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The European Parliament's Standing Committees: Patterns of Behaviour and Modes of Functioning
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About the author

Michail Schwartz currently works at the European Parliament as member of an MEP's staff. He holds a Master's degree in European Political and Governance Studies from the College of Europe where he was ranked among the five best Italian students and awarded with the "Ville de Strasbourg" prize for the best thesis on the European Parliament. Previously, he obtained a Master's degree in International Relations and European Studies from the University of Florence with a thesis on the socio-political profiles and careers of the Italian MEPs as well as a Bachelor's Degree in Political Science from the University of Florence with a thesis on the structure and organization of the Party of European Socialists. During his studies he has published on EU-related themes for the Italian Centre for Electoral Studies (CISE), notably on the party of European Socialists and the electoral performance of the European Left at the EU Elections of 2014.

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Abstract

The widened scope of Codecision brought on by the Lisbon Treaty considerably strengthened the role of certain standing committees inside the European Parliament (EP), allowing them both to shape directly EU law and to veto the Council's positions. Has this change had an impact on their modes of functioning? Has it influenced the work MEPs and groups carry out on a day-to-day basis inside these committees? Building on institutionalist theories and original data on voting inside EP committees, this work examines patterns of behaviour in four EP's standing committees that turned to co-decision on December 1st 2009: AGRI, INTA, LIBE and PECH. In particular, it focuses on three specific features of intra-committee dynamics under Codecision: participation to vote, coalition building and group cohesion. The period of reference ranges from 2009 to 2017. The added value of this work is threefold: first, it adds up to the literature by inquiring for the first time behavioural patterns within committees that turned to co-decision after Lisbon. Secondly, it adds a comparative element to the study of committee's patterns of behaviour, exploring possible mainstreaming patterns across them. Finally, it presents original data on voting behaviour inside EP's committees after the Lisbon Treaty.

1. Introduction

Parliamentary committees undoubtedly play a paramount role within the institutional systems of parliamentary democracies. In fact, if we consider the parliament as the core of democratic representation as well as the main source of democratic output, its internal committees are the central strategic pillars upon which the overall structure stands and the main *locus* where the democratic process is carried out on a day-to-day basis.

Parliamentary committees feature just as prominently in the framework of the European Union's (EU) political system in view of their pivotal role in the European Parliament's (EP) legislative work. Standing committees have been described as 'the legislative backbone' of the EP (Westlake, 1994, p.121) and the place where individual members can exercise real influence (Corbett, Jacobs and Neville, 2016). Studies have shown how the EP's committees play a crucial role in the process of policy-shaping and interaction with other institutions, providing the whole assembly with the technical means required to perform the bulk of the EP's legislative work (Neuhold, 2001).

The legislative importance fulfilled by the EP's standing committees mainly derives from the innovations brought along by the Treaty of Maastricht (ToM) and in particular from the introduction of the co-decision procedure. The latter, by establishing the principle of direct negotiations between the Council and the EP (Shackleton, 2000), implied that the Council was for the first time explicitly required by the Treaty to negotiate with the EP with the knowledge that the latter could say "no" at the end of the negotiations (Shackleton and Raunio, 2003, p.171). As a consequence, co-decision has produced a new set of norms guiding institutional behaviour (Shackleton and Raunio, 2003), as committees now involved in the legislative process had to adjust to their new *status* within the institutional system and undergo a process of adaptation to learn the rules of the game required by co-decision (Ripoll Servent, 2012).

In this light, it is of significant interest to further assess the impact that the Treaty of Lisbon (ToL) had on EP's standing committees. The latter, in fact, further extended the scope of co-decision

to almost all EU policy areas, investing with co-legislative powers a number of EP's standing committees that up until that moment only enjoyed a consultative role. It therefore becomes interesting to understand whether or not (and to what extent) this change in the rules of the game has triggered a process of adaptation from the part of those committees that on December 1st, 2009 found themselves invested with the role of co-legislator.

This work aims precisely at tackling this problematic with a twofold goal. First of all, to measure to what extent the new "rules of the game" imposed by co-decision had an impact on the way the EP's standing committees function, and secondly, to assess to what extent this (possible) impact has had the same consequences in terms of institutional adaptation to the same external input on different standing committees. In other words:

R.Q: *Has there been a change and a mainstreaming in the patterns of behaviour of those EP's standing committees that turned to co-decision with the entering into force of the Treaty of Lisbon?*

In order to answer the above-mentioned research question, this study draws on institutionalism and on theories of legislative development as applied to the American Congress, and more specifically focuses on three aspects of intra-committees' dynamics: 1) MEPs' voting participation; 2) coalition-building and 3) groups' cohesion. For each of these aspects a hypothesis is formulated.

The three hypotheses will be tested through the analysis of a set of original data on voting in committees that turned to co-decision following the entering into force of the ToL: 1) The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI); 2) the Committee on International Trade (INTA); 3) the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs¹; and 4) the Committee on Fisheries (PECH). These four committees will be analysed in the frame of the two post-Lisbon legislatures (the VII, 2009-2014 and the first half of the VIII, 2014-2019).

¹ The LIBE committee already partially turned to co-decision in 2004 as a consequence of the provisions included in the Treaty of Amsterdam. However, a consistent part of its policy domain remained under consultation until 2009.

To sum up, the added value of this work is threefold: First of all, it adds up to the literature on the EP's committees by inquiring for the first time into the behavioural patterns of those committees that turned to co-decision after the entering into force of the ToL. Secondly, it adds a comparative element to the study of committees' patterns of behaviour, exploring for the first time possible mainstreaming patterns across committees. Finally, it presents original data on voting behaviours inside four EP's committees after the Lisbon Treaty, setting up the basis for further studies on the politics inside the EP.

The rest of the work is structured as follow: Section 2 will focus on the theoretical background underpinning the research. It will first review the literature on committees and then will move on to illustrate in detail the rationale laying behind the research question, the three aspects of committees' internal functioning under co-decision analysed and the related hypotheses, to conclude with an explanation of the methodology employed. Section 3 will then illustrate and comment the results of the research. Finally, Section 4 will wrap up the work by summarizing the main results of the research and by giving an overall assessment of the most relevant findings. Further lines of inquiry will also be discussed, on the basis of the results of this work.

2. Theoretical framework

Literature on EP standing committees is rather abundant and provides for a fairly complete depiction of the subject. This, however, had not been the case until the beginning of the 1990s when studies of the EP witnessed an increase in terms of quantity and sophistication due to their new prominent role following the ToM (Hix, Raunio and Scully, 2003). The entering into force of the ToM and the consequent development of the EU's institutional framework triggered a new wave of studies of the EP, including research on its standing committees; Bowler and Farrell's pioneering work drew on legislative studies theories in order to analyse committees' assignment and committees' leadership (Bowler and Farrell, 1995).

