Chapter Four
The Future of Europe: The View from Strasbourg during the 'Future of Europe' Debate

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Abstract
The chapter analyses the views expressed by the EP political groups on the future of Europe, taken specifically in the context of the Juncker Commission's White Paper, as well as in the wider sense of their ideological views on the type of 'Europe' they envisage. The chapter focuses on the EP groups to be found in the 2014–19 legislature due to the fact that the principal debate on the future of Europe happened during this period. The chapter focuses on three resolutions adopted in 2017 as well as the EP's reaction to the white paper, and outlines the support for and against 'more' Europe. The chapter concludes by affirming that the largest EP groups remain largely in favour of 'more' Europe but that the EP elections of 2019 may result in a parliament less united on the call for greater integration.

Introduction
The aim of this chapter is to discuss the reaction of the European Parliament (EP) and its political groups to the debate on the Future of Europe. The article analyses the political groups in the EP since they reflect the various political orientations which shaped the debate following a tumultuous decade which saw a crisis with the Euro currency, widespread unemployment, an influx of irregular migrants, a surge in Euroscepticism, growing support for populist parties, and the UK voting to leave the EU; with the latter being both an indication and an addition to that ongoing turmoil.

   Against the backdrop of this troubled decade, the political groups within the parliament changed as did the political balance between them, impacting the Future of Europe debate in the EP. Ultimately, the Future of Europe debate was propelled by the distinct impression that the EU citizen had lost faith in the European Union and no institution was better placed to discuss this than the EP since it is the only directly elected institution and the only EU institution where a wide range of European political beliefs are represented. Since much of Parliament's feedback on this issue

took place during the period 2016–18, this article focuses upon the EP groups to be found in the 2014–19 legislature.

EP Political Groups

Prior to discussing the EP's reaction to the Future of Europe debate, this chapter will first outline the nature of the political groups within the EP. Political parties are ubiquitous actors within a functioning democracy. They emerge due to divisions in society and contest elections as a means to represent the interests of the electorate. While considered simplistic, it is common to view the parties on a left/right spectrum; with Communists on the extreme left, Greens extreme to moderate left, Socialists towards the centre-left with Liberals in the middle. On the right we then find the Christian Democrats and further along, the Conservatives with Nationalists considered extreme right. Alternative typologies exist to differentiate parties, as with the Nolan chart, and European political parties can be differentiated further in terms of their position on a pro/anti-integration axis (Hix and Hoyland, 2011). It is not the scope of this article to discuss in detail the political orientation of groups, but to analyse their position on the Future of Europe debate. In order to do so, we will adopt the left/right typology which will be complemented, at times, by the pro/anti-integration spectrum, as this chapter debates the groups' position on future European integration. It should be stressed that national parties normally emerge in a defined context, rooted in a clear ideology with a cohesive group identity. These parties are the constituent units of the EP political groups, but the latter are very distinct from the former.

EP Political Groups are the consequence of the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community which included a Common Assembly composed of delegates from national parliaments. When the Assembly convened in 1952, it was decided that the members (78 in total) would not sit in national groups but as party families, and in 1953 a resolution was passed which recognised these groups with three party groups occupying the first Assembly; namely the Socialists, the Liberals and the Christian Democrats. The EP groups are therefore structured groupings of like-minded parties which comply with the criteria of the EP to be recognised as a group; in the 2014–19 legislature these rules stipulated that a party group must have 25 MEPs from seven member states. Recognised party groups are then eligible for certain privileges including funds, access to committees and speaking time within the plenary (Salm 2019). This has meant that some groups are formed which unite two distinct party families, but which then enables them to benefit from official status as a party group, as with the alliance between the Greens and the Regionalists. Parties must negotiate to join groups and can be asked to leave, as has happened throughout the EP's history, while groups also differ on their level of internal coherence and organisational structure. The main parties, especially the Social Democrats, Liberals and Christian Democrats, are relatively cohesive groups with a strong organisational structure and

