

# **The British Labour Party in the First Elective Legislature of the European Parliament (1979-1984)**

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## **Summary**

The objective of this work is to assess the behaviour of the British Labour Party Members of the first elective European Parliament (1979-1984), in order to understand how did they manage the conflictual relationship between the national priorities imposed by their own party and membership of the EP Socialist Group. To achieve this goal, we will refer to two independent variables: the first is the political distance that developed between Labour and Conservatives in that period, which hindered the possibility to make common front in Europe to defend Britain, while the second one is the cleavage separating Labour from the Confederation of the Socialist Parties of the European Community (CSPEC), which made it impossible for Labour MEPs to be fully loyal towards their political family.

Our hypothesis is that put in the middle between their fellow socialists and compatriots, Labour MEPs chose to not side permanently neither with the Conservatives nor with the other socialists. In voting resolutions related to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), to the Community budget and to the area of defence, security and political cooperation, Labour MEPs were at least in principle loyal to the Socialist Group. However, when an important national interest was at stake, they were also able to assume an independent position, either acting alone or aligning with the Conservatives to defend a shared purpose.

This study has been structured as follows: in the introduction, we better specify the research question, the hypothesis and the group of variables we chose to analyse. The first two chapters are dedicated to the exploration of party documents, manifestos, newspaper articles and academic sources. The purpose is to give an overview of the Labour Party between the 1970s and the 1980s and of its relationship with the Tories and with the other European socialists in that same period. The last chapter focuses upon the European Parliament in the first elective legislature (1979-1984), offering an analysis of several roll-call votes concerning the three issues we selected (CAP; budget; field of defence, security and political cooperation). The aim is to find out how many times Labour MEPs voted with their fellow socialists, voted alone or sided with the Tories, sometimes even against the Socialist group. However, the roll-call vote analysis is complemented by a closer

scrutiny of the texts of some particularly relevant resolutions, in order to provide a deeper understanding of the reasons why Labour MEPs chose to approve or to reject them. The data on the roll-call vote confirm our initial hypothesis, strengthening the evidence already provided by the qualitative part of the study.

## **Introduction**

The 1974 Paris summit of the heads of state and government gave a significant input to the development of both the supranational and the intergovernmental side of European integration: on the one hand it was established to institutionalize the meetings between heads of state and government, creating the European Council; on the other hand, the conclusive document of the meeting underlined the necessity to achieve European elections as early as possible. At that time, the EEC (European Economic Community) was a small but heterogeneous group of states, localized in the geographical space between the two super-powers. The six founding members – France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands – constituted the hard-core of the Community. The first enlargement, in 1973, brought into the young EEC three other members, Denmark, Ireland and – perhaps most importantly – the United Kingdom. The object of our research will precisely be Britain, whose relationship with the European institutions has never been as positive as that of most of the other member states.

The question at the basis of this study regards the Labour Party, which had ruled Britain up to the month before the first European elections. In the period between 1964 and 1979, Labour had been in office for eleven years out of fifteen. In May 1979, Margaret Thatcher won the general elections for the first time. The “Iron Lady” will remain Prime Minister for eleven years and Conservatives will hold office for eighteen years in a row. This political phase was characterized by an extremely high degree of conflict between the two main British political parties. Concerning the EEC, Even though they had common points of view vis-à-vis several important issues, their reform proposals were very different and, above all, their respective approaches to the general European question were almost opposite. While Conservatives decided after the elections to create an autonomous political group within the European Parliament, the European Democratic Group, Labour – that was already a member of the supranational Confederation of the Socialist Parties of the European Community (CSPEC) – chose to join the trans-national Socialist Group, the most numerous of all. Despite this, Labour’s relationships with the Confederation and with the other European socialist parties were constantly at strain.

The aim of the research is to analyse the way in which the British Labour members of the first elected European Parliament managed the complex relationship between national identity and

membership of the Socialist Group in a political and historical conjuncture marked on the one hand by a political incompatibility with their Conservative compatriots and on the other hand by a profound cleavage separating the Labour Party from the rest of the European socialist movement. In our opinion, the value of this study lies in the objective to explain the behaviour of a group of MEPs that had to work in a situation very difficult to handle. In the EP, the Labour MEPs were on the one hand willing to defend their own national priorities and on the other hand members of the Socialist Group, even though the relationships between their own party and the Confederation were anything but positive.

