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A Divided European Left?

A mixed methods case study of cohesion in
GUE/NGL

Master's thesis in European Studies

Supervisor: Pieter de Wilde

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Abstract

This thesis explores to what degree the European Parliament group Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) is cohesive, and whether cohesion varies across policy areas. In addition to the overall level of cohesion, the thesis focuses on agriculture, fisheries and economy, with an aim to find how the potential divides can be explained. The thesis finds that the general cohesion level is lower than in the centrist pro-European groups, but higher than the right-wing Eurosceptic ones. It also finds that GUE/NGL agrees on traditional left-wing issues. However, when left-wing positions of members in GUE/NGL clash with each other, the differences become visible. There are two primary divides within the group. The first divide is along an anti-federalist versus federalist line. The anti-federalists are Eurosceptics, who want less European integration and less money and influence to go to the EU, the EP and the ECB. On the other hand, there are those who are more positive to all these aspects, and generally hold a more favourable view of the EU. The second divide within GUE/NGL is between those who will prioritise green policies over all other perspectives, and those who prioritize socialist principles and workers' rights. Both these divides are broadly embodied in the division between GUE and NGL: NGL representing more Nordic, green and Eurosceptic parties, and GUE representing southern delegations, who are generally more positive towards the EU, and prioritise socialist principles and workers' rights.

Sammendrag

Denne oppgaven undersøker i hvilken grad den politiske gruppen Den Forente Europeiske Venstre/Nordiske Grønne Venstre (GUE/NGL) i Europaparlamentet er forente i sin stemmegivning, og om dette varierer etter politikkområde. Oppgaven studerer dette med fokus på landbruk, fiskeri og økonomi, med et mål om å finne ut hvordan potensielle ulikheter kan forklares. Gruppen er jevnt over mindre forent internt enn sentrumsgruppene i Europaparlamentet, som regnes som EU-positive. GUE/NGL er likevel i større grad forent enn de euroskeptiske gruppene på høyresiden. GUE/NGL er særlig forente når det gjelder tradisjonelle venstreside-saker. Dersom disse venstreside-sakene kommer i konflikt med hverandre, kommer imidlertid uenighetene til syne. Gruppen deler seg primært langs to linjer. Den første er mellom anti-føderalister og føderalister. På den ene siden har vi euroskeptikere, som ønsker mindre europeisk integrasjon, og mindre penger og makt til EU, EP og ECB. På den andre siden har vi delegasjoner som er mer positive til de aspektene, og generelt mer EU-positive. De andre skiller seg mellom de som prioriterer grønn politikk over alle andre perspektiver, og de som prioriterer ulike sosialistiske prinsipper og arbeiderrettigheter. Begge disse skillene kan stort sett ses i sammenheng med skillet mellom GUE og NGL: NGL representerer mer nordiske, grønne og euroskeptiske partier, mens GUE representerer delegasjoner fra sør, som er mer EU-positive og mer opptatt av sosialistiske prinsipper og arbeiderrettigheter.

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Abbreviations

| | |
|---------|--|
| AI | Agreement Index |
| ALDE | Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe |
| ECB | European Central Bank |
| ECR | European Conservatives and Reformists |
| EMU | Economic and Monetary Union |
| EP | European Parliament |
| EFDD | Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy |
| ENF | Europe of Nations and Freedom |
| EPP | European People's Party |
| EU | European Union |
| Greens | Greens–European Free Alliance |
| GUE/NGL | Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left |
| MEP | Member of the European Parliament |
| OCA | Optimum urrency area |
| S&D | Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats |
| UTP | Unfair Trading Practice |

1 Introduction

Cohesion is a measure of to what degree politicians agree amongst themselves when voting. It is a crucial element in the daily running of parliaments. Without an identifiable bloc of governing politicians, the ability of the voters to hold politicians' accountable and assess their performance falls flat. Maintaining a majority voting bloc is also the essential condition for winning the parliamentary game, where whoever has a majority rules. If the majority regularly breaks, it prevents parties from winning in the future, giving them less power in the long term. Cohesion can be studied in various types of governmental systems but is especially interesting in parliamentary systems because of the aforementioned reason of needing a majority voting bloc. Another interesting aspect of cohesion is studying the reasons for why it often varies greatly because of pressure from several actors. Members of parliaments are often subject to influence from both voters in their constituency, as well as party leadership or whip. This pressure can tear a party apart, or at least divide it into different fractions, rendering it a less effective parliamentary actor.

A parliament with an increased level of pressure from several actors, is the European Parliament (EP). As the EU has had a steady increase in power over several decades, the European Parliament has also gained increased influence within the EU. The EP consists of members from different national political parties from all the EU member states. These members of the EP (MEP) sit with political allies in political groups. MEPs serve many different principals and try to serve both the leadership of their EP political group and of their national political party. If disagreement between the leadership in the EP and the national party occurs, the level of cohesion can be lower than in a parliament where there are fewer principals to serve. While the EP political groups broadly share ideology, they also comprise a variety of national parties with diverging political interests. For this reason alone, we can expect a political group to behave differently from a political party in a more traditional national parliament. For these reasons, cohesion in the EP should function differently from in most European parliamentary systems.

Studies on cohesion in the EP have previously taken a broad view, studying the political groups collectively. In studies of political groups in the EP, the major groups – the social democratic, the liberal and the conservative group – have dominated. There is a general lack of case studies on cohesion of political groups in the EP, and especially on the less dominant political groups. This thesis will therefore study cohesion of one of these groups, GUE/NGL¹.

With the EU elections coming up in May 2019, many are looking to see how well the extremes do, and especially the extreme right. With the social democratic, liberal and conservatives' groups likely to obtain a smaller parliamentary majority than previously (Europe Elects, 2019), many are waiting to see how majorities will be formed in the new European Parliament. Will these centrist pro-EU political groups cooperate to the right or to the left? Election prognoses suggest show a surge in votes for Eurosceptics on the far right, with whom these centrist groups are reluctant to cooperate. It is therefore possible

¹ The group's full English name is Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left. Throughout the thesis, this group is referred to with the abbreviated name GUE/NGL.

that the room for the radical left will increase, granting them a more important role. If so, is the left cohesive enough to be up for the task of becoming an important political force to be reckoned with? This thesis will investigate the current cohesion of the political group GUE/NGL and how united or divided they act as a group in their voting behaviour.

This thesis aims to find out to what degree GUE/NGL in the European Parliament is cohesive, more specifically what unites them and what divides them on some selected policy areas. This will be done with a particular emphasis on a few specific votes, with an aim to find out how such divides (or lack thereof) can be explained. The thesis will both discuss the group as a whole, and the three selected policy areas: agriculture, economy and fisheries. How high is cohesion within the group, and does the level of cohesion vary across chosen political areas? What do they agree on, and what do they disagree on? How can the cohesion (or lack thereof) be explained? This thesis proposes three hypotheses to how these questions can best be examined:

- (1) The group will agree on traditional left-right issues.
- (2) Various "left-wing" principles can explain many of the positions taken on issues that are not obvious left-right issues.
- (3) National interests of the MEPs will, if important for their country, prevail over the results expected from hypothesis (1) and (2).

This case study combines a quantitative and a qualitative method. The quantitative approach uses data on voting behaviour in order to show cohesion across different policy areas. As these data say little about the motivation behind voting behaviour of the MEPs, interviews with four GUE/NGL officials will be used to explain the various divides. The interview subjects are selected for their experience and knowledge of a specific policy area and will be considered experts on the group and the policy area they follow the closest. The knowledge gained from the interviews will contribute to explaining why we see cohesion (or lack thereof) on the specific policy areas, as well as the cohesion of the group in general.

The thesis is organised as follows. The next section is a theory chapter, which first discusses previous research on the European Parliamentary groups, cohesion and studies of political parties. It also lays out the theoretical framework used, and how this was central in deciding the policy cases of this thesis. Then follows a chapter on research methodology, which elaborates on the research design, how this study is an embedded case study and why the policy cases are chosen. It then outlines a mixed methods approach in which this thesis combines quantitative and qualitative methods in the forms of primarily voting records and interviews. The research design chapter also discusses what sources one could have used for a thesis like this, why the selected sources were used, and how they will benefit this thesis. The next section is the analysis chapter. It opens by giving a quantitative overview, going through relevant statistics and numbers related to GUE/NGL's voting cohesion in the EP. The rest of the analysis discusses the quantitative overview with findings from the interviews. This will be discussed in relation to the hypotheses of this thesis and the specific policy areas. This discussion will particularly focus on how the theories relate to the answers found in the interviews. Finally, the thesis concludes that the group broadly agrees, and that the cohesion in GUE/NGL is below the cohesion level of the centrist groups, but higher than cohesion level of the right-wing Eurosceptic groups. This is surprising, as the lack of a party whip were expected to give a lower level of cohesion than most groups. In addition, the thesis finds that the main divide within GUE/NGL are

between federalists and anti-federalists. There is also a clear divide along green lines. Correlation between these two is high, and NGL composes the core of both environmentalists and anti-federalists, with most of GUE largely sharing the opposing view.

2 Theory

In order to study cohesion of GUE/NGL, it is necessary to be familiar with research on cohesion of political groups in the EP. In addition, it is crucial to identify the ideological principles GUE/NGL can be expected to adhere to in their voting behaviour. Therefore, this chapter will first review the most relevant research on the EP groups and cohesion, followed by a section on ideologies and principles of GUE/NGL, more precisely issues concerning socialism and green policies. These ideologies and principles will be used later to select the cases used in this thesis: agriculture, fisheries and economy.

2.1 Cohesion and political groups

Among studies on cohesion of the EP groups, the focus has historically been on the larger and more influential groups, the social democratic, liberal and conservative ones. These groups represent the carrying ideologies of Europe in the 20th century and they have made up a majority of the EP for a long time. In addition, the governing national parties in each member state have with very few exceptions been a member of one of these groups. The previous focus on these groups stems from them having been the most important political groups regarding the development of the EU.

One of the most prominent researchers on the European Parliament is Simon Hix, who has been an influential scholar especially in studies on political group cohesion. Cohesion, in this context, measures to what degree the parties of a political group vote together as a block. This has been studied by Hix, Noury and Roland (2005), looking at every recorded vote of the EP plenary from July 1979 to the end of December 2001. While their study does not provide insight into cohesion on specific topics of the various political groups, it has many interesting overall findings. One of the major insights is that the cohesion of the political groups had increased over time. It also found that the ideological diversity amongst the national member parties of the groups only had a marginal effect on cohesion. This indicates that the EP groups have had a disciplining effect on the national member parties. For GUE/NGL, this disciplining effect is interesting, taking into account that GUE/NGL is a "confederal" group, meaning they do not use the practice of a party whip (GUE/NGL, 2019a). Not having a party whip is likely to make MEPs vote more independently. In other words, maybe this will make GUE/NGL less cohesive than other political groups with a party whip. Hix and Noury (2009) followed up their study, expanding it to include the eastern enlargement of the EU in 2004. This study found that the change in cohesion was very little, and that it still primarily follows transnational party lines. Both studies also suggest that the EP is dominated by left-right politics. Whether or not GUE/NGL agree along these left-right lines is part of what this thesis aims to find out (Hix, Noury & Roland, 2005; Hix & Noury, 2009).

While Hix, Noury and Roland explain the broader divides regarding cohesion well, there is a lack in case studies on single groups of the EP, making a study of cohesion within a single group in order to explain the reasons for cohesion (or lack thereof) a type of study that has not been done before. More specifically, there is a clear gap in the research on cohesion

in roll-call² voting on specific policy areas by group. Moreover, if there are interesting findings regarding cohesion of a specific group on a specific policy area, it is also interesting to identify the reasons for that degree of cohesion.

In addition to Hix, Noury and Roland (2005), there has also been research on the growing position of the right-wing anti-immigration and anti-EU parties especially from the 1990s onwards. After the far-right political parties in Europe drastically increased their election results from 2009 to 2014, many scholars took interest, conducting comparative studies assessing their previous results with questions of whether they actually gained increased support, or if the results were more connected to economic crises (Halikiopoulou & Vasilopoulou, 2014; Mudde, 2014).

However, there has not been performed such research specifically GUE/NGL. GUE/NGLs limited size and influence can likely be attributed some of the reason for this. What makes studying GUE/NGL interesting are several issues. One is that with social democratic parties struggling in much of Europe, the parties to the left of the social democrats have in some countries managed to gain more support than socialist movements have had since the Cold War. Another is that with right-wing populism rising, many argue that there is room for left-wing populists, even if these are not rising in popularity as fast as right-wing populists. The differences in growth in support between the left in EU member states, with soaring numbers in some, and close to non-existence in others, makes studying the only left-wing group of the EP interesting, because it highlights the differences between the national parties making up GUE/NGL. Additionally, it is well known that cooperation on what is often called the “radical left” – left of social democrats on a traditional left-right continuum – is low. In-fighting often occurs, and various left-wing ideologies often don’t function well together. Finding out how they cooperate in the European Parliament can perhaps tell us something about the left’s potential for becoming a major political force in Europe, or if it might remain a fringe project in the EP for the foreseeable future.

McElroy and Benoit (2010) argue that while some of the EP groups can be understood by party family, that does not apply to all. Party families, like social democratic or Christian conservatives, are very static characterisations, while political parties and the EP groups are not. The first interesting aspect of McElroy and Benoit’s research that is especially relevant when studying GUE/NGL is that some political parties are formed around newer, single issue cases, often immigration or Euroscepticism. Single issue members of the GUE/NGL could be the Danish Peoples Movement Against the EU, Dutch Party for the Animals and the German independent, Stefan Eck, who was elected representing Human Environmental Animal Protection (GUE/NGL, 2019i). There is a high likelihood that GUE/NGL’s appeal to these movements is its confederal nature, where there is no party whip, and every member can cast their vote freely (GUE/NGL, 2019a).

In addition, McElroy and Benoit (2010) writes that many national parties do not belong to any of the European party families. They also point out differences between the EP groups and the national parties. They conclude that GUE/NGL votes significantly more positively to European integration than the actual policies of their national member parties would suggest. The confederal nature of the group would imply that there is no pressure in the group to vote a certain way. These findings are further surprising with Meserve, Robbins and Thames (2017) arguing that MEPs serve different principals, and that when the

² A *roll-call vote* is a vote where the result of a vote in the EP plenary is recorded electronically.

opinions of those principals (national parties and EP groups) diverge, MEPs will vote with their national parties. What Meserve et al. (2017) do not study, is whether ideology or national interests are prioritised above the other. For GUE/NGL, studying this conflict would be interesting, as GUE/NGLs confederal nature makes it likely that voting divides can be seen between those prioritising ideology, and those prioritising national interests.

However, GUE/NGL is a quite unique group, as it exists only in the European Parliament. Outside the EP, the national member parties are organised in numerous different left-wing organisations, with the biggest one – Party of the European Left – only having six out of the around 29 delegations³ in GUE/NGL as members. There is a chance that GUE/NGL not being a European party makes GUE/NGL behave differently on cohesion than for example the EPP, a political group that is also a European Party. This topic has not been pursued in any scholarly literature on the EP and while not specifically concerned with that issue, this thesis will suggest a possible answer to this issue. By understanding divisions in GUE/NGL, we can gain insights into how the GUE/NGL cooperates. Exploring how they vote, and why they vote as they do, will contribute to an understanding of how a confederal group existing only in the EP behaves.