During the 1990s, and especially after the entry into force of the ToA in 1997, a whole range of academic literature on standing committees sprung up, growing both in terms of quantity and quality. Besides very detailed research illustrating standing committees' prerogatives and duties (Westlake, 1994 and Corbett, Jacobs and Neville, 2016), research on the topic narrowed their target, focusing on committees' specific features, actors or ties with other EU institutions. A first example is the number of studies on committee assignment and committees' composition. In this sense, the works of McElroy (2006 and 2008), Whitaker (2001, 2005 and 2011), Mamadouh and Raunio (2003), and Yordanova (2009a) are particularly relevant. Another consistent branch of inquiry on standing committees has developed around the role and power of some of the most prominent actors of the internal hierarchy, such as the rapporteur, focusing on its role and its influence all along the legislative process (Benedetto, 2005; Kaeding, 2005; Costello and Thompson 2010). A third field of research covers the issue of consensus-building inside committee (Settembri and Neuhold, 2009; Bendjaballah, 2011). Finally, it is possible to recognize some sparse areas of research touching upon the role of lobbying within the committees (Marshall, 2010), the impact of informal dialogues on committees' influence (Yordanova, 2009b), and deliberation inside the committees (Jensen and Winzen, 2011 and Roger, 2013).

Nonetheless, despite the broad range of studies present in the academic literature, few works on committees have tried to directly tackle behavioural patterns inside EP's committees and their developments through time. In particular, few scholars have attempted to unveil committees' processes of institutional adaptation to the rules imposed after each treaty change. A broader perspective in this sense was embraced by a number of scholars who, following the entering into force of the ToA, shed lights on EP's behavioural adjustments in response to changes in the co-decision rules. In particular, this set of works focused on EP's inter-institutional relations (Shackleton, 2000 and Shackleton and Raunio, 2003), its response to the newly assigned powers (Maurer, 2003), and intra-organisational response (Héritier and Reh, 2012).

A more targeted attempt to analyse changes in committees' patterns of behaviour and modes of functioning is the study carried out by Ripoll-Servent (2012) who, drawing on sociological institutionalist approaches, investigated possible patterns of behavioural adaptation inside the LIBE Committee following the extension of co-decision to some of its areas of competence as promoted by the ToA. This analysis, however, is still incomplete for the purposes of a thorough comprehension of committees' internal behaviour: First, the study is limited to only one committee, therefore lacking a comparative approach, and secondly, it focuses on a committee that, at the time of writing, turned only partially to co-decision and therefore might have still presented peculiar features of the old patterns behaviour linked to the consultation procedure. This need for further understanding of committees' internal modes of functioning has been paralleled by the significant changes brought on by the ToL, which emphasized the necessity of a thorough comprehension of behavioural patterns inside standing committees. As Ripoll Servent forecasts:

The introduction of co-decision will probably introduce new forms of consensus-seeking in those committees [endowed with legislative powers] in order to facilitate early agreements and avoid conflicts with the Council and the Commission. These new patterns of behaviour will also create new opportunities and challenges for political groups, who will need to rethink their strategies and their policy preferences in light of new institutional configurations. (Ripoll Servent, 2012, p.68)

In this sense, the added value of this work displays two more facets: First, it takes on Ripoll Servent's "call for further studies" and sheds lights on the two post-Lisbon legislatures, a period of time that so far has been little scrutinized by scholars and not yet explored in terms of committees' patterns of behaviour. Secondly, it includes an increased number of committees, expanding (even though to a small extent) academic knowledge on the internal functioning of the EP's standing committees. The different nature of the four committees under scrutiny (in terms of technicality, political salience, dimension etc.) adds a broader perspective to the understanding of committees' patterns of behaviour.

Research Question and the three aspects of committees' functioning

As outlined in the previous section, this work aims at further enriching the small body of academic literature on committees' internal patterns of behaviour by inquiring possible changes in these latter deriving from external inputs and in particular the entry into force of the ToL.

Secondly, this work also aims at assessing possible patterns of mainstreaming in the behaviour of the four committees under analysis. Having experienced the same external input, in fact, it is plausible to assume that the adaptation process has followed in all the four cases in the same direction. At the same time, however, literature on parliamentary committees highlights how they tend to develop norms of specialisation through time, adjusting their working methods to the specificities of their respective policy areas (Bowler and Farrell, 1995). The old modes of functioning are not always easy to abandon, as they are the consequence of the internalization of years spent working under different rules and legislations. Therefore, adaptation may apply to a different extent in different committees. Both problematic are translated into the following research question:

R.Q: *Has there been a change and a mainstreaming in the patterns of behaviour of those EP's standing committees that turned to co-decision with the entering into force of the Treaty of Lisbon?*

The research question finds its roots in the institutionalist approach and in particular in both "historical institutionalism" and "rational choice institutionalism". Central to these two approaches, regardless of the branch, is the question, "How do institutions affect the behaviour of individuals?" (Hall and Taylor, 1996, p.7). First of all, it is necessary to identify the object under scrutiny. Concerning the notion of institutions, this work takes an historical institutionalist perspective. This identifies institutions in very broad terms, defining them as "the formal or informal procedures, routines, norms and conventions embedded in the organizational structure of the polity or political economy" (Hall and Taylor, 1996, p.6). In the specific case of this work, institutions are identified as the formal rules governing the legislative process, as laid down in Art.294 TFEU.

How does the set of rules listed in Art.294 TFEU affect EP standing committees' patterns of behaviour and modes of functioning? Drawing from rational-choice institutionalism, this work postulates that institutions (here conceived as a set of rules) "structure interactions between actors, by affecting the range and sequence of alternatives on the choice-agenda or by providing information and enforcement mechanisms that reduce uncertainty about the corresponding behaviour of others" (Hall and Taylor, 1996, p.6).

The rational-choice institutionalist perspective has been largely exploited in studies on legislative development applied to the U.S Congress. The largest share of this body of work focuses on analysing how Congress' regulations influence its members' behaviour, with specific attention to Congressional Committees. According to this approach, "internal development of a legislature's organizational structure (hierarchy, rules, structure, etc.) is modified as a reaction to changing external demands" (Kreppel, 2002, p.14). Changes can also be seen as a way to avoid the costs of non-adaptation, which may result in the marginalization of the institution or in its eventual replacement (Copeland and Patterson, 1994). In this sense, the process of adaptation to external changes is not the result of one faction's preference, nor the result of a political battle. It is conceived, instead (as long as it is successful), as a "collective good" (Kreppel, 2002, p.15), since the benefits of internal adjustment concerns all the parts, regardless of the political colour.

This approach to legislative studies has also been successfully exploited in order to analyse changes undergone within the EU institutions throughout the process of European integration. An example is Kreppel's (2002) study on the effects of EP's increase in power on its internal institutional evolution as a legislature. Kreppel's analysis focuses on four aspects² of the EP's internal structure and investigates them throughout four "critical moments"³ when external change has been strong enough to provoke a process of internal reform within the EU institutions (Kreppel, 2002).

² Notably: 1) EP's rules of procedure; 2) patterns of coalition formation; 3) the role of ideology in the decision-making process; and 4) the internal evolution of the supranational party groups.

³ Notably: 1) The 1970/1975 Budgetary treaties; 2) the introduction of direct elections in 1979; 3) The entry into force of the Single European Act; and 4) the entry into force of the Maastricht Treaty.