To explain our dependent variable, that is the behaviour of the Labour Party MEPs during the first elective legislature of the EP, we will refer to two independent variables. The first one is the deep cleavage existing between the two British political parties at that time. The radical socialist stance and the anti-EEC posture assumed by Labour were incompatible with the Conservative pro-European attitude and with Thatcher's free-market ideology. The second explanatory factor is the political distance separating Labour from the CSPEC, mainly due to Labour nationalism and anti-Europeanism. Our hypothesis is that even if Labour MEPs chose to not side permanently neither with the Conservatives, given the irreconcilability of their political positions at that time, nor with the other European socialists, due to the nationalist and anti-EEC stance embraced by Labour in that historical conjuncture, they remained in principle loyal to the EP Socialist Group, with which they shared a common ideological patrimony and several policy objectives. However, when the issue at stake was considered as particularly significant for the defence of British interests, they were ready to depart from the official group position in order to fulfil their national priorities and – if necessary – to make provisional alliances with the Tories.

## **1. Britain and Europe**

The aim of the first chapter is to present the first explanatory variable we considered in our study. Between the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, the two main British political parties were located at the two opposite ends of the political spectrum. This distance also affected their points of view towards the EEC, with the Tories eager to exploit the Common Market to improve British trade and industry and Labour committed to withdrawal from an organization grounded on principles rejected by its leaders. Although sharing the objective to reform the EEC, the two parties, as we are going to show through our analysis of their points of view on the EEC policy areas we selected, often disagreed on how to do this. In our opinion, this huge political divide made it impossible for the first elected Labour MEPs to stably make common front with their Conservative colleagues in order to defend British interest in Europe.

The United Kingdom officially joined the EEC on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1973. Britain concluded successfully the negotiations to access the Community under the Conservative government of Edward Heath. For Heath, Prime Minister from 1970 to 1974, obtaining the membership of the Common Market was indeed a top priority, to be put at the centre of government agenda. Britain's road to membership was long and difficult. The French president De Gaulle imposed twice his veto on British accession, being convinced that the UK was economically too weak to join the Common Market and politically too close to the United States to participate in the project of a Europe independent from the two blocks.

In voting the principle of British entry into the Common Market (1971), the Parliamentary Labour Party experienced a deep split, despite the fact that – two months before voting – the National Executive Committee (NEC) had approved a motion against British entry on the terms negotiated by the government. Both the Trade Unions and the rank and file of the party shared the NEC's point of view. The NEC was convinced that the intrinsic federal and supranational tendencies of the Community represented a huge danger for British autonomy and national sovereignty. The Labour leader Harold Wilson promised that a future Labour government would have held a referendum on British membership. In 1975, when Wilson eventually arranged the referendum after having slightly renegotiated membership terms, the internal split resurfaced. The centre and the right of the party – including the incumbent Labour government – supported British membership, together with Conservatives and Liberals, while the left opposed it vigorously. In short, the moderates dominated the government and the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP), while the party structure had fallen in the hands of the left. The opposition of the National Executive Committee to EEC membership was clearly expressed in an official statement concerning the referendum on membership released in March 1975.

Between the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, the Labour Party experienced a very sharp political radicalization, abandoning the more moderate social-democratic revisionism that had characterized its previous decade. Tony Benn, supported by a majority in the NEC, was the true leader of the internal left. Benn, at the beginning of the 1980s, obtained the drafting of a “*rolling manifesto*”, a sort of permanent electoral program to be constantly updated and always ready to be adopted for a hypothetical general election. In this document some of the dominant Labour topics of the decade were presented, most notably the campaign for the unilateral nuclear disarmament, the abolition of the House of Lords, the renegotiation of the Common Agricultural Policy and of course a massive enlargement of state ownership. The left wing reached a peak in its influence on the party in 1980, with the election of the Marxist Michael Foot as a leader. The defeated candidate of the moderates, Dennis Healey, was supported by the former leader and Prime Minister James

Callaghan. Foot was a sixty-seven years old influent exponent of the extreme left of the party – committed to withdrawal from the EEC and to the other policy objectives listed in the rolling manifesto – whose candidature was supported by Tony Benn. Under Foot’s leadership, the Labour Party boosted its use of anti-capitalist, anti-EEC and pacifist narratives.