2.2 Confederalism

A key principle for GUE/NGL is that it is “confederal”. This essentially means that its members are free to vote as they want, with complete lack of a party whip. This differs from all the other political groups in the EP and is important because GUE/NGL thereby have opted for complete voting sovereignty instead of centralised power (GUE/NGL, 2019a). It is easy to think that we should tie this to their ideology, especially as GUE/NGL is an anti-fascist group. Anti-fascism is an ideology GUE/NGL shares, and an essence of it is the opposition very centralised power (GUE/NGL, 2019a). The other groups of the EP encounter a principal-agent problem, which is where an agent (the MEP) who want to act in their own self-interest (re-election), have a contrary demand from their principle (political group leadership). This situation is an example of a moral hazard, where political risk is involved regardless of what choice the MEP makes. For GUE/NGL, a similar issue can arise from them not having a party whip. As the opinion of the EP group leadership does not have any official influence, MEPs in GUE/NGL can instead to a greater degree serve a national principle, specifically the leadership of their national party (Bernheim & Whinston, 1986).

2.3 Socialism

Socialism can be defined as: “Socialist systems are those regimes based on the economic and political theory of socialism, which advocates public ownership and cooperative management of the means of production and allocation of resources” (Badie, Berg-Schlosser & Morlino, 2011, pp. 2356-2357). Newman (2005, pp. 2-3) puts it blunter when he describes the most fundamental characteristic of socialism as “its commitment to the creation of an egalitarian society”. Socialism is the carrying ideology of left-wing movements in the world, and GUE/NGL belongs to this tradition. Among their members, most member parties refer to themselves as socialist or communist, and the group has a rich history of connections to various socialist movements and parties (GUE/NGL, 2019b; GUE/NGL, 2019e).

³ The term *delegation* refers to all MEPs from one single national political party in a political group in the EP.

Socialism is such a vast topic that this thesis will select three socialist principles that may explain the voting behaviour of GUE/NGL on the chosen policy areas. The socialist principles used are international socialism, international solidarity and workers' self-management.

2.3.1 International socialism and solidarity

The principles of international socialism and international solidarity has historically stood strong. We know socialism as a movement where many has advocated a world revolution, including Karl Marx. The clearest example of this being practised is the Communist International, and especially the Third International from 1919 to 1943 (Marxists.org, 2019). However, while there have been and are many international socialist movements, there have also been nationalist socialist movements (Newman, 2005, pp. 2-3). It is likely that GUE/NGL inhibits both of these aspects, and that the delegations within the group differ in their view on where the natural level of organisation is located – the nation state, or on an international level like the EU. This makes it likely to find a divide between Eurosceptics and those in favour of the EU and European integration.

However, while there have been disagreements on nation state vs. international cooperation, the main principles have been the same for almost all socialists worldwide: economic and social equality. Based on the section "About the group" from the GUE/NGL website, which according to participant G⁴ is the closest GUE/NGL comes to a group manifesto, the group appears to adhere to these principles (GUE/NGL, 2019a). When GUE/NGL on their website frame themselves as united in the vision of "socially equitable, [...] integration process based on international solidarity", they also strongly imply that the international solidarity they stand for is not limited to Europe, and they can be expected to have solidarity with countries outside the EU.

2.3.2 Workers' self-management

Another principle that is important to many socialist parties is workers' self-management. This is closely tied to workers owning the means of production. The core of this idea is that every worker should own the means of production, and nobody else should manage them (Badie, Berg-Schlosser & Morlino, 2011, p. 325; p. 1793). It is important to note that there are many nuances to this principle, where a self-managed economy is one variety. A self-managed economy is one based on autonomous self-regulating economic units, where the units (workers) dictate how they want to operate themselves. One common socialist approach to this is state regulation, giving the workers similar rights and requirements, so that they all have equality of opportunity (O'Hara, 2003, pp. 8-9). The alternative to this when pushed to the extreme would be a market that is not regulated by the state, giving more opportunities for developing private monopolies in the form of big corporations. GUE/NGL adheres to the principles of workers' self-management, and strongly prioritise workers' rights (GUE/NGL, 2019f; 2019d; 2019g).

2.4 Green policies

GUE/NGL writes that they are fighting "for a respectful way to deal with our earth and its resources", and "for sustainable economic development" (GUE/NGL, 2019d). According to Derek Wall, a British proponent of green policies, the term green politics is based on four pillars: ecological wisdom, social justice, grassroots democracy and nonviolence (Wall, 2010). While this is fairly broad, in his book on green politics, he also advocated for animal

⁴ The participants in the qualitative part of the study will be introduced in the chapter on research methodology.

welfare policies being a part of green policies. It is tied to his concept of ecological wisdom. Wall (2010, p. 48) writes:

Animal welfare policies flow from the understanding that human beings are part of a larger living network, and compassion for other species tends to be another key characteristic of green politics. Green parties have strong policies on animal welfare, opposing [...] the use of animals for cruel forms of entertainment such as bullfighting, [...] factory farming and other forms of abuse.

A key element within the pillar of ecological wisdom concerns sustainability. This relates to animal welfare, in that an essence of it is preventing overfishing, in order to keep the fishing stocks at sustainable levels. According to Wall (2010, pp. 26-29), an essence of green policies is for "prosperity to be achieved through sustainable alternatives to the rat race of economic growth", meaning that while humans need to prosper, this cannot be at the expense of our climate, nature or animals.

Related to this is the recent trend of a globally more extreme type of overfishing than what has been seen before. Overall global fishery production has declined in recent years, despite an increased growth in effort. While not directly related to animal welfare, hindering overfishing and ensuring fishing stocks at sustainable levels is an important part of green policies (Sale, 2011, pp. 11-24).

In other words, compassion with animals and fighting injustice towards them is a part of green policies. In addition to GUE/NGL's ambition to deal with the earth's resources in a respectful way, the group regularly publishes articles on animal welfare, and two member delegations were elected with animal welfare as a main priority (GUE/NGL, 2019a; 2019b; 2019d; 2019h). Based on the importance animal welfare plays, especially for some delegations, it is likely we will see some division in agriculture or fisheries in this area.

GUE/NGL also adhere to both the pillar of social justice and that of grassroots democracy. The group writes: "We want equal rights for women and men, civil rights and liberties and the enforcement of human rights" (GUE/NGL, 2019a). Grassroots democracy most clearly crystallises itself in their confederal organisation, where all individual members can vote as they want (GUE/NGL, 2019a).

2.5 Identifying hypotheses

Based on the study from Hix, Noury and Roland (2005) that found a strong left-right divide in the EP, it is reasonable to expect GUE/NGL to be clearly on the left when voting on traditional left-right issues, such as economic equality and social rights. This leads to the first hypothesis of this thesis, which is that the group will agree more on traditional left-right issues, than on other policy areas.

As not all policy areas within the competence of the European Parliament are obvious left-right issues, we can assume that various ideologies and left-wing principles of the delegations can be deciding factors when voting on other issues. Some parties who adhere more to green policies will likely vote for more sustainable farming and fishing, with others being more concerned with workers' rights. Therefore, hypothesis two is that we can expect various left-wing principles to explain the positions taken on issues that are not obvious left-right issues.

With these identified shared goals of the radical left, we could expect GUE/NGL to have a high degree of cohesion. However, based on the findings of Meserve, Robbins and Thames (2017) that MEPs tend to vote more along lines of their national parties, along with the

confederal nature of the group, we can expect them to prioritise national interests over the general view of the group. While it has not been studied, this leads this thesis to expect that MEPs will also prioritise national interests over left-wing principles when voting. Therefore, the third hypothesis is that we can expect the national interests of the MEPs to, if important for their country, prevail over the results expected from hypothesis one and two.

3 Research methodology

Research design concerns the collection and analysis of research data. The choice of research design is closely connected to one's research purpose. It is the conceptual structure for how the research is conducted (Kothari 2004, p. 31; Selltiz et al., 1962, p. 50). Yin (2018, p. 26) describes it simply as "a research design is a logical plan for getting from here to there". This chapter will attempt to create a layout of the research design of this thesis. The thesis is an embedded case study, using a hierarchical mixed-method approach, with both quantitative and qualitative data, in the forms of voting records and interviews to answer its research question and hypotheses (Scholz & Tietje, 2002, p. 3).

3.1 Case study

Yin argues that case studies investigate a contemporary phenomenon in depth. This is especially true when the phenomenon and the context are not evident. A case study is especially useful when wanting to understand a real-world case in which the contextual conditions is not obvious, meaning that it is something you can find out (Yin, 2018, pp. 45-46). This thesis studies GUE/NGL in the most recent term (2014-2019), as well as that group's relation to three different policy areas, making it an embedded case study. The time limitation also makes it a contemporary phenomenon. Case studies usually require the integration of data from various sources. Embedded case studies usually combine different methods, which this thesis will do.

Yin (2018, p. 32) argues that case studies are relevant especially when the main research questions are "how" and "why" questions, and when the thesis is contemporary and not historical. This is because these are questions about a contemporary set of events. Previous research or historical records cannot answer these questions, as it is too recent for there to have been studies on it. As this thesis is concerned with "why" GUE/NGL votes as it does, with a focus on recent votes and the current (2014-2019) legislature, a case study is ideal (Yin, 2018, pp. 43-44).

A case study is chosen over other methods for its benefits when studying contemporary organisations. Other potential research methods are experimental, historical and survey research, but there are problems with all of them when studying something like GUE/NGL. Using experiments usually ignore the context by "controlling" the experiment in a laboratory setting, where the context can be completely separate. In a case study all the context is included, and it is also necessary to explain the most surprising results from the voting data. Historical research studies noncontemporary events, and as the group exists, and the legislature covered in this thesis is ongoing, that approach does not seem applicable here. Finally, a survey would not work well, as the information I would obtain from interviews were not clear before they started, which necessitated improvised follow-up questions during the interview, based on the answers I received. This would not have been possible in a survey (Yin, 2018, p. 46).

More specifically than being a case study, this thesis is an embedded case study, as it concerns not only GUE/NGL as a whole, but also specific policy areas and policy cases. An embedded case study is when one studies one unit, like an organisation, but also studies sub-units that are within (or parts of) the original case (Yin, 2018). This method allows for integration of quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study. This thesis will study

the cohesion of GUE/NGL in general, as well as the cohesion in that group on three policy areas: agriculture, fisheries and economy.

3.1.1 Identifying cases

The case of GUE/NGL is chosen because of the general lack of cohesion case studies of European Parliament political groups. The choice of GUE/NGL and not another group is mainly because they have a confederal nature, which makes their voting behaviour different than the other groups. In GUE/NGL we can assume that when a delegation votes a certain way, there are reasons for it stemming from ideology, national interests or perhaps re-election purposes, or several of them. As opposed to the dominating EP groups, the cohesion of GUE/NGL will not tell us what the leadership of the group wants, which is good as this thesis want to look at cohesion along different lines.

This thesis will select three policy area cases based on a logic of their relevance to GUE/NGL and the ideologies the group adheres to. Specifically, these cases are chosen because of how they can be tied to various principles in socialism and green policies, as well as the existence of disagreement across potential national perspectives within GUE/NGL. Choosing policy areas where there is a clear and easily explainable agreement, like on gender equality, would likely not contribute interesting findings. In choosing the policy cases of agriculture, fisheries and economy, this thesis delves into policy areas where the lack of cohesion is not obvious on a left-right continuum, but where various left-wing principles and ideologies still might help us explain the level of cohesion.

The logic behind selecting three cases, is to gain insights into how cohesion can be explained differently across several policy areas. This makes the findings more comparable than if one had only a discussion of for example economic issues. Choosing two slightly similar cases in fisheries and agriculture also gives us an opportunity to compare how views on for example green policies, like animal welfare may differ between delegations in the group.

All three policy cases are linked in some way to the ideologies and principles laid out in the theory chapter as the main ideologies of the group – socialism and green policies. The reason for this is so that the hypotheses can be tested on the cases. The selected cases do not necessarily relate directly to a single ideology or principle, but sometimes several of them and with a basis in both of the two main ideologies. Every case will be evaluated by looking into and asking about one or two specific votes, which is chosen due to a surprising or interesting voting outcome. These specific votes will be clarified and discussed in the analysis.

Fisheries

Fisheries is chosen as a policy case as many votes on this topic are suited to test whether GUE/NGL adhere to the principles of international solidarity. Fisheries is one of the main topics where the EP votes on files relating to international relations. A more obvious choice related to international solidarity would be refugees, but as it is a topic where we can expect GUE/NGL to be very much united (GUE/NGL, 2019c). However, voting behaviour on fisheries is interesting to study, as many EU fisheries polices are between the EU and nearby countries in which the EU wants its vessels to fish in. Based on these agreements playing a big role in fishery policies in the EU, we can expect high cohesion based on the principle of international solidarity. Some EU countries have very strong interests in the fisheries sector, as opposed to most. This leads us to expect low cohesion, as countries with strong fisheries sectors will likely prioritise down green aspects of green policy, such as animal welfare and sustainability. The level of cohesion we find will give us an indication

as to which aspects are valued the heaviest, international solidarity, national interests or green policies.

Agriculture

The next policy-case is agriculture, which like fisheries is connected to sustainability and animal welfare. Agriculture is a good case to study to see whether workers' self-management is relevant for GUE/NGL when deciding what to vote. There are agricultural programs to support rural development, on which there are several conditions set for the support. This support is sometimes regarded non-beneficial for small-scale farmers and as giving more economic funding to big corporations (European Parliament, 2010). As with the fisheries agreements, there could be aspects that benefit small-scale farmers, so it is far from certain that this is an easy topic for GUE/NGL. National interests could carry much weight for some delegations within GUE/NGL, making those receiving more agriculture funding more likely to vote for. Those contributing more money to the EU budget while receiving less might be more likely to vote against. This combination makes us expect a low cohesion. However, it might be the case that international solidarity within the EU could prevail over these national differences. It is not unlikely that there is a certain degree of solidarity voting with countries benefiting from these financial contributions. Therefore, the cohesion level found will give an indication as to which of these aspects are emphasised by the delegations within GUE/GNL. As both fisheries and agriculture share the perspectives of national interests, international solidarity and issues relating to animal welfare and sustainability, it is likely that the level of cohesion will be similar in these two policy areas.

Economy

The last policy case chosen is economy. It is chosen in particular because of the euro cooperation. One of the group's biggest delegations is Syriza, the governing political party in Greece. Syriza rose from being a minor party with support of around five percent of the population before the financial crisis to becoming the biggest party in the Hellenic Parliament, with the prime minister. Much of their rise can be attributed to their opposition to the EU austerity policies during the Greek financial crisis. GUE/NGL is also very outspoken against austerity policies, but as the group has some more pro-EU and some more anti-EU delegations, including some that are members of the eurozone, and some that are not, their view on economic and monetary issues can be interesting, especially concerning legislation giving the EU or the European Central Bank (ECB) more power or issues related to the euro cooperation. A low level of cohesion can be expected based on disagreements along pro- and anti-EU lines. However, the opposition towards austerity policies is a uniting topic, which will likely contribute to a higher level of cohesions. The level of cohesion found will likely show which of these views the delegations within GUE/NGL prioritise or is most present in votes on economic matters.

