



Euro-legislators' perspective on Turkey: Easier said than done...

BETAM WORKING PAPER SERIES #008

AUGUST 2012



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Stefano Braghioli²

Abstract

This paper examines the way in which the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) frame Turkey and how it affects their voting stance towards Ankara in the parliamentary debates. Recent studies (Baldwin 2005; Braghioli 2012; Canan-Sokullu 2011) have demonstrated that the “Turkey discourse” and the issue of Turkish European Union (EU) membership produce a very divisive impact on the voting dynamics and voting alignments in the European Parliament (EP). Given its national and political significance, the issue has a high divisive potential that might sensibly affect MEPs' individual behaviour.

The parliamentary positions on Ankara's European ambitions range from enthusiastic support to open Turkophobia. What is even more striking is the wide variety of individual positions generally identifiable within the same political/ideological area. The same might be said with respect to the impact of MEPs' nationality and domestic traditions. In this respect, the “Turkey discourse” emerges as a cross-cleavage and at the same time highly salient issue. To what extent are MEPs' different perceptions and representations of Turkey reflected in the way they vote when Turkey is at stake in the EP? And, what is the impact of this state of things on groups' internal cohesion?

In this paper we will try to address these questions. Therefore, we will first present how MEPs look at Turkey and how they vote when Turkey-related votes are at stake. We will then cross these two dimensions to assess the level of match between legislators' feelings and actual voting behaviour at the individual level. Two different sources of data will be used in the analysis. In order to capture MEPs' perceptions of Turkey elite survey data will be used, while MEPs' voting behaviour will be assessed in the light of their expressed votes.

This will allow us to assess MEPs' *liberté de manœuvre* vis-à-vis their respective political group (and national delegation) and the identification of pragmatic or idealistic/identitarian behavioural styles affecting their voting decisions.

¹This research has been carried out at the Bahçeşehir University Center for Economic and Social Research (BETAM) with the economic support of the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK), under the provisions of the 2216 - Research Fellowship Program for Foreign Citizens (ref. B.02.1.TBT.0.06.01-216.01-5/282).

²Stefano Braghioli is a guest researcher at Betam. He is also a post-doctoral Research Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Political Change (CIRCaP), University of Siena and Yggdrasil fellow at the ARENA Centre for European Studies, University of Oslo. He holds a PhD in Comparative and European Politics from the University of Siena.
stefano.braghioli@gmail.com

Defining the setting and the actors

When the European Council decided unanimously to start accession negotiations with Turkey in December 2004, the decision was firmly by the EP, with 407 votes in favour and 262 against³.

Despite the promising start of the negotiations, within a few months the EU's commitment lost momentum and Turkey was increasingly confronted with the open opposition of a number of member states. According to the Independent Commission on Turkey (2009), 'in several countries such public discourse coincided with elections, giving the impression that domestic political calculations were involved'. At the same time, the functional use of the "Turkey discourse" gained ground also among mainstream parties both at the national and EP level. As witnessed by Nicholas Sarkozy and Angela Merkel's recent remarks negative towards Turkey's accession, ideological and/or functional opposition towards Ankara's EU ambitions has increasingly emerged as a practical short-cut to convey popular concerns about immigration, unemployment, multiculturalism, and Islam (McLaren 2007).

The growing scepticism is reflected by the new Negotiating Framework formally agreed by the Luxembourg European Council and endorsed by the EP in 2006. While accession is defined as "the shared objective of the negotiations", the negotiations are defined as "an open-ended process, the outcome of which cannot be guaranteed beforehand" (European Commission 2005).

Following the formal redefinition of Turkey's accession prospects, some national governments argued in favour of a 'privileged partnership' or 'special relationship' rather than full membership. They emphasized the exceptionality of the Turkish case if compared to the other waves of enlargement.

So far, only few, non-mainstream, EP parties are openly against Ankara's EU membership, while a majority of EP parties formally supports it, at least on paper. However, as time passes and the negotiation outcome becomes more unpredictable, the "Turkey discourse" appears increasingly hostage of partisanship, with the European centre-left emerging as the herald of a pro-Turkey stance, while a growing number of conservatives MEPs appear increasingly tempted to adopt a more populist approach in order to attract protest vote in an electoral perspective (Braghiroli 2012). Parliamentary support and opposition to Ankara's European ambitions range between functional/interest-based and ideal/ideological stances. The former appear more frequent among the

³ The minutes of the parliamentary debate are available at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do;jsessionid=C3356102E8CABA5A5A9066FC77A2B3E4.node1?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+PRESS+DN-20041215-1+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN#SECTION1>.

mainstream parties, while the latter characterize more extreme and protest parties. Clear examples of the functional opposition side are represented by those raising concern about the shift of EU structural funds to Turkey or about the massive influence that a member Turkey would have within the European institutions. In this respect, a recent report commissioned by the German Christian-Democrats warned against a ‘too big, too poor [Turkey], with too dangerous borders and insufficiently “European” to join the Union’⁴.

The wide range of conflicting positions seems to have a non-irrelevant impact on the parliament’s voting dynamics when the “Turkey discourse” is at stake. To what extent are the parliamentary voting dynamics on Turkey function of MEPs’ different perceptions and representations of Turkey? So far, no clear answer has been given to this very basic question.

This study represents one of the few empirical attempts to look at the dynamics of the debate on Turkey from a parliamentary perspective involving MEPs’ perception-based framing of Turkey. The scholarly attention on the “Turkey discourse” has been mainly focused on the EU’s executive institutions (the Council and the Commission), while the EP has been generally depicted as a sort of ‘irrelevant other’. However, as LaGro and Jørgensen (2007) warn the institutions to decide on the faith of Turkey will not be national parliaments on the recommendation of their respective governments, but the peoples of Europe and, of course, one must not forget, the European Parliament, which is gaining power exponentially within the EU institutions.

Unlike the Commission and the Council, the EP represents the only EU institution directly legitimized by citizens’ vote. In this respect, it is not only the sole legitimate representative of the peoples of Europe, but, given its nature and composition, it is also more likely to reflect their attitudes in its voting dynamics.