It is interesting to note, as several commentators and scholars did, that Labour anti-Europeanism was based not only – and maybe not mainly – on the alleged incompatibility between the EEC and the socialist policies that Labour wanted to apply at home, but on the threat that the EEC was posing to British autonomy and to the sovereignty of the Westminster Parliament. Stressing the importance of parliamentary sovereignty and national independence against any form of federal integration, Labour leaders were able to justify their opposition to the Community. This policy was grounded on nationalist more than on socialist premises. The attachment to national interest was strong enough to prevail on any commitment to socialist internationalism, for a party that since the first experiences in government had chosen to defend the role of the UK as a global power. Labour anti-European sentiments can already be identified in the first years after the Second World War. Labour wanted to safeguard the position of Britain as an independent world authority, able to stand next to the US and the USSR.

The new Labour asset and policy quickly became unbearable for several right-wingers. When, in 1980, the Labour Conference passed a resolution asking for withdrawal from the EEC without a referendum, a group of them – led by David Owen, William Rodgers and Shirley Williams – decided to quit Labour and to create a new centre-left force, the Social Democratic Party (SPD).

Margaret Thatcher obtained the Conservative Party leadership in February 1975, defeating the former Prime Minister Edward Heath. A few years later, in 1979, she became Prime Minister. From an economic point of view, she was an ardent supporter of free-market strategies. Convinced of the necessity to drastically reduce fiscal pressure, she tried to “*roll-back*” the state by diminishing its autonomous presence in the national economy. This commitment against further nationalization and public interventions was coupled with a parallel struggle against trade unions, whose privileges and prerogatives were considered as an unjustifiable brake to economic growth.

At the 1975 referendum, the eighty-five per cent of Conservative electors had voted in favour of continued British membership. The referendum campaign had a fundamental role in strengthening the pro-European attitude of the party. The Tories decided as early as in 1976 to support the principle of direct elections to the EP, starting to prepare their European electoral campaign in that same year.

Thatcher’s opinion on the EEC was probably very different from the one shared by the majority of the Conservative Party between the 1970s and the 1980s. According to some commentators,

Thatcher never really liked the EEC but she tried to exploit membership to the advantage of British firms. During her first years as a politician, Thatcher had supported the project of British entry into the EEC in a very pragmatic way. She immediately regarded the huge Community market as an interesting opportunity for Britain. Nevertheless, as it was observed during the 1975 referendum campaign, she was not committed to the European ideal as such, like Edward Heath, but just to the economic benefits of membership. As explained by Desmond Dinan, Thatcher saw the EEC as an intergovernmental organization whose sole task was to remove barriers to commerce and investment, leaving to the governments the responsibility to coordinate economic and foreign policies.

The 1979 European elections represented an enormous success for the Tories, who gained sixty of the eighty-one seats available to Britain. The Conservative manifesto was aimed at highlighting the advantages of EEC membership for the UK. In particular, the document tried to fit the new Conservative project for Britain into the EEC, showing the Community's capacity to liberalize and deregulate European markets, enhancing free competition. Moreover, the Conservative manifesto rejected the threats to national sovereignty coming from an elected European Parliament.

On the contrary, The Labour manifesto was a short-document summing up the full disapproval of the party for the European integration process. It reflected the thinking of the anti-Markeeter majority of the NEC, which had even refused to give a role in its drafting to the Parliamentary Labour Party. During the electoral campaign, the true difference between the two parties was that Labour had opposed the very principle of direct elections, was committed to withdrawal and came from an heavy electoral defeat, while the Tories had openly endorsed the creation of a democratically elected parliament, had organized their electoral campaign very carefully and were the fresh winners of the general elections held just one month before.

Throughout the 1980s, the relationships between Britain and the rest of Europe reached first a positive peak, with the signing of the Single European Act (SEA) to which Thatcher's government gave a substantial contribution (1986), and then a negative extreme, with the belligerent speech given by the British Prime Minister in Bruges (1988). Eventually, as argued by several commentators, Europe was one of the main reasons why Thatcher had to resign in 1990. The SEA accepted some of the proposals made by the British government – which were focused on the completion of the single market and on the enhancement of foreign policy cooperation – but at the same time contained several disposition related to qualified majority vote in the Council and to a stronger role for the EP and the Commission. These last two points, of course, did not like to the British Prime Minister. In the following years, Thatcher realized that Europe was starting to move towards a more federalist direction, and this was totally at odds with the intergovernmental idea she

professed. The Bruges speech marked the lowest point of the relationship between Thatcher and Europe.

