

Analysing political dynamics in the new European Parliament: Political Cleavages and Division Lines

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In July 2025, the Jacques Delors Institute published a study entitled 'One year on from the elections: a deeply unstable European Parliament'. This research aimed to capture the main political balances that had emerged following the European elections of June 2024, by analysing the composition of political groups, alliance strategies and the first signs of stabilisation or realignment within the new institutional context.

A few months later, in November 2025, ELIAMEP (Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy) published a comprehensive quantitative study on the roll-call votes of the first year of the new legislative term, entitled 'Analyzing Political Dynamics in the New European Parliament: Politics and Division Lines'. The aim of this study was to systematically analyse the behaviour of the political groups in the European Parliament as well as the national parties represented there, by mapping patterns of convergence, divergence and internal cohesion. We are publishing this study here in its English and French versions.

Although the two studies differ methodologically – the first focusing on institutional and political analysis, the second on statistical data processing – they converge on their research objective: exploring the structure and functional dynamics of the new European Parliament. Both attempt to interpret this complex legislative body, comprising 720 MEPs and over 200 political parties, characterised by strong national and ideological differences.

One of the distinctive features of this new European Parliament lies in the relative flexibility of party discipline at the European level and in the formation of shifting majorities depending on the policy area, leading to a degree of volatility and uncertainty regarding the stability of alliances. Nevertheless, the 'central bloc' comprising the EPP, S&D, Renew and often the Greens continues to dominate key policy decisions, despite a growing tendency on certain issues towards alliances between the EPP and far-right groups. Understanding this fragile balance is a central focus of our research.

At a time when the European Union is facing geopolitical pressures and potential profound transformations, the European Parliament's role in legislative decision-making and the definition of policy directions remains crucial. Highlighting subtle political balances and emerging fault lines is not merely an academic exercise, but an essential tool for understanding European governance.

Following the publication of these studies, ELIAMEP and the Jacques Delors Institute have decided to coordinate their research efforts and to jointly monitor parliamentary activity on an ongoing and regular basis. The continued analysis of future votes, combined with an in-depth exploration of the national and political dimensions of representation, aims to contribute to the development of a coherent and scientifically grounded observatory of the new European Parliament.

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Christine Verger, Vice-President of the Jacques Delors Institute and
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1.

Introduction

The 2024 European Parliament (EP) elections have brought significant changes to the EU political landscape: new political groups have been created, some older ones have been dissolved, and a lot of new national political parties have appeared in the political landscape of both the EU and EP politics. The recent turmoil, in November 2025, regarding the passing of the so-called Sustainability Omnibus legislation, that included the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) and the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD), is indicative of the fluidity of the European political system and the new socio-political dynamics unfolding at both national and European level. In this vote, the *European People's Party* (EPP) voted together with the *Patriots for Europe* (PfE) and the *Europe of Sovereign Nations* (ESN) groups, and were backed by the *European Conservatives and Reformists* (ECR), in a coalition of forces atypical of the previous broader EP political dynamics.

In an overview of the EP political landscape, more than 200 parties from the 27 EU Member States are currently represented in the EP, forming an extremely diverse and complex political environment. This distinguishes the EP from most national parliaments, in which the number of parties is limited, and the dividing lines are more stable. A distinctive feature of political interactions unfolding in the EP is the absence of strict party discipline. Unlike most national parliaments, there are very often differences of opinion among MEPs from the same transnational political group or even national party. This reflects the ideological variety and multiplicity of the EP parties, the frequent prioritization of national concerns and preoccupations over the

views of the EP political group they have joined as well as the relative autonomy that MEPs retain in forming their positions.

The objective of this study is to analyse in depth MEPs voting patterns in this first year of the new EP term, identifying political networks and division lines not only **between** political groups but also **within** them. The analysis of roll-call votes reveals a complex picture of current political balances, acknowledging the volatility of MEPs' political behaviour.

Following this introduction, we discuss briefly, in the second section, the literature insights regarding political dynamics and cleavages in EP politics. In the third section, we offer an overview of the existing political groups and parties represented in the EP, before proceeding in the fourth section to the methodology, which is further elaborated in Appendix I. The fifth, and sixth sections of the paper constitute the backbone of our work and analysis, discussing in turn the political distance between EP groups, their internal cohesion as well as their thematic convergence (or divergence) in specific policy areas. The seventh sections offers a first tentative attempt to account for the voting patterns with reference to the two most important political cleavages identified in EP politics, namely Left-Right and EU-national sovereignty. We conclude by summarizing our findings and their political implications.

2.

Political Cleavages in the EP: Some Evidence from Literature

Following the conclusion of the sixth parliamentary term (2004-9), the EP amended Rule 159a of its Rules of Procedure, rendering roll-call votes mandatory for all final decisions on legislative acts. This reform sought to enhance EP accountability and transparency vis-à-vis European citizens (Hug, 2016). Yordanova and Mühlböck (2015) further show that this rule has changed earlier approaches, demonstrating that party group cohesion had been underestimated rather than inflated in previous analyses based on requested votes, since requested roll calls tended to focus on more contentious issues that by default triggered polarization and voting splits among EP political parties. This institutional change therefore not only improved transparency but also allowed for more accurate and representative assessments of party cohesion and voting cleavages in the EP. The analysis covered the European People's Party (EPP), the Socialist Group (PSE, now S&D), the Liberal Group (ALDE), and the Greens or European Free Alliance (Verts/ALE), which remained consistent throughout the sixth and seventh parliamentary terms.

Bressanelli et al., (2016) examined how EU informal decision-making affected voting cohesion in the European Parliament. Using roll call data from 1999 to 2011, they found that cohesion increased among the centrist groups, especially the European People's Party, the Party of Euro-

pean Socialists, and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe. These groups, often involved in trilogue negotiations and national governments, voted more cohesively on early agreements than on other legislative files. The study found that informalisation strengthened cohesion among centrist groups but reduced transparency in EP decision making.

Finke (2014) examined the reasons behind roll call vote requests during the sixth European Parliament (2004-2009). He found that groups with lower internal cohesion were more likely to request roll calls. This reflected a stronger role for national party delegations and a weaker role for group leadership, as sponsors were often closer to national than European median positions. Many roll call votes were used for position taking rather than policy purposes. Smaller parties such as the Greens or European Free Alliance used them to signal loyalty to domestic audiences, while larger parties delayed recorded votes until final legislative decisions. Thierse (2016) found that groups were more likely to request a roll call when they had already opposed a proposal at committee level, showing that cohesion existed before rather than after such votes.

Hix et al., (2005) showed that political behavior and alliance formation within the European Parliament were structured along the left-right

ideological axis from the first to the fifth parliamentary term (1975–2004). This axis did not fully explain the behavior of all groups, as Eurosceptic and non-attached members had limited cooperation with other groups. Party cohesion increased across terms, with the Agreement Index rising from the first to the fifth term. Cohesion grew as the EP legislative role expanded, even with rising national diversity after enlargement. Later studies added a second analytical dimension that separated government from opposition (Hix & Noury 2015). During the 2004–2009 term, ideological orientation remained the strongest factor shaping voting patterns, but political groups' positions toward the Commission also mattered. Groups represented in the Commission tended to vote together despite ideological differences. Following the 2014 elections, the European dimension defined by the divide between pro-European and Eurosceptic positions became the main factor explaining roll call voting (Hix et al. 2019).

The financial crisis in 2008 reduced the weight of the left-right divide and increased the role of attitudes toward European integration. In fiscal and economic issues, the European dimension became more important, and after 2013 both dimensions co-existed, accounting for about half of all votes on economic matters (Cheysson & Fraccaroli 2019). Chopin et al. (2019) used expert survey data, Eurobarometer series, and roll call analysis from 2004 to 2018 to show that by the 2014–2019 term, the European integration dimension explained 26.4 percent of voting behavior compared with 20.4 percent for ideology. The study also noted divisions linked to cultural and migration issues, which increased political fragmentation and produced a more fluid alliance system.

In the ninth European Parliament term (2019–2024), the idea of a stable bipolar structure has been questioned. Research points to a multipolar and variable alliance system. Legislative consensus is increasingly based on cooperation on specific issues rather than permanent coalitions. Political divisions now follow two main dimensions: ideological cohesion and group identity, and the divide between Euroscepticism and Europhilism, which cuts across ideological boundaries and shapes the formation of cohesive voting blocs (Rosalino et al. 2025).

