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## The European Parliament in Times of Crisis: Transnationalism under Pressure?

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## Abstract

In 2015, the intensification of the migration crisis has exposed the European Union to a highly politicized policy problem that was subject to radically different national approaches. In the past, the literature has tended to present the European Parliament as a highly supranational institution, where formal procedures and informal practices have encouraged the emergence of transnational party groups over time. However, while these groups are now seen as enjoying a high level of cohesion, the literature also argues that national loyalties are likely to prevail in the case of conflict between the European party group and the national party. The migration crisis can be expected to create numerous conflicts that would undermine party cohesion. Yet, the analysis of plenary debates in 2015 shows that European party groups still benefit from a high level of cohesion and that most MEPs avoid couching their arguments in national terms. The European Parliament is thus still a fundamentally transnational actor.

## Keywords

European Parliament, supranationalism, transnationalism, party groups, cohesion, migration

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One of the central questions at the heart of analyses of the European Parliament (EP) is about the logics that structure the behaviour of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). On the one hand, while the way MEPs are selected has changed, they have always been elected to the EP directly or indirectly by the citizens of a State. On the other hand, the members of the Assembly of the Coal and Steel Community (the earliest version of the EP) immediately organized themselves in political groups based on ideology, thereby becoming the first international parliamentary assembly where representatives did not sit nationally (Murray 2004). In his seminal work *The Uniting of Europe*, Ernst Haas thus already wondered whether the members of the Assembly (as the EP was then called) represented the European Coal and Steel Community *as a whole*, or the member states from which they came (Haas 2004: 414-437).

Studies of votes in the EP show that the transnational party groups have become more cohesive over time, despite the addition of new member states in successive rounds of enlargement (Raunio 1997; Hix 2002; Faas 2003; Hix et al. 2005; Hix and Noury 2009; Roland 2009). At the same time, the cohesion of transnational party groups is at least in part based on the high cohesion of the national party groups that are federated within them. It is thus strongest when national party groups agree with the policy preferences of the transnational group (Faas 2003; also Hix 2002; Roland 2009). MEPs are thus still torn between two logics of representation in those cases where national parties disagree with transnational party groups. These divided loyalties could pose a challenge to the work of the EP in the current political climate, where the European Union (EU) is exposed to multiple crises that bring different national view points to the fore. The public debt crisis in the Eurozone and the migration crisis with a mass influx of migrants from the Middle East and Africa, in particular, have revealed profound disagreements between member states on what constitutes effective and appropriate solutions. Both crises have also had an impact on voters and have led to a transformation of the European party landscape in regional and national elections (as in Greece or

Germany). Thus, one can expect these crises to also have an impact on the work of the EP, where politicization (defined in the following section) could come at the expense of transnational unity.

The aim of this contribution is to analyse the evolution of transnational party cohesion in the context of crisis with the aim of understanding to what extent transnational parties can maintain unity. For this purpose, it studies the evolution of EP debates on migration from third countries in the course of 2015. While the migration crisis had been simmering on for a number of years, it reached a peak in mid-2015 when migration flows rapidly accelerated and challenged the ability of member states to process them. 2015 is a key year for the politicization of EU migration policies, as this is the year when the Dublin rules on the distribution of asylum-seekers were de facto suspended. Thus, the highly controversial question of how many migrants each state should accept was added to the already salient questions of how the EU should address the wave of migration in the Mediterranean and along the Eastern European route and who should be allowed to stay. One could expect national interests to rear their head in the EP. In order to examine the impact of the crisis on the EP, the following sections will first review the literature on transnationalism in the EP and the potential of the migration crisis to cause intra-party dissent in 2015. It then turns to the analysis of 1230 migration-related speeches in plenary debates in the European Parliament. It is argued that party cohesion is lower during debates than during votes, but party groups remain nevertheless a key factor structuring policy positions in the EP. On the whole, despite the high political salience of the topic, national concerns are only a marginal element in plenary debates on the migration crisis.

#### **THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: TRANSNATIONAL OR INTER-NATIONAL ACTOR?**

In the literature, the EP is often presented as one of the truly supranational institutions (Murray 2004). This assessment is based on three elements: its organizational features, the behaviour of MEPs and the positions of the EP itself. Firstly, one of the key supranational features of the European Parliament is its organizational approach that traditionally emphasizes transnationalism. The decision to organize the day-to-day work of the EP through ideologically defined party groups reflects a willingness to transcend nationalism (Hix and Lord 1997) and to counterbalance the national representation in the Council of Ministers (Murray 2004: 106). Once formed, the political groups shaped the rules of procedure of the EP to their own advantage (Kreppel 2002). They seized control over the allocation of chairs, committee memberships, rapporteurs, etc (Corbett et al. 2011). In addition, the majority ensured that big party groups would be in a particularly advantageous position (Kreppel 2002: 121). Thus, financial resources are allocated based on the size of the group and the national diversity within the group. Voting in the Conference of Presidents is weighted by size (Bressanelli 2012) and the D'Hondt method for the distribution of office positions benefits larger groups.