3.2 Mixed methods

This thesis combines both quantitative and qualitative methods, making its approach a mixed method one. Quantitative methods have historically been held in higher regard than qualitative ones. This is because of its claims to be "hard", "objective" and "statistically significant". This contrasts the softer nature of qualitative research, historically regarded as subjective (Read & Marsh, 2002, pp. 235-236). Some went even further, with Kerlinger in the 1970s claiming that "there's no such thing as qualitative data. Everything is either 1 or 0" (Miles & Huberman 1994, p. 40). This view has however changed, and both methods are now regarded as valid forms of research by most. They are still mostly used independently of one another, but this has been challenged, with many asking why we

should discard something useful (Read & Marsh, 2002, p. 236). This thesis considers both approaches as valuable, and will therefore use a mixed methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods. These will be combined in a way called an explanatory sequential mixed method.

The main reason for using a mixed method is that a purely quantitative approach would not allow this thesis to address the second part of the research question, of how we can explain certain agreements or disagreements that based on the theory chapter is difficult to explain (Read & Marsh, 2002, p. 237). However, quantitative data can very easily explain to what degree the group votes as it does, both overall and on various policy areas. The actual reasoning behind certain voting behaviour is however impossible to explain using this kind of quantitative data. A qualitative analysis of the party manifestos would be one way to shed light on this, but this would produce new problems, like how some of the party manifestos are not specific enough and does not have a very specific policy on for example fisheries agreements with non-EU countries. As the legislative files or resolutions passed by the EU are occasionally extremely specific, obtaining information from people working in the EP will contribute with information even on very specific issues.

In addition, MEPs are often not completely loyal to their party's political manifesto. When they for some reason don't have an obvious way to vote, what do they do? They cast their vote freely. A decision is taken within the European Parliament building, with only people in their delegation and in the group knowing the reasoning and discussions that happened before the vote. For these reasons, a qualitative approach to explain the "hard data" from the quantitative part, seems logical. Doing this in form of interviews with people working in the group, using them as "experts" on what goes on in the group seems like a mixed method approach well suited. This gives a unique opportunity to dig deeper into the reasoning for varying levels of cohesion across the group on specific policy areas, as shown in the quantitative data on voting behaviour.

In addition, many argue that a combined method will strengthen the validity of the research and is especially beneficial when at the forefront of new research procedures (Creswell, 2014, pp. 216-218). The logic behind the strengthening of validity from a mixed methods research design, is that both methods serve as a check on the other. If some findings in the quantitative data do not make sense, it might be discovered in the interview that it in fact has an easily explainable reason, not caught by the quantitative approach. Or opposite, things could be said in the interviews that contradict the quantitative data. Essentially, the aim with using mixed methods would be to spot inconsistencies between the two data sources and explore why they appear (Read & Marsh, 2002, pp. 237-238).

Such an inconsistency is unlikely in this thesis, as an interview subject would not typically contradict voting records that are publicly available. However, if that would happen, the obvious solution would be to suggest a replication of the study, because it is impossible to say which is correct, if indeed one of them can be more correct than the other. This comes down to one's personal view on those methods, and a researcher more likely to prefer generalisable data would likely trust the quantitative section more, and opposite. When carrying out mixed-methods research, one's hope is not to encounter this problem, and that any differences between results found can hopefully triangulate with other findings, strengthening both. Because if the results found are not contradictory, the combination of methods may strengthen potential findings. (Read & Marsh, 2002, pp. 240-242; Padgett, 1998, p. 134).

Read and Marsh (2002) argues that every type of methodological triangulation can add to our knowledge and understanding, if it is sensitive to the epistemological issues. This can be done with for example a qualitative method followed by a quantitative one, to see if the result found in for example interviews is more generalisable. This thesis does the opposite, in that interviews here will help elaborate on the findings from the quantitative section, making this a triangulation starting out with hard data from votes, followed up by “soft” data from interviews trying to explain what is going on. This is called an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach. It is sequential because there is a clear order to the thesis – quantitative data first, then qualitative. It is explanatory because the qualitative data is used to explain the findings from the quantitative part (Creswell, 2014, p. 14). Essentially, while theory can account for many of the findings in the quantitative data, in-depth interviews about the topic will allow us to construct a fuller explanation to the cohesiveness (or lack thereof) of GUE/NGL (Read & Marsh, 2002, pp. 238-240).

3.3 Voting records

The source this thesis starts out with, is voting data. It shows GUE/NGL voting cohesion is in general, how it has changed, and how it is on specific policy areas is relevant to this study. The gathering of data has been done by accessing the database VoteWatch, where all roll-call voting data from the EP is gathered and can be systematised and combined according to certain criteria one is interested in, such as political group, committee or member state⁵. This was particularly done to get quantitative data on cohesion in the voting of GUE/NGL. Both the general cohesion, but also cohesion on the specific policy areas will be interesting to systematise data on.

The measure of “cohesion” will be used frequently in the analysis of this thesis. Cohesion here refers to how united an EP political group is in a voting situation. This is calculated with an “agreement index” (AI). It effectively compares the number of votes for each of the three options: Yes, No and Abstain. As a result, the AI equals 1 when all the members of a political group vote together and equals 0 when all the members of a political group are equally divided between all three voting options (Hix, Noury & Roland, 2005, p. 215; VoteWatch, 2019c). In this thesis percentages will be used instead of binary.

Another measure is that of “voting loyalty to majority position of GUE/NGL”. “Majority position” simply refers to the plurality position of the MEPs within a group, which is especially relevant for a group without a party whip. If, for example, out of GUE/NGL’s 49 MEPs, 20 vote “yes”, 15 vote “no” and 14 vote “abstain”, the political line of GUE/NGL is “yes”. Therefore, a measure of “voting loyalty to majority position” tells us how often a delegation votes together with the majority position. If voting loyalty of a delegation is at 1, that would mean that the delegation in 100% of the cases vote along the majority position of the group. A voting loyalty of 0 would mean they in 0% of the votes vote the same as the majority position (VoteWatch, 2019c).

An essential aspect with the collection of voting records was the results of specific votes. One case was selected for each of the three policy cases. For the GUE/NGL overall discussion, two cases relating to the same theme were selected. These were single files that the European Parliament voted on in plenary sittings. They were chosen firstly for their high level of disagreement. Having high level of disagreement as a criterion is

⁵ The database VoteWatch is not accessible without a registered account. However, all the data referenced from it can also be accessed from the EP website (European Parliament, 2019b).

grounded in the cohesion being generally high. While the cohesion level on all policy areas in GUE/NGL was relatively low compared to other political groups in the chosen period, there were more often agreement than disagreement. GUE/NGL cohesion on different policy areas was around 70-80% (see figure 1 and 2). In addition to disagreement, another criterion was that the divides on the different files should not be identical, meaning that the parties voting against should be of different patterns, to get as much as possible out of the explanations from the experts in the interviews. The cases were chosen because they had such surprising results (based on the theory), that the different voting patterns would be something interview subjects with knowledge of GUE/NGL and the policy area would be able to explain. For them to be able to explain, the votes all had to be quite recent, so the interview subject would remember them as clearly as possible. While the cases were all interesting by themselves, mentioning them were also a segue into questions on how the group is divided on that policy area more broadly.

3.4 Interviews

3.4.1 The choice of interviews

The primary qualitative source of data is from interviews. These are semi-structured interviews with people working in GUE/NGL⁶. Interviews are chosen because the scope of this study is something that has not been studied before – how and why an EP group is divided in certain ways on certain topics. One way of assessing this would be the mentioned study of voting records and combine it with a comprehensive analysis of all GUE/NGL member parties' party programs. That method however, would have several major issues. One being that the political parties don't necessarily have policies on all areas, especially as this group contains several single-issue parties. Another issue is that some delegations have left their party or were elected on a now "dead" election alliance (GUE/NGL, 2019i; Il Fatto Quotidiano, 2015). These MEPs will not vote according to a political party program as they don't have one. Another problem with that method, is that reading party programs of close to 30 different delegations in 14 different languages would require a team of researchers with knowledge of all the languages (GUE/NGL, 2019b). Interview subjects however, were more accessible. That way, insiders, who know a lot about the groups dynamic and different delegations and policy areas, can function as experts on the topic. Combining broad data on cohesion with voting results on specific votes, and then asking these interviewees about them, seemed a better good way to get the data this thesis is interested in.

3.4.2 Informants

The choice of informants was based on the selected policy areas. Informants divide across the areas in this manner: agriculture (participant A), fisheries (participant F) and economy (participant E), as well as a focus on GUE/NGL in a broader sense (participant G). These are chosen for their expertise on GUE/NGL as a group, and on the policy area specifically. As there are no case studies on GUE/NGL, and therefore few, if any, researchers who would know as much as people working within the parliament. Much of the information they share are also explanations for voting behaviour that never reach media. As these are the only

⁶ I had an internship in GUE/NGL during spring of 2018. Throughout the process of conducting this research, I have been conscious of my personal relation to the group and its employees. However, this relation was also essential in granting me access to interview subjects that other researchers would not have gotten.

ones who are likely to have information about the topic, using them as experts strengthens the reliability of this thesis.

When choosing interviewees, I needed to keep in mind any particular bias they might have. Because of this, the four people I interviewed are from three different countries, and from both GUE and from NGL⁷. The necessity of this diversity is because most people who work in GUE/NGL are tied to a national delegation and might have a bias or agenda based on that. These potential biases can be based in either national interests or ideology. Whether they are members of a political party or not, gaining information from different delegations and nationalities strengthens the reliability of the findings. With a fairly broad combination of interviewees, much of their potential bias will be evened out, and will not negatively affect the reliability of this thesis (Grønmo, 2004, pp. 220-221).

Additionally, there is a chance that some interviewees want to frame GUE/NGL in positive or negative light. However, as statements from the interviewees are tied to the reliable data of voting records, the potential effect of this is limited. Downplaying or emphasising cohesion does not work when the data would contradict them, making their opportunities to frame the group in a skewed way limited. This makes it likely that an analysis using a different method would yield the same result and an analysis of records of internal debates in the political groups would likely also mirror the responses gained from the interviewees.

The reaching out to the interviewees were done via email. Most were positive, but some did not reply. Those who did not reply were replaced with new ones. Combined, I view those who were positive to be interviewed as providing sufficient data material for this research. All interviewees were sent a participant information document via email before the interviews took place (see appendix 1). This gave them information on the purpose of the research and why they were invited to take part. It also pointed out that it was voluntary and that they would be anonymised. The document informed them that the data from the interviews will only be handled by the researcher, and that all personal data will be stored separately from the research data. The document also stated that the research can be published, and that if there were any problems, they were free to contact me. Some of this information were briefly explained in person before the actual interviews took place.

The interviewees were also informed that the interview would be taped, and later transcribed. All interviewees agreed to this. This is the most common practice in research, and it ensures that the researcher captures everything that is said. It also allows us to be more present in the interview situation, where we can focus on the participants, and ensuring a good flow throughout the interview, while also allowing the flexibility for follow-up questions or elaboration when necessary. One potential downside of taping the interview, is that some interviewees can limit themselves, and not speak as openly as without a tape recording, but with the accuracy of the research in mind, it is still beneficial to record the interview (Tjora, 2013, pp. 140-143).

In the first interview round, four informants were interviewed. One of these were someone with a very good overview of the group, with knowledge of the group dynamics, and what views the different delegations hold. The other three were concerned with specific policy

⁷ NGL is a suffix added to the name GUE/NGL on the insistence of Finnish and Swedish MEPs who wanted to emphasise a separate identity from the rest of the group. Today NGL operates within the EP as an alliance of likeminded political parties (Raunio & Tiilikainen, 2004, p. 58-59). GUE is internally used as a term for all GUE/NGL MEPs who are not in NGL.

areas, and the related committee in the EP. By interviewing these four, I got both an overview and information on the specific policy areas this thesis focuses on.

Before conducting the interviews, I decided on doing them in person. As opposed to conducting them via phone, in person one can use body language to lead the conversation on and encourage the interviewee to continue when giving interesting information. Interviewees also enjoy the presence of another person. This makes them more talkative in a face to face interview setting. The interview is likely to be shorter if done via telephone, as it gets a more formal aspect, making them less inclined to spend longer periods of time (Tjora, 2013, pp. 140-142).

I chose anonymisation of the interviewees to give them the opportunity to speak as freely as they wanted. The anonymisation process removed all information about them, except for the policy area they are very familiar with. As GUE/NGL is a small group, potentially shared information could easily have identified the interviewees. As the group has around 50 MEPs and a few hundred employees, of which only a few follow a specific committee, they are easily identifiable if wither party membership, gender or nationality were reported (European Parliament, 2019a).

3.4.3 Interview guide

An interview guide roughly describes how the interview will be conducted, with a particular focus on which themes to ask about. It needs to be comprehensive, but also general enough that it opens for conducting the interview in a flexible manner (Grønmo, 2004, pp. 161-162). When making the interview guide, I started out with assessing what information I needed. This was based on my thesis question and my three hypotheses. Based on them, it was clear that I wanted information on what GUE/NGL agrees on, and what they disagree on. In addition, it was important to ask the interviewees if they view the group as divided, and if so, into what fractions. If divided, does the divisions vary according to policy area? One of the most important aspects was also why they believe these divides exist.

These questions regarding the whole group was asked every interviewee. This was to gain thorough knowledge of how the group is divided, and how it is perceived amongst people working there. In addition to these questions, I asked similar, but more policy area specific questions about each interviewee's policy area of expertise. I also included questions about 1-3 cases of votes with surprising results, based on what I knew and presumed based on the data I had, and based on the theoretical framework of this thesis. Asking them to provide their view on why the group was divided, in various ways and across different policy areas seemed a good way to gain both an overview and a more specific understanding of the three chosen policy areas: agriculture, fisheries and economy.

While constructing the interview guide, I tried to always keep in mind that poorly constructed questions can lead to a bias. This is especially the case if questions are framed in a way that makes it clear to them that I want a specific answer. I kept that in mind while conducting the interview, as a semi-structured interview takes improvised turns, and I could not plan all my questions. I therefore asked several follow-up questions when the interviewee touched an interesting topic.

Both during and after the interviews, my interview guide seem to have captured the most essential data I was aiming for. The interview subjects appeared to speak very freely and honestly. This can be simply because this thesis does not have an angle that would be of obvious harm to the group, any specific delegations, or them personally. In addition, the

anonymisation of interviewees in the thesis is likely to have contributed to their willingness to speak openly. Out of four interviews, all of them were very open in their answers.

I transcribed the interviews myself, in an attempt not to lose important information. Norwegian sociologist Tjora (2013, p.143-145) argues that interviews transcribed by the person who did the interviewing is beneficial. Interviews transcribed by an outsider more often lose important information in the process, like "visual cues" which can give additional information or give an understanding of the tone in the interview.

4 Analysis

4.1 Quantitative data on cohesion of GUE/NGL

This section will give a brief overview of the general cohesion of GUE/NGL. When we delve into the specific policy areas, relevant cohesion statistics will be used, and having an overview of overall cohesion data of the group as a prerequisite when reviewing those numbers will help evaluate them more efficiently. This section will therefore focus on what the cohesion level is for GUE/NGL, what the average is, and what it is on the different policy areas. It will both focus on how the cohesion of GUE/NGL compares to the other EP groups, as well as cohesion internally in the group.