3.

Composition and Political Structure of the European Parliament (2024-29)

The EP, which is one of the two legislative bodies in the EU bicameral political system, consists of 720 members, organised into eight transnational political groups, each of which has a relatively clear and distinctive political identity. Some

MEPs do not join any political group (Non-Ins-crits - NI), opting for political independence, either for ideological or strategic reasons, at the expense, however, of their political influence.

TABLE 1: Political Groups in the European Parliament

Code	Name	EP Members in political groups (16 July 2025)	Nb of Political Parties	Independents	Biggest Political Parties
EPP	European People's Party	188	47	3	CDU (Germany) PP (Spain)
SD	Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats	136	27	-	PD (Italy) PSOE (Spain)
PFE	Patriots for Europe	85	16	-	RN (France)
ECR	European Conservatives and Reformists	79	22	2	Fdl (Italy) PiS (Poland)
RENEW	Renew Europe	75	35	2	-
GREEN/ EFA	Greens/European Free Alliance	53	22	2	GRUNEN (Germany)
GUE/ NGL	The Left in the European Parliament	46	18	3	LFI (France) M5S (Italy)
ESN	European Sovereign Nations	27	8	-	AfD (Germany)

▲ Source: [European Parliament](#)

As of July 10, 2025, the European Parliament includes 203 national parties represented by 701 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), reflecting a high degree of political fragmentation. Only 12 parties have more than ten delegates. Eighteen independent candidates hold seats without any party affiliation, 83 parties are represented by a single MEP, 46 parties have two MEPs, and 22 parties have three MEPs each. Altogether, 259 MEPs, more than one third of the entire Parliament, belong to very small political parties or have no party affiliation. On the one hand, this enhances diversity and pluralism within the EP. On the other hand, it constitutes a constant concern regarding the formation of stable political and ideological networks given the much prevailing individualistic approach to politics of the majority of such political ‘lone wolves’. Conversely, just 10 national parties gather 204 MEPs, dominating political interactions in the EP environment.

It is worth highlighting the highly dynamic nature of the system, with these figures constantly changing, as several MEPs shift from one national party to another or become independent away from the national parties with which they were initially elected. At the same time, it is not uncommon for MEPs elected with the same national party to join different groups in the EP.¹ Still, these MEPs ultimately display similar voting behaviour, with their national partisan priorities eventually outweighing the ideological lines of their respective European political group.

In general, parties follow the political direction of the political group to which they belong, while maintaining a significant degree of autonomy. However, in several votes, there is a cross-party national convergence that transcends the ideological identity of MEPs and their respective political families. In this fluid political environment, outliers and extreme cases exist, with parties and delegates who deviate significantly and consistently from the voting average.² The multitude and diversity of parties and the absence of strict political discipline in voting result in significant differences in voting patterns, which will be analysed in the next sections.

1 This is the case, for example, with *Eesti Keskerakond* (Estonia), that has two MEPs, one having joined the ECR and the other the RENEW political group. The Bulgarian *Movement for Rights and Freedoms* has three MEPs, two of whom are independent, and one has joined the RENEW group.

2 From the parties in this category, the *Communist Party of Greece* (KKE) shows the greatest deviation from the voting average, as the subsequent analysis will show, followed, at the other side of the political spectrum, by the Polish monarchist and anti-communist party *Konfederacja Korony Polskiej*, and the *Slovakian Republika*, which is part of the ESN group.

4.

Roll-call votes: Methodology and Data

A total of 221 roll-call votes were collected from howtheyvote.eu, covering the period from the beginning of the 10th parliamentary term until 10 July 2025. These votes were grouped into ten key thematic areas based on their titles. As shown in Table 2, financial and budgetary issues

are of primary importance, being the most frequently voted topic. In contrast, only one vote related to agricultural policy was recorded for 2024–25; therefore, this thematic area was excluded from subsequent analyses.

TABLE 2: Roll-call Votes in the European Parliament (2024-25)

	Thematic Area	Description	Number of Votes
1	Budget/Financial Issues	EU expenditure and priorities	57
2	External Relations	General foreign policy issues	40
3	Environment	Climate change, sustainability	29
4	Human Rights	Within the EU and internationally	27
5	Institutional issues	Role and functioning of institutions	18
6	Russia – Ukraine	Special section (due to issue salience)	16
7	Health – Social policy	Social cohesion, resilience	13
8	Energy and industry	Energy transition, competitiveness	12
9	Technology – Digital	Digital market, artificial intelligence	10
10	Agriculture	-	1

A three-point coding system was applied to MEPs' political stance on each vote ('in favour': +1; 'against': -1; 'Abstention or absence': 0). Summing up the votes of respective MEPs of one political group, as explained in more detail in the Methodological Appendix I, the closer the group's score is to +1, the clearer its overall support for a voted resolution is, i.e. most

of its parties and MEPs have voted in favour of it. Conversely, the closer it is to -1, the stronger the group's rejection of it is. If the score is close to 0, it indicates a tendency toward abstention on that resolution, or intra-group lack of cohesion and fragmentation. For example, a score of +0.92 means that almost all MEPs of a political group voted in favour, while a score of -0.92

means that the vast majority of MEPs within that political group voted against.

Using these results, we calculate each national party's distance from its respective European political group by comparing their average voting scores and accounting for the number of votes cast. This distance value, ranging from 0 (complete alignment) to 10 (maximum divergence), expresses how closely a national party's voting behaviour corresponds to that of its group as a whole.

5.

Distance between EP Political Groups

Table 3 shows the political distance between the EP political groups. The first cluster of political groups with relatively smaller distances between each other is easily discerned and comprises the EPP, the S&D, and Renew, with the Greens at some (small) distance. Far away politically from this cluster, a second one com-

prises ESN and PFE. Both the European Left and the ECR have an intermediate position, showing thematic flexibility and an occasional, selective *ad hoc* convergence with either cluster in different votes. Finally, the non-inscrits MEPs feature high heterogeneity and low predictability in their voting behavior.

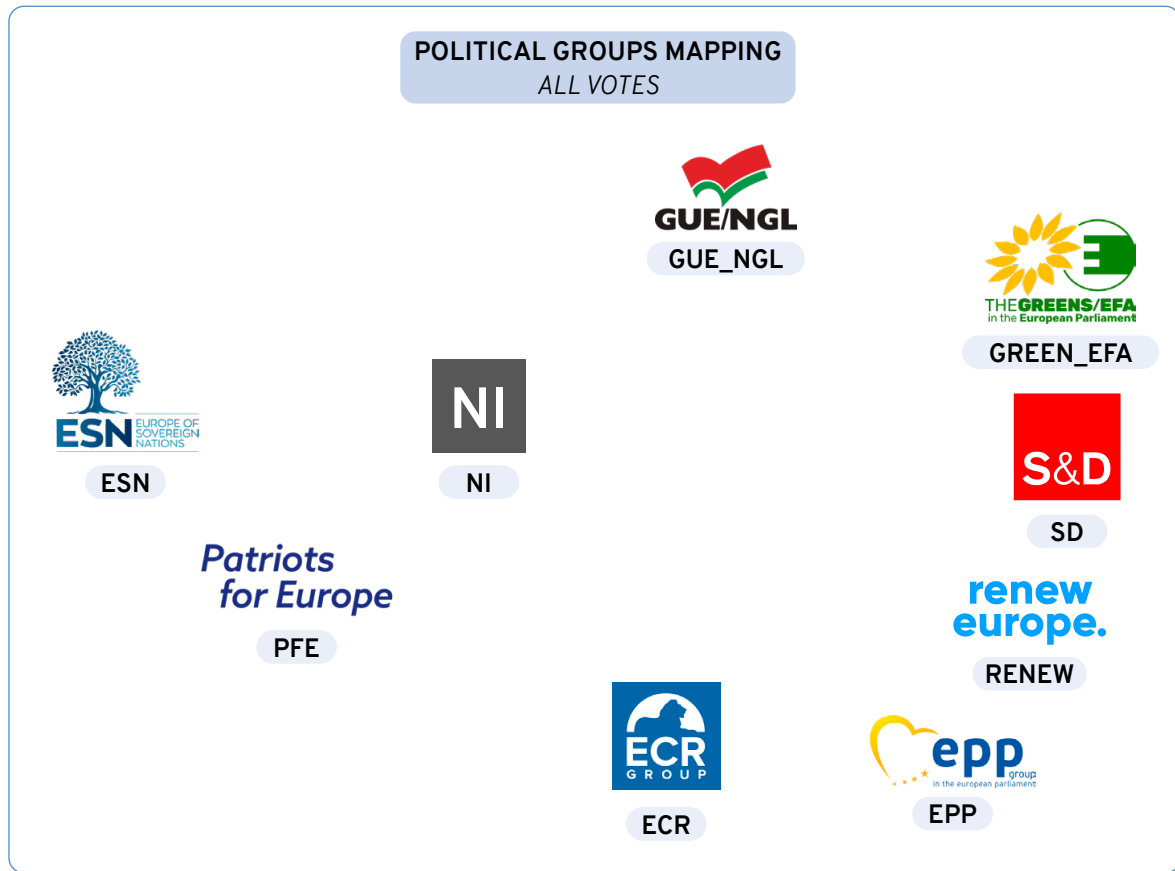
TABLE 3: Political Distance between EP Political Groups