Secondly, the transnational party groups are relatively cohesive in practice, albeit less cohesive than parties in national parliaments (Attinà 1990; Hix et al. 2005; Frantescu 2015). Even after the 2004 and 2007 enlargements, MEPs are reluctant to defect from their group in votes, as they are worried that the group will penalize them for their behaviour by denying them attractive positions in the EP or valuable speaking time (Hix et al. 2009). However, in practice, MEPs have not one but two principals. While the European group determines their career within the EP, the national party tends to control candidate selection during election time (Rasmussen 2008). Part of the reason why these divided loyalties do not obstruct party cohesion is that national parties join European groups they largely agree with. Thus, Bressanelli (2012) found that pragmatism, i.e. the desire to join a large group to benefit from its size, only plays a limited role. Ideological compatibility is by far the most important factor, although slightly less so in the case of the states that joined after 2004 (also McElroy and

Benoit 2010; Lefkofridi and Katsanidou 2013). The exception are the nationalist groups (ECR and ENF), which have high congruence with their national members on the EU-scale, but less so on the left-right scale. This can be explained by the fact that these groups and the corresponding national parties are more interested in the EU-dimension than the left-right scale (Lefkofridi and Katsanidou 2013; also McElroy and Benoit 2011). As a result, the high levels of group cohesion also stem from a situation where national parties are by and large well-matched with their group. Most academics agree that MEPs would follow their national party in situations where the preferences of the national party and the European group clash (esp. Hix 2002). This is particularly true for MEPs who hope to pursue careers in domestic politics (Meserve et al. 2009). However, as the two sets of preferences are most of the time very similar, there is little need for defection in practice. While there is a certain competition between loyalty to national parties and loyalty to European party groups, it is not very common that all MEPs from one member state vote together (Hix and Noury 2009). This holds true even for issues where one would expect to find traditional national differences, such as votes on EU-Russia relations (Braghiroli 2015). This is another indication that ideological divisions trump national divisions matter.

Thirdly, the European Parliament is often associated with an integrationist agenda (Murray 2004). However, the commitment to integration did depend on external circumstances as well, and wavered somewhat during the 1970s, for example, with the enlargement to more Eurosceptic states and a general erosion of solidarity between member states (Murray 2004). The enlargement of 2004 raised similar concerns. Would MEPs from the new member states be less pro-European in light of the fact that they had only experienced limited socialization in the European context? On the basis of a survey of MEPs from 2010 Scully et al. (2012) argue that this is no longer the case. The MEPs from the new member states are on balance farther to the right on the left-right spectrum, but they have very similar attitudes to EU integration as MEPs from the old member states. Overall, the behaviour of MEPs is thus considered to be very transnational. However, much of the evidence is based on votes and thus only provides us with part of the picture. In addition, roll call votes might provide a distorted picture by over- or underestimating party cohesion. By recording the votes of individual MEPs, they make their choices more visible. However, the precise effect of this is subject to dispute. According to Mühlböck and Yordanova (2015) and Hug (2016), voting cohesion is likely to be lower or equal in roll call votes compared to other votes. However, according to Trumm (2015), MEPs indicated in a survey that they are more likely to follow national party preferences in 'ordinary' votes where their individual preferences are not made public than in roll call votes. This is especially true for MEPs from the new member states.

Votes are only one part of the work of MEPs, though. Another important element is their participation in debates, which provides them with an opportunity to voice constituency concerns and to explain and justify their stance on EU policies (Lord 2013). As debates are a far more detailed source of information on the positions of MEPs than votes, they can be used in a more varied way and have recently captured the attention of academics. Bäck and Debus (2016) argue, for instance, that the quantity and content of speeches of MEPs can shed light on gender roles and career goals of MEPs. In addition, they provide more detailed insights into party group cohesion. But can we expect party group discipline to be equally strong during debates? One can expect debates to offer more opportunities for MEPs to defect from the European party line based on their personal preferences or their national party's preferences. The literature on voting argues that MEPs are most likely to adhere to voting instructions from their party group when the stakes are high, i.e. when the vote is likely to influence the outcome of a policy (Hix et al. 2005). This makes sense, as party leaderships can be expected to penalize their members more severely for defection when they undermine their party in a crucial moment. This is particularly true for votes under the ordinary legislative procedure, where the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union de facto form a bicameral

system (Kreppel 2011). The fact that the EP can have great influence under this procedure – but dependent on its ability to reach a compromise with the Council – has led the EP to organize its work much more strategically. Coalitions between party groups have become more stable over time (Costello 2011), and one can assume that this also affects party discipline within groups. As debates are an exchange of view that does not result in a concrete conclusion or outcome, the stakes for parties are much lower than in votes. Thus, Slapin and Proksch (2010) argue that dissenting MEPs can use debates as a mean to explain the position of their national party to their European group and to gain political capital with the national group that will facilitate re-election. In the same vein, Rasmussen (2008) argues that MEPs feel bound by the voting instructions of the European party, but are inclined to represent their national parties in debates.

That said, it is of course not the case that debates are completely out of the control of the EP's party groups (cf. also Proksch and Slapin 2012 on party control over debates in the UK and Germany). Speaking time in plenary debates is first allocated to key actors such as a representative of the Commission, Council or European Council, a rapporteur, authors of motions etc. After this, one representative of each group and the non-attached is allowed to speak. The rest of the time, which is often by far the largest part, is allocated to the remaining MEPs. The time each group is allocated is regulated by Rule 162 of the Parliament's Rules of Procedure: a section is divided equally between groups, and another is divided based on the size of the groups (Judge and Earnshaw 2008; Corbett et al. 2011). Groups can then allocate their speaking time between different debates, i.e. they can prioritize topics that are particularly close to their heart. In addition, they divide their speaking time between their members. In other words, the party leadership can to some extent marginalize backbenchers who have a tendency to undermine the party. In addition, as the first person to speak for the party is usually its spokesperson on this issue, the party can choose to allocate a substantial part of its speaking time to someone who is likely to represent its official line. However, in some cases, the Commission or Council statements can be followed by an open 30 minute 'catch-the-eye' debate, where speaking time is allocated based on spontaneous expressions of interest from the floor. In addition, once per part-session, a roughly 30-minute debate on matters of political importance allows room for interventions beyond the reach of the groups, as MEPs can discuss any topic they like. A brief 'catch-the-eye' procedure is also often added to the end of longer pre-set debates. However, if time is short, this procedure is often skipped or is not foreseen from the start. One example of a highly controlled debate was the debate on the programme of the Luxembourgish Presidency in July 2015, where only the official spokespersons for each party were allowed to speak (European Parliament 8 July 2015).