As we are addressing a relatively unexplored ground, this study is conceived as an exploratory analysis towards a more precise understanding of the relationship between MEPs’ perceptions and voting behaviour in the specific case of the “Turkey discourse”. For this reason, we will not propose a formal set of hypotheses to test.

⁴ For further details, see Hughes (2004) and Boehm (2010).

Methodology

Two different sources of data have been used in the analysis. In order to capture MEPs' perception of Turkey a feeling thermometer question included in the 2009-10 wave of the European Elite Survey/Transatlantic Trends Leaders⁵ has been used, recoded according to a 0 (lowest level of sympathy) – 1 (highest level of sympathy) scale.

When it comes to MEP' voting behaviour, the available roll-call votes (RCVs) held on Turkey-related issues between 2009 and 2012⁶ have been collected. The procedure that has been adopted to score MEPs' votes according to their connotation towards Turkey implies three successive steps. *First*, for every bill considered, the sections concerning Turkey and Turkish membership are recorded. *Second*, every vote is assigned a score in the light of the connotation it gives to Turkey⁷. *Third*, a final measure is calculated for every MEP on the basis of the each legislator's valid votes, portraying MEPs' overall voting position when Turkey and Turkish membership are at stake. Therefore if MEP 'x' supports a piece of legislation favourable to Turkey or opposes one labelled as negative towards Turkey he/she gets score 1, *vice versa* he/she gets score 0. In case of abstention he/she gets score 0.5. The final measure represents MEP's average score and ranges from 0 (highest level of Turkey-friendly voting behaviour) to 1 (lowest level of Turkey-friendly voting behaviour). The final analysis will be conducted by crossing MEPs' perception of Turkey and their voting behaviour at the individual level⁸ and by assessing the level of match between the two. This will allow us to understand whether MEPs tend to vote according to their preferences, when it comes to the "Turkey discourse", or whether they are driven in one way or the other by domestic or parliamentary pressures and behave pragmatically.

⁵ The EES/TTL is a panel project (initiated in 2006) whose aim is to examine the attitudes of MEPs and top Commission and Council officials towards foreign policy and transatlantic issues. The project is coordinated by the Centre for the Study of Political Change (CIRCaP) of the University of Siena in cooperation with other European universities and is supported by the foundation *Compagnia di San Paolo*.

⁶ The record of the votes held is available at <http://www.votewatch.eu/search.php>. Only the votes with the modal voting option lower than or equal to 75% have been considered in the analysis. In total nine votes were included in the computation.

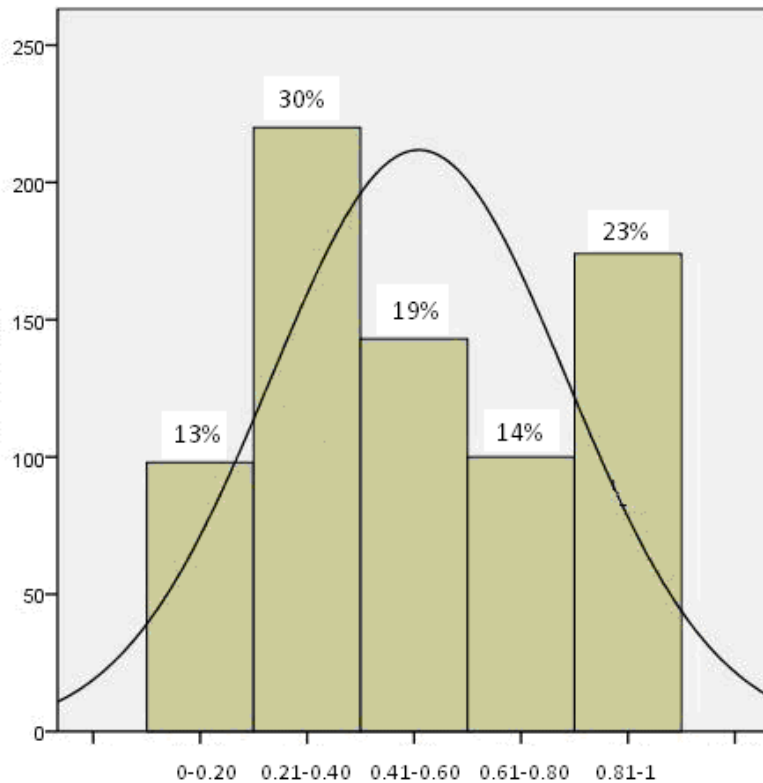
⁷ Accordingly, the score equals "+" if the overall body of the proposed text is mostly favourable/positive towards Turkey; it equals "-" if the overall body of the proposed text is mostly unfavourable/negative; it equals "=" if no position or neutral position is reported.

⁸ While the EES/TTL sample includes 176 MEPs, the final experiment crossing expressed votes and declared includes 87 MEPs for which the comparison was possible, accounting for 18% of the total.

The voting side

In the following sections, we will discuss the two analytical dimensions considered. Measures of homogeneity and cohesiveness will be calculated on the basis of MEPs' partisan affiliation and nationality.

Figure 1. - Distribution of MEPs' individual voting scores



In total 9 votes were included in the analysis respecting the 75:25 ratio, five coded as positive/favourable towards Turkey and four as negative/unfavourable. The RCVs analyzed are all related to MEPs' scrutiny of the Commission's annual progress reports.