To measure more recent cohesion, this thesis has chosen to focus on the current legislature. As it is possible to measure over four out of the five-year term on the current European Parliament, the cohesion data from this period should be sufficient to gain an indication as to what the current cohesion in the GUE/NGL is. It is also limited up until January of 2019, so that the data will not change throughout this research. This limits all the quantitative data used in this thesis to data from 01.07.14 to 01.01.19. As this period will be used in all quantitative data, all tables and figures will be easily comparable. Choosing a focus on the current legislature also makes the data relevant for the delegations discussed in the analysis of this thesis, as the composition of GUE/NGL have not changed much during this period.

The main measure used for voting patterns of GUE/NGL in this thesis is cohesion. Measuring the European Parliament political group by cohesion gives us information about to what degree they vote similarly. Figure 1 shows us the overall cohesion, as well as on all policy areas. Based on the theory section of this thesis, the fact that they agree on for example gender equality and environment is not very surprising. However, looking into the policy areas around average and below, like agriculture, fisheries and economy, can give interesting findings as to why they disagree. Agriculture and economic & monetary affairs are both slightly below average, while fisheries are the absolute lowest in the entire group. Based on the theory section, the low cohesion on fisheries is particularly surprising, and will be discussed further in the fisheries part of the discussion.

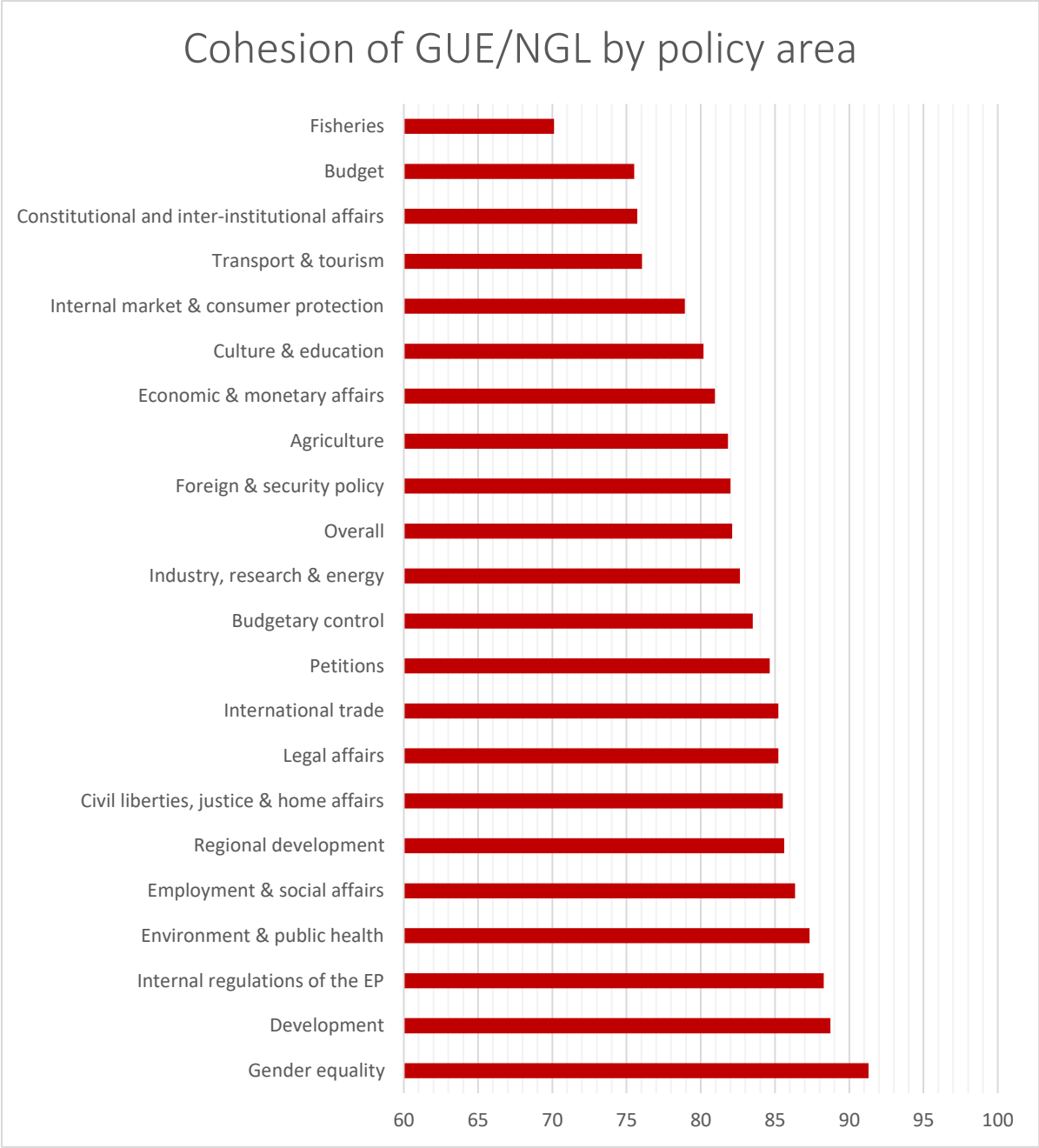


Figure 1. Cohesion of GUE/NGL by policy area from 01.07.14-01.01.19 (VoteWatch, 2019a).

In order to get a notion of what cohesion between 70-80% mean, showing the cohesion of the other EP groups for comparison is relevant. Figure 2 does this. The first cluster of bars show us the overall cohesion of the various EP groups. GUE/NGL positions itself below the four pro-EU groups (Greens, EPP, S&D and ALDE). GUE/NGL does however have a higher degree of cohesion than the right-wing Eurosceptic groups, both the softer ones (ECR) and the more hardliner Eurosceptics (EFDD and ENF). The data from both figure 1 and 2 will be used when discussing the specific policy areas. One aim is to find where the disagreement within the specific policy areas is found and get explanations for it.

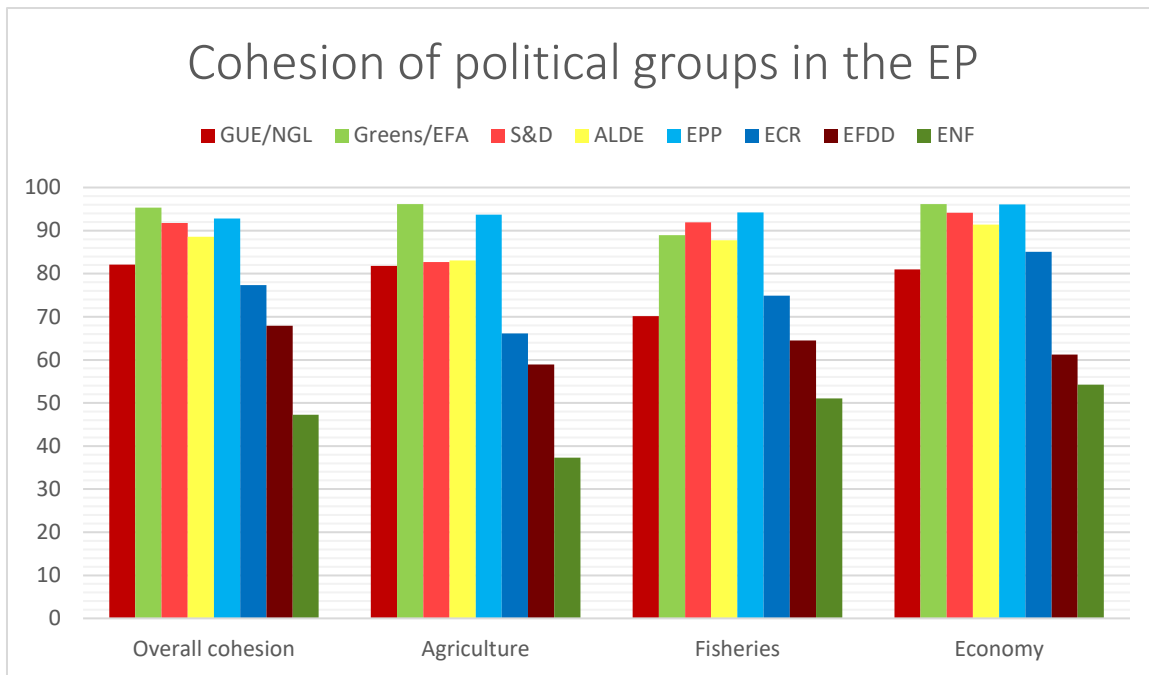


Figure 2. Cohesion of political groups in the EP in percentages from 01.07.14-01.01.19 (VoteWatch, 2019a).

The next aspect we will examine before proceeding with the analysis, is figure 3, which shows to what degree GUE/NGL has any actual power in the European Parliament. Actual power is measured by analysing how often GUE/NGL voted alongside the winning position in the EP. This is not a perfect measure of actual power, but it gives an indication of how much influence GUE/NGL wields. It gives an indication as to whether GUE/NGL can cooperate with other groups in order to create a plurality. Putting it bluntly, the numbers tell us how often the different delegations voted together with the majority in the EP. Figure 3 also includes numbers from the other political groups, as that shows us where the majority on the different policy areas most often were found.

One takeaway from figure 3 is that in the overall actual power shows that the majority is generally centred around the social democratic, liberal and conservative groups. In addition, the Greens and ECR are a part of the majority more often than GUE/NGL. This is also the pattern on fisheries, with a slight increase in actual power of GUE/NGL. Agriculture is however a little more interesting, as GUE/NGL is almost exactly equal to the Greens and is part of the majority less than 50% of the time, with ECR as the clear partner for the three centrist groups. The last, economic & monetary affairs, stands out, with GUE/NGL very rarely being part of the majority. This might help explain the cohesion or lack thereof of GUE/NGL and will be of help in the analysis.

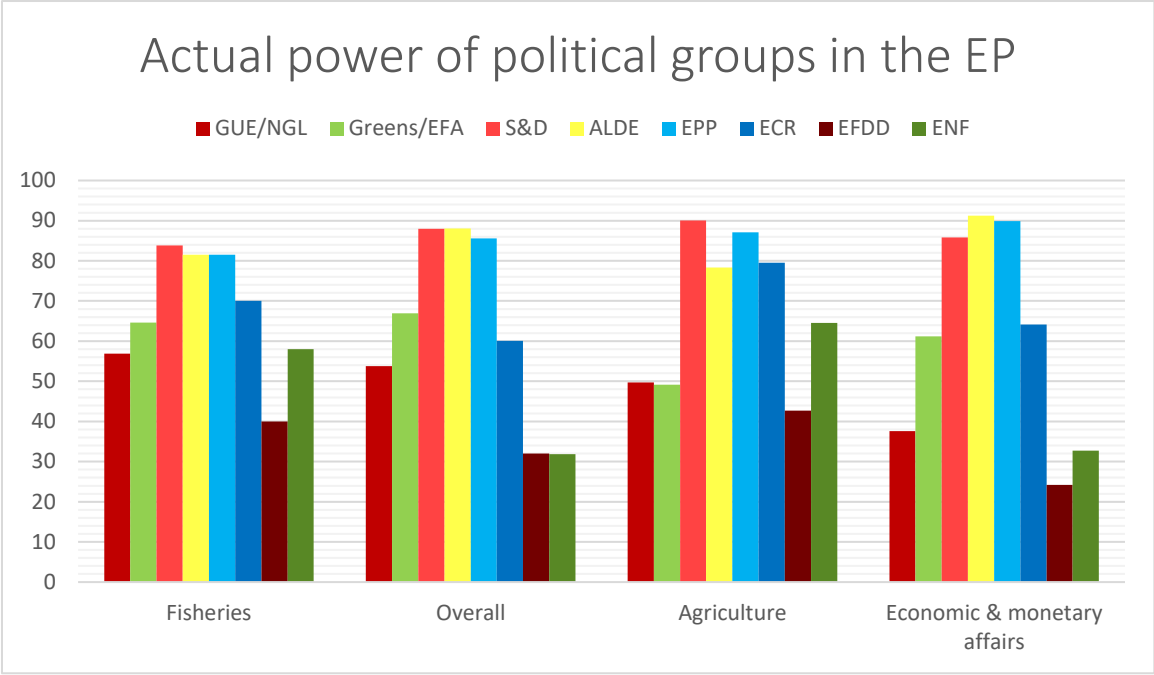


Figure 3. Actual power of political groups in the EP by policy area in percentages from 01.07.14-01.01.19 (VoteWatch, 2019e).

The last table we will look into in this section is table 1 on voting loyalty to political group. It shows in percentages how often the delegation (or a single MEP who is a sole member of a delegation) votes along the majority position of the group. The names used are primarily the English translations, where they exist. Exceptions are made for Die Linke, Syriza and Podemos, that are referred to with those names in several interviews, as well as those where English translations were not found. With 22 delegations and a total of 49 MEPs, there are not surprisingly many single MEPs. We should note that a particular focus will be on the bigger delegations and the NGL. The bigger delegations are Die Linke (7 MEPs), Podemos (5 MEPs), Syriza (4 MEPs) and Sinn Fein (4 MEPs)⁸. Another important actor is the Nordic Green Left (NGL), an intragroup alliance consisting primarily of Scandinavian, Dutch and Irish MEPs, whom share certain values. They cooperate a lot internally, so seeing the pattern of their cohesion is interesting. To simplify see the differences between NGL and GUE, NGL delegations are coloured in a darker blue.

We can from table 1 already see one clear division. It is clear how votes from members of the NGL differ from the majority position more often than other members of GUE/NGL. With the exception of the Portuguese and the Czech communist parties, everyone from Finnish Left Alliance and below in table 1 are NGL members. This reveals some of the divide in the group and will be investigated further. Policy specific numbers on voting loyalty to majority position will be used in the sections of the analyses focused on specific policy areas.

| Country | Political party | Number of MEPs | Voting loyalty |
|---------|-------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Italy | The Other Europe with Tsipras | 2 | 96.32 |
| Germany | Die Linke (The Left) | 7 | 95.72 |

⁸ Three Sinn Fein members are elected from Ireland, and one is elected from Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom.

| | | | |
|----------------|--|---|-------|
| Portugal | Left Bloc | 1 | 94.07 |
| France | Left Front | 3 | 93.23 |
| Greece | Syriza (Coalition of the radical left) | 4 | 92.44 |
| Spain | EH Bildu | 1 | 92.14 |
| Spain | Podemos (We can) | 5 | 92.06 |
| Spain | Izquierda Unida | 4 | 91.91 |
| Greece | Popular Unity | 1 | 91.67 |
| Cyprus | Progressive Party of Working People | 2 | 91.05 |
| Spain | Galician Left Alternative | 1 | 89.00 |
| France | L'union pour les Outremer | 1 | 87.09 |
| Finland | Left Alliance | 1 | 86.89 |
| United Kingdom | Sinn Fein | 1 | 85.46 |
| Ireland | Sinn Fein | 3 | 85.36 |
| Sweden | Left Party | 1 | 84.89 |
| Czech Republic | Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia | 3 | 83.37 |
| Germany | Stefan Eck (independent) | 1 | 82.75 |
| Netherlands | Party for the Animals | 1 | 82.32 |
| Denmark | People's Movement against the EU | 1 | 80.83 |
| Portugal | Portuguese Communist Party | 3 | 76.69 |
| Netherlands | Socialist Party | 2 | 73.64 |

Table 1. Voting loyalty to majority position of GUE/NGL in percentages from 01.07.14-01.01.19 (VoteWatch, 2019d).