On the whole, the way that speaking time is allocated means that EP debates are very structured and allow only limited room for true interaction between MEPs (Garssen 2016). MEPs can use so-called 'blue cards' to ask questions to the current speaker, but if there is time pressure (and there often is), the use of these cards can be restricted to one per MEP or suspended altogether. Overall, in light of the fact that party groups contain like-minded MEPs and that they have some ways to control those MEPs, we would expect plenary debates to show at least some measure of party cohesion, especially in early 2015. However, we also expect this cohesion to erode in the course of the year, as the crisis intensifies and member states are increasingly divided on the right course of action. At those times, the debates do provide opportunities for dissent. But how much division can we expect and along which lines? The following section will provide an overview over the main issues in 2015 and how they could lead to different forms of politicization. It will develop a set of hypotheses on this basis.

## THE MIGRATION CRISIS OF 2015 AND ITS POTENTIAL FOR POLITICIZATION

The European Union had been facing a constant migration crisis for a few years before the events reached a peak in 2015. Asylum applications from citizens of non-member countries to EU member states had gradually increased in the years leading up to 2012. They then sharply increased to 627,000 in 2014, which was the highest numbers since the Yugoslav crisis in 1992. In 2015, they then doubled to almost 1.3 million applications. The main increase is caused by a rise in the number of applicants from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq (Eurostat 2016). The number of migrants more generally arriving in the EU also increased sharply in that period and, at the same time, migration routes shifted from Italy and Spain to Greece (UNHCR 2016).

In this general context, several angles of debate and disagreement emerged. The first one was the obvious question of how many migrants the European Union should accept. This is a question that largely matched the left-right spectrum with more restrictive attitudes on the right and more welcoming attitudes on the left. However, the migration crisis affected member states unevenly: migrants targeted some member states (e.g. Germany, Sweden) more than others (e.g. the Czech Republic). In addition, under the Dublin rules on refugees, the countries where asylum seekers first arrive should – in theory – accommodate them. As a result, countries like Greece, Italy or Portugal, where the migration streams arrived, were under pressure. When the EU responded with the decision to distribute a certain number of refugees across all member states via a quota system in the second half of 2015, the question of ‘how many’ turned into a question of ‘how many for which state’. The decision was highly controversial as some member states refused to accept refugees via quotas, had to be adopted via qualified majority voting due to a lack of consensus and, in practice, only a few hundred refugees were relocated, and many member states staunchly refused to accept the quotas (The Guardian 4 March 2016; Högenauer 2016). This led to further disagreements between strongly affected countries that demand solidarity and changes to the Dublin rules, and certain, mainly, Eastern European member states that insist on their right not to accept refugees who arrived in other countries. In addition, as those countries that were subject to particularly intense migration pressure were not always able to contain the migration flows, some MEPs demanded the suspension of the Schengen rules that that member states would regain the right to close their national borders.

A further dimension of the problem was the humanitarian situation in the Mediterranean. One long-standing problem with migration routes via the Mediterranean was that regular occurrence of mass-drownings due to human traffickers packing too many people on old vessel that did not withstand the journey. In the EU, this triggered a debate on whether one could tolerate these deaths and what the appropriate response should be. In 2013, Italy started Operation Mare Nostrum, a naval search and rescue mission with the aim to prevent migrants drowning in large numbers in the Mediterranean. However, in 2014, it ended the mission as it failed to receive financial support from other member states. Frontex took over with Operation Triton, but some member states, such as the UK, feared that the rescue mission would encourage migrants to take the Mediterranean route (The Guardian 27 October 2014). In 2015, the debate continued on whether rescuing people from the Mediterranean encouraged them to come and human traffickers to dump them at sea in poor-quality vessels, and what one could do instead. On the left, demands for more legal avenues of migration were made, so that migrants did not have to rely on traffickers. On the right, demands for discouragements to come were prevalent. In addition, throughout 2015, the problem became linked to security concerns. In the aftermath of Islamist attacks in Paris in January and November 2015, for example, concerns about the risk of terrorists coming to Europe with the stream of refugees became more pronounced. These concerns also reflected left-right divisions.

Finally, disagreements between member states intensified in 2015, as different member states opted for different approaches to the crisis. To name but some prominent examples, Hungary, one of the earliest countries exposed to mass migration erected several fences along its borders to neighbouring countries. German chancellor Angela Merkel, by contrast, adopted a (rather unilateral) open-arms policy whereby Germany would accept asylum seekers without a maximum ceiling. However, this created a migrant stream from Greece and the Balkans to Germany that a) led to mass migration to Germany and an increasingly heated German debate on migration policy and b) heavily impacted other countries on the route, such as Slovenia and Austria, which eventually also erected fences. In addition, Austria decided to cap the number of migrants that it would let into the country, thereby creating a debate about the legality of its measures that triggered disagreements even between EU institutions (Politico 2016). As a result, migration policy became particularly politicized in the course of 2015. But what does this mean for party cohesion? In this context, I adopt a similar definition to Zürn (2013) and de Wilde and Zürn (2012), whereby politicization is seen as the process of an issue being

brought into the political sphere . that is, transported either into the political sub-system (defined by the ability to make collectively binding decisions) or into the political space (defined by public debates about the right course in handling a given problem). (de Wilde and Zürn 2012: 141).