This work takes the fourth critical moment, the signing of the ToM in 1992, in particular the developments brought on by the co-decision process as independent variable. It shifts the focus from the EP as an institution to its internal standing committees, in particular to four committees that turned to co-decision after the entering into force of the ToL: AGRI, INTA, LIBE and PECH. Co-decision, especially in its updated version established by the ToA, has profoundly altered the institutional structure of the EU as well as the political balance between its main institutions. Without going too much into detail here, co-decision had two main repercussions on the EP: First of all, the EP's vote began to matter. If under consultation the Council was not forced to listen to the EP's position, after the ToM it has had to bargain every file, with the risk of seeing the negotiations not concluding. Secondly, co-decision has provoked an increase in both the amount of work the EP has found itself dealing with (European Parliament, 2014) as well as the level of technicality of the issues discussed. Consequently, as Ripoll Servent affirms:

The procedure has not only changed the institutional triangle, but also the working methods and institutional culture of the EP. More than just a rule of procedure, co-decision has grown to form a new set of norms that guide institutional behaviour. (Ripoll Servent, 2012 p.57)

This radical change also invested its internal committees, which passed from being characterized by free-riding behaviour in inter-institutional relations, flexible intragroup political structure and centrifugal policy outcome, to a structure presenting a more consensual attitude *vis-à-vis* other institutions, an intra-committee dynamic made of large and stable coalitions and centripetal policy outcome (Ripoll Servent, 2012).

This work assumes that the entry into force of the ToL has represented for certain committees the same "critical moment" which other committees experienced when they were invested by co-decision in 1993 and therefore assumes the appearance of the same patterns of change. For reasons of time and space constraints, this work only focuses on one of the above-mentioned features of committees' functioning, namely that concerning the EP's political groups (here re-nominated, more generally, "intra-committee's dynamics"). From this, three hypotheses relating to MEPs' participation to the vote, coalition-building, and groups' cohesion are formulated. The focus on these

three aspects of committees' internal functioning allows for the exploitation of original data on voting within the EP's committees recently made public on the EP's website.

Intra-committee dynamics and the three hypotheses

According to rational-choice institutionalism, within the frame of the possibilities and constraints imposed by the institutions, actors "have a fixed set of preferences or tastes [and] behave entirely instrumentally so as to maximize the attainment of these preferences" (Hall and Taylor, 1996, p.12). Building upon this main assumption, this work wants to analyse intra-committee dynamics assuming, as already delineated in the previous section, that the changes brought on by the ToL have had repercussion on committees' internal patterns of behaviour and modes of functioning.

According to Ripoll Servent, the old consultation procedure favoured unstable coalitions, flexible majorities, incoherent political groups, and higher possibilities for smaller and extremist groups to influence the legislative process (Ripoll Servent, 2012). The low political stakes deriving from the non-binding effect of the EP's position, in fact, did not bring any incentive for MEPs to participate constantly and actively to the works of the committees.

The turn to co-decision has brought a radical change in a number of aspects. The new position of equality of the EP *vis-à-vis* the Council in the legislative process, and the consequent higher stakes of the legislation discussed in the EP's committees, has given MEPs and political groups the chance to effectively influence the EU's political output. This work therefore hypothesizes that under co-decision, MEPs belonging to the four committees under analysis will be more willing to participate in the works of their committees in order to exert their influence to the largest extent possible. Voting, in fact, is one of the most effective ways to exert influence on the policy outcome, and it results a viable testing variable, given the time constraints this work is subject to. Consequently:

Hypothesis 1: MEPs' rate of participation in the vote tends to increase under co-decision.

Another claim often made when discussing the effects of co-decision is that it has affected the strategic behaviour of groups with regards to coalition-building. In particular, one of the most

recurrent assumptions in the literature is that the rules of co-decision have incentivized the formation of majorities including most of the political forces.

This supposition mainly draws on the claim that the EP would generally be more effective by presenting a large and united front when it comes to negotiate with other institutions (Attinà, 1990; Hix and Lord, 1997; and Kreppel, 2000). At the roots of the claim lies the fact that under co-decision, the EP enjoys full legislative recognition but at the same time has to share it with the Council. Therefore, “the level of interparty cooperation is liable to increase significantly, [given] that the legislature does not gain absolute control of the legislative process and no single party controls an absolute majority” (Kreppel, 2002, p.126). As Ripoll Servent argues:

The necessity of attaining higher majorities - combined with a sense of sharing responsibility for the outcome - [should motivate] the two largest groups to enter into a logic of coalition formation and consensus seeking enhancing thus the ‘sense of shared responsibility’. (Ripoll Servent, 20012, p.64)

Drawing on what just said, this work hypothesizes that after the turning to co-decision in 2009, also the four committees under analysis have followed this pattern of behaviour as a response to the external incentives given by the legislative procedure. In other words:

Hypothesis 2: Under co-decision, the voting patterns tend increasingly towards large and omni-comprehensive coalitions.

Thirdly, this study hypothesizes that the turning to co-decision has pushed political groups to be more cohesive. This argument builds primarily on a rational-choice institutionalist approach in which actors have a fixed set of preferences and behave instrumentally in order to maximize their priorities in the frame of the existing set of rules (Hall and Taylor, 1996). Drawing on this premise, there are two main reasons why groups should attain a higher degree of cohesiveness: First of all, as pointed out for Hypothesis 1, the new rules of the game provided by co-decision plunge committees, and therefore political groups, into a new institutional position from which they can exert a concrete and effective influence on the EU’s policy output. This, in turn, should incentivize political groups to be as united as possible in order to exert a stronger influence during the intra-committee negotiations.

Secondly, because of the new co-legislator's role assigned to the EP by co-decision, it has an incentive to present a strong support behind its positions during the inter-institutional bargaining. Political groups, therefore, have an incentive to remain as cohesive as possible in order to have more chances (together with the other groups) to get to a favourable deal. This work therefore hypothesizes that the political groups in the four committees under analysis have become more cohesive in order to increase their chances to exert an influence during the inter-institutional bargaining.

Hypothesis 3: The rate of cohesion of political groups tends to increase under co-decision.

Methodology

This study focuses on the VII and VIII legislatures (2009-2014 and 2014-2019). Obviously, to what concerns the VIII legislature, the analysis covers only its first three years, from 2014 to 2017. The committees under scrutiny are four of the five committees that completely turned to co-decision with the entry into force of the ToL: 1) the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI); 2) the Committee on International Trade (INTA); 3) the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs; and 4) the Committee on Fisheries (PECH).

Given the space constraints imposed on this work, the chosen methodological approach is the analysis of original data on voting inside the four committees published on the EP's website. More precisely, the set of data exploited for the analysis includes the recording of 317 votes cast by the four committees under analysis between 2015 and 2017. The recordings were collected from the EP's website in each committee's webpage. Every recording included a number of votes in favour, contrary and abstentions. The largest number of votes was collected for the INTA committee (145), whereas the lowest one was for the PECH committee (33).

As seen in Table 1, votes have been grouped in three main categories: 1) votes cast in a situation where the committee had a role of co-legislator (co-decision files where the committee under scrutiny was the leading committee); 2) files that fell under the so-called "consent procedure" (where the EP is entitled to only cast a final vote on the whole text); and 3) non-legislative files (Own

Initiative Reports, Opinions and Motions for Resolution), when the committee under analysis did not hold a legislative role in the procedure.

The results were then compared to detect possible specificities related to the different nature of the files, in particular concerning co-decision⁴. It could be argued that this methodology does not allow for an assessment of (possible) pre-post Lisbon variations, as the overall set of data does not include votes cast from pre-Lisbon legislatures. However, given the data available, this system appears to be the only viable method in order to measure the impact of the new rules of the game on committees.