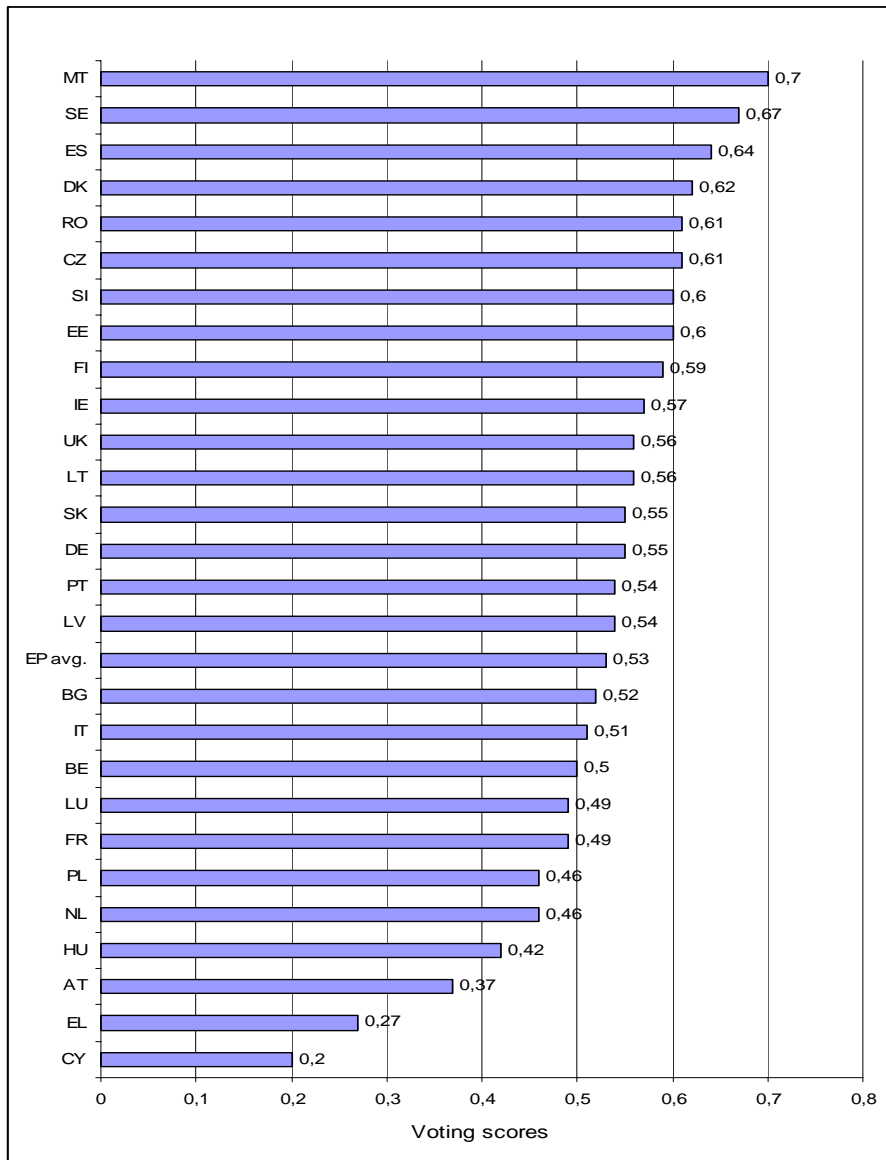
Figure 1 charts the distribution of voting scores among the 735 MEPs included. The votes clearly do not appear *normally* distributed. If we look at the two polar voting categories, respectively expressing the highest level of negative expressed votes towards Turkey (0-0.20) and the highest level of positive ones (0,81-1), the chart shows that the latter is by far the most frequent category, with 174 MEPs, more than 24% of the total. In this respect, those who expressing the most negative voting stance represent the smallest of the five categories, with 98 MEPs (13%).

Looking at the general trend, what emerges is a slight prevalence of positive scores (given an average EP score of 0.53), while MEPs expressing a ‘moderately negative’ voting attitude towards Turkey (0.21-0.40) represent the modal group with 220 MEPs (30%). The general picture emerging seems fairly balanced and the gap between the ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ group seems very narrow, also considering the 143 MEPs that fall in the median category (19%).

Figure 2 represents the average voting scores by country. Also in the light of the great domestic political salience of Turkey’s EU accession in many member states, the results presented witness a significant level of variance among the national delegations. A 50% gap emerges between the delegation expressing the most negative connotation and the delegation expressing the most positive one.

Against an average EP score of 0.53 (denoting a fair balance of negative and positive votes), the member states presenting the lowest rank score respectively 0.2 (Cyprus) and 0.27 (Greece). It is worth noting that if we ignore these two outliers the gap narrows to 33%. While it is no surprise that Nicosia and, to a lesser extent, Athens’ delegations present a cold voting stance towards Turkey, more puzzling are the other low scoring delegations. In total, only seven out of 27 delegations are characterized by a majority of negative expressed votes. Among them it is worth mentioning the Austrian (0.37), the Hungarian (0.42), the Dutch and the Polish (0.46), and the French (0.49) delegations.

Figure 2. - Distribution of average voting scores by national delegations



While in the case of the Austrian, French, and Dutch MEPs the cold voting stance seem to reflect long lasting negative bias towards Ankara's membership, often fuelled by the presence of relevant migrant communities from Turkey (McLaren 2007), more confusing appear the cases of the Hungarian and Polish delegations. In this case the average negative factors are possibly determined by incidental factors that will be possibly clarified by the analysis of the inter-group variance.

Interestingly, the German delegation (0.55) appears not only characterized by a majority of positive expressed votes, but it also scores higher than the EP average. The Scandinavian MEPs and those from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) express the most favourable voting stance towards Turkey, along with Mediterranean Spaniards (0.64) and Maltese (0.7). The political support of Nordic countries such as Sweden (0.67), Denmark (0.62), and Finland (0.59) to Ankara's European

ambitions has been well documented in a number of studies (Adam and Moutos 2005; Müftüler-Bac and McLaren 2003) and our data seem to confirm the same Turkey-friendly stance in the voting dynamics of the Scandinavian delegations. On the other hand, the high scores of most of the CEE delegations – Romanian and Czech (0.61), Slovenian and Estonian (0.6) MEPs – seem due to the well documented phenomenon of *enlargement solidarity* (Falkner and Treib 2008; Rahman 2008; Zielonka 2002).