4.2 Agriculture

The Common Agricultural Policy of the EU (CAP) was launched in 1962 and is the agricultural policy of the European Union (European Commission, 2019a). While being a large and important part of the EU budget in the early days of European integration, its portion of the overall EU budget has been reduced from 72% in 1984 to 36% in 2018 (European Commission, 2013; 2019). It is both funded and managed at the EU level, and among other aspects, it focuses on farm subsidies and rural development (European Commission, 2019a).

4.2.1 The case of unfair trading practices

For the interview with a GUE/NGL official who follows agriculture closely, I looked into a specific vote named "proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on unfair trading practices in business-to-business relationships in the food supply chain". The goal of this legislation is to deal with unfair trading practices (UTPs), especially for primary producers (farmers). According to the European Commission: "They lack bargaining power" against those they sell their products to, primarily processors and supermarkets (European Commission, 2018a). These are big companies, and farmers have limited alternatives with regard to whom they can sell their products. UTPs can therefore put the profit margins of farmers under pressure, which can even drive them out of business, even if the business should be viable. The legislation introduced bans on ten UTPs. These were on a so called "black list". The Commission also made a "grey list", in which the listed practices have to be agreed on in a transparent manner for them to be legal. Among the black list bans were: not providing payment for services, payment delays for perishable products over 30 days and cancellation of orders for perishable products with short notice (European Commission, 2018a). This is a proposal sent from the

European Commission to the European Parliament, because as they are both co-legislators in the EU after the Lisbon Treaty took effect in 2009, EP gets its say (Lisbon Treaty, 2007, p. 135; European Parliament, 2019e).

Essentially this was a vote on whether one wanted to implement this or not. GUE/NGL was somewhat split about this vote. Participant A pointed to an issue with a particular amendment as a root cause for the split:

This legislation is there to help farmers to strengthen their position in bargaining vis à vis the supermarkets. [...] [T]he group was split especially because of one amendment which was adopted in Agricultural committee, which was about that supermarkets and processers cannot impose to the farmer higher standard on the environmental and animal welfare issues than required by the law (participant A).

The informant went on to say that if this amendment passed, this would mean that there would not be a levelled playfield for all farmers if it is implemented, because then some farmers will operate with different standards than others, and this will cause an inequality in the market. He also stated that it is problematic from a left perspective to “demand from the supermarkets to regulate this on a market level”, and that it should not be up to the consumers to regulate, it should be the task of the legislator (Participant A). A statement like this makes it clear that GUE/NGL adheres to the principles of workers’ self-management and a self-regulated economy, in that they want the farmers themselves to be on equal ground with a regulation from the legislator (the EU) that they all have to follow. As he puts it more explicitly later in the interview: “[W]e are focused on small farmers” (participant A).

This amendment was very important in each delegation’s decision what to vote, because if they voted against, the whole file would be referred back to the committee, and if voting for, it would go to negotiations with the Council of the European Union (Council). While this amendment was problematic for many, the rapporteur from S&D said that they would “drop this condition anyway, in negotiations with the Council” (participant A). However, there were still disagreements inside GUE/NGL. According to participant A, the disagreement was between those who argued that this was not ambitious enough, and those who felt that it was better than nothing. Nothing could very easily have been the alternative. On a follow up question about the split, he answered that GUE/NGL’s shadow rapporteur⁹ took the position that the legislation was “not ambitious enough” and that it “doesn’t go far enough to tackle unfair trading practices”, and he therefore suggested that the group should vote against it. The result was a very even split in GUE/NGL on the entire file. Much of NGL voted against, along with parts of Die Linke, and a few other delegations (VoteWatch, 2018).

On this specific vote, the split within GUE/NGL was based on the level of ambition of the legislation. However, in this specific case, the main cause for disagreement was the level of ambition, with delegations arguing that it did not go far enough in tackling the UTPs. The split can therefore be explained by who is more prone to take a more principled ideological stance, rather than the pragmatism of some. Among those voting against were the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) and the Dutch Socialist Party (SP). This is mirrored

⁹ A *shadow rapporteur* is an MEP who follows a specific file for one EP group. In GUE/NGL, he dictates the official group line.

by a statement from participant G, about how these two parties are more ideologically principled, and less likely to vote in a certain way for pragmatist reasons (participant G).

4.2.2 Agriculture generally

If we move on from the specific vote to the more general view of agricultural issues in GUE/NGL, the most notable divide is according to my interviewee simply about whether the EU should have a Common Agricultural Policy. There is also a conflict regarding how it should be funded. When asked about what the biggest divides were about, the interviewee stated:

So basically, the first big issue, is whether to have a common agriculture policy, or not to have a common policy, which means whether the policy should be financed from the EU budget or from the national budget [...] the Nordic countries are inclined not to go in that direction, while the southern are happy to have a common policy (Participant A).

Regarding the reasons for this apparent north-south divide on the issue of CAP, participant A stated that it to a certain extent is a question of Euroscepticism, where some delegations want common (EU) policies, and some want separate (national) policies. This mirrors the answers of participant G regarding GUE/NGL generally, who also stated that the Nordic delegations are the most Eurosceptic ones (participant G). When we look at table 2, we see that there is a significant split between NGL and the other members when it comes to cohesion on agriculture, with only a few exceptions. My participant somewhat backs up these numbers, when he states:

“Most of the NGL parties are against increasing the EU budget in general, but also in agriculture. But Sinn Fein, of Ireland and Northern Ireland, where the rural economy is very much dependent on CAP money, is in favour of increasing the budget” (Participant A).

The last remark on Sinn Fein shows us that the GUE versus NGL split is not absolute, and does not apply completely to agriculture, even if the broader part of it seem to also apply here. While GUE/NGL disagree on whether the EU should fund CAP or not, there is agreement on how CAP should operate while it exists:

One of the biggest goals is the redistribution of payments within the agricultural policy, because currently we have 20% of the farmers who own 80% of the whole land in Europe and they receive 80% of all the money. And this is a structural problem where there is a big inequality among farmers, so we are always on the side of the small farmers (Participant A).

The argument for redistribution of wealth even within something as specific as the CAP, shows a clear element of international solidarity in the voting patterns of GUE/NGL on distribution of funds within the CAP. The group want the money paid out to farmers to go to the “small farmers”, and not those who run industrially sized production.

| Country | Political party | Number of MEPs | Voting loyalty |
|----------|-------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Italy | The Other Europe with Tsipras | 2 | 98.20 |
| Portugal | Left Bloc | 1 | 97.53 |
| Germany | The Left (Die Linke) | 7 | 97.08 |
| Greece | Popular Unity | 1 | 94.93 |

| | | | |
|----------------|--|---|-------|
| Spain | Podemos | 5 | 94.71 |
| Spain | Izquierda Unida | 4 | 93.57 |
| Greece | Syriza | 4 | 92.81 |
| France | Left Front | 3 | 92.07 |
| Finland | Left Alliance | 1 | 91.72 |
| Spain | EH Bildu | 1 | 90.82 |
| Cyprus | Progressive Party of Working People | 2 | 90.54 |
| Spain | Galician Left Alternative | 1 | 87.50 |
| France | L'union pour les Outremer | 1 | 85.37 |
| Portugal | Portuguese Communist Party | 3 | 82.14 |
| Sweden | Left Party | 1 | 81.10 |
| Germany | Stefan Eck (independent) | 1 | 80.70 |
| Netherlands | Party for the Animals | 1 | 79.41 |
| Denmark | People's Movement against the EU | 1 | 76.09 |
| Czech Republic | Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia | 3 | 73.62 |
| Netherlands | Socialist Party | 2 | 72.44 |
| Ireland | Sinn Fein | 3 | 72.15 |
| United Kingdom | Sinn Fein | 1 | 71.33 |

Table 2. Voting loyalty to majority position of GUE/NGL on agriculture in percentages from 01.07.14-01.01.19 (VoteWatch, 2019d).

While there is a clear Eurosceptic pro/anti CAP divide, participant A points to views on environmental issues as another important cause for divide in the group. While the group is mostly cohesive on agriculture, there are times when environmental issues clash with farmers' interests, making them divide a "green line". Participant A says that the way agriculture is organised, it pollutes a lot, and there is a question in the group on whether it is right to "point fingers" at farmers, or if that should be avoided, as they produce our food. My participant states that there are some that "will do everything that protects the environment" and others who "[come] from the farmer perspective", and that these are visible divides. This split is most prominent in that NGL, along with Die Linke, is regarded as "greener", according to participant A. This shows that there is possibly a divide in to what extent one prioritises the environment, and clearly a divide between those who prioritise the farmers and those who prioritise the environment. While the group agrees a lot on agriculture generally, both on farmers' rights and environmentalist issues, when these clash, the group is split.

We have four members in agriculture committee, and sometimes we have four different positions or different reasonings for the positions. [...] MEPs are very independent. We are fully confederal in that sense. [...] Everybody checks the voting list, and then sometimes we follow [it], depends on the topic. Because we know, some people are in favour of EU funding, some are not in favour of. Some people are in favour of increasing budget, others are not (Participant A).

This references the internal dynamic of the committee, and it shows that the confederal nature of the group is visible in that everyone can vote as they please. One argument we can make is that with this confederal behaviour, it seems logical that a strict party whip would increase cohesion. As we can see from figure 2, GUE/NGL cohesion on agriculture is only slightly below that of ALDE, S&D and higher than ECR, EFDD and ENF. With the confederal dynamic of the group, a cohesion level this high on a policy area where we

expected some disagreement from conflicts between ideological Eurosceptic delegations and delegations from countries relying heavily on the CAP, is a little surprising.

In total, it is clear that the group generally agrees on (i) environment, (ii) workers' (farmers') rights and (iii) animal welfare, as long as the different perspectives do not come into conflict with one another. This general agreement results in the fairly high level of cohesion on agriculture. In contrast, they disagree on whether the EU should have the CAP at all. When reviewing how the CAP functions today, the agreement is greater, as the whole group wants a more equal distribution of the funds within the CAP framework.

4.3 Fisheries

Fisheries policies in the EU are organised in the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). It is a set of rules for managing fisheries in the EU. In particular, it aims to conserve fish stock and manage European fishing fleets. It gives all European fishing fleets equal access to fishing in EU waters. It was introduced in the 1970's, and the latest update of it was implemented on 1 January 2014 (European Commission, 2019b). While not a big portion of the EU budget, fisheries is an extremely important sector for a few countries. Spain, Greece, Italy and Portugal make up around 73 percent of those employed in the fishing sector, something we can expect to impact how delegations in GUE/NGL votes on Fisheries (European Commission, 2017).

4.3.1 The case of the Morocco Fisheries Partnership Agreement

Before the interview with Participant F, I read up on the file "Morocco Fisheries Partnership Agreement". This is an agreement that follows up previous agreements on fisheries between the EU (formerly the EC) and the Kingdom of Morocco. On 14 July 2018 the previous agreement was concluded and signing a new one is perceived almost as a formality. These agreements usually enjoy broad support, as the more centrist groups (S&D, ALDE and EPP) tend to agree on these agreements specifically, as well as fisheries policy generally. What this agreement mainly does, is securing EU vessels access to various species of fish in exchange for a financial contribution from the EU. This contribution covers access rights for EU vessels to Morocco's territorial waters, as well as financing support for the Moroccan fisheries sector (European Parliament, 2019c).

Regarding this file GUE/NGL was almost completely unanimous, making it differ from what could be expected, as figure 1 showed fisheries as the area where cohesion in the group is at its lowest. Compared to other "Fisheries Partnership Agreements" the difference is significant. Usually, these are votes where GUE/NGL disagrees wildly. One example of this the equivalent vote on an agreement with Côte d'Ivoire, where 17 voted for it, 8 abstained, and 7 voted against (European Parliament, 2019; VoteWatch, 2019b). From looking through other votes, low cohesion appears to be the rule on these votes, making an investigation into why that is not always the case interesting.

When asked about the unusually high cohesion, participant F could tell me that the concerns were related to Western Sahara:

[T]he agreement is based on Western Saharan waters. The group has a strong solidarity position with Western Sahara's struggle [...] against the Moroccan occupation, so in this case, the vote was not so focused on the fisheries as on normal fisheries agreement issues, so the group was unanimously against the agreement (Participant F)

GUE/NGL unanimously voting against an agreement of a type they usually tend to agree more with, highlights a clear element of international solidarity with the fishermen and people of Western Sahara. He goes on to clarify how these agreements have changed recently and how they usually are perceived now. As mentioned, they have two dimensions, one where the EU pays for access to the waters, and another where they pay for sectorial support. Participant F states that this latter point is important for many in GUE/NGL:

This new generation of agreements [...] means that you are giving money to the fisheries sector of these third countries. You are supporting the fisheries infrastructure, the renewal of the fleet, better conditions for fishermen, [...] there's more money for sectorial support (participant F).

Following up on this description of how these agreements are structured, participant A goes on to discuss the divides within GUE/NGL on these agreements.

[GUE/NGL has] two positions, or at least two positions in the group. One that sees these agreements as a colonial - an almost colonial branch - and say that "you are just paying to these third countries to go there and export their resources". [...] If you just look to the agreements, with this look, you would vote against an agreement.

Participant F explains the logic of a particular view on these agreements with some delegations in GUE/NGL always regarding them as a colonial move by the EU, using their economic strength in order to exploit poorer countries. These are contrasted, Participant F argues, by those delegations who argue that these agreements benefit the inhabitants in these countries. They support them because of the money allocated for sectorial support.

The first view is a more traditional argument that opposes oppression and colonialist behaviour by the EU. It is an argument which appears to overlook much of the content in the actual policy but opposing it from an ideological standpoint regarding the EU's role in the world. There is perhaps an element of solidarity in it, but it seems more ideologically driven, where even an agreement that made all the stakeholders satisfied might not be voted in favour of by all the delegations in GUE/NGL.

The other view is however a more pragmatic one, with an argument for international solidarity based on the level of sectorial support included in the agreement. This logic seems more concerned with the actual outcome of the policy, and not the underlying principles behind it, making it a position based heavily on the principle of international solidarity.

When asked about a potential presence of national interests in these decisions, Participant F argues that normally that is not the case. An example used is of how Spanish MEPs often votes against these agreements, even though the Spanish fleet is large, and "in many cases [are] fishing in these countries" (Participant F).

Regarding the Moroccan agreement, it seems the votes of GUE/NGL are based heavily on international solidarity with an oppressed people and their fishermen. The voting of GUE/NGL in this case was cohesive for reasons of solidarity with the people of Western Sahara. On other "Fisheries Partnership Agreements", this is not the case, as delegations in GUE/NGL have differing opinions on these agreements. However, it is noteworthy that the principles used are the same, even if they result in different outcomes. Key principles are solidarity with fishermen. For some delegations however, their ideological opposition to these EU policies prevail of the solidarity with fishermen in the specific country. This disagreement contributes to the relatively low cohesion on fishery policies overall. This

goes a long way in confirming hypothesis 2 on the policy area of fisheries, as ideologies and principles seem to be driving the decision making in GUE/NGL on fisheries, which is a topic where the traditional left-right continuum has a weak explanatory power. In addition, it shows how delegations differ in which principles are perceived as most important for them.