Table 1: Nature of the data collected from the EP's website

	Co-legisl.	Consent	Non-legislative	Total	First vote	Last vote
AGRI	17	0	40	57	14 April 2015	20 March 2018
INTA	36	25	84	145	22 January 2015	22 March 2018
LIBE	27	11	44	82	2 July 2015	24 January 2018
PECH	15	8	10	33	21 January 2015	25 January 2018
Total	95	44	178	317		

Source: European Parliament: <https://bit.ly/2FkQzE7>

3. The results

As outlined in the previous section, the aim of this work is to assess whether or not the extended scope of co-decision brought on by the ToL has triggered a change (as well as a mainstreaming) in the behavioural patterns of four EP's committees (AGRI, INTA, LIBE and PECH). The rationale behind this assumption builds up on institutionalist theories, according to which changes occurring at the level of the rules governing an institution have repercussions on the behaviours of the actors operating inside. In this case the assumption is that the new co-legislative role assigned to the four committees under scrutiny has triggered a process of institutional adaptation

⁴ During the analysis of the data, however, because of the scarce number of votes collected in certain committees, which risked undermining the overall analysis, as well as for reasons of time constraint, it was decided not to take the "consent portion" of votes into account. Anyway, for the sake of clearness, the three groups are all displayed in table 3.

to the new rules of the game. In particular, this work focuses on committees' internal dynamics, notably MEPs' participation to the vote, coalition-building and groups' cohesion. In turn three hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis 1: MEPs' rate of participation to the vote tends to increase under co-decision.

Hypothesis 2: Under co-decision the voting patterns tend increasingly toward large and omnicomprehensive coalitions.

Hypothesis 3: The rate of cohesion of political groups tends to increase under co-decision.

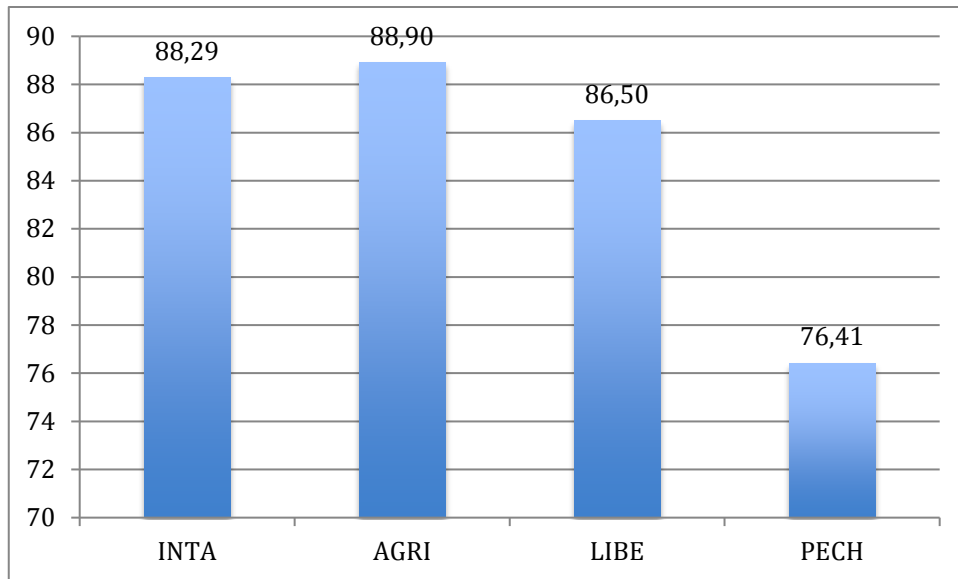
The three hypotheses were tested by analysing a set of votes cast in the four committees under analysis during the VIII legislature. As explained in the previous section, the set of data includes the recording of 317 votes cast by the four committees under analysis between 2015 and 2017.

Participation

The first hypothesis related to committees' internal dynamics revolves around MEPs' participation to the vote. The main rationale behind this assumption is that the new status of co-legislator brought on by the ToL, and the consequent rise in relevance of the four committees under analysis, have produced an incentive for MEPs to be more active inside the committees in order to influence the political outcome of a legislation.

In Figure 1 it is possible to observe data concerning the total participation rate in the four committees under analysis. In all the four committees, more than three quarters of the members participated in the vote. Particularly high are the rates recorded in AGRI, INTA and LIBE, where on average more than 85% of the MEPs participated in the vote, regardless of the kind of file.

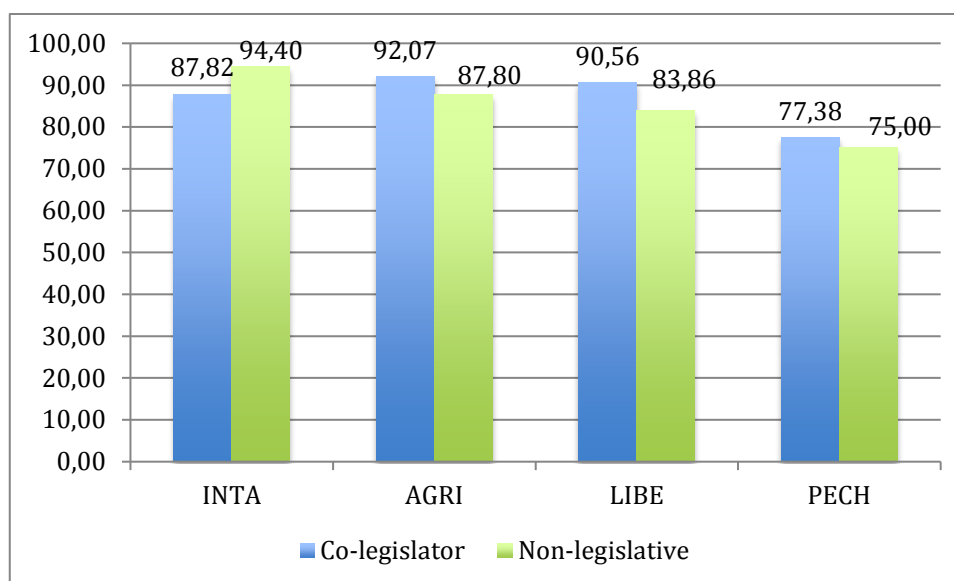
Figure 1: Total participation rate in the four committees under analysis (%)



Source: European Parliament, calculations by the author

This data alone, however, does not answer Hypothesis 1. A clearer and more nuanced picture regarding the incentives to participate in the vote is provided by Figure 2. Here, it is possible to observe the participation rate for the four committees under analysis, both in the cases of co-decision and non-legislative files. Regardless of the role of the committee in the legislative process, the participation rate remains substantially high. None of the committees, in fact, fall below three quarters of the members participating in the vote. At the same time, it is possible to observe differences between the participation rates when the committee has a role as co-legislator and when it has a mere consultative role. With the exception of INTA, all the committees present higher levels of participation when they act as co-legislator, with variations ranging from the 5,9 percentage points for AGRI to 2,38 for PECH.