Figure 3. - Distribution of average voting scores by group

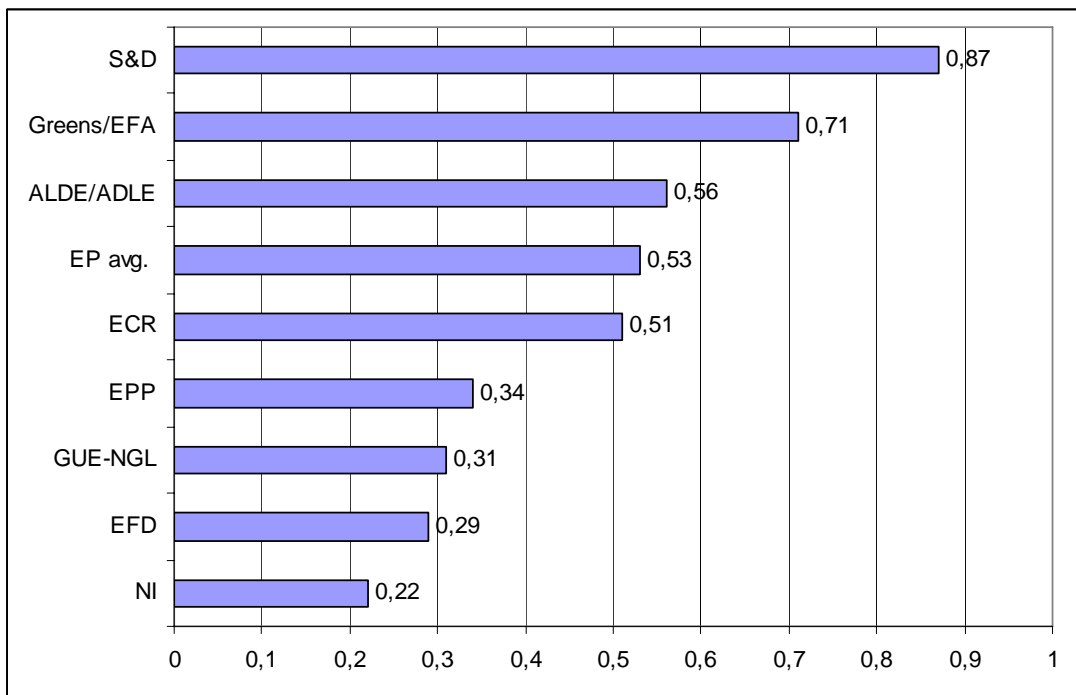


Figure 3 charts the average voting scores distribution by political group. A number of recent studies (Hix and Noury 2009; Rasmussen 2008) have demonstrated that votes in the EP are generally expressed along political lines, rather than national ones. Other studies claim that the political groups in the EP also represent the main source of discipline when it comes to MEPs' individual voting behaviour as mirrored by the very high level of cohesion in the Parliament (Hix 2002). In this respect, the results presented above appear very relevant.

A point that emerges clearly from the figure above is that MEPs' voting stance towards Turkey seems to reflect a very evident left-right divide, thereby presenting a clear ideological/partisan connotation. Worth noting is that the range between the parliamentary group expressing the most negative stance and the group expressing the most positive one equals 75% and is therefore far larger than in the case of the national delegations discussed above. In this respect we can divide the

political groups in the EP in three clusters. The *right* side of the political spectrum (including extreme right, eurosceptic right, and moderate-conservative European People's Party⁹) presents scores far below the EP average, thereby reflecting a majority of negative expressed votes. The *centre* of the spectrum - including liberal-democrats (ALDE) and democratic eurosceptic affiliated to the group of the European Conservatives and Reformers (ECR) – presents scores aligned to the EP average, thereby suggesting a combination of different voting options and a less ideological approach for the centrist groups. The *left* side of the political spectrum – including the social-democrats (S&D) and the Greens – presents the highest scores and the highest level of Turkey-friendly votes.

Looking at the scores of the groups, two relevant exceptions seem to emerge with respect to the ideological characterization of the Turkey-related votes. In particular, the radical left and the democratic eurosceptics seem to present a relevant mismatch in this respect. The radical leftist group of the European United Left–Nordic Green Left (GUE-NGL) presents extremely low voting scores (0.31), comparable to the radical and eurosceptic right. This seems to be due to two specific factors. On the one hand, it is worth mentioning the long lasting support expressed by many constituent parties for the Kurdish cause which is reflected by a widespread functional opposition towards Turkey and its alleged assimilation and repression campaigns (Günes-Ayata 2003). Another important factor that contributes to explain the exceptionality of the group is represented by the key relevance of the Cypriot communist delegation within the GUE-NGL. In this respect, despite the limited size, the Cypriot communists express the only head of government from the ranks of the GUE-NGL, thereby making the Cyprus-issue a very sensitive one for the group.

In the case of the eurosceptic ECR the relatively high scores recorded seem due to their strong support for a faster enlargement strategy for the EU as way to make the Union more plural and to weaken its alleged federal character. In this respect, the conservatives' support for Turkish membership seems therefore functional.