4.3.2 Fisheries generally

If we move from that specific case to the broader fisheries policy views of GUE/NGL, much of it follows a similar logic, with a prioritisation of the small-scale fishery sector. When asked about the main priorities regarding fisheries, participant F said:

Our main focus, or the main focus of the majority of our MEPs in PECH10 committee, is on the communities, on the fishery workers, on the small-scale sector. [...] what our group is very focused on [are] the workers of the small-scale fisheries sector (participant F).

This support for small-scale fisheries is contrasted by other political groups, according to participant F. Elaborating on the GUE/NGL fisheries position, participant F explains where the other groups are placed. That knowledge can give us a foundation for what the GUE/NGLs stance is based on, before we delve into the internal differences within the group. Firstly, he states that GUE/NGL can cooperate with the Greens, S&D and ALDE pretty well, with the Greens being an especially good ally when it comes to being “against the interests of the industrial fleet of the big fishery enterprises” (Participant F). GUE/NGL differ from the Greens when the Greens have a focus on protection of the resources, and GUE/NGL do not. Cooperation is much more difficult with the remaining groups, as the ECR and the EPP especially are perceived as closer to the big enterprises and to the big financial interests.

Mentioning how participant F perceives the other groups, and especially his view on the Greens is relevant, as the “green” part of GUE/NGL tend to vote more with the Greens than other GUE/NGL members. When asked about the presence of animal parties (Dutch Party for the Animals and German independent Stefan Eck), Participant F states that:

They tend to, the Dutch animal party [...] and also [...] Stefan Eck. [...] Normally these parties have a more conservationist approach to the fisheries policy, so they tend to have a stronger position on the resources, and not on the small-scale interests. [...] The votes are not so convergent in this case, because the animal parties tend to vote differently from the others (Participant F).

With “conservationist approach”, participant F later states that this is a position where preservation of the fishing stocks, and avoiding overfishing is essential. Participant F goes on to identify more members of GUE/NGL sharing that view:

I would say that it seems to me that generally the Nordic delegations, the Swedish, Danish and the Finish are more supportive of conservationist approach. [...] They tend to vote more closely to the NGO’s positions. [...] The pressure of the NGOs is more felt in some in the Nordic delegations that than in others. [...] I think it’s a political thing, the pressure from the society in those countries are more sympathetic to the NGO causes than to the interests of the fisheries sector causes (participant F).

¹⁰ PECH is the European Parliament Committee on Fisheries.

Participant F identifies the Nordic delegations as having a conservationist approach, thereby showing a division of GUE/NGL that is more based on green issues, such as sustainability and avoiding overfishing. These are contrasted, according to him, with for example the Portuguese delegations in GUE/NGL. Portugal is one of the bigger fishery nations in the EU. In Portugal, the pressure from NGOs is lower than in Nordics countries. In addition, the Portuguese culture related to eating fish is another element reducing the amount of the population (and thereby politicians) opposing fishery, even if stocks are at a critically low level.

Table 3 on voting loyalty to GUE/NGL's majority position confirms the analysis of participant F when it comes to cohesion regarding fishery policies. In the table, NGL delegations are coloured in a darker blue than GUE delegations. Animal parties are on a very low level, with Stefan Eck being slightly below 50 percentages. There is also a clear divide between NGL and the rest of the group. All NGL delegations are positioned from Sinn Fein and below, while there are only two GUE parties among these. In addition, the mentioned Swedish, Danish and Finish delegations are all among the bottom 7. This strengthens the perception of sustainability and the fight against overfishing as divisive along NGL and non-NGL lines, with the animal parties having an even lower cohesion than their allies in NGL.

| Country | Political party | Number of MEPs | Voting loyalty |
|----------------|--|----------------|----------------|
| Cyprus | Progressive Party of Working People | 2 | 96.40 |
| Greece | Popular Unity | 1 | 94.17 |
| Greece | Syriza | 4 | 92.19 |
| Portugal | Left Bloc | 1 | 91.67 |
| Czech Republic | Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia | 3 | 91.34 |
| Italy | The Other Europe with Tsipras | 2 | 88.33 |
| Spain | Podemos | 5 | 88.28 |
| Germany | Die Linke (The Left) | 7 | 86.89 |
| Portugal | Portuguese Communist Party | 3 | 83.08 |
| Spain | Izquierda Unida | 4 | 82.95 |
| Spain | EH Bildu | 1 | 81.91 |
| France | Left Front | 3 | 80.34 |
| Ireland | Sinn Fein | 3 | 78.69 |
| Spain | Galician Left Alternative | 1 | 76.47 |
| United Kingdom | Sinn Fein | 1 | 76.19 |
| Finland | Left Alliance | 1 | 71.00 |
| France | L'union pour les Outremer | 1 | 62.60 |
| Denmark | People's Movement against the EU | 1 | 61.54 |
| Netherlands | Socialist Party | 2 | 55.91 |
| Sweden | Left Party | 1 | 55.28 |
| Netherlands | Party for the Animals | 1 | 53.13 |
| Germany | Stefan Eck (independent) | 1 | 47.24 |

Table 3. Voting loyalty to majority position of GUE/NGL on fisheries in percentages from 01.07.14-01.01.19 (VoteWatch, 2019d).

In total, the fisheries section of the analysis shows how the cohesion level of GUE/NGL compares to that of the other political groups in the EP. Figure 2 shows us that cohesion of GUE/NGL is significantly below all the centrist groups, as well as the Greens and even

ECR. GUE/NGL having lower levels of cohesion than ECR is rare, as on 15 out of 21 policy areas during this period, that is not the case (VoteWatch, 2019a). While GUE/NGL on the overall cohesion and on agriculture cohesion was respectively 13 and 15 percentage points below the political group with the highest cohesion, this number is 24 on fisheries, making this a policy area where the difference in cohesion is very high.

By summarising the findings on cohesion in fishery policies within GUE/NGL, we see that there are both elements where they agree and where they do not. Agreements are not surprisingly typically found relating to small-scale fishing, and the fight against large enterprises. However, fisheries is the policy area with the lowest cohesion within GUE/NGL, and the divide appears to be easy to spot. Table 3 and participant F both suggest that the division within the group on fisheries are between the “green” parts of the group, and those who are not so concerned with that aspect of the policies, who rather emphasises rights for fishermen. The “green” parts of the group are, according to participant F, mainly the animal parties, but also Scandinavian delegations. From table 3, it appears that close to all of NGL can be viewed as belonging to this position.

4.4 Economy

Economic and monetary policies in the EU are all part of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). Launched in 1992, its main tasks are coordination of economic and fiscal policies, a common monetary policy, and a common currency, the euro. All member countries take part in the economic union, but some have opted out of the euro cooperation. The goals of these policies from the EU is to provide stability for the union’s economy (European Commission, 2019c). This cooperation has also received considerable criticism. One common criticism concerns whether the Eurozone constitutes an optimum currency area (OCA) (The New York Landler, 2008). Many argue that the eurozone does not fulfil the criteria for being an OCA, and the economic difficulties of the eurozone are often attributed to this (Ricci, 2008).

4.4.1 The case of common system of digital services tax

When discussing cohesion on economic and monetary matters in GUE/NGL, choosing a case about tax policies seemed like a good place to start, as this is an area where one would expect a left-wing political group to agree. As tax policies in the modern world is a core tool in the strive for a more egalitarian society, this is at the essence of what the left-right divide is about. For these reasons, we can expect GUE/NGL to mostly agree on tax policies, as we know from previous research that they tend to agree on left-right issues.

However, there are some cases where they disagree, and one of these is on the vote on “Common System of a digital services tax on revenues resulting from the provision of certain digital services”. The vote concerned whether or not the EU should set up a new taxation system that targets tech companies. In the text voted on, its stated goal is to close the gap between taxation of digital revenues and traditional revenues, to ensure a level playing field for all companies operating in the Single Market. It also states that “digital businesses face an effective tax rate of only 9.5%, compared to 23.2% of traditional business models” (European Parliament, 2019d).

GUE/NGL was split on this vote in a slightly different way than on agriculture and fisheries. All delegations in NGL voted against, along with the Portuguese Communist Party and Cypriote Progressive Party of Working People. Participant E explains this divide as a competence issue: “It is related to competences. It is a competence issue more than it might be an economic issue. So in this sense, it’s whether or not the European Union

should introduce this new taxation system". Participant E follows up by talking about the reasoning of those voting against: "If you're from these countries, you might have a very big issue with taxation, and you think taxation should be a national competence, and not a EU competence". While this vote is on an economic file, it appears that this issue is about EU competences, and not an economy-specific issue.

Participant E argues that the divide appears to stem from ideological differences on what competence the EU should have. This strengthens the argument for the NGL being amongst the most Eurosceptic in GUE/NGL, as they all voted against the proposal. Participant E also argues that the Portuguese PCP, who voted against, are opposed to giving the EU more power: "PCP, the Portuguese communists are not necessarily in favour of delegating more power to the Commission or the European Union" (participant E). What is curious about PCP voting against, is that the other Portuguese delegation, Left Bloc, voted for the file. The diverging voting patterns of the two Portuguese delegations can further strengthen the argument for PCP being among the most ideologically driven opponents of granting the EU more power.

A potential national interest to vote against this file would be for countries with large tech companies, fearing they would move their operations to other countries:

[A] lot of these countries will also be where tech companies have their seats [...] I think for some it's ideology and [...] national competence in one actually, both with SP from the Netherlands, and Sinn Fein from Ireland, it might be both actually (participant E).

As many big tech companies have large operations in both Ireland and the Netherlands, voting against introducing new taxes on these companies makes sense from a purely national interests-oriented standpoint, as such tax policies could discourage further investments (Ward, 2018; Srivastava, 2018). The Eurosceptic views of these parties makes voting against such a proposal an easy choice to make. It does however make it difficult to know whether national interest or ideology was the more dominant reason for voting against the proposal.

4.4.2 Economy generally

When moving from this specific case to the broader policies of economic and monetary affairs, the euro is one of the main points of discussion within the group. There are both agreements and disagreements in GUE/NGL regarding the euro:

[T]hey agree that the Euro is constructed wrongly, and that it is a lot of very unfortunate side effects in the way the euro is constructed as it is at the moment. That is where they agree. [...] [T]hey agree on the diagnosis, but they might not agree on which treatment is best served (participant E).

Participant E further argues that while the view on the faults in the construction of the euro is prominent now, this idea was not as outspread before. The cohesion on that field is a fairly new one, stemming from the Greek crisis:

Going back several years, [...] there were very few delegations within GUE who [...] was [...] saying we need to abandon the Euro, we want national currencies back, we want a plan if any country wishes to scrap the Euro and go back to a national [currency], and there should be a plan for that. That position was very much a fringe position within the group, but especially after the Greek crisis [...] showed that if you [...] as a national government [don't] have power over your

currency, then the agency controlling the currency, in this situation the ECB, [...] control the destiny of the country (participant E).

This statement tells us where much of the critical view on the euro originates from. The power the ECB had over economic reforms during the Greek financial crisis emphasised how much power the ECB had over the economy of European states. Few were open for abandoning the euro before the Greek financial crisis, but now more delegations in GUE/NGL are open for that as an option. While disputed, it has been argued that there exists no provision in any European Union treaty for leaving the eurozone (Proctor, 2012). The change in view on allowing countries to leave the eurozone is most clearly seen when there are votes on amendments concerning making this process easier:

[I]f there is like amendments saying, for any file saying: "The commission should set aside money, to make a plan for countries eventually wanting to leave the euro", then you would see more delegations vote in favour of such an amendment (participant E).

An increased number of delegations voting in favour of such an amendment shows us that many delegations within GUE/NGL want to open up for the option being available, even if few explicitly state a desire to leave the eurozone. There are however divisions within the group on this issue. When asked about who would oppose such amendments, participant E explains:

Syriza for instance. Because of otherwise that would open them up to critique. [I]f they would vote in favour of that, you rightly would ask them, "then why did you not leave the euro, when you had the chance?" [...] [T]hey pursued a policy trail different than leaving the Euro, and they would probably not want to answer questions about that. Which makes sense.

Syriza being one of few delegations that would oppose opening for an easy way to leave the eurozone is an example of how national politics influence what delegations vote in the EP. It appears that the only reason Syriza has for opposing an amendment granting member states the option of leaving the euro, is because it would be difficult to defend nationally, given their track record during and after the Greek financial crisis.

Table 4 shows us that Syriza is generally on average when it comes to voting loyalty to the majority position in GUE/NGL. This is however not the case for NGL. They are, as in both agriculture and fisheries, on the lower end. What is interesting on economic and monetary affairs, is the presence of aforementioned the Portuguese PCP, and the Cypriot delegation, in the lower bracket along with NGL. These are the same parties that voted together with all of NGL against common system for a digital services tax, making table closely correlate with the digital services tax vote. Everyone from German independent Stefan Eck, down to the Dutch SP vote against, and everyone above voting for or abstaining. While this case hardly is a generalisable sample, it is not unlikely that this case was somewhat representative of the divides within GUE/NGL on this policy area. The answers from participant E also goes a long way in suggesting that the position on on EU competences – how much power the EU should have over the economy of member states – is the main dividing line on economic and monetary affairs.

| Country | Political party | Number of MEPs | Voting loyalty |
|---------|-------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Italy | The Other Europe with Tsipras | 2 | 96.25 |
| Spain | Izquierda Unida | 4 | 94.87 |

| | | | |
|----------------|--|---|-------|
| Germany | Die Linke (The Left) | 7 | 94.78 |
| Spain | Galician Left Alternative | 1 | 93.77 |
| Spain | EH Bildu | 1 | 93.59 |
| Portugal | Left Bloc | 1 | 93.13 |
| France | Left Front | 3 | 92.67 |
| Spain | Podemos | 5 | 90.91 |
| Greece | Popular Unity | 1 | 89.69 |
| Greece | Syriza | 4 | 89.45 |
| France | L'union pour les Outremer | 1 | 88.51 |
| Czech Republic | Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia | 3 | 88.44 |
| Germany | Stefan Eck (independent) | 1 | 87.46 |
| Finland | Left Alliance | 1 | 82.96 |
| Cyprus | Progressive Party of Working People | 2 | 82.17 |
| Portugal | Portuguese Communist Party | 3 | 81.86 |
| Denmark | People's Movement against the EU | 1 | 81.20 |
| Sweden | Left Party | 1 | 80.36 |
| United Kingdom | Sinn Fein | 1 | 79.12 |
| Netherlands | Party for the Animals | 1 | 78.91 |
| Ireland | Sinn Fein | 3 | 78.38 |
| Netherlands | Socialist Party | 2 | 75.33 |

Table 4. Voting loyalty to majority position of GUE/NGL on economic and monetary affairs in percentages from 01.07.14-01.01.19 (VoteWatch, 2019d).

If we look back at figure 2, we see that the cohesion on economic and monetary affairs is much higher than on fisheries, and almost identical to the cohesion level on agriculture. The cohesion level is slightly lower than average cohesion, and well below that of the centrist groups, S&D, ALDE and EPP. The low cohesion can likely stem from disagreements on files similar to the chosen case file, with issues regarding EU power and competence, dividing GUE/NGL along a Eurosceptic and more pro-EU line.

