the Finnish economy. The vote on the directive limiting the sulphur content of marine fuels demonstrates that nationality can play a significant role in the EP if the issue in question is framed in national terms and is widely covered by the domestic media. However, the vote on the working time of road transport personnel shows that even when an issue is of national importance, ideology and party group affiliation can still play an important role. While the vote on the sulphur content of marine fuels saw seven Finnish MEPs defect from their party groups, in the vote on the working time of road transport personnel not one MEP did so. Instead, in the latter vote there was a clear left-right cleavage in both the EP and among the Finnish MEPs.

Although the votes on the management of the eurozone crisis were not very visible in the national media, the voting patterns nevertheless indicate that these issues are both contested and salient in Finland. In the vote on Eurobonds, a concept that has

proved very controversial in Finland, four MEPs in all defected from their party groups and either abstained or voted against. The votes on Eurobonds and strengthening the supervision of budgets and economic policies of the eurozone members also mirrored the domestic fault line between the government and the opposition to some extent, as both votes saw the Finns Party MEP and Centre Party MEPs end up on the same side. However, in general the pro-integration-anti-integration divide, which emerged as one of the central conflict lines in Finnish politics in the aftermath of the 2011 national parliamentary election, was somewhat less prominent in the EP. When such a divide did emerge, Finland's EU-critical axis was most commonly formed by the lone Finns Party MEP, who was joined by the Christian Democratic MEP Sari Essayah and, on some occasions, by the Centre Party MEPs.

Despite the fact that the 17 votes analysed here represent a very small share of all EP votes, even they are enough to demonstrate that cleavages and coalitions within the EP vary greatly. The two most common alternatives were a left-right divide or a large coalition. In the latter case, the divide sometimes ran somewhere along the pro-anti-integration divide, but was at times also a coalition of the centre, leaving both the Eurosceptic Finns Party and the (often very pro-integrationist) Green League in the minority (as in the vote on the rules governing the reintroduction of borders).

The tendency to build varying (and issue-based) coalitions means that voters should challenge MEP candidates to position themselves on several policy dimensions in order to find out how the candidates would behave in the different policy areas dealt with by the EP. Finally, wider media coverage of some key EP votes would force the MEPs to clarify their role between European and national politics and explain whether they view the issues from the point of view of domestic politics or from the perspective of the European party competition.

In order to further clarify the interrelationship between Finnish and European politics, both quantitative and qualitative studies would be welcome. Quantitative studies could, for example, attempt to codify both the positions of the Finnish parties in relation to their European party groups and the salience of individual issues from the perspective of Finnish parties, and then systematically test whether the findings of previous studies on MEP voting apply to the Finnish context. This would also shed more light on the EU issues the Finnish parties consider truly important. Qualitative studies, on the other hand, could try to uncover the nature of the relationship between the national parties and national party delegations in the EP, preferably through expert interviews and/or surveys.