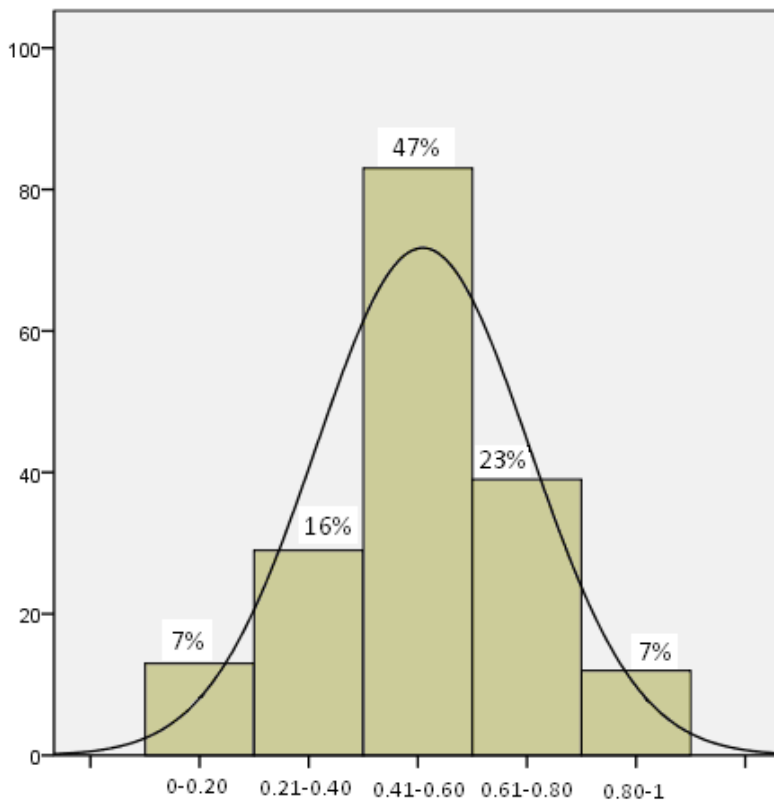
The elite opinion side

Figure 4 charts the distribution of perception scores among the 176 MEPs included in the 2009 European Elite Survey. In this case, the MEPs appear more *normally* distributed than in the case of

⁹ Interestingly the moderate EPP, with a score of 0.34 presents a level of voting scepticism very close to the non-attached extreme right MEPs (0.22) and to the Eurosceptic right (0.29).

the voting scores presented in the previous section. In terms of connotation of Turkey, the declared opinions appear positively-oriented. In this case, while the two negative categories (0-0.20 and 0.21-0.40) account for 24% of the total, the percentage grows to 29% if we consider the two positive categories.

Figure 4. - Distribution of MEPs' individual scores in the feelings thermometer

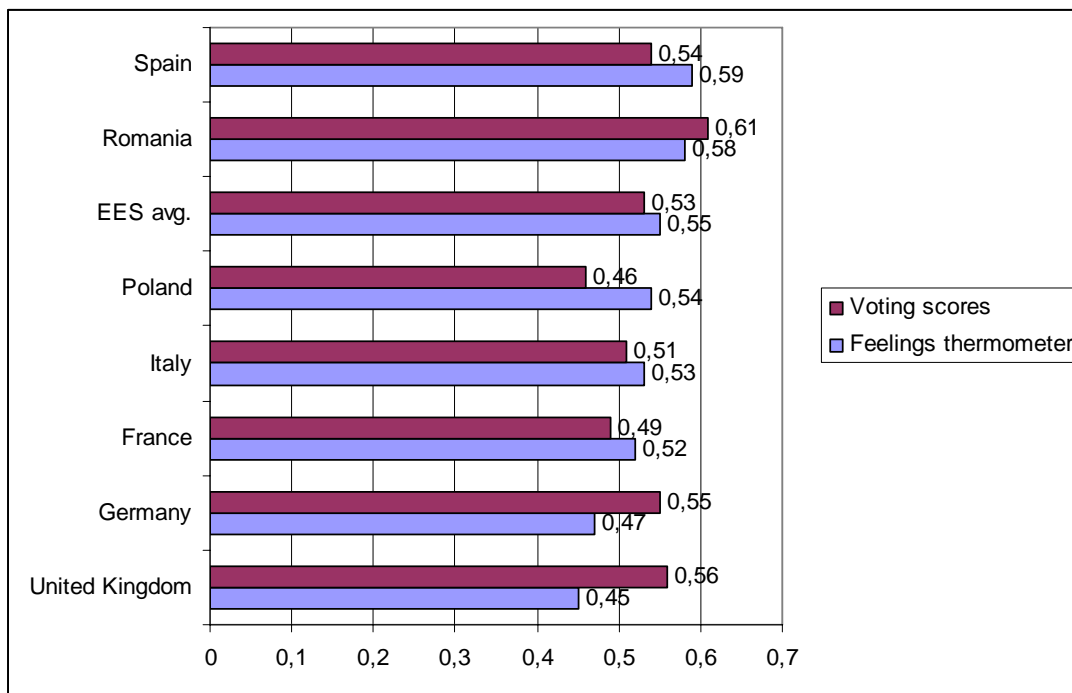


Moreover, what emerges as the most relevant difference in comparison to the distribution of voting scores is that the modal group in the elite opinion distribution is represented by the central category (0.41-0.60) capturing neutral or moderate scores in the feelings thermometer and accounting for 47% of the total. In general, we can therefore say that not only the declared opinions appear on average more *normal* than the expressed votes, but also more moderate and less polarized.

Figure 5 charts national delegations' average declared feelings towards Turkey and compare them with their average voting scores presented above. Only the national delegations with at least 10 interviewees were included in the computation in order to grant a fair degree of generalization. Moreover, for the same reason, the distributions presented have been weighted according to the relative size of each party in the respective national delegation.

If we compare MEPs' image of Turkey with their actual voting scores in the 7 largest delegations included, no major mismatch seems to emerge. Moreover, all scores do not distance themselves too much from the average (0.55) and the gap between the most friendly delegation and the most negative one is much more narrow than in the case of the expressed votes, thereby equalling 14%. Interestingly, in most of the national cohorts the gap between declared perceptions and expressed votes is of a few decimals. This is the case in the Spanish (+5%), Romanian (-3%), Italian (+2%), and French (+3%) delegations. In these cases, MEPs' image of Turkey seems to almost perfectly reflect the way they vote.

Figure 5. - Distribution of average scores in the feelings thermometer by national delegations



Partial exceptions to this state of things are represented by the British, German, and Polish delegations. More specifically, in the case of the Polish delegation, the image of Turkey that representatives have in mind is more positive than the one that emerges from the voting scores. The positive mismatch emerged appears consistent and it equals 8%. On the other hand, in the German and British cases, MEPs' representation of Turkey is much more negative than their actual voting behaviour. Moreover, in both cases their voting scores suggest a moderately-positive attitude (respectively 0.55 and 0.56), while their declared opinions highlight the existence of moderately-negative attitudes (respectively 0.47 and 0.45), thereby confirming the existence of a negative mismatch. The existence of relevant mismatches appears – among the others – related to the high

voting cohesion achieved within the major group which seem to induce pragmatic, rather than idealistic behavioural styles in the affiliated MEPs.