	EPP	SD	PFE	ECR	RENEW	GREEN_EFA	GUE_NGL	ESN	NI
EPP	0.00	2.40	5.37	3.00	1.38	3.45	4.70	6.38	4.53
SD	2.40	0.00	5.65	3.53	1.72	2.18	3.99	6.47	4.47
PFE	5.37	5.65	0.00	3.51	5.58	5.90	4.80	2.67	2.74
ECR	3.00	3.53	3.51	0.00	3.30	4.09	4.38	4.77	3.40
RENEW	1.38	1.72	5.58	3.30	0.00	3.01	4.54	6.52	4.63
GREEN_EFA	3.45	2.18	5.90	4.09	3.01	0.00	3.35	6.64	4.56
GUE_NGL	4.70	3.99	4.80	4.38	4.54	3.35	0.00	5.27	3.14
ESN	6.38	6.47	2.67	4.77	6.52	6.64	5.27	0.00	3.09
NI	4.53	4.47	2.74	3.40	4.63	4.56	3.14	3.09	0.00

The visualization of these findings in Figure 1 shows clearly that a **majoritarian ‘governing coalition’ of EP political groups** is formed, with core members being the **EPP, S&D and Renew** groups, while the **Greens/EFA** are in relatively close distance. Potential bridges between the European Left and the Greens as well as between the ECR and the EPP are discernible, despite the relative distance. The other two political groups

(ESN and PFE), as well as the non-inscrit MEPs, are further away from the European political majority.

FIGURE 1: Visualisation of EP Political Group's Relative Positioning – ALL VOTES



6.

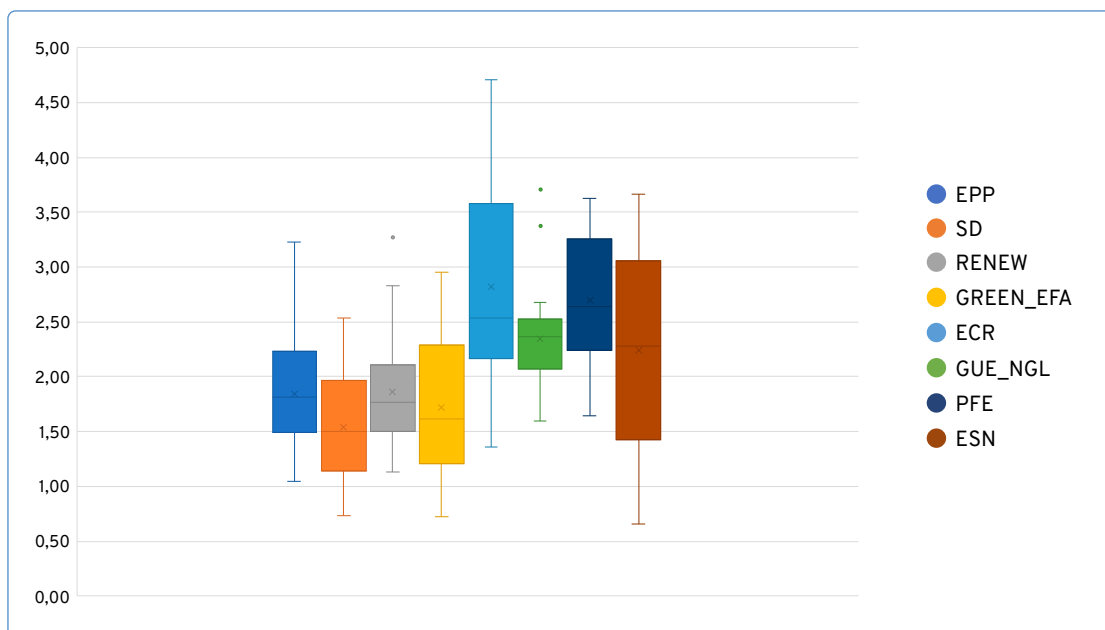
Cohesion of EP Political Groups

I OVERALL PARTY COHESION

Having mapped the relative distance between EP political groups, we analyse, in this section, their internal cohesion – first in terms of their overall voting record, and second in relation to their voting behaviour across thematic clusters (see Appendix I for methodological details). The closer the median is to 0, the stronger the

cohesion of each group. Overall, as illustrated in Figure 2, **S&D** is the most cohesive group in the EP, whereas large deviations in the voting patterns of their constituent members exist in the **ECR** and **PfE** groups, indicating lower internal cohesion. The **EPP** and the **RENEW** group also show a high level of cohesion, reflecting a more stable and coordinated political stance within their groups.³

FIGURE 2: Cohesion of Political Groups – All Votes

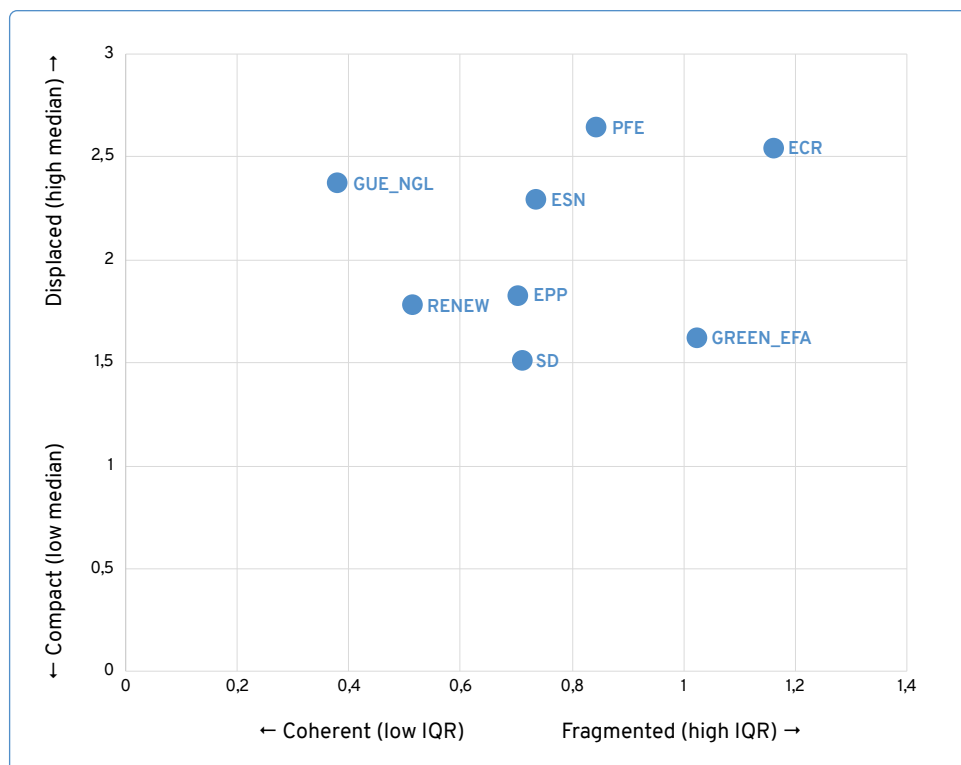


³ To enhance readability, the main text includes only graphical summaries of the cohesion of political groups, displayed through scatter plots and boxplots, while the detailed statistical tables and a guide to read them through, containing the corresponding IQR and median values for all groups and thematic areas, are provided in Appendix I and II.