Figure 2: Participation rate per kind of file in the four committees (%)



Source: European Parliament, calculations by the author

Participation rates can also be observed from a different angle, namely by looking at the participation of political groups in the four committees under analysis, both when their vote matters and when it does not. By looking at Table 2, it is possible to observe that the picture shows the same results as detected in Figure 2: In AGRI and LIBE, groups' participation increases when the committees act as co-legislator (with the important exception of S&D in AGRI), while in INTA the non-legislative role seems to have greater appeal. In fact, only three minor groups present a higher rate of participation when the committee act as co-legislator (ECR, GUE/NGL and ENF), two groups present substantially no variation (S&D and EFDD), and three groups present higher participation rates when the committee has a consultative role (EPP, ALDE and the Greens). An interesting picture emerges from data related to PECH: In this case, the three main groups (EPP, S&D and ALDE) do not display a higher level of participation when the committee acts as co-legislator, whereas groups that often stay in opposition (ECR, Greens, GUE/NGL and EFDD) increase their level of involvement when the vote begins to matter. The substantial variation in these latter's participation may explain the overall positive difference as detected in Figure 2.

Table 2: Participation rate of the eight political groups in the four committees (%)⁵

	EPP				S&D			
Committee	AGRI	INTA	LIBE	PECH	AGRI	INTA	LIBE	PECH
Co-legislator	96,15	92,36	96,08	79,05	93,65	92,22	96,79	95,56
Non-legislative	95,36	94,40	91,28	81,43	94,59	92,53	91,20	96,67
	ECR				ALDE			
Committee	AGRI	INTA	LIBE	PECH	AGRI	INTA	LIBE	PECH
Co-legislator	91,43	95,14	77,25	93,33	92,86	83,33	94,07	86,67
Non-legislative	82,56	90,96	66,23	83,33	85,90	85,00	94,09	90,00
	Greens				GUE/NGL			
Committee	AGRI	INTA	LIBE	PECH	AGRI	INTA	LIBE	PECH
Co-legislator	96,43	80,56	96,30	77,78	87,50	85,19	91,67	53,33
Non-legislative	91,45	98,00	86,36	56,67	87,82	83,94	83,52	46,67
	EFDD				ENF			
Committee	AGRI	INTA	LIBE	PECH	AGRI	INTA	LIBE	PECH
Co-legislator	88,10	71,76	74,81	73,33	77,78	76,67	70,37	7,69
Non-legislative	73,50	71,08	59,20	61,67	59,80	70,27	59,09	14,29

Source: European Parliament, calculations by the author

To summarize, hypothesis 1 has been revealed to be largely correct. As shown in Figure 2, in three of the four committees under analysis (AGRI, INTA and PECH), participation rates rose when acting as co-legislator with the Council. At the same time, however, further scrutiny is needed in order to explain the behaviour of INTA, which seems not to align with the rest of the committees and presents a higher level of participation when endowed with non-legislative powers. Further research also needs to address possible reasons behind the participation of political groups to the vote. From the data presented here, in fact, co-decision appears not to be the only discriminant. The inclusion of further variables may therefore result useful in order to draw a more accurate picture of committees' internal dynamics concerning participation.

⁵ Participation rate for each group was calculated by taking the number of members of a group taking part in the vote over the total number of MEPs composing it.

Coalition-building

The second aspect of intra-committee dynamics concerns the way political groups structure alliances inside the committee. As a simple majority⁶ needed in order to pass legislation, there are many ways to reach this threshold. A classical example is the so-called “grand coalition” between the two main groups, EPP and S&D, which together easily attain the majority of the votes. A second way to pass legislation is to structure a coalition along political divides, such as centre-right (usually EPP, ECR and ALDE, mainly on economic issues) and centre-left (S&D, Greens, GUE/NGL and still ALDE, mostly on civil rights). A third way is to build a broad and omni-comprehensive coalition, able to bring together very different political actors in a compromise that satisfies all parts. This last option is at the centre of Hypothesis 2.

A first useful indicator to assess groups’ behaviour when it comes to building winning coalitions can be derived from the indicator of participation previously exploited. As Table 3 shows, when it comes to vote on files falling under the co-decision procedure, the share of MEPs voting in favour of the EP’s position increases. Particularly relevant in this sense is the case of AGRI, where the increase registered is larger than ten percentage points. Another relevant pattern is the one concerning abstention votes. In all four committees under analysis, the share of MEPs choosing not to take a stance increases when the file voted does not fall under co-decision. A relevant example is that of INTA, where the share of abstentions nearly doubles for non-legislative files.

Table 3: Distribution of participation rates per type of vote in the four committees (%)

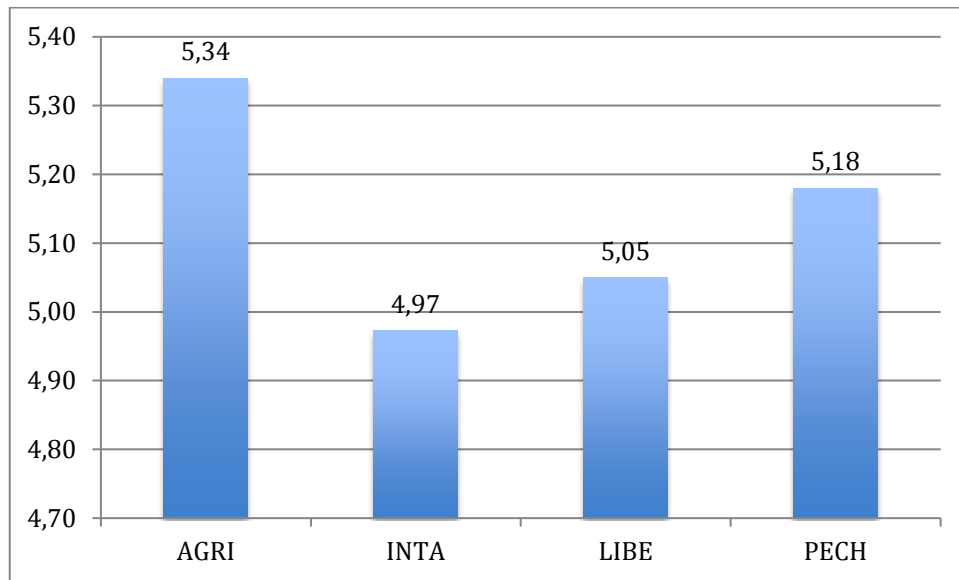
Comm.	In favour				Contrary				Abstention			
	INTA	AGRI	LIBE	PECH	INTA	AGRI	LIBE	PECH	INTA	AGRI	LIBE	PECH
Co-leg	75,04	77,26	72,72	77,38	8,79	9,50	13,52	4,76	3,99	5,77	4,32	2,62
Non-leg.	73,07	67,12	69,47	75,00	8,43	14,51	10,04	6,07	6,87	6,17	4,36	3,21

Source: European Parliament, calculations by the author

⁶ 50%+1 of the vote

A clearer picture regarding the average size of winning coalitions inside the four committees under analysis can be provided by Figure 3, which shows the data related to the average number of groups forming the winning coalition in the four committees.