As we already said, the points of view of the two parties on several important European issues were quite similar. However, their reform proposals and their overall approaches to Europe were extremely different. They both believed it necessary to reform the CAP. However, Labour asked to reduce the level of support prices in order to block the accumulation of food surpluses, to diversify the support strategy according to the exigencies of the specific territories and to attribute to national governments the responsibility of proposing structural and social reforms related to the first sector. The Tories assumed a critical but reformist stance. The Conservative manifesto for the 1979 general elections contains a clear pledge to reform the CAP and to impose a “*freeze in CAP prices for products in structural surplus*”. This commitment was reiterated also in the manifesto for European elections, in which the case for a Common Agricultural Policy within the EEC was plainly supported but the negative consequences of the CAP on consumers and taxpayers were underlined, exactly as Labour did. A point on which the two parties sharply differed was the policy to adopt on the Green Pound. The Tories wanted to devalue the Green Pound in order to enhance the competitiveness of British products in the European market, while Labour did not want any devaluation, claiming that such a decision would have increased food prices even more. The Conservative Research Department, in a reserved document distributed to Conservative candidates a few weeks before European elections, added that Labour proposals for CAP reform were largely unrealistic. For example, Labour’s request to cut support prices was believed to be at odds with the rising costs of production borne by producers, while the request to increase national schemes of support was considered too expensive.

The two parties also agreed on the necessity to achieve a reform of the EEC budget. Both Labour and Conservatives believed that the British contribution to the budget was not proportional to the economic return of membership. The battle to reduce the contribution of the UK was indeed conducted by the Conservative government, not by Labour. However, for the Tories this represented another battle in the war against excessive public expenditure they were fighting, while for Labour this was just a way to weaken the Community by reducing its size and budget.

Concerning the field of defence, security and political cooperation, Labour did not recognize the need for coordinating foreign policies, was against any collaboration between NATO and EEC and against the possibility of the Community acting as an independent actor in international relations. The Conservatives, conversely not only adopted a constructive attitude on the EPC – by proposing their own idea to reform political cooperation and suggesting even stronger foreign policy coordination – but were also in favour of a greater involvement of the Community in the field of

armament technology, as reported in their European manifesto.

## **2. The European Socialists in the First Elected European Parliament**

This chapter will be aimed at analysing the second independent variable we are using in order to explain the behaviour of the Labour MEPs between 1979 and 1984, namely the political cleavage between Labour and the Confederation of the Socialist Parties of the European Community (CSPEC).

The reestablishment of the Socialist International after the end of the Second World War, which occurred in parallel with the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), inaugurated a new era of cooperation among socialist parties in Western Europe. The European socialist parties, since the creation of the First International in 1864, had developed a tradition of transnational cooperation, which would have been further refined and developed by the post-war European integration project. On the one hand, the European socialist parties had historically been keen to establish reciprocal connections, but on the other hand, once integrated into the political mainstream of their own polities, they became strongly committed to the pursuit of their own national interests and jealous of their autonomy and independence. The priority given by each socialist party to its own national concerns was at the basis of the collapse of the Second International (1889-1914) and of the Labour and Socialist International (1923-1940). Despite the repeated failures, the efforts to establish a supranational mechanism of coordination had the merit to generate among European socialist parties a tendency to institutionalize their cooperation networks. When the six founding countries started to negotiate the ECSC treaty, their respective socialist parties organized a round of talks on the same issue. Eventually, this sort of socialist European committee issued a policy statement expressing its point of view on the ECSC project. The six socialist parties, after the decision to establish the ECSC Common Assembly in Luxembourg, created also a unified Socialist Group in order to gather their representatives at the Assembly. The creation of the CSPEC, in 1974, was determined on the one hand by the willingness of the socialist parties to present a stronger common platform at the forthcoming European elections and on the other hand by their desire to profit of the new powers that the Parliament would have acquired once provided with a real influence on the budget. The Confederation's tasks were mainly to create a network involving socialist aspirant MEPs, to give an impression of socialist cohesion to the media and to insert a transnational element in the nine separated campaigns for the 1979 elections.