Distributional data, visualized in Figure 3 and presented in full in Appendix 2, show that the S&D, EPP and RENEW political groups record the smallest interquartile ranges (IQR \approx 0.7), suggesting that most members vote closely in line with their group median. Conversely, the ECR

and PFE show the widest dispersion (with IQR values exceeding 1.1), reflecting greater internal diversity and a higher frequency of deviant voting cases. Groups such as the Greens/EFA, GUE/NGL, and ESN fall in the intermediate range, displaying moderate cohesion levels.

FIGURE 3: Cohesion of Political Groups – All Votes



THEMATIC BREAKDOWN PER PARTY

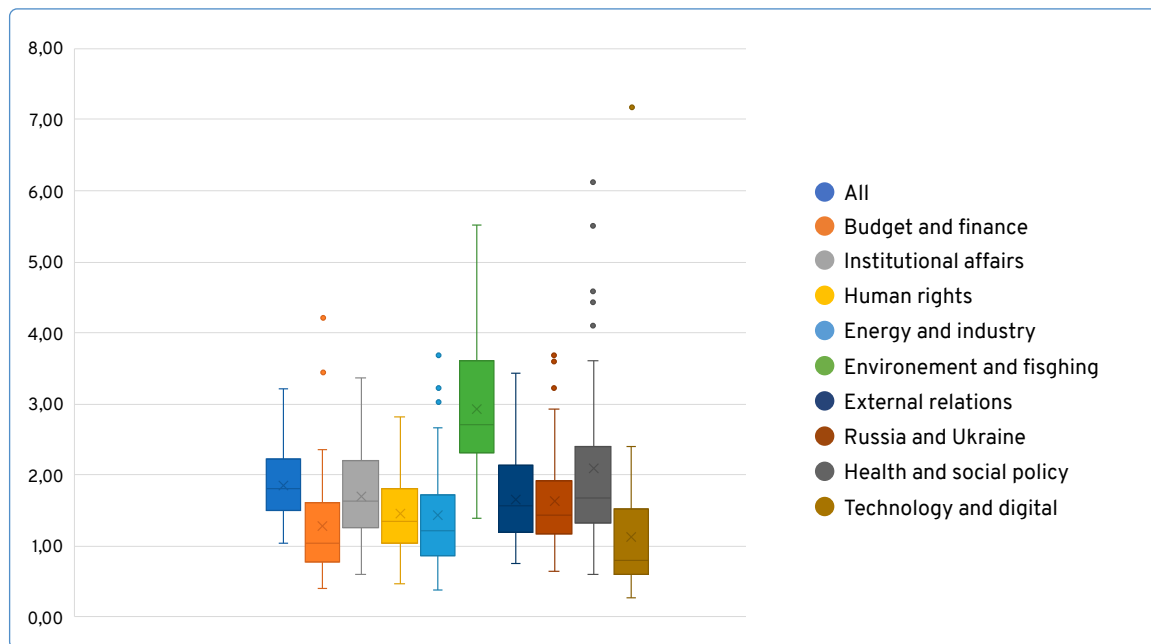
Breaking down the full set of roll call votes into the nine thematic clusters identified, several interesting observations occur per political group, as seen in Figures 4 to 11.

– The EPP Group

The **European People’s Party (EPP)** is the largest political coalition in the European Parliament, both in terms of the number of MEPs and the number of parties from almost all EU countries. Its political family often includes more than one party from the same country, reflecting its diversity and broad appeal. However, despite its multi-party composition, the EPP has an overall high degree of cohesion, compared to most of

the other EP groups. Narrowing down the focus thematically, on almost all issues, its members are very well aligned, as depicted in Figure 4, with the most problematic thematic area in terms of cohesion being the environment. There are very few cases of national parties deviating systematically from the common line (outliers), most notably the Swedish *Kristdemokraterna*, which stands out overall.

FIGURE 4: Cohesion of the EPP per thematic area

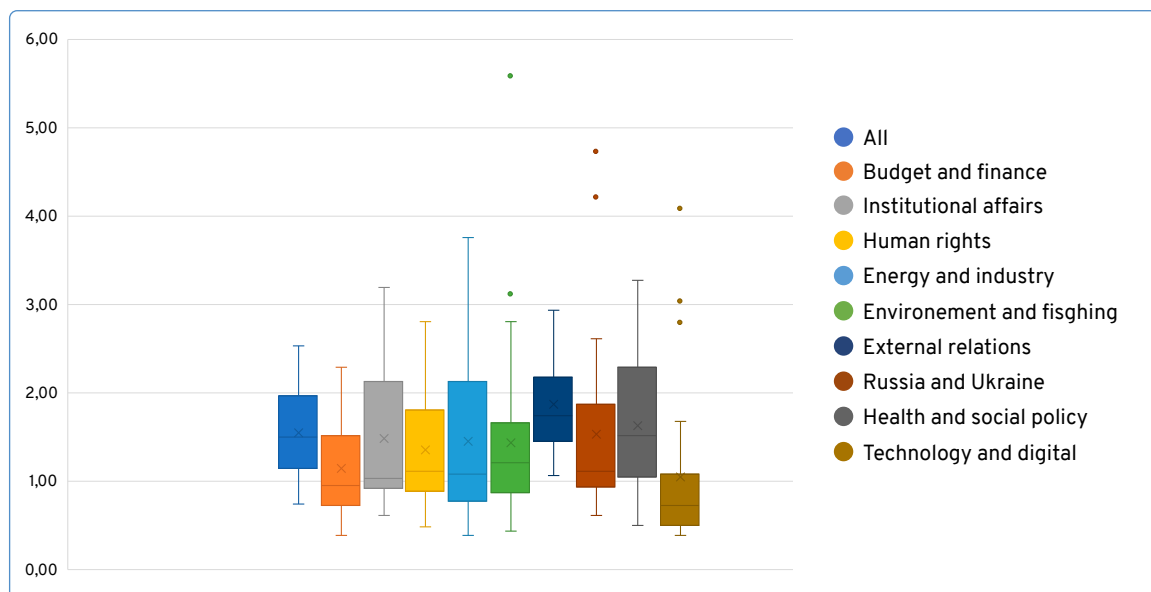


— The S&D Group

The **Socialists and Democrats Group (S&D)** brings together parties from all EU countries and plays a decisive role in shaping and making decisions at European level due to its size and high degree of cohesion overall. As shown in Figure 5, in most areas, there is a very high degree of agreement among its members,

which strengthens the group’s unified political stance and its effectiveness in legislative procedures. Exceptions and political outliers in this group comprise the Estonian *Eesti Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond* on environmental issues, or the Bulgarian *Balgarska Sotsialisticheska Partiya* and the Maltese *Partit Laburista* on resolutions concerning Russia.