Figure 6 charts party groups' average feelings towards Turkey and compares them with the voting scores presented in the previous section. Also in this case, the distributions presented have been weighted according to the relative size of each national party in the national delegation. Looking at the overall picture, what emerges is that the inter-group variance is higher than in the case of opinion distribution by national delegations, but smaller than in the case of the vote-based analysis of the party groups.

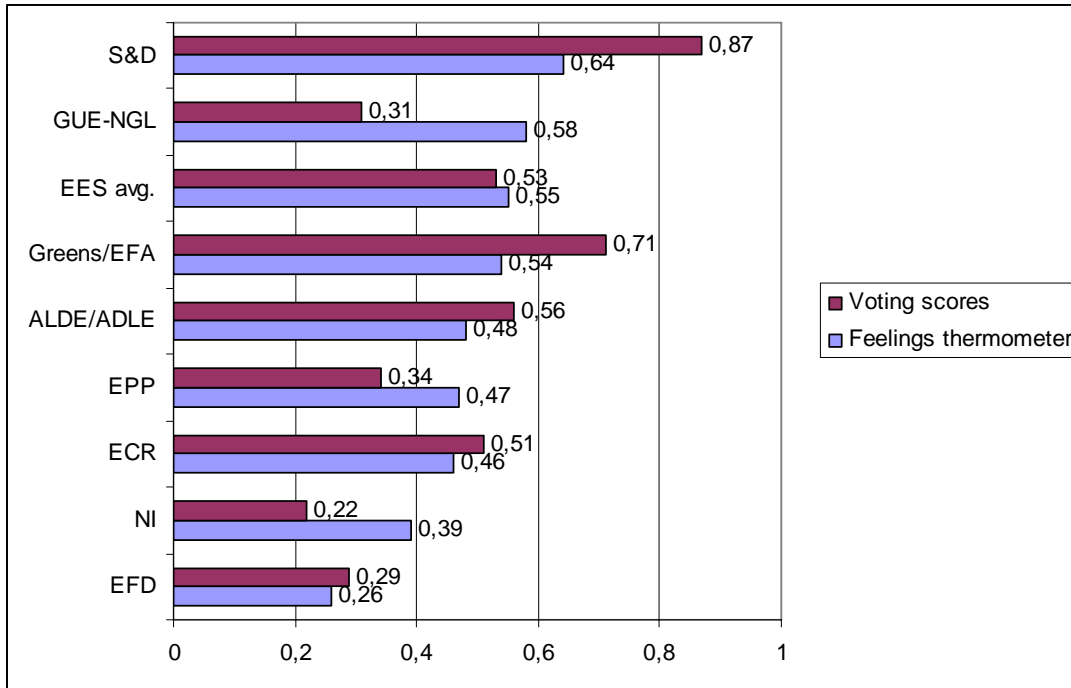
Looking at the individual groups, the most significant negative mismatches are represented by the group of the European Social-democrats (-23%) and by the Greens (-17%). In this respect, the MEPs belonging to groups that presented extremely high voting scores appear to have more moderate feelings. Although – on average – they still present a very positive connotation towards Turkey, their positive attitudes appear more tempered than it appears from their voting stance.

Interestingly, the biggest gap is represented by the positive mismatch registered among the MEPs belonging to the radical left, where the difference between declared opinions and expressed votes equal 27%. In the previous section, we emphasized the potential factors behind GUE-NGL's extremely low score such as the well-known concern for the Kurdish issue and the key role played by the small Cypriot delegation (not included in the EES/TTL sample). In this respect, many of the leftist MEPs appear to have far more moderate ideas than those expressed by the voting stance of their group, denoting a very pragmatic behaviour. Other very significant positive mismatches are represented by the EPP group (+13%) and by the far-right non-attached MEPs who mark a difference of +17%, despite retaining a very negative stance towards Turkey. In this respect, shifting from expressed votes to declared opinions seems to imply to process of 'normalization of the extremes'.

The ideological diversity in many groups, witnessed by the mismatch between declared opinions and expressed votes, reflects the existence of frequent pragmatic behaviours as hypothesized above. In this respect, it seems that a relevant number of MEPs – if let free to act according to their preferences – would adopt a more positive or more negative voting stance towards Turkey than the one sponsored by their party group. The emergence of a consistent gap proves the existence of a relevant group of MEPs who only partially follow their belief structure when voting, thereby prioritizing group's interests or other exogenous instances.

Those who have a strongly negative perception of Turkey appear however less likely to behave pragmatically than those characterized by a positive percentage.

Figure 6. - Distribution of average scores in the feelings thermometer by party group