a relatively tight ideological coherency amongst members (Cicchi 2017). The other party groups within the EP are less ideologically cohesive and less structured with a tendency for members to disagree on issues. Therefore, on the Future of Europe, not all groups provided the same coherency or depth of feedback, as will be seen in this chapter (Cicchi, 2017).
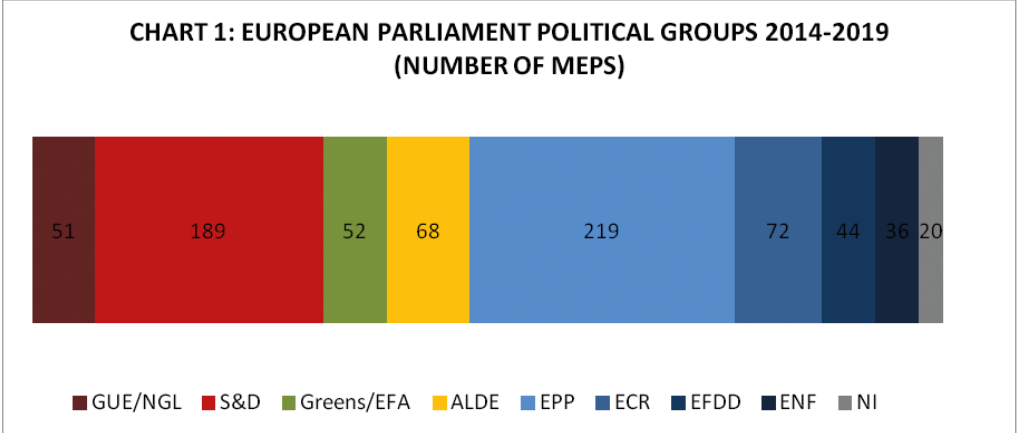
During the 2014–19 legislature, there were eight groups recognised within the European Parliament. These groups had themselves changed over the last 15 years, and were a reflection of an enlarged Union as well as the turmoil seen in Europe over the last 10 years. With this in mind, it is interesting to analyse how the groups have evolved since the 2004 EU enlargement which also saw a major shift in the distribution of seats within the EP. In 2004 the EP seat number increased from 626 MEPs to 732 with nearly all the 'old' member states (15) seeing a reduction in their seats to accommodate the new member states which joined from central and eastern Europe, as well as Malta and Cyprus. In the 2004–09 parliament there were seven groups, namely (ordered in terms of size, from the largest to the smallest):

1. The European People's Party – European Democrats (EPP-ED)
2. Party of European Socialists (PES)
3. Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)
4. The Greens/European Free Alliance (G-EFA)
5. European United Left/Nordic Green Left (EUL-NGL)
6. Group for Independence and Democracy (IND/DEM)
7. Union for a Europe of Nations (UEN)
8. Unattached members (non inscrits – NI)

In 2007 the Union expanded to include Bulgaria and Romania, and a key development from this enlargement was the creation of a new political group – the Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty group (ITS) – which enabled several far-right parties such as the French National Front to join with the intake of Bulgarian and Romanian far-right MEPs and meet the criteria to be recognised as a group (Salm, 2019). However, when one of its members, the Italian MEP Alessandra Mussolini (granddaughter of the Italian dictator) made disparaging remarks about Romanians, the Romanian members resigned, and the group no longer met the criteria to be recognized as a group and was dissolved. The ITS group symbolised the uneasy balance that EP groups often represent, namely the need to gather into groups so as to be recognised by the EP but then needing to maintain consensus amongst political parties which may differ significantly in ideology and goals.

The 2009–14 legislature saw some changes to the EP groups with the EPP-ED becoming the EPP after many of the European Democrats left while the PES was renamed the Socialist and Democrats (S&D) to accommodate an influx of Italian Democrats who did not identify as socialists. 2009 saw the creation of a new group, the European Conservative and Reformists, which were primarily formed after the British Conservatives decided to leave the EPP-ED while the EUL-NGL became the

Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD) and the UEN was disbanded. In the 2014–19 legislature the balance of seats shifted again, but the groups remained largely consistent with the EPP, S&D, ECR, ALDE, GUE-NGL, G-EFA and the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (a continuation of the EFD but having lost several members to the ECR and after admitting the Five Star Movement). Chart 1 shows the party groups within the EP during the 2009–14 legislature, including their relative size and position on the left/right political spectrum.

CHART 1: EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT POLITICAL GROUPS 2014-2019 (NUMBER OF MEPS)

GUE/NGL	S&D	Greens/EFA	ALDE	EPP	ECR	EFDD	ENF	NI
51	189	52	68	219	72	44	36	20

(Source: Author's own, compiled from data available at https:// europarl.europa.eu/ meps/en/full-list)

Therefore, the 2014–19 legislature comprised eight groups and it was these groups which engaged with the debate on the Future of Europe. By far the largest was the EPP, the European Peoples' Party which comprised Christian Democrats and Conservatives from 27 member states (all MSs except for the UK). The constituent members represented Christian democracy, conservative and liberal-conservative politics, placing them on the right of the political spectrum (Corbett et al., 2016). In recent years, the group's coherency was challenged on the pro/anti-integration spectrum and the group retains member parties which can be classified as Eurosceptic, such as Viktor Orban's FIDESZ. The EPP is a highly organised party group with strong structures for managing party cohesion and provides strong leadership within the EP, often occupying the role of President. In the future of Europe debate, the EPP was one of the most coherent actors in contributing to the debate.