FIGURE 5: Cohesion of the S&D per thematic area

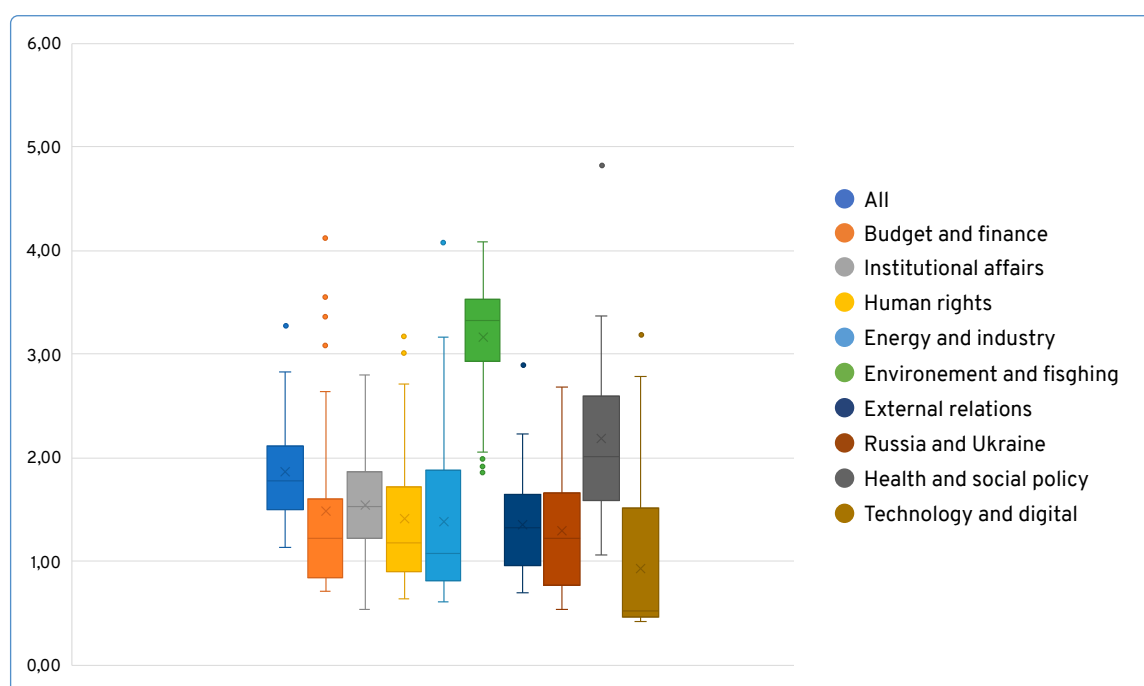


– The RENEW group

The **Renew Europe** group is smaller in size than the EPP and S&D, but, nevertheless, it contributes substantially to the shaping of the European ‘governing majority’. Although it is mainly composed of smaller parties and does not have a dominant leading party, it shows remarkable cohesion compared to other poli-

tical groups, with its members showing very small differentiation in their voting behavior except for the environment, as shown in Figure 6. Outliers comprise the Danish *Det Radikale Venstre*, mainly on environmental and energy issues, the German *Freie Wähler*, on budgetary and environmental issues, and the Latvian *Latvijas Attīstībai* on health and budgetary issues.

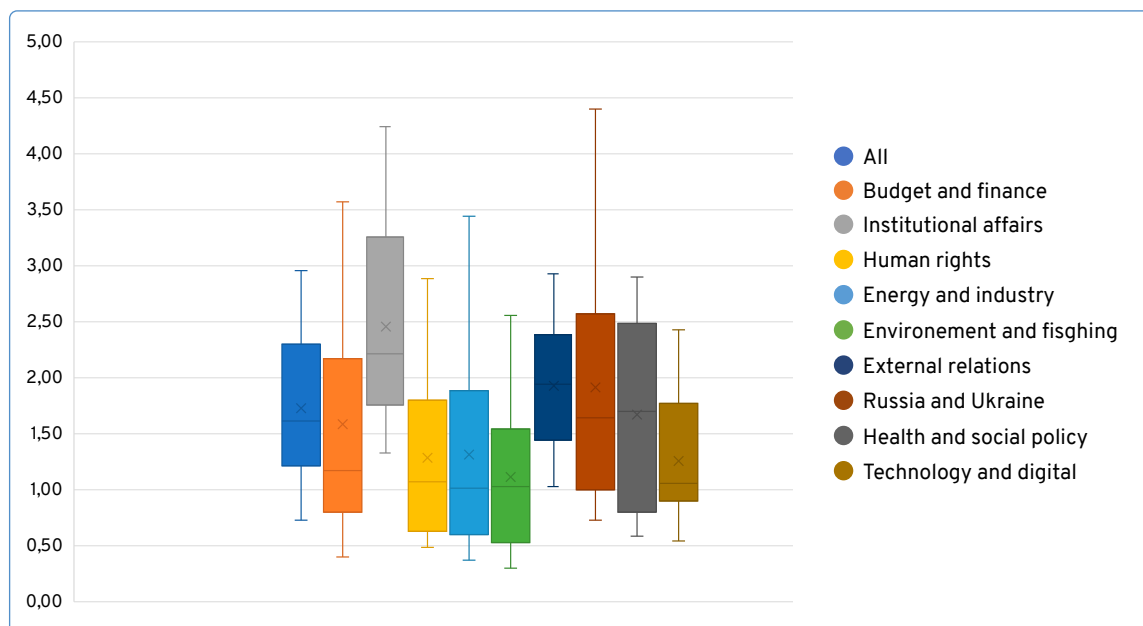
FIGURE 6: Cohesion of RENEW per thematic area



– The GREEN_EFA group

Although not one of the largest political groups in the EP, the **Greens/European Free Alliance** actively participates in decision-making, often aligning with the majority, while maintaining a critical stance on specific topics. The group is dominated by the German Greens and shows a high degree of coherence in the fields of human rights, energy, environment and technology, which are key issues in the group’s political and ideological agenda (Figure 7). Despite existing internal differences, the Green political group remains a dynamic and active player in shaping European policy, with an emphasis on social justice, sustainability and technological progress.

FIGURE 7: Cohesion of the GREEN_EFA per thematic area



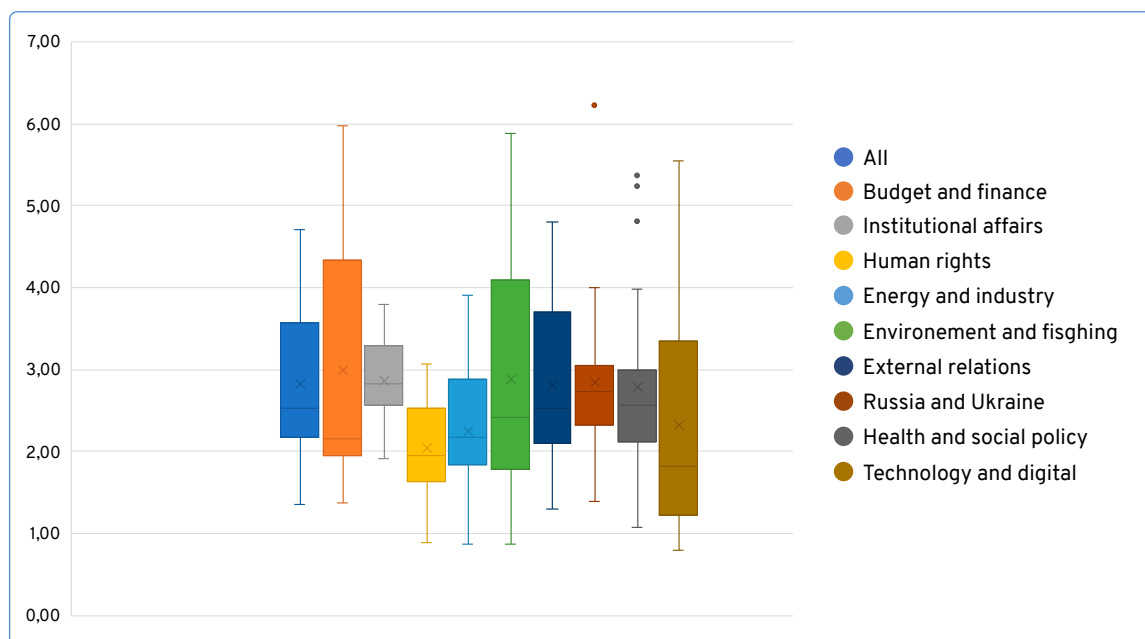
— The ECR Group

The **European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)** political group does not have a high degree of internal cohesion, with a rather loose and often contradictory stance on critical issues. It has occasionally converged to the positions of the ‘governmental bloc’ (EPP, S&D, Renew, Greens) and in other issues has contributed to the formation of the ‘Venezuelan majority’ with EPP and other political groups in the Right and Far Right.

As shown in Figure 8, the group’s cohesion is tested on most issues, especially on the budget, relations with Russia, the environment, health policy and institutional issues. In these thematic areas, several of its members lean towards more sovereigntist positions. The Italian party *Fratelli d’Italia* plays a key role in the shaping of the group’s

political line, while parties such as *Perussuomalaiset* (Finland), *Sverigedemokraterna* (Sweden), *Danmarksdemokraterne* (Denmark) and *Elliniki Lisi* (Greece) diverge significantly from the party’s main line. Especially for the latter, *Elliniki Lisi* systematically deviates from the group’s general stance, particularly on foreign policy and democracy issues. For example, on Russia, the party’s stance is closer to that of the ESN group, which expresses more pro-Russian positions, and the same goes for the condemnation of authoritarian regimes and the strengthening of democracy as a European value. This is indicative of the broader ideological heterogeneity of the ECR and its limited capacity for internal discipline, with some constituent national parties acting more as independent players than a consistent member of the political group.