Findings on economic and monetary affairs are primarily that GUE/NGL shares a critical view of the euro but disagrees on the treatment for it. NGL, along with a few other parties (primarily Portuguese PCP and Cypriot PPWP) share the position that the EU should have fewer competences when it comes to the economic and monetary governing of Europe. These delegations want to avoid giving the EU more power over national parliaments in Europe. Another finding is that ideological and national preferences sometimes coincides, rendering decision making easier. Lastly, it is interesting to note that parties sometimes follow their national political interests more than ideological ones, exemplified with Syriza voting against amendments opening for an easier way to leave the euro in order to avoid criticism in a national setting. This gives some strong support to hypothesis three, as a national interest is valued above Syrizas expected ideological position.

4.5 GUE/NGL overall

In the last part of the analysis, this thesis will discuss cohesion in GUE/NGL independently of the specific policy areas. The time frame studied is still the same, but the focus will mainly be on a divide more dominant than others, namely the divide between Eurosceptics and pro-EU delegations. In the other policy areas there is a clear divide on views regarding granting the EU more power, and whether further integration is needed. As the greatest

divide within GUE/NGL appears to be along Eurosceptic lines, this section will focus almost entirely on that divide.

4.5.1 The cases of differentiated integration and composition of the EP

In order to study the conflicting position on the EU more generally, this section will focus on two votes that directly relates to views on the EU and European integration. One is a vote on “differentiated integration”, and the other concerns the “composition of the European Parliament”. They have different results and discussing them in combination, might provide us with some indications as to how and why GUE/NGL is so divided when it comes to questions regarding being *for* or *against* granting the EU more power, increasing the EU budget, or furthering European integration.

The vote on “differentiated integration” is a vote with an aim to find “the best way to operationalise differentiated integration – which is already a political reality – within the EU’s institutional framework in the best interests of the Union and its citizens” (European Parliament, 2018). As the EU already have somewhat differentiated integration, with countries having various opt-outs – Ireland and the United Kingdom from Schengen, and Denmark from defence being just a few examples, there is an aim to formalise this more (Danish Ministry of Defence, 2014; Phinnemore, 2013, pp. 29-31). Ever since the 1990s, when the UK got its first opt-out in from the so-called “social chapter”, there has been a fear of the realisation of an à la carte EU, where member states can pick and choose the areas where they are willing to further integrate into the EU. In order to avoid this, and to formalise differentiated integration in a way acceptable to those who prefer a unitary EU integration, the file of “differentiated integration” contained several aspects addressing this issue:

Opt-out from treaty provisions should not be possible anymore as they are cases of negative differentiation. Instead of a group of Member States moving forward with European integration, opt-outs are permitting Member States to move backward towards less integration. Therefore, they should be eliminated. [...] While the insufficient level of preparedness (for example, criteria for joining the euro or Schengen are not met yet) is a legitimate factor to provide for temporary multispeed solutions, unwillingness cannot be legitimate in every fields, especially when it has negative impacts on the other Member States or on the EU as a whole (European Parliament, 2018).

This quote reveals that the file contains a strong reluctance to allow a large degree of differentiated integration and is thusly topic for concern in the more Eurosceptic delegations in GUE/NGL. Distribution of votes on this file in GUE/NGL were for that reason very much along the previously shown Eurosceptic lines. Only the Cypriots and NGL, with an exception of the Finnish delegation, voted against. We can note that the Finnish Left Alliance has gone through a change towards being more and more pro-European, in a generational shift (The Democratic Society, 2014). Participant G explains that the reasons for the critical view from some delegations within GUE/NGL stem from how the suggested model being voted on is one that would not work for all:

[T]hose countries who decide not to be a part of [...] a more advanced integrated cooperation are defined as pre-ins, and not considered that they are just out, they are always per definition pre-ins. So, if you accept that logic, [...] all types of differentiated integration would then be kind of a motor for integration, and that divides the group (participant G).

It seems clear that the basis for the resistance, and therefore also the divide, stems from a scepticism to the notion of forcing reluctant countries further into the integration process than they want. Participant G also states explicitly that if what they voted on had been more based on voluntary integration, not the notion that everyone has to catch up eventually, it would have been more popular amongst the more sceptic Nordic delegations too:

So for instance if you look at some of the Nordic delegations, how they voted, they would tend to vote against that logic, even though, let's say, had the question been framed differently, in the sense that you had asked: "Do you believe that the EU cooperation should to a larger extent be a matter of alliance of the willing?", then you would have a completely different answer from those delegations. Then they would say "yes, those who want to go ahead, please go ahead, we will not stop you, but please accept that we don't want to be part of this", but that was not the framing of the question (participant G).

Results from the "differentiated integration" vote appear to closely follow the Eurosceptic divide we established in the previous sections of the analysis. Participant G argues that this divide is the biggest divide inside the group, transcending most policy areas, going along what one can call a "left federalist line" and a "left anti-federalist line":

You have some [...] fractions within the left that think [...] the national state is somehow illegitimate, so they see international cooperation as something that is positive in itself, almost regardless of what that international cooperation consists of. And then you have another part of the left that think that the nation state that thinks that the nation state is a legitimate forum for democratic debate, and therefore also decision-making, and they would tend to be less willing to give up issues that they think are core. Sovereignty (participant G).

While the vote on "differentiated integration" seems to be a clear-cut "federalist" vs "anti-federalist" vote, we can assess a more complicated vote, the one on the "Composition of the European Parliament". At its core, this vote relates to the same division along Eurosceptic lines, while also containing aspects of both national interests and other ideological dilemmas, making the job of selecting a position more challenging for the delegations.

"Composition of the European Parliament" is a vote on what to do with the spare "Brexit seats" in the European Parliament when (or if) the UK leaves the EU. The UK currently has 73 MEP seats, and this vote is a compromise between two polarising points, namely all UK seats being distributed among remaining EU member countries, or removal of all the spare seats. The vote being discussed would redistribute 27 of the 73 seats, while leaving 46 for future enlargements (European Council, 2018). This grants all EU countries the same number of seats as before, or more, but does not allocate all the spare seats, saving some for potential future EU enlargements.

What this new solution addresses is the misrepresentation according to the *degressive proportionality* principle in the allocation of seats in the EP. Degressive proportionality in the EP means that smaller countries are allocated more MEPs than they would hold, had the allocation followed an ordinary proportional representation. In addition, there is both a maximum and a minimum on how many MEPs the largest and smallest countries can have. The maximum number of MEPs for a country is 96 (which Germany has) and the smallest is 6 (as with for example Malta and Luxembourg). If allocated according to proportionality, Malta should have had fewer MEPs and Germany more. The problem this vote addresses is however misrepresentations stemming from unequal population growth

in EU countries. Some countries have increased their population to the degree that their population number has passed other countries with more MEPs than them. Brexit is seen as a good opportunity to fix this problem without either (i) doing the unpopular exercise of removing seats from existing countries or (ii) spending money in creating new MEP seats. Allocating seats in the new way would make the *de facto* threshold in EP elections lower in many countries and can therefore be seen as reducing the much-criticised democratic deficit in the EU, by allowing smaller national political parties representation in the EP (Smismans, 2013, pp. 342-344).

As this vote grants new seats to remaining EU countries, while removing none, this vote could potentially be perceived as a victory for most countries. In GUE/NGL, an overwhelmingly majority voted for it. Only three delegations voted against it – Irish Sinn Fein, Dutch SP and Portuguese PCP. While some countries with the new legislation do not get an increased number of seats, others get between 1 and 5 new seats, and the distribution can help us understand the voting behaviour of the various delegations. It is therefore relevant to note that Ireland got +2, the Netherlands got +3, and Portugal did not get an increase. For PCP, participant G argued that the threshold was the main motivation for them to vote against:

PCP votes against because for them we should use all 751 seats, because it would be a way to reduce the threshold to be elected for the parliament, so they didn't agree to have these reserve seats. [...] PCP had a very principled view on it (participant G).

This shows the Portuguese PCP taking a principled position on the issue, in that distributing all the seats would reduce the electoral threshold even more. However, Portugal not getting an increase in number of seats can have contributed to this vote as well. For the Dutch SP, they held a principled view too, but a different one than the PCP:

And then, for SP, the Dutch SP, it's a question of money saving. [...] They thought we should just lose the 72 seats, not use them, and then maintain [...] the balance [...] we have at the moment (participant G).

SP's view is a very principled anti-federalist one. They want to reduce the number of seats as much as possible. This is rooted in their belief that there should be less EU generally, so removing parts of the expenditure of the EP would be beneficial. While having a principled reason, one can wonder if they would use this logic to reduce the number of seats the Netherlands have today even further. For Sinn Fein, voting against was a result of primarily problems stemming from Brexit:

For Sinn Fein it was a question of Brexit. It was a question of the fact that they wanted to have seats allocated for the north of Ireland. And they didn't want to – let's say – lock the decision in on the composition on the future before Brexit was settled (participant G).

Sinn Fein's motivation is also different, as their reasons are two, (i) they want seats allocated for Northern Ireland and (ii) they want to know the outcome of Brexit before deciding on the composition of the EP. Both of these perspectives can be argued as being of national interest, rather than principled (ideological) standpoints. They relate to the progression of Brexit and the role of Northern Ireland in that process, making both reasons highly national questions.

An interesting aspect of this vote is how the Nordic (Swedish, Danish and Finnish) delegations did not vote against. As we saw on the specific policy areas discussed, all of

NGL and PCP often votes together on files with a clear federalist vs. anti-federalist divide, that is, votes that can be viewed as for and against the EU. While Sinn Fein's reasoning is nationally oriented, PCP and SP both use different principled arguments for opposing the argument, something the Nordic countries often do as well. Sweden, Denmark and Finland gain a seat each, and they have taken a more pragmatic approach, and vote in favour because of this very fact, according to participant G: "I'm sure that Finland and Denmark and Sweden, they all voted in favour because they all would gain seats".

The voting behaviour of the Nordic delegations on this file shows an unpredictable pragmatism in GUE/NGL. This is the kind of surprising voting behaviour one get when no party whip exists, and all delegations value different arguments over others. While agreeing ideologically on the topic, delegations can end up voting completely differently. With so many different reasons for voting differently, it is in many ways surprising that the overall cohesion of the GUE/NGL is as high as 82%. When talking about the broader lines, participant G argued that there can be several reasonings for voting similarly:

I checked before the summer and at that time the voting coherence for the group was around 80%. So, for me the interesting thing was that when it then comes to the concrete voting behaviour actually, the group vote together most of the time. Obviously, there can be different reasoning for why you end up voting the same, which I think is often the case (participant G).

It is interesting how cohesion can be so surprisingly high, even without a party whip. There are however still many policy areas and specific cases where cohesion is lower, something the former chapters have gone in depth about. When asked about what different divides we see in the group, participant G argues that there are perhaps three main dividing lines in the group:

Let's say that, if you look at why are the delegations voting differently inside the group, perhaps there are three main things. You have the sort of federalist, anti-federalist divide. Then you have questions that are questions of national interests, where you might have similar goals, but you still disagree, because of the question of national interest. And then you have also just different left ideologies, the parties are based on different left ideologies, and that can also lead to voting differently (participant G).

Sorting the divide within GUE/NGL in those three ideologies is not unlike what this thesis proposed in the introduction and has found so far. The first divide, which follows a federalist and anti-federalist line, is a clear one found in all the policy areas examined. The second, is a divide along different left ideologies, which is combined with a division along a "green" line, especially on the cases on agriculture and fisheries. The third divide, of delegations voting according to a perceived national interest, is also present in all policy areas discussed.

5 Conclusion

This thesis has sought to find out to what degree GUE/NGL is cohesive both generally and across the politic areas of agriculture, fisheries and economy, and to explain those divides. Previous research has been largely focused on a broader picture of cohesion within in the EP, with little research having been case studies on a specific political group in the EP. This thesis is built on quantitative data on cohesion and voting records in the EP, with interviews utilised to explain the findings in the data. The participants interviewed has been used as experts on GUE/NGL, with three covering specific policy areas, and one covering the group from a more overall perspective.

The first key finding from the quantitative data on cohesion at a more overall level is that GUE/NGL has a lower cohesion than the centrist parties and the Greens, but higher than the right-wing Eurosceptic parties. While not among those with the highest cohesion between the EP groups, the level of cohesion is surprisingly high due to the lack of a party whip in GUE/NGL. Even when MEPs are free to vote as they want, they still tend to agree. This high cohesion shows that the group generally agrees a lot, and from the interviews it is clear that they agree on traditional left-wing issues. Having fairly high cohesion stemming from agreement on left-wing issues strongly supports hypothesis one, which stated an expectation of high cohesion on those issues.

The research did however highlight profound variations across different policy areas. The level of cohesion varies from fisheries at 70% to gender equality with over 90%. Chosen policy areas for this thesis were agriculture, economy and fisheries. The average cohesion of the group is at 82%, and both agriculture and economy are just slightly below this. Fisheries stands out as an outlier. This is surprising, as the thesis expected agriculture and fisheries to have many similar characteristics, resulting in a similar level of cohesion.

Fisheries stands out with the lowest cohesion level of all policy areas. The almost contradictory aspects of the EU's fisheries policy accounts for some of this. The EU wants to have a sustainable fisheries sector, but also want the industry to thrive. The EU want to fish as much as possible in waters of non-EU countries, but they also want to support the industry and fishermen in these countries economically. GUE/NGL contains both MEPs from countries with large fishing industries as well as several animal parties, which makes all the contradictory positions of the EU broadly manifest themselves within the group, causing the low level of cohesion on fisheries.

When reviewing the results from the three policy areas: agriculture, fisheries and economy, two clear divides stand out in all of them. The first is a divide between federalist and anti-federalist delegations – a kind of Eurosceptic divide. NGL and in particular Portuguese PCP agrees on their Eurosceptic/anti-federalist stance. This finding is similar across all the three chosen policy areas, as well as more generally. Both the cohesion data and the interviews confirm this divide, making it likely that the biggest divide in GUE/NGL is between GUE and NGL, in their opposing views on European integration.

The second divide is along green lines. It divides the group between those prioritising environmental and animal welfare issues over other issues, from those who do not. German Stefan Eck and Dutch Animal party are the main proponents of this view, with their co-members of NGL mostly sharing their perspective. While GUE/NGL largely agree on

environmental issues, these come under pressure when it clashes with the workers (fishermens) interests. Present in both the areas of agriculture and fisheries are those who oppose "pointing fingers" at farmers or fishermen, and who have more conservationist approaches when it comes to fisheries. This divide stems largely from ideological differences, where the animal parties and NGL are the driving forces on the animal rights and conservationist side. This show that while most delegations adhere to the same principles, when certain issues take the front seat, corresponding principles clash, which fosters division within the group. This further strengthens a perception of the main divide being between GUE and NGL.

On economy, the key finding is a divide in the position of delegations on whether taxation should be an EU or a national competence. This goes broadly along the federalist versus anti-federalist lines we see across all policy areas. The perhaps most interesting finding on economics is how the Greek Syriza can vote against an amendment they ideologically support because of national priorities. If they voted for an amendment opening up for countries leaving the euro, that would open them up for domestic criticism in Greece, so they vote against for national reasons. This adds weight to hypothesis three, which states that national interests will prevail over principles or ideologies.