In the case of the migration crisis, the second part of the definition is particularly relevant as the issue has become increasingly controversial and debated in recent years. Whether politicization harms or helps party unity depends on the nature of the issue. De Wilde (2011) thus distinguishes between *partisan* and *intergovernmental* politicization. The former creates a left-right division that is likely to reinforce party unity, whereas the latter pits different governments against each other and is thus likely to prioritize national interest over partisan lines. Similarly, de Wilde and Lord (2016) distinguish remote conflict (where the problem is seen as a foreign problem) from international conflict (which pits member states one against the other or supranational institutions, similar to intergovernmental politicization) and domestic conflict (which corresponds to partisan politicization). International conflict and domestic conflict are also distinguished by de Wilde (2012). The category of 'remote conflict' is irrelevant in this context, as the migration crisis was a hot topic in all member states. But the distinction between partisan and intergovernmental politicization is important, as the previous discussion of the crisis has highlighted the fact that the migration crisis had the potential to trigger both types: While migration typically appeals to partisan divisions with the left being more open to migration than the right, the migration crisis also pitted national governments against each other in debates on the uneven impact of the migration crisis on member states and the distribution of migrants across member states. We thus add two hypotheses in this regard that point into two different directions – H1 towards party cohesion and H2 towards a resurgence of national interests:

H1: MEPs from right-wing parties demand a more restrictive migration policy than MEPs from left-wing parties.

H2: MEPs from member states that had to bear the brunt of the migration crisis under the Dublin rules (i.e. the Mediterranean states) are more likely to demand a revision of those rules and the move towards burden-sharing.

In addition, party cohesion can be expected to change over time as member states became increasingly divided in 2015.

H3: As the crisis intensified in 2015 and member states adopted conflicting approaches in the second half of the year, party cohesion eroded.

As different national interests and viewpoints were pitted against each other in the European Council and Council of Ministers, to what extent could the European Parliament continue to maintain ideological divisions over national divisions?

## DATA

The study relies on the quantitative analysis of plenary debates in 2015. All plenary debates specifically on the migration crisis and external migration were coded, including debates on European Council meeting or meetings of the Council of Ministers where migration was on the agenda. In addition, all general debates that provided MEPs with an opportunity to put migration on the agenda were discussed, such as debates on the Council Presidencies, the state of the Union and the one-minute speeches on matters of political importance, as well as debates on closely adjacent topics where migration was a key theme (e.g. debates on terrorist attacks in Europe). In total, 33 debates under rule 123 of the European Parliament's Rules of Procedure (2016) were retained (following statements by the Commission, Council or European Council), 20 debates under rule 163 (one-minute speeches that can be on any topic), one debate under rule 135 (breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law), one debate following a statement by the President of the European Parliament after the attacks on Charlie Hebdo and ten debates following reports by rapporteurs.

On this basis, a database was compiled, where each speech that discusses external migration represents a case. Each speech was manually coded, and only speeches were included where the speaker made some observation about migration (i.e. not speeches where the issue was mentioned once in passing).<sup>1</sup> The decision to use manual coding is based on the fact that some of the dimensions that were coded required an interpretation of the content of speeches (see below). In total, 1230 speeches were retained. For each speech, background data such as the speaker, the party and member state of the speaker and the date were recorded. In addition, the content was coded including several dimensions:

- Immigration stance, coded on a scale from 1-5: a speech was coded as 1 if it deemed the difference between refugees and economic migrants to be artificial and demanded that member states accept both types of migrants. A typical 2 would emphasize the need to show solidarity with refugees and/or demand the creation of more legal avenues for migration. A typical 4 would advocate the restriction of migration, whereas a 5 would either demand a stop to migration and/or use strong negative imagery to depict migrants or migration (e.g. an 'invasion', a 'threat'). A 3 is a speech that reflects a relatively balanced or neutral approach. For example, a typical speech in category 3 demands on the one hand more solidarity with refugees (of war), but on the other hand a stricter stance on economic migration.
- Whether the MEP supports mandatory quotas (1) or not (0).



- Whether the MEP demands changes to the Dublin rules or their abolition (1) or wants to maintain those rules (0).
- Whether the MEP refers to his/her own member state (1, otherwise 0).
- Whether he/she openly defends a national interest (1; otherwise 0).
- Whether he/she defends the national government (1) or attacks it (0).

The advantage of the use of speeches in debates is thus that they can provide more diverse data. On the other hand, not every speech can be coded on all dimensions. In addition, some speeches include further issues. The dimensions for this study were chosen as they cover fundamental attitudes ('immigration stance'), the national focus of MEPs, and the reactions of MEPs to key controversies about policy direction (e.g. about the continuation of the Dublin rules or the introduction of quotas). Other dimensions were dropped after a pilot study, as too few MEPs referred to them and/or they proved too difficult to code systematically (e.g. the attitudes of MEPs towards the integration of migrants into society).