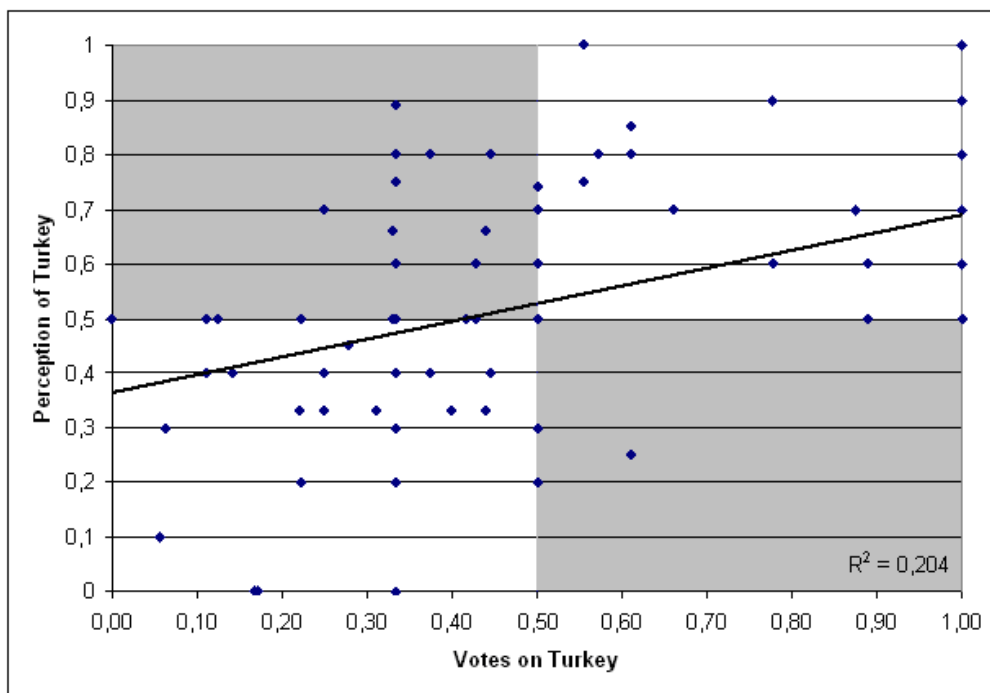
Closing the circle

In this final section, we will discuss the results of our experiment, thereby crossing MEPs' perceptions of Turkey and their voting behaviour at the individual level, after having explored them separately in the previous sections.

Figure 7 provides a graphic representation of the 87 MEPs' distribution along the two dimensions. In general, the trend emerged confirms that – as expected – the two dimensions are positively and significantly correlated. In this respect, as MEPs' perception of Turkey shifts from unfavourable to favourable, also their likelihood to support Turkey-friendly legislation and to oppose the unfavourable one is supposed to increase. However, as proved by the slope of the interpolation line and by the r-squared coefficient (0.204), the match appears imperfect and in many instances fairly weak. In particular, around 30% of the analysed cases do not fall in the expected quadrants if we assume a positive relationship between perceptions and votes. The two unpredicted quadrants are marked in light grey in the figure.

This state of things seems to suggest that generally, MEPs' image of Turkey is not the only and (often) not the strongest criterion according to which legislators take their voting stance when the “Turkey discourse” or Ankara's membership are at stake. The presence of a relevant number of MEPs in the unpredicted quadrants confirms that MEPs' pragmatic behaviour seems to play a very relevant role in the voting dynamics related to Turkey, as mirrored by the frequent mismatches highlighted in the previous section.

Figure 7. - Scatter plot crossing expressed votes and declared opinions at the individual level



Interestingly, pragmatic behaviours are not equally distributed among the two deviant categories. In this respect, the MEPs who display a positive perception towards Turkey are much more likely to behave pragmatically – that is to support unfriendly legislation towards Ankara (see upper-left quadrant) – than those who display a negative perception towards Turkey. The latter appear instead much more unlikely to ignore their negative feelings and to support friendly legislation towards Ankara (see right-lower quadrant).

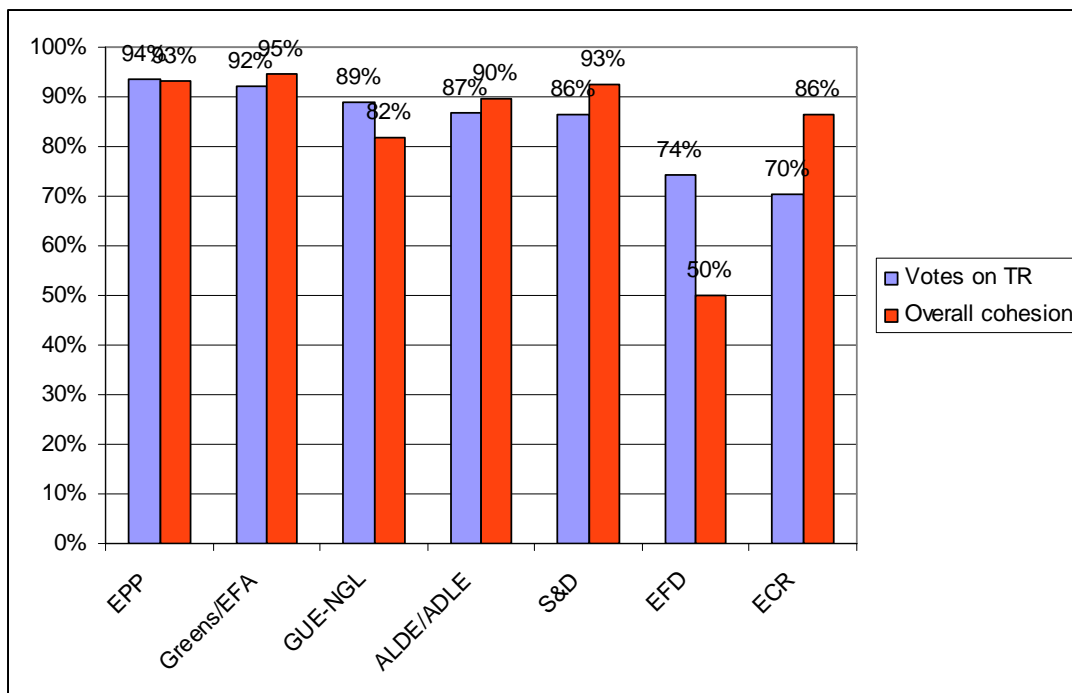
In other words, while *Turkey's supporters* tend to support the votes favourable to Ankara, but can accept vote pragmatically due to group's loyalty or national interest, the *opponents of Turkey* only very rarely vote against their beliefs and appear therefore more ideological and less pragmatic.

Does the mismatch observed have any divisive impact on groups' voting cohesion? Is there any evident difference among the groups considered? In order to answer these questions it is worth

looking at the groups' level of cohesion in the Turkey-related votes and to compare them with the average level of cohesion of the groups in the 7th EP [see Figure 8].

As expected, in most of the cases, despite the very relevant mismatch between registered perceptions and expressed votes, the level of cohesion of the groups does not seem to suffer from the gap. Particularly significant seems to be the disciplining potential of the group in the case of the radical left (GUE-NGL) and of the social-democrats (S&D) that presented a mismatch equalling respectively +27% and -23%. In both cases, almost no difference is registered when we compare the voting cohesion in the case of Turkey-related votes with the overall level of cohesion. In general, all the major groups do not seem to suffer from the ideological mismatch among the affiliated MEPs.