The S&D, the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, was the second largest group during the 2014–19 legislature and the only group to have members from all 28 MSs. Centre-left in orientation, the group is constituted of social democrats and, unlike the EPP, the group is relatively cohesive on the pro/anti-integration debate (Cicchi, 2017). As with the EPP, the S&D has a strong and cohesive structure which

ensures party group coherency and the group was one of the principle contributors to the debate on the Future of Europe.

The European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) emerged in 2009 after the British Conservatives left the EPP-ED. It represented parties from 18 EU countries in the 2014–19 legislature, and was primarily a northern European group with some isolated members from the Balkans (Corbett et al., 2016). Primarily on the centre-right, the group is considered anti-integration based on the concept of eurorealism and the need to reform the EU. Its largest members were the British conservatives and the Polish Law and Justice Party.

The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) is one of the oldest groups and had membership from 20 EU countries in the 2014–19 legislature. This liberal-centrist group is consistently pro-integration with strong support for the single market (Corbett et al., 2016). As with the EPP and S&D, the group has a strong infrastructure for ensuring group cohesion, and is often a key player in EP politics as its votes can swing left or right which enables it to cooperate with both the EPP and S&D on determining voting outcomes in the Parliament (Cicchi, 2017).

The European United Left-Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) represents the amalgamation of former communists with Nordic Green parties. Fourteen countries were represented in this group from 2014–19. Primarily socialist and communist in orientation, with a strong opposition to the political structure of the Union, it is not considered primarily anti-integration but more opposed to the Union's political system (Corbett et al., 2016). For this reason and the fact that the group is confederal, the constituent members are guided by their national parties and this can lead to members voting differently on issues though the group meets regularly to prepare for parliamentary business (Cicchi, 2017).

The G-EFA (Greens-European Free Alliance) had members from 18 MSs in the 2014–19 legislature and comprised three distinct parties, namely the European Green party, the European Free Alliance and the European Pirate Party (Corbett et al., 2016). Primarily constituted of parties representing stateless nations, regionalists and minority political interests, the group is situated on the left of the spectrum. Due to the diversity of its members, party cohesion is more challenging, and members are not expected to vote consistently as a group but tend to vote in the context of their party families.

Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) had parties from seven countries with its largest constituent members being UKIP. The group was a loose alliance of hard Eurosceptics and there was little group coherence in the 2014–19 legislature. From 2014 the group was beset with defections, in particular a failed attempt by the Five Star Movement to join ALDE. As with most right-wing, Eurosceptic parties in the EP, there is little that unites the constituent members other than their dislike of the EU as seen by the Five Star Movement which is anti-EU but which is difficult

to place on the political spectrum having right-wing policies (such as being anti-migrant) coupled with left wing, green policies.

The final group in the EP during the 2014–19 legislature, the Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF) had parties from eight countries and was the smallest EP group in the 2014–19 legislature with its largest constituent member being the French National Rally (formerly known as the National Front) but the group also included the Austrian Freedom Party and Italy's Northern League. Right-wing, anti-EU and largely anti-migrant, the group was a loose party group with little coherency amongst members (Corbett et al., 2016).

Finally, the EP has always included members who do not wish to be affiliated with a group or who are not welcome in the established groups. These members are non-attached or non-inscrits (NI) and represent a range of political beliefs, though the 2014–19 legislature batch of NIs were largely far-right politicians. They have always had limited ability to influence the EP and play an insignificant role in EU politics.