Figure 3: Average number of groups in the winning coalition⁷



Source: European Parliament, calculations by the author

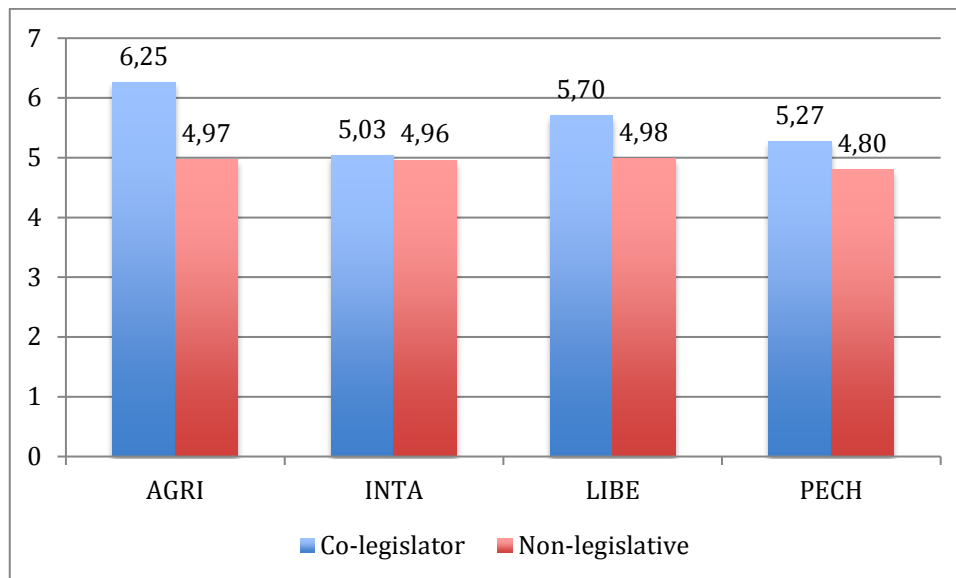
In this case we can see how in all the committees, even though with differences from one another, the average number of groups ‘taken on board’ is rather high. All four committees, in fact, attain a share of 5 groups. If we consider that every committee has eight groups plus the non-attached members, these data already show the willingness of MEPs to build broad coalitions, instead of splitting the committees around ideological divides.

This trend raises even more interest when comparing co-decision and non-legislative files. As observed in Figure 4, in all four committees the number of political groups ‘taken on board’ in the winning majority increases when the vote cast ‘matters’. This is particularly evident for the AGRI committee, where the average number of groups raises from a bit less than five for non-legislative

⁷ The average number of groups in a winning coalition is calculated by taking the number of political groups present in the coalition that wins, regardless of the positive or negative outcome of the vote. In order to be part of the winning coalition, a group needs to support the winning committee with at least 50%+1 of its members.

files to more than six (out of 8 and the non-attached) for co-decision files. These data confirm what has been predicted in Hypothesis 2, showing a positive correlation between the new co-legislator role assigned to the EP and the tendency to put together coalitions including the largest number of MEPs.

Figure 4: Average number of groups in winning coalition for each legislative procedure



Source: European Parliament, calculations by the author

The same patterns can be read even more in depth by looking at Table 4, showing the distribution in the number of groups composing the winning majorities inside the four committees. From this point of view, the data regarding AGRI are even more comprehensive: Co-decision files never gather a majority below five groups, whereas for non-legislative files almost one-fifth of the winning majorities count 3 groups, and more than one-third of them count 3 or 4 groups. Moreover, the share of winning coalitions including six groups is particularly high (43,75%, against 25,64% for non-legislative files). Finally, almost one-fifth of the co-decision votes were passed with a majority composed of eight political families (against only 2,56% for the non-legislative files).

INTA and LIBE show a large share of 5-groups coalitions in co-decision files while displaying a marked difference with non-legislative votes in relation to 7-groups coalitions (19,44 against 5,95 in INTA, 11,11 against 4,55 in LIBE). PECH follows the same trend, displaying a share of 5-groups coalitions for co-decision files, which is more than double with respect to the non-legislative files.

The same holds true for the 6 and 7-groups coalitions, which present a share for co-decision files double than non-legislative files.

Table 4: Distribution of number of groups in the winning coalitions (%)

AGRI	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Co-legislator	0,00	0,00	0,00	25,00	43,75	12,50	18,75	0,00
Non-legislative	0,00	17,95	15,38	33,33	25,64	2,56	2,56	2,56
INTA	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Co-legislator	2,78	11,11	11,11	50,00	5,56	19,44	0,00	0,00
Non-legislative	2,38	7,14	25,00	33,33	23,81	5,95	2,38	0,00
LIBE	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Co-legislator	0,00	3,70	33,33	40,74	11,11	11,11	0,00	0,00
Non-legislative	2,27	6,82	22,73	43,18	15,91	4,55	2,27	2,27
PECH	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Co-legislator	0,00	0,00	33,33	26,67	20,00	20,00	0,00	0,00
Non-legislative	0,00	20,00	40,00	10,00	10,00	10,00	10,00	0,00

Source: European Parliament, calculations by the author

Finally, patterns of coalition-formation inside the four committees under analysis can be further understood by investigating the composition of these coalitions, and in particular by observing the participation rate of political groups to the winning coalitions. In fact, if it is true that the trend goes towards the formation of omni-comprehensive coalitions, it is also true that every committee has a main core of groups that try to impose their vision on the agenda, influencing also the construction of winning coalitions. The first tendency that can be observed in Table 5 (below) concerns the two largest groups, EPP and S&D: First of all, with the exception of the S&D group in INTA, it is possible to observe in all the four committees an increase in the participation to the vote when the committee acts as co-legislator. In this sense, particularly relevant is the case of the S&D group in the AGRI committee, which passes from a participation rate of 79,49% in non-legislative files to a rate of 100% when the vote matters. Secondly, it is relevant to highlight the strong weight that the two groups have inside the four committees under analysis. With the exception of the S&D group in the INTA committee, in both non-legislative and co-decision files, the two groups are almost

fully present in all the winning coalitions, forming, *de facto*, the backbone of all the different configurations of winning coalitions.

Besides this element, Table 5 does not display strong patterns of mainstreaming between the four committees under analysis, and it is difficult to detect a generalized trend for groups other than those already highlighted for EPP and S&D. Some interesting insights, however, can still be observed in the patterns of specific groups taken singularly. In the case of ECR, for example, the difference between types of file is particularly evident in INTA and PECH. In these two cases, the political group passes from being an actor often, but not always included in the final majority to being an integral part of the committee's backbone, together with EPP and S&D. The same can be observed for the Greens, GUE/NGL and EFDD in AGRI. These three groups pass from being substantially opposition groups to being parties very often involved in winning coalitions (especially EFDD, which contributes to 75% of the winning coalitions). The rest of the data shows how ALDE remains rather stable between the two kinds of legislative files as well as always fully involved in the winning coalitions. Finally, to what concerns ENF, its involvement varies from committee to committee (almost inexistent in LIBE, present in one-third of the winning coalitions in AGRI). Moreover, the variations between legislative files do not seem to suggest a clear and stable trend.

Table 5: Rate of participation in the winning coalitions (%)

AGRI	EPP	S&D	ECR	ALDE	Greens	GUE/NGL	EFDD	ENF
Co-legislator	100,00	100,00	75,00	81,25	62,50	50,00	75,00	37,50
Non-legislative	97,44	79,49	79,49	74,36	41,03	28,21	17,95	38,46
INTA	EPP	S&D	ECR	ALDE	Greens	GUE/NGL	EFDD	ENF
Co-legislator	100,00	97,22	88,89	83,33	50,00	33,33	36,11	23,33
Non-legislative	98,81	98,81	60,71	82,14	48,81	35,71	54,76	14,14
LIBE	EPP	S&D	ECR	ALDE	Greens	GUE/NGL	EFDD	ENF
Co-legislator	92,59	96,30	44,44	92,59	70,37	48,15	14,81	0,00
Non-legislative	90,91	95,45	54,55	93,18	75,00	36,36	13,64	9,09
PECH	EPP	S&D	ECR	ALDE	Greens	GUE/NGL	EFDD	ENF
Co-legislator	100,00	100,00	93,33	80,00	66,67	26,67	33,33	6,67
Non-legislative	100,00	100,00	70,00	80,00	40,00	40,00	10,00	10,00

Source: European Parliament, calculations by the author

To summarize the data indicates that the EP's committees tend to form larger coalitions when voting files under the co-decision procedure, therefore confirming hypothesis 2. This conclusion was supported by a number of evidences detected in this section.