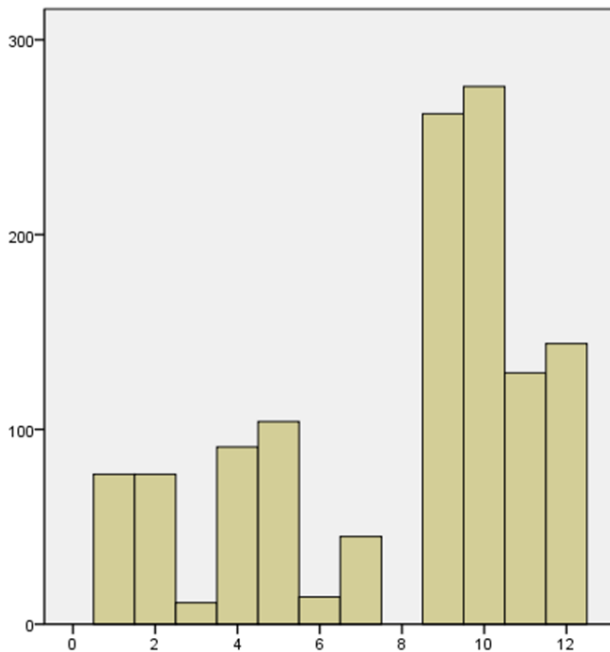
However, while a dataset of individual speeches is well-suited for an analysis of the frequency with which MEPs refer to their member state or the national interest, it is less ideal for an analysis of party cohesion. Some MEPs are far more active than others and could thus create an illusion of party cohesion when, in reality, it is just one MEP agreeing with himself/herself. To avoid this problem the original dataset was condensed into a second dataset where the cases were no longer speeches, but the MEPs who made migration-related speeches. Each MEP was given an average score for 2015 for 'immigration stance', 'support for quotas' and 'change Dublin' based on their speeches. As a result, in the analysis of party cohesion on migration, all MEPs within a party group have the same weight, regardless of whether they made two speeches or ten. Finally, in order to be able to contextualize party cohesion in debates, we will compare the results to cohesion in three key migration votes in 2015.<sup>2</sup>

## THE EVOLUTION OF INTEREST IN MIGRATION IN 2015

In total, 1230 speeches on migration from third countries were made in the plenary of the European Parliament in 2015. 315 MEPs – or around 42 per cent of MEPs – participated actively in these debates. However, the speeches were by no means evenly distributed over time: As the migration crisis intensified in spring/summer 2015, it became a key item on the agenda and attracted far more attention in mid- to late-2015 than in the first half of the year. The intensification of debate is reflected both in the number of speeches and in the number of MEPs involved in the debate (see Figure1).

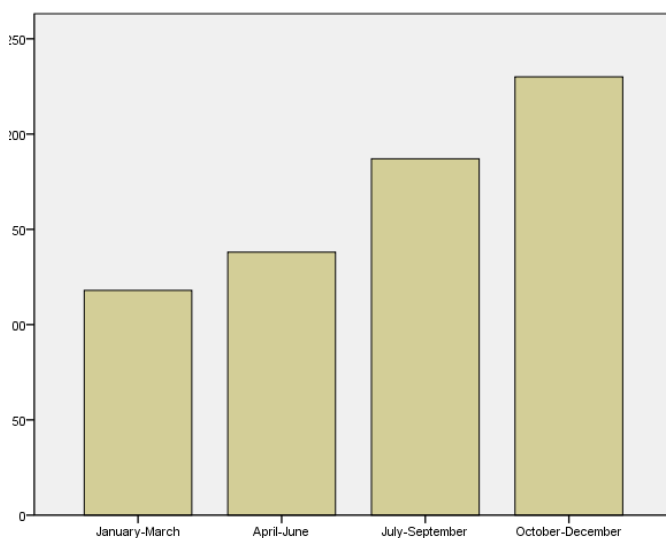
The spikes in early 2015 were at least in part related to the attacks on Charlie Hebdo in Paris in January and the subsequent debates on internal security and migration. The renewed interest in April and May 2015 is linked to debates on the humanitarian aspects of the migration crisis after mass drownings in the Mediterranean in April. However, those debates only captured the attention of MEPs in the short-term, as evidenced by the lack of interest in the issue in March, June and July 2015. During the summer, the unprecedented mass influx of refugees and migrants fuelled a more sustained interest in the issue when the EP reconvened in September after the summer break. Towards the end of the year, a new major terrorist attack in Paris and terror warnings in Brussels kept the issue on the agenda.

Figure 1: Number of speeches per month (2015)



The increasing salience of the migration crisis also becomes evident in the analysis of the contributions to the session on *one-minute speeches on matters of political importance*. MEPs who participate in these sessions can talk about any topic they like, including constituency issues related purely to national politics. From January to mid-April, migration was almost entirely absent from these session, with only zero to one speeches on migration per session. After the mass drownings in April, and once migration flows started to increase sharply in the run-up to the summer, interest slowly increased and the number of one-minute speeches increased from two to five until July. After the summer break, the number of migration-related speeches per session of one-minute speeches peaked at 10, before declining to four at the end of December.

Figure 2: The number of MEPs participation in Migration Debates (2015)



Thus, spontaneous interest in migration was still higher at the end of the year, when migration flows died down during winter, than at the start of the year – and this despite the fact that the number of

official migration-related debates had also increased. Similarly, the number of MEPs who participated actively in migration debates increased steadily over time (see Figure 2). In the first quarter of 2015, only 118 MEPs referred to external migration in their speeches. This number had almost doubled by the end of the year.