As can be seen from this discussion, the groups range from left to right on the political spectrum, in addition to differing in terms of their strength, organisational structures and group cohesion. In this way, the willingness and ability of groups to engage with the Future of Europe debate was not uniform as we will see in the next section. It should also be stated that the debate took place in a specific context with the Parliament providing leadership but many looking to the Commission to structure the way forward with specific proposals. The Commission and the Parliament do not always have a smooth relationship (Ross, 2011). The former is beholden to the latter as it is the EP's job to ensure accountability while the Commission can at times baulk at the Parliament's interference. That said, the two institutions share a common, political bond; the Commission is composed of politicians from the mainstream parties and the political groups that dominate the Parliament (S&D, ALDE and EPP) are still the same parties that dominate the College of Commissioners. In fact, during its 60-year history, the presidency of the Commission has switched between the socialists, liberals and Christian Democrats; reflective of their dominance of the political landscape of most EU Member States. In this way, the dynamics between the College of Commissioners and the main party groups within the EP, especially the link between the then President of the Commission (Jean-Claude Juncker) and the EPP group within the EP, also implied that there would be a greater willingness for the S&D, ALDE and EPP to engage with the Commission's debate on the Future of Europe. Therefore, it was to be expected that the mainstream parties within the EP would play the principle role in the debate on the Future of Europe, and that it would be these parties, in conjunction with their fellow politicians within the College of Commissioners, who would establish the way forward.

The Future of Europe debate in Bratislava, Brussels and Strasbourg

The Union has periodically discussed the future of Europe in the last three decades as it reacted to unfavourable developments including declining turnout for EP elections right up to 2014, the rise of Eurosceptic politics in the 1990s, and the rejection of various EU treaties by the electorate in Denmark, Ireland and France, as well as in reaction to more favourable developments such as the Union's impending enlargement in 2004. However, much of these discussions remained open-ended, and where substantive action was taken, as with the Adonnino Committee in 1985 or the Convention on the Future of Europe from 2001–03, the guiding principle seemed to be the precept of 'more Europe'. It was the decision of the British people to vote against EU membership in June 2016 that brought the urgency for a discussion to a head with the EU-27 issuing the Bratislava Declaration and Roadmap in September 2016. Focused on a commitment to the Union and a wish to ensure that the EU works for all its citizens, the declaration clearly stated that 'although one country has decided to leave, the EU remains indispensable for the rest of us... We are determined to make a success of the EU with 27 member states' (European Council 2016). While the declaration was an opportunity to show a united front, some noted that the EP was conspicuous in its omission from the declaration; the Visegrad Four issued their own statement wanting greater involvement for national parliaments in EU affairs while the then Italian PM, Matteo Renzi, declared that the summit was a waste of time (Zalan, 2016). Subsequently, the 27 re-affirmed their commitment to the Union on the 60th anniversary of the Rome Treaties, and laid out a union integrating at different speeds while still moving in the same direction. Then, in March 2017, the European Commission issued its White Paper on the future of Europe and outlined five scenarios which have been summarised as:

1. Continuing on the same path
2. Focusing on the Single Market
3. Variable integration with some moving forward quicker than others
4. Doing less but working more effectively in those areas
5. More Europe

The White Paper has been complemented by a series of Citizens' Dialogues across the Union as well as periodic updates through the Commission President's State of the Union addresses to Parliament.

In terms of the European Parliament, in the aftermath of the Brexit vote the EP had approved a resolution in June 2016, which re-affirmed the MEPs' commitment to the Union but calling for the need to relaunch the European project and to reflect on the future of Europe. At the core of that resolution was the need to make the Union more democratic while recognising that MSs would need to integrate at different speeds and that this would need the revision of the treaties. Ultimately, the EP called for a road map for a better union, based on exploiting the Lisbon Treaty to the full. The EP's contribution to the debate can be differentiated into three principal initiatives,

the first being a series of resolutions issued in February 2017 in reaction to the debate instigated by the Brexit vote, the second being the plenary discussion following the publication of the Commission's White Paper with the third being a series of debates on the Future of Europe held in the Parliament's plenary where Heads of State or Government were invited to give their vision of the future, stretching from January 2018 to the EP elections of 2019 and involving 18 leaders.

Resolutions on the Future of Europe

In the context of the Brexit vote as well as the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, the EP adopted three resolutions in February 2017 outlining how they thought the EU could be reformed to increase people's trust, thus representing the most substantive contribution by the EP to the debate. The first report, compiled by Mercedes Bresso (S&D, Italy) and Elmar Brok (EPP, German), outlined what improvements could be made to the existing system (European Parliament, 2017a). The recommendations (some of which were to be repeated in the other resolutions) included:

1. Ending Europe a la carte: in particular by reaffirming the use of the Union method (formerly referred to as the Community method) over intergovernmental decision making in the Council; making enhanced cooperation less restrictive; and reducing the practice of opt-outs.