First of all, it was possible to observe patterns of increases in the average number of groups included in the winning coalitions when the vote matters, as opposed to non-legislative files (Figure 4). This main finding was further corroborated by data showing how under co-decision the share of votes in favour of the EP's position tend to increase, whereas abstention rises when the file voted does not have legal power. Moreover, through Tables 4 and 5 it was possible to further analyse the average composition of the winning coalitions in terms of number and kind of political group.

At the same time, however, the evidence did not fully display patterns of mainstreaming among the four committees analysed. If patterns of mainstreaming were observed at the level of committee (as observed in Figure 4), the same thing cannot be said when narrowing the focus of the analysis. It was the case in Tables 4 and 5, which provided interesting insights (such as those regarding the two main groups, EPP and S&D), but at the same time did not provide for satisfying indications concerning possible mainstreaming patterns.

Group cohesion

The third and final hypothesis linked to the study of intra-committees' dynamics concerns the cohesion of political groups inside the four committees under analysis. The assumption is that the new role of co-legislator assigned by the ToL to the four committees may have incentivized the political groups inside these latter to be more united.

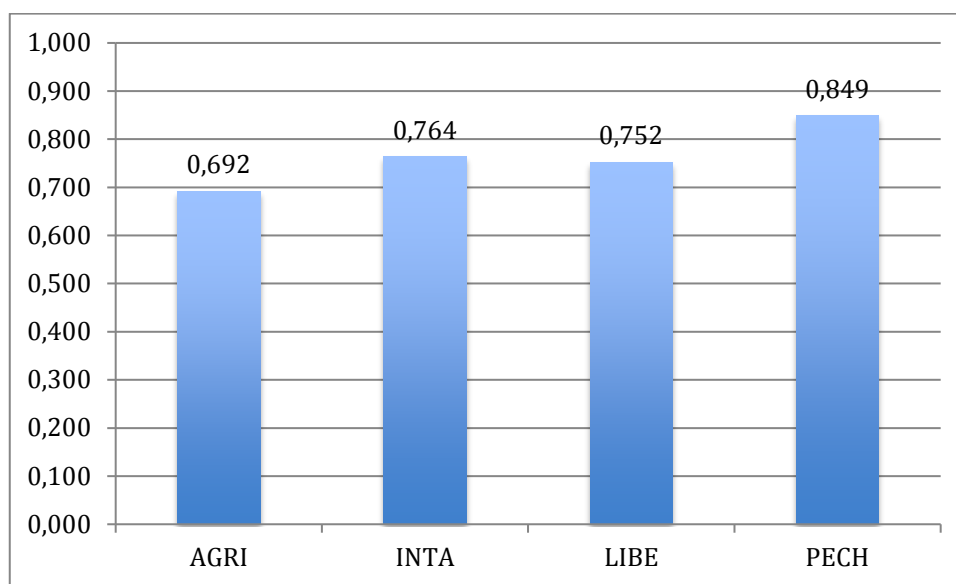
Cohesion of political groups is calculated by exploiting an "agreement index"⁸ already used by Hix, Noury and Kreppel (2003). On a vote that gives three possibilities (in favour, contrary, and abstention), a cohesion rate of 1,000 means absolute cohesion whereas a cohesion rate of 0,000 means

⁸ The formula used is: $A_i = \{\max [Y, N, A] - 0,5 * [(Y+N+A) - \max (Y, N, A)]\} / (Y+N+A)$ where "Y" denotes the number of 'yes' votes, "N" the number of 'no' votes, and "A" the number of 'abstain' votes.

maximum dispersion of the votes (that is, when the group is equally divided between all three of these voting options).

To begin the analysis of the results, it is interesting to look at the general cohesion rate of the four committees under analysis. As it is possible to observe from Figure 5, all four committees display a rather high rate of cohesion. At the same time, it is also possible to detect a certain degree of variation between them, especially between the AGRI committee (cohesion rate: 0,692) and PECH (cohesion rate: 0,849).

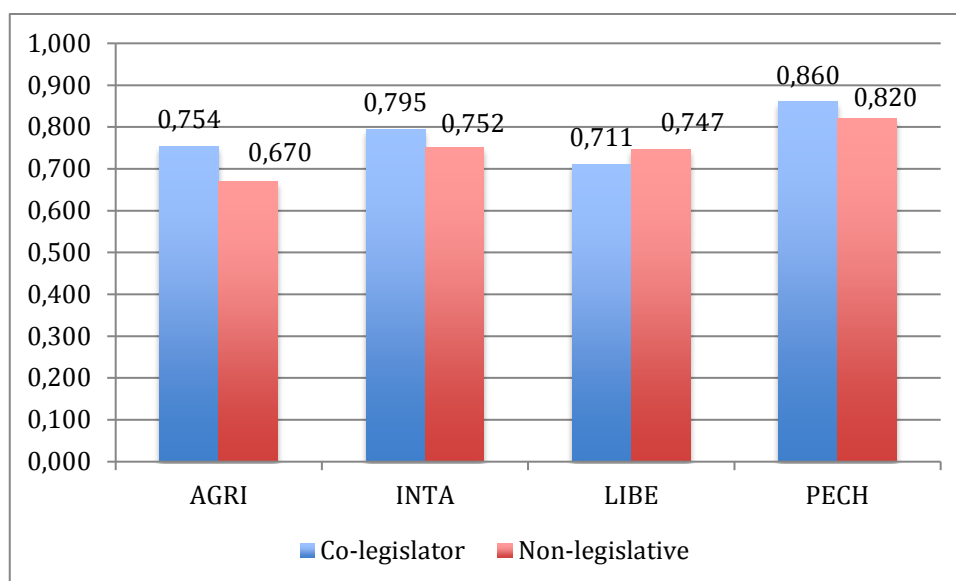
Figure 5: Cohesion rate in the four committees



Source: European Parliament, calculations by the author

Furthermore, data can be better analysed in the light of Hypothesis 3 by looking at Figure 6, which shows the cohesion rate of the four committees both when the file under discussion falls in the frame of co-decision and when it is a non-legislative act. In three committees (AGRI, INTA, and PECH) the cohesion rate is higher when these latter act as co-legislator. However, it has to be noted that the differences in these three cases are not particularly pronounced, especially in the cases of INTA and PECH. Also, in the case of LIBE, the only committee presenting the opposite trend, the two rates do not differ substantially.