Figure 8. - Average voting cohesion of the groups in Turkey-related votes



On the other hand, particularly interesting are the cases of the rightist MEPs affiliated to the eurosceptic group of Europe of Freedom and Democracy and of the democratic eurosceptics (ECR) where the impact on groups' discipline is rather remarkable. In the first case, the “Turkey discourse” seems to play the role of an identitarian glue, thereby fuelling the group's cohesion from 50% to 74% in the case of Turkey-related votes. The high ideological coherence of the EFD group in the Turkey-related votes is clearly reflected by the almost perfect match between expressed votes and declared opinions, discussed in the previous section. The opposition to Ankara's membership represents part of the ideological dna of the EFD group, as evident by the words of its charter:

“Peoples and Nations of Europe have the right to protect their borders and strengthen their own historical, traditional, religious and cultural values”¹⁰.

In the second case, despite the modest mismatch emerged between expressed votes and declared opinions, the “Turkey discourse” seems to play a very significant and divisive role within the ranks of the European Conservatives and Reformers, thereby determining the lowest level of cohesion among the eight group (-16%). A more in-depth analysis of the voting defections seems to suggest the presence of a deep-rooted disagreement when it comes to Turkey between the two main components of the group, the British conservatives and the Polish nationalists, with the latter sponsoring a more intransigent stance.

Conclusions

The present paper has the ambition to be a pioneering attempt to explore the nature of the “Turkey discourse” looking at MEPs’ perception-based representation of Turkey and at the way it reflects their voting behaviour. As this EP perspective is generally ignored by the mainstream literature on EU-Turkey relations, the revealing potential of our results appear even higher. In this respect, the EP seems to represent a perfect laboratory to study the impact of cross-cleavage issues, such as EU Turkey’s bid, on the voting dynamics, given its multinational, multilingual and multicultural nature. A comparative analysis of the EP voting dynamics on the “Turkey discourse” vis-à-vis the perspective of the EU’s executive institutions (the Council and the Commission) seems increasingly necessary also in the light of the EP’s growing stake in the enlargement process due to the recent treaty reforms.

Having in mind EP’s exceptional nature and multi-dimensionality, our primary objective was to assess how MEPs frame Turkey and how this vision affects their voting stance towards Ankara in the parliamentary debates. In the analysis the results have been presented according to two criteria: MEPs’ partisan affiliation knowing that the general patterns of competition and coalition in the EP are largely based on the ideological left–right division and their nationality knowing the high domestic salience and significance of the “Turkey discourse”.

Practically, the analysis performed in this study has been twofold. First, we described separately how MEPs look at Turkey and how they vote when Turkey-related votes are at stake, using

¹⁰The charter of the EFD group is available at <http://www.efdgroupp.eu/about-us/who-we-are/charter.html>.

respectively EES/TTL survey data and RCV data. Then we cross these two dimensions at the individual level in order to assess the level of match between MEPs' declared opinions and expressed votes. The goal of the analytical efforts was to identify pragmatic or idealistic/identitarian behavioural styles affecting MEPs' voting decisions and groups' internal coherence.

In both respects, our analysis proved successful and particularly revealing, thereby demonstrating that the nature of the voting dynamics is much more complex than it might appear at a first sight. In general, we found that MEPs' declared opinions appear not only on average more *normally* distributed than the expressed votes, but also more moderate and less polarized. On the other hand, looking at the scores distributions what emerged is that the inter-group variance is higher than in the case of opinion distribution by national delegations, but smaller than in the case of the vote-based analysis of the party groups. The results seem therefore to confirm the prevalence of politically-driven votes over nationally-driven ones and to highlight a significant gap between MEPs' preceptual representation of Turkey and their expressed votes.

The separate analyses of survey data and voting records revealed that MEPs' voting stance towards Turkey seems to reflect a left-right divide, thereby presenting a clear ideological/partisan connotation. Three clusters emerged reflecting political groups' different levels of support: the *right* (and moderate) side of the political spectrum presenting a majority of negative expressed votes; The *centre* of the spectrum presenting a combination of different voting options and a less ideological approach for the centrist groups; and the *left* side presenting the highest scores and the highest level of Turkey-friendly votes.

Looking at the level of variance among the national delegations, the analysis revealed the existence of national delegations' clusters characterized by a strong voting support towards Turkey, including mainly Scandinavian delegations and MEPs from CEE. The high scores of most of the CEE delegations seem to reflect the phenomenon of *enlargement solidarity*.

When it comes to the second part of the study crossing MEPs' preceptual representation and expressed votes, the analysis revealed the existence of frequent pragmatic behaviours, witnessed by the mismatch between declared opinions and expressed votes. Our results suggest that a relevant number of MEPs *would* adopt a more positive or more negative voting stance towards Turkey than the one sponsored by their party group, while voting consistently with the latter. The emergence of a consistent gap between *potential* and *actual* behaviour proves the existence of a relevant group of

MEPs who only partially follow their belief structure when voting, thereby prioritizing group's interests or other exogenous instances.

The results of our final experiment suggest therefore that MEPs' image of Turkey is not the only and (often) not the strongest criterion according to which they take their voting stance. Moreover, the presence of a relevant number of MEPs in the unpredicted quadrants confirms that MEPs' pragmatic behaviour seems to play a very relevant role when Turkey is at stake. Interestingly, pragmatic behaviours are not equally distributed among the two deviant categories. MEPs who display a positive perception towards Turkey are much more likely to behave pragmatically than those who display a negative perception towards Turkey.

A further evidence of legislators' pragmatic behaviour is also represented by the fact that, in all the major groups, despite the very relevant mismatch between registered perceptions and expressed votes, the level of cohesion of the groups does not seem to suffer from the gap.

In conclusion, our attempt to penetrate the nature MEPs' perception-based representation of Turkey as reflected by the parliamentary dynamics, far from being exhaustive, seems to provide a useful map to identify the key dimensions of conflict and the triggering factors related to the identified voting patterns, while representing a valuable stress test of groups' capacity to achieve high voting coherence despite significant internal ideological variance.

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