### PARTY DISCIPLINE AND NATIONAL LOYALTIES IN TIMES OF CRISIS

The positions of MEPs on immigration in the context of the migration crisis were broadly aligned to the left-right spectrum (see Table 1). On the left, the Verts/ALE, GUE, S&D and the liberals in ALDE all emphasized the need to show solidarity with migrants. The means of around 2 indicate that these party groups emphasized that the EU member states should welcome refugees and that they frequently advocated facilitating legal migration to Europe. However, relatively few MEPs argued that there is no difference between refugees and economic migrants or that all migrants should be accepted irrespective of their precise circumstances (i.e. a score of 1).

The European People's Party (EPP) took up the middle ground. Their mean of 3 reflects the fact that many MEPs made balanced statements that cannot be categorized as 'more' or 'less' migration. A typical position would be to demand more solidarity with refugees, but a stricter stance towards economic migrants. Further to the right, the EFDD, ECR and non-attached advocated a restriction of migration, and the MEPs who now form the ENF demanded a strong restriction of migration. A score of 5 was only given to speeches that demanded a complete stop to migration and/or used strong negative imagery or pejorative contextualization to support their claim (e.g. migration as 'invasion', migrants as potential terrorists etc.). Many speeches from the ENF fell into that category, but also a few speeches from the non-attached and the EFDD.

Table 1: Party group cohesion on immigration in the context of the migration crisis\*

Party party group	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Verts/ALE	1.885	13	.2764
GUE/NGL	2.052	23	.4531
S&D	2.194	35	.6183
ALDE	2.353	17	.5928
EPP	3.226	53	.7947
EFDD	3.867	21	.9845
ECR	3.908	25	.5499
NI	4.070	10	.8381
NI/ENF <sup>o</sup>	4.530	20	.4414
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.086</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>1.0887</b>

\*For the purpose of this table, each MEP was given a score based on his/her average position on the migration crisis across his/her speeches in 2015. N=217, meaning that 217 MEPs made at least one speech that could be coded on this dimension.

<sup>o</sup>NI/ENF: All MEPs who joined the newly created ENF in mid-2015.

1=strongly in favour of accepting more migrants; 5=in favour of strongly restricting migration to the EU.

In terms of party unity in the context of debates, the parties on the extremes (Verts, GUE and ENF) were the most united in their positions. By contrast, the moderate right (EPP) and the EFDD showed the highest level of fragmentation. In the case of the EPP, its size and diverse membership pulled it into different directions: While many MEPs from Eastern Europe leaned towards more restrictive policies (e.g. a score of 4), many Southern Europeans, Luxembourgers, Irish MEPs, Germans and Swedes leaned more towards policies that show solidarity towards refugees (a score of 2-3). In the case of the EFDD, the Italian MEPs of the Five Star Movement all had a markedly different position (2-3) than the rest of the party. In the debates, most party groups thus regrouped a spectrum of opinions rather than one single party line and the diversity of views within each party was higher than the literature on voting patterns might lead one to expect. Especially centrist and right-wing parties combined views that ranged from calls for more solidarity with refugees to stringent anti-immigration policies.

Interestingly, when one compares party unity in debates with party unity in the three key votes on migration in 2015, some parties perform differently (see Table 2). The Verts and ENF still show a high level of party cohesion. In fact, the Verts did not register a single dissenting vote across all three votes. However, the S&D and the non-attached, which only had average levels of cohesion in the debates, also shows extremely high levels of cohesion in the votes, with average scores of over 90 (out of 100). By contrast, the EPP is relatively divided in votes (on average 65.51/100), and the divisions between different national parties in the EFDD make it the least united party by far (37.64/100).

Table 2: Party group cohesion scores on key migration votes in 2015\*

Group	29/04/15	9/09/15	10/09/15	Average
<b>Greens/EFA</b>	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
<b>ENF</b>		96.05	95.83	95.94
<b>S&amp;D</b>	95.81	95.79	90.85	94.15
<b>NI</b>	96.67	83.33	100.00	93.33
<b>ECR</b>	82.79	79.85	84.75	82.46
<b>GUE-NGL</b>	66.33	86.96	72.37	75.22
<b>ALDE/ADLE</b>	70.49	73.39	70.54	71.47
<b>EPP</b>	67.91	67.33	61.29	65.51
<b>EFDD</b>	40.00	37.21	35.71	37.64

\* The cohesion scores are taken from <http://www.votewatch.eu/>.