2. New economic governance for economic growth, social cohesion and financial stability: including the adoption of a convergence code (in addition to the Stability and Growth Pact) which would set converging targets for taxation, labour market, investment, productivity, social cohesion, public administration and good governance capacities; equal ranking for social rights and economic freedom for a comprehensive EMU; incorporation of the fiscal compact into the EU legal framework; a fiscal capacity for the euro area based on genuine own resources and a European treasury equipped with the ability to borrow; the creation of an EU Finance Minister (responsible for the operation of the EMS); the enabling of the EMS to act as first lender of last resort for financial institutions under the ECB's supervision; ensuring the European Central Bank enjoys the full powers of a federal reserve; completion of the banking union and the capital markets union; as well as the lifting of the requirement of unanimity for decision-making on certain tax practices.

3. New Challenges: recognising the need for a genuine European energy union; an EU migration system synergised with foreign aid and the EU's foreign policy; the upgrade of the EU's capacity to fight terrorism and international organised crime; as well as action to ensure that security become a shared competence and not an exclusive competence of the member states.

4. Strengthening EU foreign policy: the High Representative to be named EU Foreign Minister and to become the main external representative of the Union

in international fora, as well as being able to appoint deputies; creating a European Intelligence Office to support the CFSP.

5. Safeguarding fundamental rights: in particular by giving the Commission the power to take 'systematic infringement action' against member states that violate fundamental values; converting the Charter of Fundamental Rights into a Bill of Rights of the Union, and extending the right of legal persons to bring cases before the ECJ for alleged violations of the Charter; the introduction of provisions for referenda at the EU level on matters relevant to the Union's actions and policies.

6. More democracy, transparency and accountability: including the transformation of the Commission into the principle executive authority or government of the Union; reducing the size of the College and having only two vice-presidents (namely the Finance Minister and the Foreign Minister); allowing citizens to be able to vote in all elections of the country where they are living; establishing a single seat for the EP; transforming the Council configurations and the European Council into a Council of States; removing the rotating six-month presidencies in the Council of the EU and replacing them with permanent chairs; having a single legislative council and turning specialised councils into just preparatory bodies; creating an additional council for the eurogroup with legislative and control functions; removing the consultation procedure and applying the OLP to all matters (where feasible) while also removing unanimity from voting in the Council in areas such as defence and social policy; introducing a green card procedure in the national parliaments' early warning mechanism whereby national parliaments could submit legislative proposals to the Council; giving Council and the EP the right of legislative initiative; reinforcing the EP's right of inquiry powers and; introducing QMV in terms of the budget and own resources as well as in the decision-making procedure of the Multiannual Financial Framework. Finally, the resolution called for the extension of the EP's scrutiny powers to the whole EU budget as well as making treaty ratification less rigid by allowing amendments to enter into force if approved by an EU referendum or by 4/5 of the member states. (European Parliament, 2017a)

The resolution was approved by 329 votes to 223 with 83 MEPs abstaining (European Parliament 2017b). An analysis of the roll call shows that a significant number of MEPs from EPP, S&D, ALDE and G/EFA voted in favour. A small number of EPP, S&D, ALDE and G/EFA voted against with a significant number of ECR, GUE/NGL, ENF and NI opposing as well as a number of EFDD members. There were a number of EPP, S&D, ALDE and G/EFA who abstained, as did isolated members of the ECR, GUE/NGL and EFDD (European Parliament 2017b).

In terms of the second resolution by Guy Verhofstadt (ALDE, Belgium) the remit was more ambitious and geared toward treaty reforms (European Parliament, 2017c).

Many of the recommendations were identical to those listed in the first resolution but others necessitated treaty change and included

1. The consolidation of parliamentary scrutiny of national governments and the exchange of best practice; the reduction of the Council configurations with a single legislative council meeting in public; equality between the EP and Council on the appointment of members of the Court of Auditors; greater parliamentary involvement in the management of EU agencies; the reduction in the duration of the MFF so as to be in alignment with the EP and Commission's term; completion of the banking union based on a single supervision mechanism as well as a single resolution mechanism and a European deposit insurance scheme; establishment of a true capital markets union; the establishment of a social Europe and a new social pact; establishment of an EU white book on security and defence on the basis of the EU global strategy; the creation of a permanent civilian and military headquarters; as well as the appointment of a European Public Prosecutor. (European Parliament 2017c).

