

The European Parliament as an arena of contestation?

The European Union is increasingly contested. Gains for Eurosceptic parties in national elections are clear indicators. At the supranational level, populist radical right parties from different member states have met (Koblenz) and seek to organize for the upcoming EP elections (Bannon's movement; Salvini's League of the Leagues of Europe). This project will contribute to a better understanding of Eurosceptic contestations by studying Eurosceptic parties once they were elected to the European Parliament (EP). What are patterns and constellations of contestation inside the EP?

To this aim the project will describe, measure, and map contestations in the EP through an analysis of voting behaviour and parliamentary discourse. Existing work on *voting behaviour* has greatly contributed to our understanding of the dimensionality of party competition and alignment (right-left, north-south, east-west, regulatory models and varieties of capitalism). Jensen and Spoon (2010) question the importance of these patterns for niche parties, such as Eurosceptic parties, and Brack (2012, 2013) points to their differential roles as absentee, pragmatist or public orator. This raises the question whether Eurosceptic parties in the EP vote against European integration or for national interest? What patterns and country/ party clusters emerge over time and across policies?

Parliamentary discourse: Mass media frequently report Eurosceptic parties to be particularly prone to conflictual debate and aggressive interaction with governing and (other) opposition parties as indicated e.g. by breach of parliamentary rules, calls to order or even exclusion from the plenary session. Some issues lend themselves more easily to such controversial rhetoric. For the EP, we expect such issues to be related to state structures (e.g. EU army, welfare), to rights (e.g. anti-discrimination, EU-citizenship) and to political rule (e.g. Art. 7, Spitzenkandidaten, Citizens initiative or transparency). How do Eurosceptic MEPs position themselves on these issues? Do they use provocative language in their contributions and breach parliamentary rules more frequently? To what extent does their rhetoric align?

Providing a differentiated analysis of contestations in the EP does not only move the field forward from public opinion and pre-electoral discourse towards the factual manifestation of contestation in political institution. It is also important to understand the (potential) impact Eurosceptic parties will have on policy substance and the functioning of the EU system more generally after the 2019 elections – not least since the influence of the EP in the inter-institutional process crucially hinges on its internal cohesion. Therewith, and at a more general level, the project provides insights on the durability and severity of current challenges to the liberal script at the European level (<https://www.scripts-berlin.eu/index.html>). It will also provide important insights on the extent to which the EU political system shapes the evolution of Eurosceptic populism in Europe.