FIGURE 8: Cohesion of the ECR per thematic area

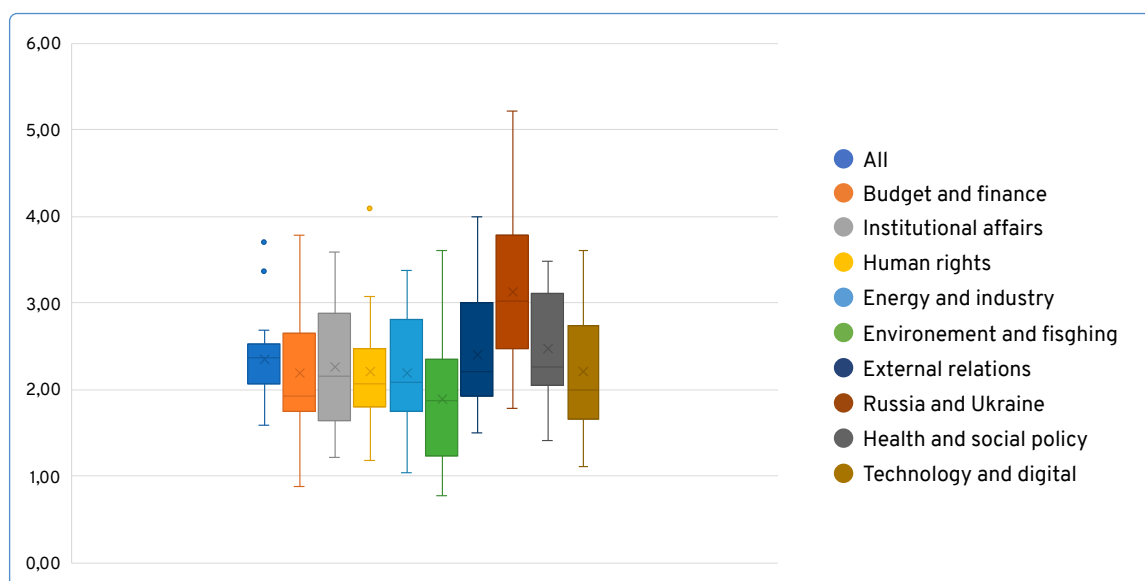


— The GUE_NGL Group

The **Left** is a broad coalition of political parties comprising parties with communist roots, parties originating from the radical left, as well as eco-socialist and environmental activist movements. In addition, within the group there are anti-EU voices, as well as national parties that focus particularly on minorities rights. Despite such a diversity, the general level of cohesion is satisfactory, with significant differences, though, especially on Russia, where opinions

are strongly divided (Figure 9). In general, the Left political group maintains a critical stance towards European integration. It rarely supports positions that strengthen the deepening of European integration, prioritising social justice, ecological sensitivity and national sovereignty. The most divisive issue for the group is relations with Russia, with outliers comprising the Danish *Enhedslisten - De Rød-Grønne*, the Cypriot *AKEL*, the Swedish *Vänsterpartiet*, and the Portuguese *Partido Comunista Português*.

FIGURE 9: Cohesion of GUE_NGL per thematic area

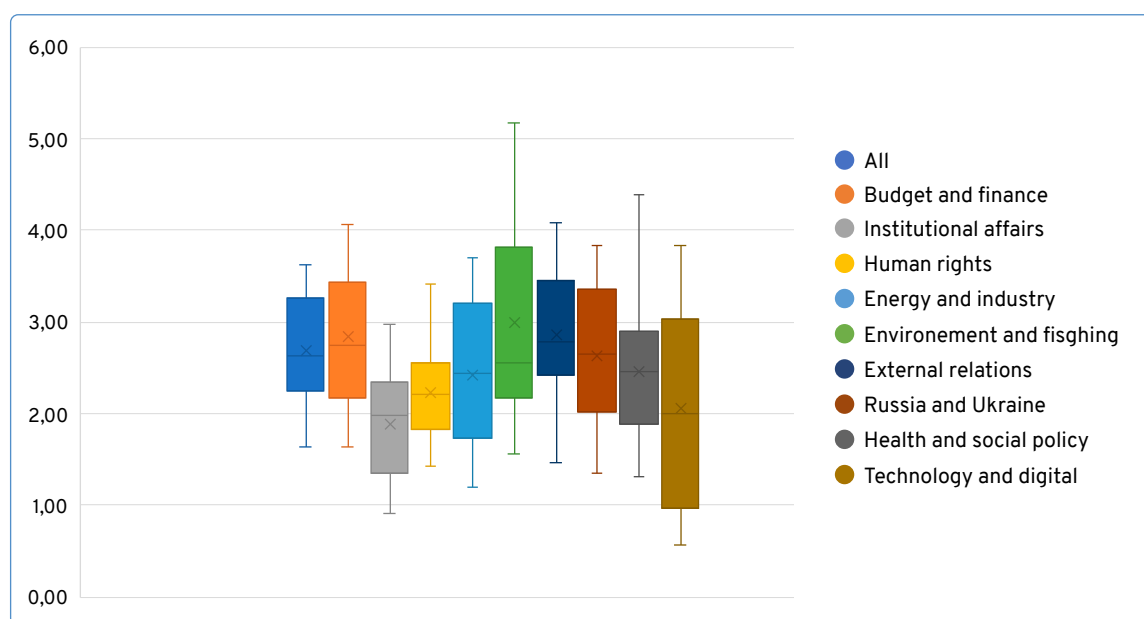


– The PfE Group

The **Patriots for Europe** political group is a new coalition of sovereignist, Eurosceptic and right-wing/far-right parties that was formed after the dissolution of the *Identity and Democracy* (ID) political group. As indicated in Figure 10, the group does not have a consistent voting pattern, and its members vote differently on most issues. This makes it more of a tactical alliance than a coherent political party based on ideological unity. The issue showing the greatest divisions

within this political group is the environment, where the divergences are particularly significant. The Czech *ANO 2011* votes differently on budgetary and environmental issues; the Czech *Přísaha* on budgetary, environmental, foreign affairs, and resolutions related to Russia; and the Czech *Motoristé sobě* on environmental and foreign affairs issues. The Austrian *FPÖ* diverges on technology issues, the Danish *Dansk Folkeparti* on budgetary matters, and the Dutch *PVV* on health issues.

FIGURE 10: Cohesion of PfE per thematic area

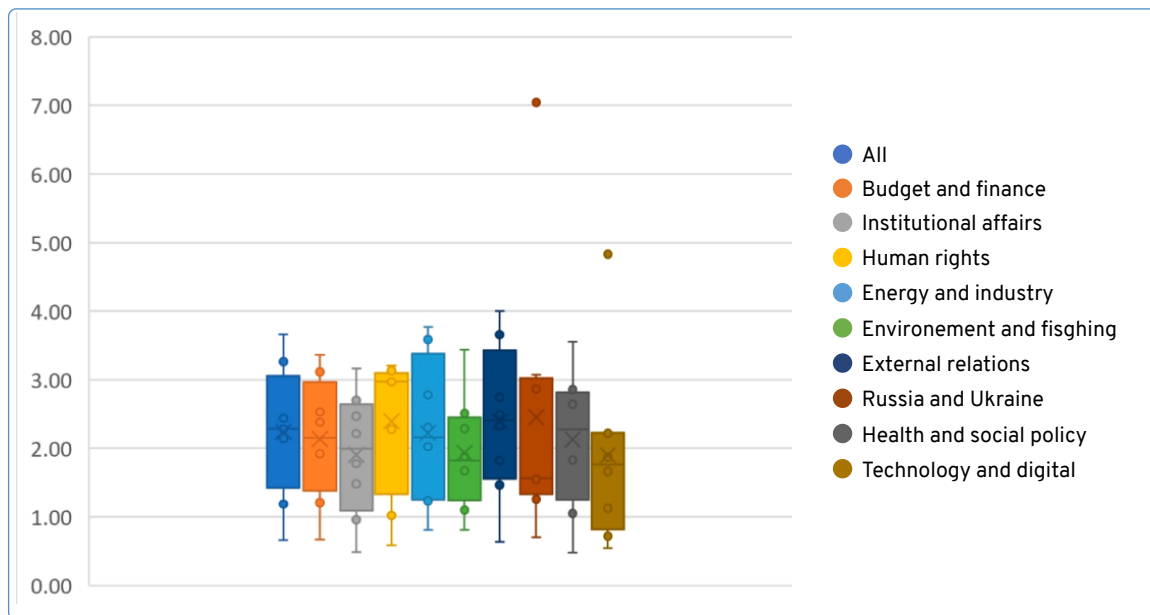


– The ESN Group

Europe of Sovereign Nations (ESN) is the newest and smallest political group in the European Parliament. It was created to host Germany's *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD), which was expelled from the ID group, in 2024. It was formed with the minimum number of MEPs and Member States required by the EP Rules of Procedure (23 MEPs from 7 countries). In practice, it is a single-party group, with AfD at its core, flanked by small and mainly regional parties. The ESN expresses a hardline Eurosceptic and sovereignist political stance with strong opposition to European integration. It functions more as an artificial construction to secure the benefits of parliamentary grouping (funding,