The resolution was approved by 283 votes in favour, 269 votes against and 83 abstentions (European Parliament 2017b). An analysis of the roll call shows that a large majority of S&D, ALDE and G/EFA voted in favour as well as a majority of the EPP. Votes against included the majority of the ECR, GUE/NGL, EFDD and ENF with some ALDE members also voting against, a large number of NI, some S&D, some G/EFA and a large minority of the EPP members. Abstaining we had a large number of EPP and S&D members and isolated members of ECR, ALDE, GUE/NGL and G/FRA (European Parliament, 2017b).

The final resolution was compiled by Reimer Boge (EPP, Germany) and Pervenche Beres (S&D) and focused on the lack of convergence in the Euro area and called for further integration (European Parliament, 2017d). The resolution reiterated many of the recommendations made in the first resolution in terms of the Euro, and called for a fiscal capacity consisting of the EMS and additional and specific budgetary capacity for the Eurozone which would be funded by its members as part of the EU budget. The resolution also called for the development of the EMS to become a European Monetary Fund with a mandate to absorb economic shocks, a convergence code which would include taxation, as well as a greater role for the EP and national parliaments in governance of the Eurozone (European Parliament, 2017d). The report was approved by 304 votes in favour, 255 votes against and 68 abstentions (European Parliament, 2017b). Of the votes in favour, a significant number of S&D, ALDE and G/EFA MEPs voted in favour as well as a large number of EPP MEPs. While there were some isolated members of S&D, ALDE and G/EFA voting against, a large number of the EPP rejected the resolution while a significant number of the ECR, GUE/NGL, EFDD, ENF and the NI voted against. Of those abstaining, a large number were from the EPP with some members of S&D, ECR and ALDE (European Parliament, 2017b).

It is clear from the three resolutions that the majority of MEPs were in favour of the concept of 'more Europe'; more in terms of designating new areas for EU competence, such as defence and taxation, more power for those areas where the EU already had competence, as with the single currency, a simplified institutional structure with a distinct federal slant which saw greater powers for the European Parliament, a diminished role for the MSs by restricting their veto power (as well as the creation of the concept of European referendums) while also pushing for the Commission's recognition as the Union's government with the Council and the EP as the Union's legislative branch. Not surprisingly, this distinct federal orientation gained the principal support from the left-wing groups within parliament, in particular the S&D and G/EFA while ALDE and the EPP showed marked support. Not surprisingly, nearly all the other groups heavily opposed the resolutions which called for more Europe but also a large number of EPP members were unhappy with them and voted against, in particular the second resolution which was drafted by one of the EP's most ardent federalists, ALDE's Guy Verhofstadt. Ultimately the EPP is less cohesive on the pro/anti-integration question, and several constituent parties, such as FIDESZ, are against further integration and opposed all three resolutions as did the all Maltese MEPs who all voted against, irrespective of political orientation. It was clear therefore that, in discussing the Future of the Union, that the mainstream groups were largely in favour of 'more Europe' while the peripheral groups were heavily opposed, both left and right.

Plenary Debate on the Commission's White Paper

The Commission published its White Paper on the Future of Europe on 1 March 2017, with Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker addressing the EP plenary on the same day. From the initial reaction within the EP, a clear division was seen with some welcoming the five scenarios outlined by the Commission while others preferred one clear plan and bemoaned the lack of concrete examples: 'you are playing into the hands of all those who want to weaken the European Union or even get rid of it' (S&D Leader Gianni Pittella) (European Parliament, 2017e). Further afield there were calls for the Union to do less but do things more efficiently (Ulrike Trebesius of the ECR) while Patrick Le Hyaric (GUE) advocated a new scenario, a bottom-up political system where the people could be represented better (European Parliament, 2017e). More negatively, Vicky Maeijie (ENF) noted 'we in the Netherlands said no to the European constitution, no to the trade agreement with Ukraine, and it is time we said no to Europe' (European Parliament, 2017e).

In statements issued during and after the plenary, the EPP was the most positive: 'President Juncker's White Paper on the Future of Europe also comes at the right moment for the European centre-right. The EPP stands committed to participate in this reflection process, ready with its own initiatives to make Europe better for its people… Separating banks from states to ensure that never again taxpayers' money

be used to rescue banks, as we proposed in our paper on the future of the Economic and Monetary Union; or creating a true European defence force to maintain peace, not to make war' (European People's Party, 2017a). The S&D reiterated the need for a strong social pillar, a European fiscal capacity, a completed monetary union and a sustainable Europe which would be able to fight climate change and create jobs and growth. They also highlighted the need for efforts to combat tax fraud and the need for a European army, a clear call for 'more Europe' (Socialists and Democrats, 2017). A similar message came from ALDE with the group leader, Guy Verhofstadt, calling for EU MSs not to use unanimity voting to block vital efforts to move the Union forward.