Despite their longer tradition of cooperation and transnational networking, the socialists did not manage to draft a true common electoral manifesto for the first EP elections. The member parties decided to autonomously draft their electoral manifestos, attaching the generic "Appeal to the



Electorate” just as an appendix. During the electoral campaign all the socialist parties, with the exception of Labour, expressed an even vague commitment to ameliorate Europe in a socialist sense even though they did not believe that the supranational Confederation was a necessary means to achieve this goal.

Labour’s anti-Europeanism and nationalism were at the basis of the lack of cooperation and the frequent contrasts of the party with the Confederation. The rejection of the idea to establish a closer partnership with the rest of Europe started to open a cleavage with the other Western socialist parties, for example the French one, which had started to look at the integration project as a vehicle to maintain a certain independence from the two blocks. Labour wanted Britain to remain a great world power and in this sense the perspective to relinquish part of its sovereignty to the European organization was obviously unacceptable. Labour’s aim was to protect British workers and to safeguard its privileged relationships with British trade unions, on which it depended from a financial and electoral point of view. Labour boycotted the Confederation’s efforts to coordinate the electoral campaigns of its member parties and refused to participate in the activities of the CSPEC. The diversity of perspectives among the leaders of the three main European socialist parties was clear. If Brandt and Mitterrand expressed their desire to transform the European Parliament in a true supranational Chamber provided with a proper party system, Callaghan proclaimed again the absolute freedom of each national political subject to pursue its independent political and economic strategy.

However, the Confederation and the Labour Party also shared a number of policy objectives, such as the commitments to plan the economy, to impose a political control on multinational companies, to defend workers rights and to improve the relations between Europe and the third world. There were points of convergence also in the policy areas we have taken into account in our study. On the CAP, the socialist were in favour of reform, even though their attitude was more moderate than Labour’s. This was valid not only for the Confederation, but also for the two main member parties, the SPD and the PS. Even on the budget the Confederation shared Labour’s pledge to reduce overall expenditure. However, the quarrels concerning British budgetary contribution deeply affected the cohesion of the Socialist Group during the first elective legislature. In the areas of defence, security and political cooperation, however, the positions of the two groups sharply differed, mainly due to the unwillingness of Labour leadership to attribute any role to the EEC in this field. Both the French and the Germans were in favour of a stronger coordination of foreign and security policy at the EEC level, of an increased collaboration with NATO and of a more independent role of Europe in international affairs.

The new Confederation was formally separated from the Socialist Group active within the EP, although they were strongly connected. This is indeed the normal structure of the political parties present at the EEC/EU level, which are made up of an EP party group and an organization active outside the Parliament. During the 1970s, also the Parliamentary groups experienced a phase of intensive political development determined by the organizational dominance they achieved within the Parliament, whose agenda was increasingly established by their secretariats.

The disagreements between the Labour Party and the CSPEC affected only partially the relationship of the Labour MEPs with the EP Socialist Group. The Labour MEPs, once involved in the everyday work of the European Parliament, developed a form of loyalty towards their socialist comrades. Labour MEPs progressively improved their attitude towards the Socialist Group and the EEC as a whole. If the relationships between Labour and the CSPEC were always at strain, those between the Socialist Group and its Labour members were thus much less tense, despite the fact that Labour's leaders constantly remarked their commitment to retire from the EEC. Between 1979 and 1984, Labour Euro-deputies learned not only that British interest could also be served by working constructively in Europe, but also that the membership of the multinational Socialist Group was a very valuable asset. Nevertheless, Labour representatives at the EP remained faithful to their own party and to its political line, especially when they had to vote on resolutions potentially relevant for Britain.

### **3. The First Elective Legislature of the European Parliament**

The aim of this is to support the qualitative part of the research with an analysis of roll-call votes expressed during the first elective legislature of the EP, in order to confirm our initial hypothesis. The roll-call vote analysis to which this section is dedicated demonstrates that Labour MEPs refused to strike stable alliances with the Conservative group, even if they chose to support some Conservative motions on grounds of national convenience. The roll-call vote analysis also shows that Labour MEPs did not manage to be fully loyal to their EP political group, even though they shared a common ideology and an array of policy objectives, as a consequence of the divergences between Labour and the Confederation of the Socialist Parties of the European Community.