speeches, committees) than as a cohesive political bloc. This is evident in the low cohesion of ESN in most issues, including energy, foreign policy, and relations with Russia, as illustrated in Figure 11. The constituent parties are better aligned on environmental issues, advocating an anti-green agenda, and on social policy issues, with a clear anti-immigration stance and rhetoric. Most notable differences in voting patterns are identified on resolutions concerning Russia, where the Lithuanian *TTS* voted systematically in deviation with the group's general line. The French *Reconquête* diverged from the group's general trend on foreign affairs and technology issues, while the Polish *Konfederacja* voted differently on energy matters.

FIGURE 11: Cohesion of ESN per thematic area



7.

Voting and Political Cleavages in the EP

Having identified the levels of internal cohesion of the EP political groups as well as their relative distance in the previous sections, we now turn our attention to the association of our findings with the main political cleavages identified in the EP politics. In that respect, we explore whether voting decisions are linked with their position on the traditional Left–Right ideological axis and/or their stance toward European integration.

Our analysis combines our findings with the ones of the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES), one of the most widely used and methodologically robust datasets for comparing the ideological positions of European political parties, which collects experts' evaluations of party positions across several policy domains and dimensions. The experts' evaluations are aggregated to produce mean scores for each political group, and measures of reliability—such as variance across expert responses—ensure that data quality remains high. The CHES is a regularly conducted survey, which facilitates both cross-national comparisons and longitudinal analyses, making it particularly well-suited to studying how ideological divides evolve over time.

Methodologically, we combine three variables, the first two deriving from the CHES data (see Table 4) and the third from the analysis undertaken in the previous sections:

- **Left-Right Ideology:** the overall ideological orientation of each political group, combining economic and sociocultural positions.
- **European Integration Stance:** the degree of support for deeper European integration versus a more intergovernmental or Eurosceptic approach.
- **Voting Distance:** similarity or divergence between political groups in their roll-call votes in the European Parliament.

These variables will allow us to examine whether political groups that are ideologically close to one another—either in left–right terms or in their stance on integration—also tend to vote similarly in parliamentary decisions.

TABLE 4: Ideological and Integration Positions of EP Political Groups (CHES scores)

POLITICAL GROUP	LEFT-RIGHT IDEOLOGY	EUROPEAN INTEGRATION
EPP	6.50	8.84
SD	3.82	9.21
PFE	8.47	3.32
ECR	8.21	4.73
RENEW	5.78	8.73
GREEN	2.81	8.63
GUE	1.94	5.87
ESN	9.14	2.89

Comparing the **pairwise distances** between political groups across the three variables (Left-Right ideology, European integration preferences, and roll-call voting), we seek to

establish links between ideological stances and actual legislative behaviour of the EP political groups (Table 5).

TABLE 5: Pairwise Distances between EP Political Groups

POLITICAL GROUP		IDEOLOGY	EUROPEAN INTEGRATION	VOTES
EPP	SD	2.67	0.37	2.40
EPP	PFE	1.97	5.52	5.37
EPP	ECR	1.72	4.11	3.00
EPP	RENEW	0.72	0.11	1.38
EPP	GREEN	3.68	0.21	3.45
EPP	GUE	4.56	2.97	4.70
EPP	ESN	2.64	5.95	6.38
SD	PFE	4.64	5.89	5.65
SD	ECR	4.39	4.48	3.53
SD	RENEW	1.96	0.48	1.72
SD	GREEN	1.01	0.58	2.18
SD	GUE	1.88	3.34	3.99
SD	ESN	5.32	6.32	6.47
PFE	ECR	0.25	1.41	3.51
PFE	RENEW	2.69	5.40	5.58
PFE	GREEN	5.65	5.31	5.90
PFE	GUE	6.53	2.55	4.80
FE	ESN	0.67	0.43	2.67
ECR	RENEW	2.43	4.00	3.30

ECR	GREEN	5.40	3.90	4.09
ECR	GUE	6.28	1.14	4.38
ECR	ESN	0.93	1.84	4.77
RENEW	GREEN	2.97	0.10	3.01
RENEW	GUE	3.84	2.86	4.54
RENEW	ESN	3.36	5.84	6.52
GREEN	GUE	0.88	2.76	3.35
GREEN	ESN	6.33	5.74	6.64
GUE	ESN	7.20	2.98	5.27

For a statistical assessment, we are using the Pearson correlation coefficient. For the Left-Right cleavage ($r = 0.56$), a positive but moderate association with voting similarity is identified. For the European Integration one ($r = 0.82$), a much stronger association is discernible. This suggests that groups' positions on European integration explain voting alignment better than ideology does, reinforcing a key literature insight that **European integration has become a distinct and highly influential cleavage** in the EP politics – one that increasingly structures legislative behaviour beyond the traditional Left-Right divide.

8.

Conclusion

The first year of the new EP has been characterised by continuity and change in the voting behaviour of the EP political groups and their subsequent political alignment. Despite the existing high political fragmentation, a relatively stable ‘governing coalition’ keeps dominating EP politics. This coalition consists of the EPP, S&D and Renew, with the *ad hoc* support of the Greens on specific thematic issues. These three groups feature the highest degree of internal cohesion, with most of their members aligning with the group’s main political position and with few outliers expressing diverging views. This enables the formation of relatively comfortable majorities. However, political turbulence does occur occasionally, with political alliances shifting and new voting patterns emerging, integrating at times and on different issues ECR and GUE/NGL in the governing majority. Although these two groups have a lower degree of internal cohesion, they constitute a thematically focused, very useful deposit of potential votes. The most characteristic example of ECR’s political ‘mainstreaming’ is the -so called- “Venezuelan majority”, which appears in votes related to the condemnation of authoritarian regimes (such as Venezuela), democracy, and human rights issues as well as EU foreign policy (Russia–Ukraine, Latin America).

Besides ECR and GUE/NGL, the two other groups, PfiE and ESN, also have a low degree of internal cohesion. Not only are they located at a significant distance from the political groups of the ‘governing coalition’, but they are also characterised by significant internal political fragmentation. This fact is explained by the dominant role of one national political party in their formation and political orientation

and indicates the absence of a unifying political identity, more notably for the ESN group. These features explain the great surprise and criticism to the EPP for its choice to align with the PfiE, the ESN and the ECR in the so-called Sustainability Omnibus legislation, passed in November. Although the ECR political history and ideological nature justify (occasional) voting alignments with the EPP, such a broad voting coalition is atypical of the previous EP political dynamics but indicative of the new socio-political dynamics unfolding at both national and European level.

Political pragmatism - even political opportunism - is definitely a factor behind such political decisions. More structurally, from an early analysis, the political cleavage of European integration versus national sovereignty appears more powerful than the more traditional Left-Right one. This element, of course, requires further and more methodologically robust research, but these early findings reinforce the arguments about the growing importance of the EU factor in European but also national politics.

9.