From the other groups the tone was less welcoming. The ECR spoke about the need for the Union to focus on fewer policies and to become more efficient in those areas with greater focus on fighting terrorism and ensuring border security (European Parliament, 2017e). Further afield, the EFDD MEP Gerard Batten placed the blame of the EU's problems on the EU. As with the resolutions issued in February 2017, the core group of the EPP, S&D and ALDE were in favour of the need for more Europe while the other parties were against or, at most, in favour of a Europe doing less (ECR) or a reconfigured Europe with more decentralised decision-making (GUE/NGL) (European Parliament, 2017e).

In September the Commission President delivered his annual State of the Union address to Parliament where the five scenarios were to be solidified into a single proposal. The speech culminated in Juncker's sixth proposal, a Union of Values (European Commission, 2017). At the core of this proposal was the concept of three fundamentals: namely freedom (of expression), equality (of countries, of workers, of consumers) and rule of law (and upholding the decisions of European and national courts). Based on this, Juncker called for a more united, stronger and democratic Union, for all members to join Schengen and adopt the Euro, to enter the banking union and for all members to agree on the European pillar of social rights. Juncker also called for more use of QMV in the Council, for unanimity to be stripped for several sensitive areas like taxation and the creation of a European Minister of Economy and Finance. Ultimately, Juncker's final proposal argued for more Europe, more integration with more centralised power. As had always been the case, the EU reacted to declining support for the Union amongst its population by calling for more power, not less, with the ultimate recommendation being the amalgamation of Commission and European Council presidencies; 'Europe would be easier to understand if one captain was steering the ship' (European Commission, 2017). Many of these proposals had already been part of the EP's initial response to the debate and, if anything, the Commission's proposal was a less ambitious version of the EP groups' own recommendations as laid down in February 2017.

As with the initial response to the original White Paper, feedback to the State of the Union address could be differentiated into the feedback provided by the mainstream party groups which largely backed the concept of more Europe and the peripheral party groups which opposed. The EPP applauded Juncker for placing

European citizens at the heart of Europe's future, called for a European defence and security union as well as a Common European Asylum System, the strengthening of the social dimension of the Union, and reaffirmed its support for the EP's role in the selection of the Commission President (European People's Party, 2017b). Gianni Pittella (S&D) dismissed the scenarios, called for Juncker to be courageous but also attacked the European Council which 'undermines the decisions taken by the European Commission and Parliament' (Socialists and Democrats, 2017). Further afield, ECR co-chair, Ryszard Legutko, stated that his group 'rejected the federalist ambitions contained throughout the speech' and that 'Mr Juncker has suggested there has been a debate on the Future of Europe... but we already know it. It will be the same old, 'more Europe, more Europe'' (European Conservatives and Reformists, 2017). These sentiments were echoed by Nigel Farage of the EFDD who went on to state 'the way you're treating Hungary and Poland already must remind them of living under the Soviet communists when you attempt to tell them how they should run their own countries. All I can say is thank god we're leaving' (Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy, 2017). Later that year the ENF, in reaction to the Commission's plans for the Eurozone, stated that it 'rejects this plan which is a way to increase the Commission's influence... whereas citizens of many EU countries have increasingly been voting for parties calling for a modest EU and a greater subsidiarity, M Juncker follows the opposite path and initiates a new step towards a federal European government' (Europe of Nations and Freedom, 2017).

Heads of State or Government Debates

Finally, within the context of the debate on the Future of Europe, the EP took the decision to host a series of high-profile debates on the Future of Europe running through 2018 until the 2019 European elections. On the invitation of the EP President, European Heads of State or Government addressed the EP's plenary on the future of Europe. In sequence, the leaders of Ireland, Croatia, Portugal, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, The Netherlands and Poland addressed the EP in 2018 followed by Greece, Estonia, Romania, Germany, Denmark, Cyprus, Spain, Finland, Italy and Slovakia in 2019. It is not the aim of this article to go into detail on this initiative, the stated positions not being of direct correlation with the position of the political groups within the EP. However, in terms of the reaction of the plenary to the speeches given, it was not surprising to see a general division based on the mainstream parties and those on the periphery, as highlighted in the previous section. Throughout the session, speeches made by the EPP, S&D and ALDE were consistently pro-integration, often lauding the success achieved by countries such as Ireland, calling for greater leadership from countries like The Netherlands, and effectively calling for more Europe. Outside these groups the message was less supportive from the ECR, while the EFDD and ENF on the right and the GUE/NGL on the left were overwhelmingly critical of the EU and the pro-EU stance taken by many leaders.