In 1979, the European Parliament was much less powerful than now, even though it was not anymore the simple consultative chamber designed in 1957 by the Treaty of Rome. Since the beginning of the 1970s, thanks to an array of budgetary reforms, the Parliament acquired a veto power on EEC "non-compulsory" expenditure, namely on the social and economic voices of the budget excluding agriculture and regional spending. Since the mid 1970s, the Council started to

consult the Parliament even when the Treaties did not require it, while the Commission began to send also to the EP all the communications and memoranda addressed to the Council. The importance of the first direct elections in developing a form of supranational party system was enormous. Throughout the 1970s, due to the actual perspective of holding elections at the end of the decade, several supranational parties and confederations experienced a growth in terms of political importance and organizational capacity. This was for example the case for the socialist movement, which, as documented in the previous section, decided to create the CSPEC.

During the first elective legislature of the EP, the Socialist Group showed a degree of cohesion a bit lower, although still quite high, than those showed by the other major parliamentary groups. The European socialist family had been affected by a problem of internal cohesion on the very issue of European integration since the first enlargement to Britain, Denmark and Ireland. Before 1973, the Socialist Group had a strong pro-integrationist orientation, but then it suffered from pressures produced by national politics intramission in the European Parliament. Already during the 1960s and the 1970s not only Labour but also the socialist parties of Denmark, Ireland and Norway (which was not and still is not a member of the EEC/EU) had declared their official opposition to the EEC. This latter feature represents an important difference with the other two most ancient political families of the first elected EP, the Christian-Democrats and the Liberals, which were and remained pro-European even after the enlargement.

The issue dominating the first elective term of the European Parliament was the Community budget that provoked several inter-institutional struggles. The Common Agricultural Policy, on which the great majority of the budget was concentrated, was another major concern of the EP between 1979 and 1984. Nevertheless, no significant reforms of the CAP were achieved during that parliamentary term. The first Parliament showed the ambition to radically modify the asset of the EEC and this is probably the reason why six resolutions suggesting policy and institutional reforms were positively sanctioned between 1980 and 1982. The “Draft Treaty Establishing the European Union”, approved in February 1984 can also be seen as the culmination of this tendency. The Parliament dealt with regional policy and with the conservation of fisheries resources, issuing its opinions on the possibility to establish a Common Fisheries Policy. A number of resolutions related to energy policy and in particular to the financing of research programs on the use of nuclear energy for civilian purposes were passed. Issues of security, defence and foreign policy cooperation were also the object of some parliamentary acts, besides being included in the Draft Treaty.

We analysed seventeen separated roll-call votes related to the budget. On twelve occasions the Labour MEPs voted with their fellow socialists, showing their loyalty towards the political group. Six times, the Conservatives decided to align with Labour and the rest of the Socialist Group.

Nevertheless, on five occasions, Labour decided to break away from the socialist majority, voting two times with the Tories and three times alone. We particularly focused upon the dispute that arose on the 1982 supplementary budget, through which the UK had to obtain a refund of its budgetary contribution. In this latter case, despite the strong opposition of the whole Socialist Group, Labour MEPs decided to side with the disliked Tories in order to achieve their goals.

We analysed thirteen roll-call votes related both to agriculture in general and to the CAP in particular. Even in this case, there was a tendency of Labour Euro-deputies to vote with their own political group, something that occurred nine times out of thirteen. On eight of these occasions, the Conservatives sided with Labour and the Socialist Group. However, like for the budgetary resolutions, Labour MEPs showed their readiness to detach themselves from the position of their own group whenever they deemed it necessary and this occurred three times: in two of these, Labour acted independently, voting for example against a Conservative proposal to improve the CAP, endorsed by most of the socialist group (1981); in one case, Labour MEPs voted with their Conservative compatriots – and against their parliamentary group’s orientation – in favour of a resolution containing new guidelines for the Community’s structural policy in the agricultural sector (1983). As we argued in the first and the second chapter, although they shared the objective of reforming the CAP, socialists, Labour and Conservatives had different ideas on how to do that. The point of view expressed by Labour was much more critical and radical than those expressed by the other two groups. Like we did for the resolutions related to the budget, we are now going to examine in more detail some particularly relevant votes.

