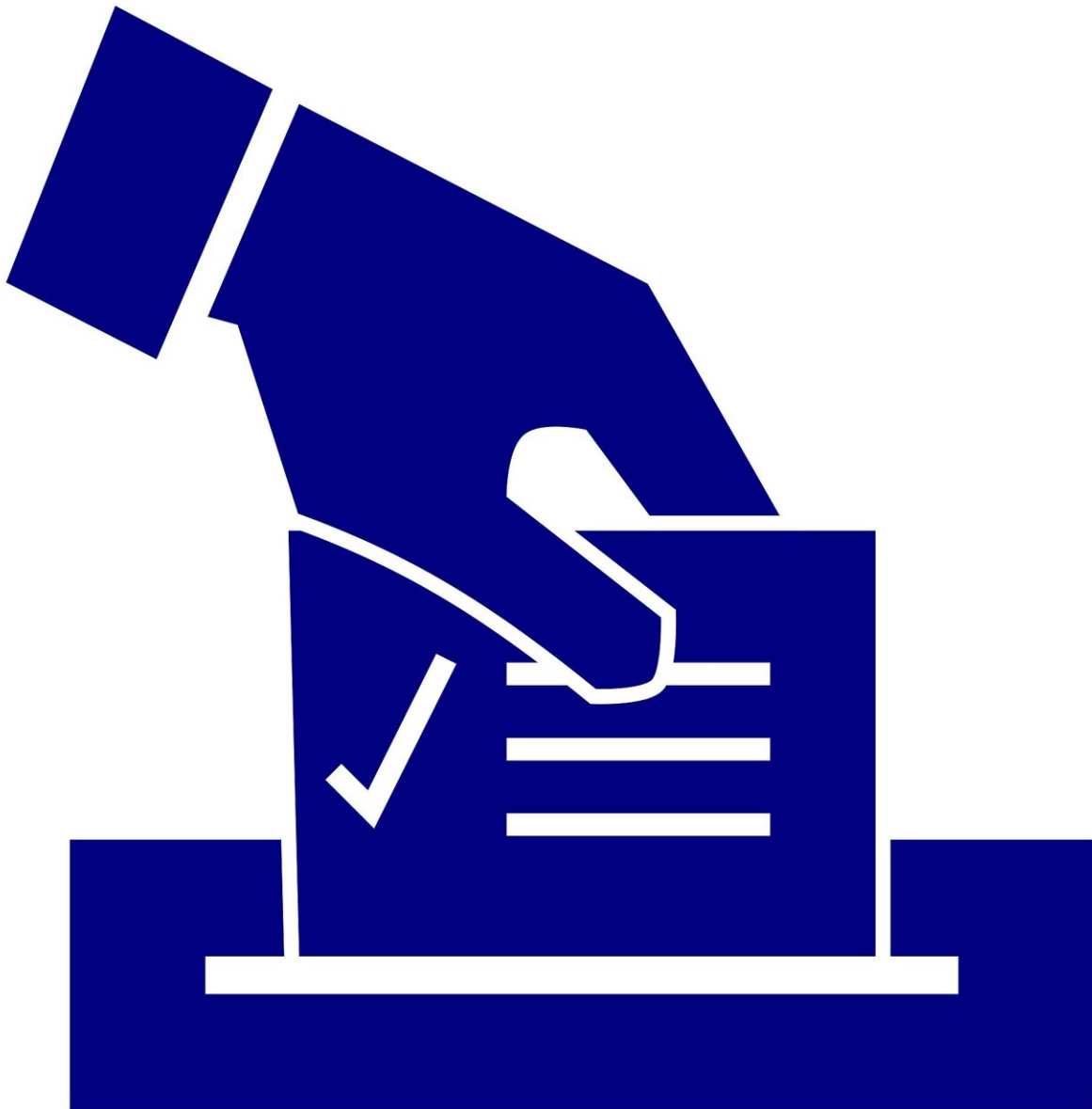


Center-right MEPs less cohesive on votes about EU fundamental values during Fidesz era, study shows

March 15 2021



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During the past decade the European People's Party in the European Parliament was criticized for its unwillingness to vote for measures that would sanction the Hungarian Fidesz government, which is accused of

breaching key democratic principles.

Researchers have said the EPP protected Fidesz in order to safeguard Hungarian votes in its ranks and protect their own interests, but this support had weakened by 2019, when Fidesz was suspended from the EPP.

Researchers analyzed the votes of EPP MEPs for 24 resolutions covering the protection of EU fundamental values between 2009 and 2019. They found there was a "sharp increase" in the tendency of EPP MEPs to support these resolutions over time, and during 2011 to 2019 a below-average EPP cohesion on these votes compared to others.

Before Fidesz left the EPP MEPs on the group had become more likely to vote in favor of sanctions against Hungary.

In the period 2009 to 2019, EPP average party cohesion on votes about fundamental values was 67.3 per cent, compared to overall average voting cohesion of 92.5 per cent in the same period, and 92 per cent for votes originating in the Civil Liberties, Justice, and Home Affairs committee. The average cohesion for votes on the Hungarian situation was 59 per cent.

The analysis shows EPP MEPs were around 20 per cent less likely to vote for a resolution if it targeted Hungary or Fidesz.

MEPs from more authoritarian or traditionalist political parties were around 30 per cent less likely to [vote](#) for resolutions on fundamental EU values than those from liberal political parties.

The research, published in the journal *European Political Science Review*, was conducted by Lise Esther Herman, from the University of Exeter, Julian Hoerner, from the London School of Economics and Political

Science and Joseph Lacey, from University College Dublin.

Dr. Herman said: "Our analysis suggests the EPP protected Fidesz in order to safeguard Hungarian votes in its ranks, and their strategic, office, and policy-seeking interests.

"We found MEPs are more likely to oppose sanctions when their party is in government at the national level, which suggests they are willing to protect the capacity of their national organizations to form alliances with states where democratic values are at risk within the EU's intergovernmental institutions."

Dr. Lacey said: "We found there was a sharp dip in support for resolutions involving fundamental values in 2015 following the onset of the Syrian refugee crisis from EPP MEPs from all member states. The Hungarian Government was strongly opposed to the influx of asylum seekers, criticizing the welcoming approach of German chancellor Merkel, and ordering the construction of a fortified fence at its southern border."

In September 2015 Fidesz voted against the Commission's proposal for the relocation of refugees throughout the Union and, in June 2014, Viktor Orbàn also voted against the EPP's official candidate for the European Commission Presidency, Jean-Claude Juncker, in the European Council. Researchers say this may have made it harder for EPP MEPs to deny issues in Hungary and also protect their reputation in the European Parliament and avoid tensions with other political groups.

Dr. Hoerner said: "Over time increasing evidence about democratic backsliding and arguments in favor of taking a stand seem to have convinced conservative EPP MEPs to support sanctions. In 2012 they may have genuinely believed that claims about democratic backsliding in Hungary coming from political opponents were overstated and politically

motivated. In 2018, it becomes far harder to minimize the significance of Fidesz's breaches or to see the Hungarian situation as an isolated case."

More information: Lise Esther Herman et al, Why does the European Right accommodate backsliding states? An analysis of 24 European People's Party votes (2011–2019), *European Political Science Review* (2021). [DOI: 10.1017/S1755773921000023](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773921000023)

Provided by University of Exeter

Citation: Center-right MEPs less cohesive on votes about EU fundamental values during Fidesz era, study shows (2021, March 15) retrieved 16 August 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-03-center-right-meps-cohesive-votes-eu.html>

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