From the "Composition of the European Parliament" case, we see that delegations can have wildly differing reasons for voting as they do. Sinn Fein voted according to national interests related to the role of Northern Ireland in Brexit. PCP voted according to a democratic principle of wanting the lowest electoral threshold possible in the EU elections. SP voted according to the anti-federalist principle of reducing the EU budget as much as possible. This case is not a traditional left-right issue, so hypothesis two and three were right in that ideological differences and national interests would play an important role.

It was however not foreseen that these differing views would result in many delegations voting more similarly than if the file was an obvious left-right issue. The diverging views on the vote shows how both national interests, differing ideologies, and anti-federalist principles can influence a delegation's choice in such a vote. In addition, it shows us how different voting logics can lead to similar results. The results from this vote, and in particular the views of these three delegations gives support to both hypothesis two and three, as we see both ideologies and national interests prevail when these different delegations cast their votes.

On the vote on "Composition of the European Parliament", it should also be mentioned how other NGL delegations – in the anti-federalist part of the group – took a more pragmatist approach in supporting this. The Swedes, Danes and Finns voted for the file, showing themselves as more pragmatic in their voting behaviour than SP, whom they usually agree with on many matters. The reasoning behind the Scandinavian delegations supporting the vote, were that they all received a modest increase in the new allocation of seats in EP. This gives additional weight to hypothesis three, in that national interests of lowering the *de facto* threshold can trump ideological anti-federalist positions.

This thesis finds that all three hypotheses have largely been confirmed. The general agreement GUE/NGL shares on left-right issues, confirm the first hypothesis. The second is confirmed as GUE/NGL is split on issues where there is no obvious left-right divide manifests itself. It shows how various left-wing principles make up the foundation for how various delegations vote when the issue is not an obvious one. Hypothesis three is confirmed when national interests are prioritised in voting behaviour. Both hypothesis two and three are most evident with regard to the vote on "Composition of the European

Parliament”, where both various left-wing principles and ideologies, as well as national interests, are used as voting reasonings for different delegations.

In total, the results of both the data on cohesion and the interviews paint a picture of GUE/NGL as a fairly cohesive group overall, but with large differences between policy areas. The divisions that exist within the group, can largely be explained by the division we see in their name, between GUE and NGL. GUE is generally made up of the more southern delegations of the group. Most of them are relatively positively oriented towards the EU. They prioritise workers’ rights heavily, and value green policies less. NGL makes up mostly northern delegations, who are significantly more Eurosceptic than their counterparts. They tend to emphasise green policies over most other issues.

Generalisation is not always possible in research. However, the representative selection of interviewees gives this thesis a fairly strong reliability (Tjora, 2013, pp. 203-207). This thesis being grounded in quantitative data further strengthens the reliability, as potential mismatches between the quantitative data and information from the interviews would have been caught. Combined, this mixed methods approach makes it likely that another researcher attempting to replicate this study would find the same results.

As the thesis focuses on the European parliamentary term from 2014 to 2019, and the political groups in the EP will change after the elections in May 2019, these findings are only valid for the current European Parliament. This would, however, make a study comparing these findings to the new GUE/NGL grouping after the EP elections interesting. One could study whether there are changes in the cohesiveness on these policy areas, and if the group will be less or more federalist. On economy, one could study potential change in support for the euro, and on fisheries whether the greener parts of the group will win ground as Europeans are more concerned with environmental issues than in previous years (European Commission, 2018b).

In research on cohesion in the EP, there are very few case studies. Conducting a case study on another EP political group would due to the significant ideological differences between the political groups show vastly different areas of disagreement or agreement. Is it for example possible to identify systematic lines of division within the most cohesive political group, currently the Greens? It is unlikely to find division along the same lines as in GUE/NGL – however, the Greens’ cohesion is not absolute, and some disagreement must exist. Another case of interest would be the right-wing Eurosceptic groups, EFDD and ENF. Other than their EU-opposition, what unites their members? GUE/NGL appears to have some clear divides but is still largely cohesive, even without a party whip. Maybe EFDD or ENF, the groups with the lowest level of cohesion, have even more significant divides within. The large ideological differences between the political groups in the EP reveal a need for further research on cohesion in the EP generally, and on the various political groups specifically.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Participant information

Appendix 2: Interview guide agriculture

Appendix 3: Interview guide fisheries

Appendix 4: Interview guide economy

Appendix 5: Interview guide overall

Appendix 1

Participant information

What is the purpose of this research?

MA thesis concerns the GUE/NGL, with a focus on how the group votes. It expects that GUE/NGL votes largely similar on most issues, and especially traditional left-right issues. However, it expects there to be differences. The thesis aims to identify both similarities and differences and answer why these exist. This will be done both quantitatively and qualitatively. The first by using publicly available data on how MEP's in GUE/NGL vote, and the latter primarily from interviews.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited because you work in, or in close relation to the GUE/NGL. As an expert, you will contribute to my understanding of the GUE/NGL, their behavior as a group, as well as their voting on specific policy areas.

Do I have to participate?

No. You can ask questions about the MA thesis before deciding whether or not to participate. If you do agree to participate, you may withdraw yourself from the study at any time, without giving a reason and without penalty, by advising the researcher of this decision.

What will happen to me if I take part in the interview?

If you agree to take part in the research, you will be asked to attend an interview. I will talk you through what the thesis is about and give you the chance to ask any questions. This should take approximately 5-10 minutes. If you are still happy to take part, you will then be asked to sign a consent form. Afterwards, I will ask you a series of questions based on the research goals and your specific expertise. You will only be recorded with your express consent; otherwise written notes will be taken. You may review notes/transcripts on request, however (1) you may not alter the interpretation of the transcripts and (2) you may not change the transcript in any significant way, other than to correct factual inaccuracies.

What are the risks and benefits?

You will receive no direct benefits from participating in this research study. However, your responses may help me to understand the GUE/NGL better and improve the quality of my MA thesis.

How do you ensure the confidentiality of my data?

Your data will be treated confidentially, all personal information will be removed. The anonymisation process will be implemented by me. All personal data will be protected through pseudonymisation and will be stored separately from the research data. Identifiers that are not essential to the analysis of the data will be destroyed, once the data processing has been completed.

Who will have access to my data?

The information you provide as part of the study is the research data. Any research data from which you can be identified (e.g. your name, position, audio recording), is known as personal data. It does not include data where the identity has been removed (anonymous data).

I will minimise our use of personal data in the study as much as possible.

Will the research be published?

The research may be published in peer reviewed scientific publications. It may also be disseminated to the general public via other channels.

What if there is a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this project, please speak to me. I should acknowledge your concern within 10 working days and give you an indication of how I intend to deal with it. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact my university, NTNU.

Contact:

Harald Aksnes Karmhus

haraldkarmhus@gmail.com

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Appendix 2

Interview guide: agriculture

Information about the interview

Present my thesis

Interview will be taped

Interview answers will be anonymized

Warm up questions

- What is your name and your position?
- How long have you worked in the European Parliament?
- What does that position mean?
- What are your main tasks?

Agriculture

- What goes on in the agricultural policies of EU now?
- The importance of CAP seems to shrink for every EU budget. How does that affect Agriculture work in the Parliament?
- Do you have any cooperation with other groups in the European Parliament?

Specific votes

- On the vote on the file "Unfair trading practices in business-to-business relationships in the food supply chain", the group was very split. What is this file about?
- Eck, SP, the swedes against. A lot of people from Spain either voted against or abstained
 - Why was it so split so large here, and along which lines were the group divided?
 - Why is the group so split on certain agriculture files?
 - *Probe for an answer like: national interests, ideology, view on CAP, view on animal welfare, east-west divide, left-right?*

GUE/NGL

- CAP is still a large portion of the EU budget. What do you believe determines the views of MEPs when it comes to CAP?
 - Solidarity with countries who receive subsidies, or national interest?
- What is the general view on agriculture shared among the members of GUE/NGL?
 - On Agriculture, what separates the group from the other groups, like EPP and S&D and Greens?
 - What do GUE/NGL agree most on?
 - Are there any clear divides on agriculture within the group?
 - How are these divides?
- How important is agriculture generally for the group?
 - Are there some delegations that prioritize it?
- How do the different delegations in GUE/NGL cooperate on agriculture?
 - Do they mostly look at the files themselves, or are there groups working on it together?

- Is there a lot of pressure from the group leadership or secretariat to vote in a certain way?
 - Is there a party whip of any sorts?

Outside influence

- Does GUE/NGL cooperate with actors outside the EP on Agriculture?
 - Unions, European Left Party, Rosa Luxembourg foundation?
- Do you receive a lot of lobbyists related to agriculture?
 - What kind of lobbyists?
 - Who do they represent?
 - National or international lobbyists?
 - How do they influence the group stance on Agriculture votes?

Finishing questions

- How do you think EU agriculture policies will change the coming years?
- Do you think the stance of the members in GUE/NGL going to change towards agriculture?
 - How?
- Summarize most interesting answers
 - Have I understood you correctly?

Appendix 3

Interview guide: fisheries

Information about the interview

Present my thesis

Interview will be taped

Interview answers will be anonymized

Warm up questions

- What is your position?
- What does that position mean?
- What are your main tasks?
- How long have you worked in the European Parliament?

Fisheries

- What goes on in the fisheries policies of EU now?
- Do you have any cooperation with other groups in the European Parliament on fisheries?

Specific votes

- On the vote on the file from February: "EU-Morocco Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement", the group voted together. What is this file about?
 - Why was to split so small here, compared to some other votes on fishing outside the African coast?
 - Why is the group so united on certain pesch files?
 - *Probe for an answer like: national interests, ideology, view on animal welfare, east-west divide, left-right?*

GUE/NGL

- Solidarity with countries who receive subsidies, or national interest?
- What is the general view on fishery shared among the members of GUE/NGL?
 - On fishery policies, what separates the group from the other groups, like EPP and S&D and Greens?
 - Animal parties? Resources focus?
 - What do GUE/NGL agree most on?
 - Are there any clear divides on fishery policies within the group?
 - How are these divides?
- How important is fisheries generally for the group?
 - Are there some delegations that prioritize it?
- How do the different delegations in GUE/NGL cooperate on fisheries?
 - Do they mostly look at the files themselves, or are there groups working on it together?
- Is there a lot of pressure from the group leadership or secretariat to vote in a certain way?
 - Is there a party whip of any sorts?
 - junos

Outside influence

- Does GUE/NGL cooperate with actors outside the EP on fisheries?
 - Unions?
- Do you receive a lot of lobbyists related to fisheries?
 - What kind of lobbyists?
 - Who do they represent?
 - National or international lobbyists?
 - How do they influence the group stance on fisheries votes?

Finishing questions

- How do you think EU fisheries policies will change the coming years?
- Do you think the stance of the members in GUE/NGL going to change towards fisheries?
 - How?
- Summarize most interesting answers
 - Have I understood you correctly?

Appendix 4

Interview guide: economy

Information about the interview

Present my thesis

Interview will be taped

Interview answers will be anonymized

Warm up questions

- What is your position?
- How long have you worked in the European Parliament?
- What does that position mean?
- What are your main tasks?

Economics

- What goes on in the economic and monetary policies of the EU now? Are there any big reforms there is a lot of debate around?
- Do you have any cooperation with other groups in the European Parliament on economy?

Specific votes

- On the vote on the file from February: "Common system of a digital services tax on revenues resulting from the provision of certain digital services", the group were somewhat split. What is this file about? SP, Sinn Fein, PCP, Swedes, Stefan Eck against, others for it.
 - Why is the group so split on certain econ files?
 - *Probe for an answer like: pro or anti-EU, national interests, ideology, east-west divide, left-right?*
 - In which other ways are the group usually split on ECON matters?

GUE/NGL

- What do you believe determines the views of MEPs when it comes to economic policies?
 - What will benefit their country? Their economy?
- What is the general view on economy shared among the members of GUE/NGL?
 - On Economic policies, what separates the group from the other groups, like EPP and S&D and Greens?
 - What do GUE/NGL agree most on?
 - Are there any clear divides on economy within the group?
 - How are these divides?
- How important is economy policies generally for the group?
 - Are there some delegations who prioritize it?
- How do the different delegations in GUE/NGL cooperate on economy?
 - Do they mostly look at the files themselves, or are there groups working on it together?
- Is there a lot of pressure from the group leadership or secretariat to vote in a certain way?

- Is there a party whip of any sorts?

Outside influence

- Does GUE/NGL cooperate with actors outside the EP on economic policies?
 - Unions?
- Do you receive a lot of lobbyists related to economic matters?
 - What kind of lobbyists?
 - Who do they represent?
 - National or international lobbyists?
 - How do they influence the group stance on economic policies votes?

Finishing questions

- How do you think EU economic policies will change the coming years?
- Do you think the stance of the members in GUE/NGL going to change towards economics?
 - How?
- Summarize most interesting answers
 - Have I understood you correctly?

Appendix 1

Interview guide: overall

Information about the interview

Present my thesis

- About GUE/NGL
- How they vote, voting cohesion. What they agree on, and not. How can agreements and disagreements be explained.

Interview will be taped

Interview answers will be anonymized

Warm up questions

- What is your name and your position?
- What does that position mean?
- How long have you worked in the European Parliament?
- What are your main tasks?

Specific votes

- In January there was a vote on differentiated integration. There seemed to be a clear divide in GUE/NGL that Eurosceptic MEPs in GUE/NGL voted against, and those more pro EU voted for it. Would this file give countries a real option to commit to less European integration, or would it just postpone it?
- On the vote on the file "Composition of the European Parliament" from last year, the group was split. The final version of this file stated that some seats will be distributed to member countries with too few seats, while others were not distributed, but rather saved for potential future enlargements.
 - Why was to split so large in GUE/NGL here, and along which lines were the group divided?
 - SP, Sinn Fein and PCP against
 - Why them? These would benefit: Ireland (+2), Netherlands (+3), Not: Portugal (=)
 - Cyprus, (=) + MEPs Marisa and Forenza abstained
 - *Probe for an answer like: national interests, ideology, view on integration, east-west divide, left-right?*

Constitutional affairs and EU integration

- There seems to be more and more opposition to European integration, especially in the European Parliament. Do you see European integration slowing down, or continuing in the same level?
- Do you think the overall stance of the members in GUE/NGL going to change towards EU integration?

GUE/NGL

- GUE/NGL is a fairly cohesive political group, and they largely agree on most topics. What are some they disagree surprisingly much on?
 - Along which lines are they divided on these?

- *Probe for an answer about policy area*
 - *And: national interests, ideology, east-west divide, left-right, more power to the EU*
- Is there a lot of pressure from the group leadership or secretariat to vote in a certain way?
 - Is there a party whip of any sorts?
 - Is there any other pressure to vote certain ways?
 - Is there sometimes agreements in the group that everyone will support a delegation in a matter important to them?
 - Where are decisions like these taken?
 - When making decisions about the official group policy, can the majority decide, or does every MEP have a veto right?

Outside influence

- Does GUE/NGL cooperate with actors outside the EP on how to vote?
 - Unions, European Left Party, Rosa Luxembourg foundation?
- Does GUE/NGL receive a lot of lobbyists? What are their main focus usually?
 - What kind of lobbyists?
 - Who do they represent?
 - National or international lobbyists?
 - What is your impression of how much they influence the groups positions?
- Summarize most interesting answers
 - Have I understood you correctly?