Against the backdrop of the speeches by the Heads of State or Government and a year after the publication of the original resolutions, the EP adopted a resolution on the state of the debate (European Parliament, 2019). The resolution reiterated differentiated integration as a way forward, bemoaned the imbalance between the main institutions which had benefited the European Council, and called for the right of legislative initiative to be given to the Parliament. In terms of policy, the principal concern was for more to be done on migration, defence and respect for the Union's values (European Parliament, 2019). The resolution was passed by 407 votes to 196 with 41 abstentions.

Conclusion: The View from Strasbourg on the Future of Europe

After three years of debate, it is clear that the groups in parliament during the 2014–19 legislature could be differentiated on the future of Europe between those groups advocating for more Europe, primarily the mainstream parties (EPP, S&D, ALDE and the G/EFA) and those groups calling for less Europe (ECR) or a new political system for Europe (GUE/NGL) or wanting to halt the integration process completely (EFDD and ENF as well as a large number of NI). On the left side of the political spectrum, the call for more Europe included a call for more bottom-up decision making, more inclusive policy making, and a more social and environmentally friendly Europe (G/EFA). On the centre-left, centre and centre-right, the call was stronger for a Europe doing more on defence, asylum and to guarantee the single currency while creating a stronger social pillar to the Union. Unsurprisingly, the mainstream parties called for a more federal Europe, and one where the parliament was placed on equal footing with the member states in Council. Many of the recommendations made in 2017 were incorporated into the Commission's vision for the Future of the Union. Unsurprisingly, considering that the College of Commissioners is constituted of EPP, S&D and ALDE politicians, both the Commission and the EP were often singing from the same hymn sheet. From Strasbourg to Brussels, the message was clear, at least amongst the mainstream parties, namely more Europe and a more federal Europe. Beyond these mainstream parties, the message was less supportive with the left wing GUE/NGL questioning the logic behind the idea of 'more Europe' with Altierio Spinelli's daughter, MEP Barbara Spinelli, saying 'the proposals lack any critical analysis of the responsibilities of the EU and of the inadequate policies that have been adopted so far. Hence, the proposed solutions follow the same line: a mere institutional reshaping of the status quo' (European United Left – Nordic Green Left, 2017).

Therefore, the view from Strasbourg during the 2014–19 legislature was largely of an institution calling for more Europe and a more federal Europe. In May 2019, EU citizens went to the polls to elect a new European Parliament. The election was of note for reversing years of decline in turnout with over 50% of the eligible voters participating. The outcome will have important consequences for legislative politics

within the EP but may have less of an impact on the future of Europe debate. Both the EPP and S&D saw a decline in their seats with a significant increase for ALDE (renamed 'Renew Europe') and the Greens/EFA. Identity and Democracy (ID) (the successor party group to the Europe of Nations and Freedom group) jumped the ECR to become the fifth biggest group while GUE/NGL became the smallest group. Many of the former members of Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy are now listed as NIs, including the Five Star Movement and the Brexit party, the largest party in the EP. Much has been said about the legislative balance between the EPP, S&D, Renew Europe and the G/EFA; the shift in balance between these parties will impact the chamber's voting on key issues as the left/right balance has become more nuanced. However, the overall balance between the pro-and anti-integration parties within the EP remains relatively unaltered. While there has been an increase in MEPs on the right/far-right (ECR, ID, NI) and a decline on the far-left (the GUE/NGL), that increase has been marginal, it does not threaten the ability of the mainstream parties to control the chamber and many of the anti-integrationists now sit as NIs, and are therefore denied many of the advantages of being recognised as a party group. If anything can be predicted in terms of the EP's support for the future of Europe debate as it enters its ninth legislature is that it was often G/EFA, S&D and ALDE supporting more Europe with the EPP showing a majority of its members in favour. With an increase in ALDE (Renew Europe) and G/EFA and a decline in the EPP, it does not seem that the balance in favour of 'more Europe' has been dented and we can expect much of the same rhetoric heard during 2014–19 to be repeated in Strasbourg during the ninth legislature.

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