Figure 6: Cohesion rate per type of file in the four committees



Source: European Parliament, calculations by the author

An even more nuanced picture of the cohesion rate in the four committees under analysis can be detected from Table 6, which shows the cohesion of the eight groups in the four committees, both for files falling under the co-decision procedure and for those files with a non-legislative character. The first important element emerging from Table 6 is the very high cohesion rate displayed (with few exceptions) by almost all the groups inside the four committees. The most striking case is the one of PECH in which five groups out of eight displayed a perfect rate of cohesion, and six out of eight showed perfect cohesion in one of the two types, regardless of the type of file under analysis. The only exception to this rather pronounced overall rate of cohesion appears to be the EFDD group, which is composed of a very heterogenous coalition of members.

This overall high level of cohesion, at the same time, does not present clear tendencies confirming Hypothesis 3. By looking at Table 6, in fact, it is possible to observe how the rates displayed by the groups do not follow the same patterns, both inside each committee and across the four committees under analysis. This element, together with the already high level of overall cohesion rate, renders it rather difficult to draw conclusions about the influence of the new co-decision rules on the behaviour of political groups.

Table 6: Cohesion rate in the eight political groups per type of file

AGRI	EPP	S&D	ECR	ALDE	Greens	GUE/NGL	EFDD	ENF
Co-legislator	0,949	0,904	0,930	0,925	0,911	0,839	0,643	0,958
Non-legislative	0,967	0,918	0,848	0,926	0,987	0,817	0,615	0,871
INTA	EPP	S&D	ECR	ALDE	Greens	GUE/NGL	EFDD	ENF
Co-legislator	0,990	1,000	0,948	1,000	1,000	0,764	0,793	0,804
Non-legislative	0,989	0,987	0,962	0,989	0,982	0,816	0,837	0,854
LIBE	EPP	S&D	ECR	ALDE	Greens	GUE/NGL	EFDD	ENF
Co-legislator	0,948	0,958	0,882	0,967	1,000	0,898	0,578	0,940
Non-legislative	0,964	0,991	0,958	1,000	0,991	0,991	0,564	0,981
PECH	EPP	S&D	ECR	ALDE	Greens	GUE/NGL	EFDD	ENF
Co-legislator	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	0,904	0,597	1,000
Non-legislative	1,000	1,000	0,925	1,000	1,000	1,000	0,663	1,000

Source: European Parliament, calculations by the author

To sum up, the initial Hypothesis 3 seems to find confirmation in the data analysed. This element, however, is mitigated by the generalized high level of cohesion displayed by the four committees, regardless of the file. The same generalized high level has found further confirmation when observing the cohesion of single political groups inside the four committees. Moreover, when observed individually, political groups did not show specific patterns of cohesion across the four committees.

4. Conclusions

The aim of this work has been to detect and analyse possible changes in the patterns of behaviour and modes of functioning of four EP standing committees that turned completely to co-decision with the entry into force of the ToL as well as possible mainstreaming patterns between them. In order to do so, this work has focused on intra-committee's dynamics, deriving three hypotheses concerning MEPs' participation in the vote, coalition building, and group cohesiveness.

The hypotheses have been tested through the analysis of a set of original data on voting in the four committees between 2015 and 2017.

The results of the research showed how under co-decision political actors display a stronger involvement in the activities of the four committees. The analysis confirmed all three initial hypotheses. As observed in Figure 2, with the only exception of INTA, MEPs display a higher rate of participation when acting as co-legislator. Moreover, data have shown how under co-decision winning coalitions present a larger number of political groups; in certain cases, such as the one of AGRI, this can reach six rather stable members. This element was also supported by data on MEPs' participation in the vote. In this case, it was possible to see how under co-decision the share of MEPs voting in favour of the EP's position tend to increase, confirming the initial assumption. Finally, Figure 6 showed how co-decision is largely accompanied by a stronger cohesion in three of the four committees under analysis.

At the same time, by having a closer look at the four committees, the picture appears to be less straightforward. In particular, for all three hypotheses, it was difficult to detect patterns of mainstreaming among the political groups present in the four committees under analysis, even in the case of the main ones (EPP and S&D). In regards to Hypothesis 1, two committees presented homogeneous patterns in line with the initial hypothesis, whereas in the case of INTA groups were very much divided, and in the case of PECH the main groups presented opposite trends to what initially was hypothesized. A more nuanced situation was also observed in the cases of Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3, where no evident patterns were displayed.

These results suggest that the variables chosen to test the initial hypotheses, despite their proven adequacy, are probably not the only ones affecting the choices of the political actors inside the committees. In this sense, it would certainly be of interest to further scrutinize elements such as the content of the legislation, the political opportunities linked to the period in which the file is discussed, as well as the character of the persons involved in the negotiations, such as the rapporteur and shadow rapporteurs.

Moreover, the limited amount of data collected here for reasons of time and space constraints leaves open the necessity for a widening of the scope of the research in order to complete the information unveiled. It would be interesting, in this regard, to expand the analysis of voting patterns to a higher number of committees, in order to have a more accurate depiction of behaviours inside the EP. Moreover, a more nuanced and complete picture could be derived from the chronological analysis, both of a complete legislature and of more than one legislature. The findings of this work, in fact, can hardly be generalized for the post-Lisbon period, which is still “too young” for exhaustive conclusions.

Thirdly, the study of possible mainstreaming patterns could be further and more thoroughly scrutinized. In this sense, it would be of interest to analyse a wider spectrum of different committees, such as the ‘more political’ and more technical ones or the ‘legislative’ and ‘less legislative’ ones (like the Committee on Foreign Affairs - AFET), where political groups’ or MEPs’ behaviours and the rationale behind coalition-building might be different. It would also be of interest to compare the results obtained in the committees with analysis of plenary sessions, in order to better understand groups’ and MEPs’ behaviour inside the EP.

Finally, in order to have a more complete understanding of committees’ changing patterns of behaviour and modes of functioning, it would be of interest to further investigate the other two categories of committees’ behaviour as presented by Ripoll Servent (2012), namely inter-institutional relations and policy outcome (in terms of number and content of amendments and percentage of amendments present in the final text).

All in all, the contribution of this work is threefold: First of all, it is the first comparative analysis concerning the impact of co-decision on standing committees’ behavioural patterns. So far, the sole attempt in this sense has been Ripoll-Servent’s work on LIBE (Ripoll Servent, 2012), which took into account only one committee (lacking therefore a comparative perspective) in a period of time (2004-2009) when the EP had not turned completely to co-decision, and therefore presented what the author herself labels as “dual behaviour” (Ripoll Servent, 2012, p.68).

Secondly, this study is the first to look at patterns of behaviour of those committees that turned to co-decision after the entry into force of the ToL. As also underlined by Ripoll Servent, “the process undergone by the [LIBE] committee can be used as a case study for changes likely to occur in other committees after the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon” (Ripoll Servent, 2012, p.68). This study allowed for a first assessment of the impact that this major change has had on the internal structure of EP’s standing committees, shedding some light for the first time on the effect of the ToL on the patterns of behaviour and modes of functioning of those committees endowed with co-decision powers.

Finally, this study is the first to have gathered and analysed original data on voting inside those committees that turned to co-decision after the entry into force of the ToL. This element has allowed for a preliminary assessment of certain specific features, such as participation to the vote, coalition-building and groups’ cohesion, in those committees that turned to co-decision after the ToL.

To conclude, this work has begun to analyse an aspect of the EP, and in particular of its internal standing committees, this far little scrutinized. Relevant and original data on committees’ voting behaviour were collected, analysed and discussed, paving the way for further research in the field of the EP’s standing committees.

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