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Appendix

I • Methodology

I CALCULATION OF POLITICAL DISTANCE BETWEEN TWO POLITICAL GROUPS

The methodology used to calculate the distance between political groups in the European Parliament (EP) is based on the **Euclidean distance formula**.

$$d(p,q) = \sqrt{(p_1 - q_1)^2 + (p_2 - q_2)^2 + \dots + (p_n - q_n)^2}$$

In this context, **p** and **q** represent two different political groups. For each roll call vote, **p₁** denotes the position of political group **p** on the first vote, while **q₁** denotes the position of political group **q** on that same vote.

Example: Calculation of a Group's Position in a Vote

If the Members of a political group vote 65% in favor, 15% against, and 20% abstain or are absent, the group's overall position is calculated as:

$$[0.65 \times (+1)] + [0.15 \times (-1)] = +0.50$$

This value reflects the group's overall tendency on that vote, ranging from -1 (entirely against) to +1 (entirely in favour).

Example: Calculation of the Distance between Two Groups

Given the following voting scores for three roll call votes:

Vote	Group P	Group Q
1 st Vote	0.5	-0.6
2 nd Vote	-0.7	-0.1
3 rd Vote	0.3	0.9

The Euclidean distance between them is:

$$d(p,q) = \sqrt{(0.5 - (-0.6))^2 + (-0.7 - (-0.1))^2 + (0.3 - 0.9)^2}$$
$$d(p,q) = \sqrt{(1.1)^2 + (-0.6)^2 + (-0.6)^2} \approx 1.39$$

The distance value (1.39) represents how dissimilar the two groups' voting patterns are:

- Smaller distances indicate greater similarity or alignment in voting behavior.
- Larger distances (approaching the maximum possible distance) indicate stronger disagreement.

The maximum theoretical distance, assuming completely opposite votes on three roll calls, would be:

$$\sqrt{(2)^2 + (2)^2 + (2)^2} \approx 3.46$$

Normalization

To make distances comparable across different sets of votes, the calculated distance is divided by the maximum possible distance and then multiplied by 10. This yields a normalized distance score between 0 and 10, where:

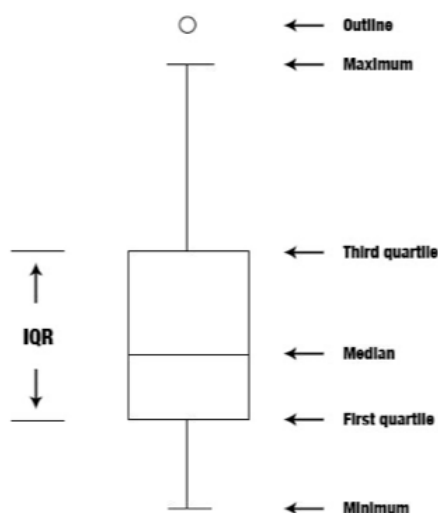
- 0 indicates *identical voting behavior*, and
- 10 indicates *complete opposition*.

This normalization allows for meaningful comparisons between political groups, helping to identify patterns of alliance, opposition, and ideological proximity within the European Parliament.

I UNDERSTANDING THE BOXPLOT

A boxplot visualizes the distribution of data through five key descriptive values:

- Minimum (lower whisker): the smallest *non-outlier* value
- Lower quartile (Q1): 25th percentile
- Median (Q2): 50th percentile (the central tendency)
- Upper quartile (Q3): 75th percentile
- Maximum (upper whisker): the largest *non-outlier* value
- Outliers (dots or circles): values lying outside the range
 - Below $Q1 - 1.5 \times IQR$, or
 - Above $Q3 + 1.5 \times IQR$, where $IQR = Q3 - Q1$ (the interquartile range).



– Applying Boxplot Interpretation to Political Groups

When Euclidean distances are used, the boxplot shows how far each political group is from the average or consensus position across all votes.

- Lower Euclidean distances → greater proximity to the mainstream or consensus.
- Higher Euclidean distances → ideological or behavioral divergence from the average pattern.

Thus, the boxplot helps identify which groups vote cohesively and which show internal variation or polarization on specific policy areas.

– Interpreting a Boxplot

Median (central line inside the box):

Indicates the typical or central value.

A higher median means a group tends to have larger or more extreme values.

Box height (IQR):

Reflects *consistency* or *internal variability*.

- A small IQR → consistent behavior within the group.
- A large IQR → greater internal diversity.

'Whiskers':

Represent the normal range of variation.

Longer whiskers indicate a wider spread of regular values.

Outliers:

Show exceptional or atypical cases.

A large number of outliers may signal occasional unpredictable behavior.

In our analysis, the two main elements of interest are:

- The **median**, indicating the central or typical position of a group.
- The **box height** (IQR), showing how uniformly group members behave.

	SMALL IQR (<1)	LARGE IQR (>1)
Median close to 0 (<2)	COHERENT GROUP	MODERATELY COHERENT
Median not close to 0 (>2)	MODERATELY COHERENT	NOT COHERENT

II • Statistical Indicators of Cohesion (IQR and Median Values of EP Political Groups) – Findings for Figures 4 to 11

TABLE 4: IQR & Median - All Votes

	IQR	MEDIAN
EPP	0.71	1.81
SD	0.72	1.50
RENEW	0.52	1.77
GREEN_EFA	1.03	1.61
ECR	1.17	2.53
GUE_NGL	0.38	2.36
PFE	0.85	2.64
ESN	0.74	2.28

TABLE 5: IQR & Median - Budget and Finance

	IQR	MEDIAN
EPP	0.81	1.05
SD	0.79	0.94
RENEW	0.54	1.22
GREEN_EFA	1.35	1.17
ECR	2.00	2.15
GUE_NGL	0.65	1.93
PFE	1.04	2.75
ESN	0.93	2.15

TABLE 6: IQR & Median - External Relations

	IQR	MEDIAN
EPP	0.93	1.57
SD	0.70	1.74
RENEW	0.65	1.33
GREEN_EFA	0.88	1.94
ECR	1.52	2.52
GUE_NGL	1.00	2.20
PFE	0.92	2.78
ESN	1.24	2.41

TABLE 7: IQR & Median - Environment

	IQR	MEDIAN
EPP	1.20	2.70
SD	0.70	1.20
RENEW	0.59	3.33
GREEN_EFA	0.88	1.02
ECR	2.24	2.41
GUE_NGL	1.01	1.88
PFE	1.46	2.55
ESN	0.81	1.82

TABLE 8: IQR & Median – Human Rights

	IQR	MEDIAN
EPP	0.74	1.34
SD	0.89	1.11
RENEW	0.79	1.18
GREEN_EFA	1.05	1.07
ECR	0.88	1.96
GUE_NGL	0.59	2.07
PFE	0.59	2.21
ESN	1.06	2.98

TABLE 9: IQR & Median - Institutional Affairs

	IQR	MEDIAN
EPP	0.93	1.63
SD	1.06	1.03
RENEW	0.57	1.52
GREEN_EFA	1.49	2.21
ECR	0.70	2.83
GUE_NGL	1.20	2.15
PFE	0.98	1.98
ESN	1.18	2.00

TABLE 10: IQR & Median - Russia/Ukraine

	IQR	MEDIAN
EPP	0.71	1.43
SD	0.88	1.11
RENEW	0.83	1.23
GREEN_EFA	1.39	1.64
ECR	0.65	2.74
GUE_NGL	0.91	3.03
PFE	1.26	2.65
ESN	1.44	1.57

TABLE 11: IQR & Median - Energy and Industry

	IQR	MEDIAN
EPP	0.84	1.22
SD	1.09	1.08
RENEW	0.86	1.08
GREEN_EFA	1.23	1.01
ECR	0.80	2.17
GUE_NGL	1.06	2.07
PFE	1.30	2.43
ESN	1.71	2.16

TABLE 12: IQR & Median - Health and Social Policy

	IQR	MEDIAN
EPP	1.08	1.68
SD	1.21	1.52
RENEW	0.92	2.01
GREEN_EFA	1.58	1.69
ECR	0.86	2.57
GUE_NGL	0.96	2.26
PFE	0.88	2.45
ESN	1.10	2.27

TABLE 13: IQR & Median - Technology - Digital

	IQR	MEDIAN
EPP	0.89	0.80
SD	0.53	0.73
RENEW	0.93	0.52
GREEN_EFA	0.76	1.05
ECR	1.73	1.82
GUE_NGL	1.07	2.00
PFE	1.78	1.99
ESN	1.20	1.77

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