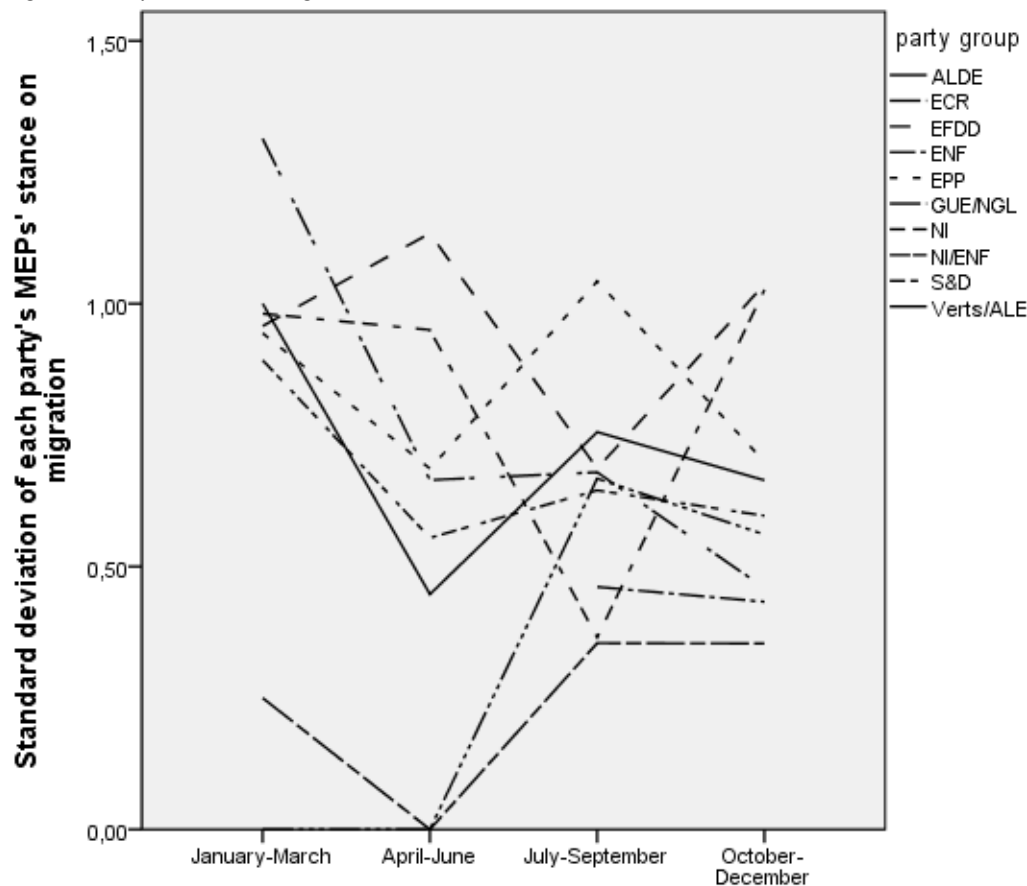
The three votes on migration are the joint motion on the Report of the extraordinary European Council meeting (23 April 2015) taken on 29 April, the legislative vote (consultation procedure) on Provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and Greece taken on 9 September and the joint motion on Migration and refugees in Europe taken on 10 September.

That said, our expectation that the intensification of the crises would lead to an increased divergence of views was not confirmed. As figure 3 illustrates, the level of party cohesion on their immigration

stance has been fluctuating throughout 2015, but there is no clear trend towards more or less cohesion. The same can be said for the votes in April and September 2015.

But what is the source of intra-party divergence? Unlike in the case of voting behaviour, low cohesion does not appear to be the result of strong national party discipline. The atypical views of the Five Star Movement in the context of the EFDD were the only example where several MEPs from the same national party break away from their European party group. This is of course a special case. The Five Star Movement's membership in the EFDD is half-hearted and it has in fact tried unsuccessfully to leave the EFDD for ALDE in 2016/2017. Its stance in the immigration debates is thus also very close to the position of ALDE. The only other – far less pronounced – example of MEPs of the same country clustering on one side of the European party group are the Spanish members of the EPP, who all adopted more pro-integration stances than the average EPP MEP. However, they were not isolated within the party: many other MEPs from Germany, Sweden, Ireland, Greece and Luxembourg etc. expressed similar views. They were merely located in a wider pro-immigration wing of the EPP. By and large, European party groups have thus been able to represent their national members relatively well in these debates.

Figure 3: Party cohesion on migration in 2015



The migration crisis has also not led to a resurgence of 'national' viewpoints. In the case of most member states, there is a considerable discrepancy between the views of MEPs from the left and from the right (see Table 3). The only exceptions to this are Spain, Portugal and Croatia, where EPP MEPs are relatively pro-immigration. The relatively unified positions of Czech and Polish MEPs around sceptical positions are unsurprising: As only centre-right and right-wing MEPs took part in the debates in the case of those two countries, it is normal that there is no great diversity of viewpoints.

Table 3: The cohesion of member states on immigration in the European Parliament in 2015\*

MS member state	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Spain	2.12	15	0.28
Portugal	2.32	5	0.43
Czech Republic	3.67	6	0.52
Poland	3.69	14	0.69
Croatia	2.47	6	0.78
UK	3.66	20	0.93
Bulgaria	3.75	6	0.95
Germany	2.84	18	0.98
Belgium	2.73	7	1.04
Greece	3.17	14	1.07
Hungary	3.64	9	1.09
Italy	2.73	21	1.10
Sweden	2.51	11	1.17
Austria	3.03	7	1.21
Netherlands	3.26	10	1.23
France	3.46	19	1.39

\* The table only includes member states for which five or more MEPs from three or more parties took part in the debate.

However, as the Mediterranean countries generally came out as being relatively pro-immigration on average, we have analysed the relative influence of party and geographic location with a regression

analysis. Both the membership of a European party group and being an MEP from a Mediterranean country are highly significant factors in explaining the attitudes of an MEP. However, party membership is the stronger explanatory factor. Together the two factors explain almost 60 percent of the variation in the attitudes to migration.

Table 4: The influence of party membership and geographical location on attitudes to migration (regression analysis)

	Unstandardized Coefficients	Significance
<b>Right-wing party</b>	.77	.000
<b>Mediterranean state</b>	-.44	.000

$R^2=.58$

Right-wing party: GUE/NGL+Verts/ALE=1; S&D+ALDE=2; EPP+ECR=3; EFDD+ENF=4.

Mediterranean states: 1= Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece, Malta, Cyprus, Croatia. 0=rest.