The third and last group of motions that we decided to take into account in our research is made up of resolutions related to defence, security and political cooperation. We have selected six roll-call votes on the issue. As documented in the second chapter, the anti-Europeanism embraced by Labour’s leaders also produced an opposition to the strengthening of the EEC powers in these areas, traditionally at the core of national sovereignty. Conversely, the Tories had shown a more favourable attitude, especially on the aspects of cooperation in the development of military technologies and on foreign policy coordination. The two main shareholders of the EP Socialist Group – the French PS and the German SPD – shared this more positive approach, although in the last chapter we underlined some differences between them. Even in voting on this kind of matters, the Labour MEPs showed a certain loyalty to their own group. Four times out of six, Labour voted with the rest of the socialists, expressing on three occasions a negative preference. Nevertheless, in two very important occasions the Labour MEPs decided to depart from the Socialist Group’s majority and to vote alone. Labour MEPs decided to oppose the Spinelli Treaty (1984), which included several important provisions concerning defence, security and political cooperation, aimed

at giving to the EU a stronger role in this field. Moreover, the Labour delegation voted down an important resolution concerning shared European interests, risks and requirements in the security field (1984). The Conservatives, in both these latter circumstances, expressed the same preference of the Socialist Group.

## **Conclusions**

We stated that our aim was to assess the behaviour of the British Labour MEPs during the first elective legislature of the European Parliament. We pointed out that to achieve this goal we would have considered the following two independent variables: the deep cleavage that developed between Labour and Conservatives between the 1970s and the 1980s hindering the possibility to stably make common front at the EP level in defence of the British interest; the political distance separating Labour from the Confederation of the Socialist Parties of the European Community (CSPEC) in that same period, as a consequence of the nationalist and anti-EEC stance embraced by Labour. The hypothesis that we proposed to explain the conduct of the EP Labour group was that although its members chose to not side permanently neither with the Conservatives nor with the other European socialists, they remained in principle loyal to the EP Socialist Group, towards which they developed a genuine bond over time. However, when it came to defend national interest, they were always ready to depart from the group orientation either to take an autonomous position or, sometimes, to side with the Tories in defence of common views or objectives. The roll-call vote analysis – which was basically aimed at confirming the qualitative findings – demonstrated that even though Labour Euro-deputies had actually been fairly loyal to their own political group, in a number of occasions they disregarded the orientation of the socialist majority.

Therefore, the answer to our initial research question, concerning how did Labour MEPs manage the conflictual relationship between the defence of national interest and their membership of the Socialist Group, is that their priority was and remained the pursuit of the British interest as defined by Labour's official policy. However, they established close linkages with the rest of the Socialist Group, to which they were in principle loyal unless the socialist position was at odds with their national priorities.

The behavior of the Labour MEPs can be explained in the light of the Rational Choice Theory. Labour Euro-deputies acted in a purposive way, in the sense that their votes were finalized to achieve specific goals and to maximize their own utility. Moreover, they were also provided with consistent preferences, at the top of which there was the pursuit of their own conception of national interest. The conduct of the Labour MEPs has been shaped by cost-benefit calculations, as demonstrated by their choice to detach themselves from the Socialist Group when they considered

that the cost of acting in this way was lower than the potential gain. The individual conducts, as suggested by Oppenheimer, can be aggregated in order to understand the behaviour of the group. The purpose of this research has been to analyse the behaviour of the Labour MEPs in a context in which their own party was not only isolated from the rest of the European socialist movement but also largely unable to converge with Conservatives. If we consider that in the next years the two parties started to switch their respective positions, with the Labour Party adopting a more constructive approach and the Tories becoming increasingly hostile towards Europe, it could be interesting to analyse the second or even the third elective legislature of the EP, in order to understand how these changes affected the behaviour of the Labour and Conservative MEPs. Did the Labour MEPs start to stably align with their political group, abiding to its point of view without giving anymore the utmost priority to national interest? Did the Conservative MEPs begin to oppose the Community from within or did they prefer to remain faithful to its institutions, refusing the Euro-scepticism embraced by a portion of their own party? These questions could constitute the core of a new research aimed at analysing – from the perspective of the European Parliament – the progressive evolution of the British approach to Europe.