Both party politics and geographical location can also have an impact on how vocally MEPs demand or reject certain policy options. In the case of the EU's decision to distribute a certain number of refugees across member states based on quotas, both the geographical location and the party explain the positions of MEPs. MEPs from Mediterranean states are particularly prone to voice support, whereas MEPs from right-wing parties are more likely to reject those policies (see Table 5). In fact, *all* MEPs from Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Spain who talked about the Dublin rules demanded a revision of these rules, regardless of their party affiliation. Almost all the MEPs from these countries who mentioned policies related to burden-sharing (e.g. quotas for the distribution of refugees across member states) were in favour of such policies. In the remaining states, MEPs from right-wing parties are more likely to demand the application of the Dublin rules, as this would protect their member state by containing the migration problem in another member state. Similarly, right-wing MEPs are more likely to reject policies that support burden-sharing.

Table 5: Explaining support for quotas and for the amendment/suspension of the Dublin rules

	Is the MEP in favour of quotas?*		Should the Dublin rules be changed or abolished?°	
	Coefficient: B	Significance	Coefficient: B	Significance
<b>Right-wing party</b>	-.22	.000	-.24	.000
<b>Mediterranean state</b>	.28	.000	.36	.000
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	.38	.000	.54	.000

\* In favour of quotas=1; rejection of quotas=0

°Change or abolish Dublin rules =1; maintain Dublin rules=0

However, there are other ways in which national concerns can rear their heads in the EP. For instance, MEPs can openly defend the national government or national interest. Or they can advocate policies that can be expected to benefit their state. On the whole, 28 per cent of all speeches made reference to the member state of the speaker. However, not all of those speeches had a clear 'national' agenda. Thus, only 8.7 per cent of all speeches tried to openly defend a national interest by justifying the position in terms of what the member state needed or wanted. In addition, only 7.1 per cent of speeches defended a national policy, whereas almost the same number (6.1 per cent) attacked the policy of the own member state. It would seem that ideological differences between the government and opposition parties from a member state carry over to the European arena. Speeches from Hungarian, Greek, Slovenian and Bulgarian MEPs were more likely to contain a reference to the member state than not, with the proportion of references to the member state being at 62.7, 58.5, 56 and 52.3 per cent respectively. MEPs from Slovenia, Greece, Bulgaria but also Malta are the most likely to invoke the national interest. In many cases these demands were justified by reference to the great migratory pressures that affected these states. By contrast, Hungarian MEPs are the busiest MEPs when it comes to attacking and defending one's own government, which is of course a reflection of European-wide debates about the Orban government.

On the whole, the limited relevance of national concerns is an interesting finding. After the elections in 2014, Eurosceptic and populist parties had gained seats in the European Parliament, which could lead to expect a rise in national frames of reference. Yet, the analysis of speeches on migration illustrates that an overwhelming majority of MEPs prefers to couch their arguments in general terms rather than narrow national(ist) frames – even on contentious issues such as migration. In fact, references to the national interest are rare even among right-wing MEPs: The non-attached MEPs, for instance, are the most nationalist group of MEPs with 16.5 per cent of speeches referring to the national interest of their member state, but this is still less than one in six speeches. However, the tensions between different member states in the Council of Ministers and the European Council due to different national approaches to the crisis did leave their mark on the European Parliament. Thus, while only 2.4 per cent of speeches criticized another member state during the first quarter of 2015, this number jumped to 12 per cent in the second quarter and 15 per cent in the third quarter and was still high at 13.3 per cent in the last quarter of 2015. By comparison, the proportion of speeches praising the actions of another member state remained low: it peaked at 4.3 per cent in the third quarter, up from 1.8 per cent in the first quarter of 2015.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that the migration crisis turned into a highly salient policy problem in the course of 2015, the style of debate in the EP remained profoundly supranational. The parties on the left and the ENF on the right were particularly cohesive in their views, whereas the parties on the moderate right and right had to subsume a greater diversity. However, this diversity cannot simply be attributed to the influence of national visions: The only clear case of a national party having a substantially different position from the rest of its European party group is the case of the Italian Five Star Movement and the EFDD. That said, the MEPs from Mediterranean member states (including right-wing MEPs) tended to be particularly welcoming towards migrants.

A large portion of the variation in the views of MEPs can be explained with just two factors: which party group they belong to, and whether they are from a Mediterranean state. These factor also explain whether an MEP supports the introduction of mandatory quotas for the repartition of refugees across member states and whether they demand the abolition or modification of the Dublin rules. Finally, the relative absence of national frames of reference from EP debates is another indicator that its supranational character is still intact. Despite the intense arguments between



member states in the European Council and Council, less than one in ten speeches explicitly referred to a national interest. Similarly, less than one in ten speeches defended national policy on migration. That said, there has been a jump in the proportion of speeches that criticize another member state, which suggests that the arguments between national governments have had a certain polarizing effect on debates in the EP as well. While the transnationalism in the EP is being taxed by certain national differences, it still remains a profoundly transnational actor.

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### ENDNOTES

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1 A typical example of a speech that would not have been included is one that lists migration as one of the many problems facing the EU, without offering any further discussion of the issue.

2 The three votes on migration are the joint motion on the Report of the extraordinary European Council meeting (23 April 2015) taken on 29 April, the legislative vote (consultation procedure) on Provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and Greece taken on 9 September and the joint motion on Migration and refugees in Europe taken on 10 September. These three votes were three out of four votes that focused explicitly on the migration crisis. The fourth vote (on the release of funds to address the refugee crisis) was excluded as it was deemed too specific. The votes are after all compared to a very fundamental question in debates, namely the question of who should be allowed to come and in what numbers.

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