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NATIONAL OR EUROPEAN POLITICIANS? GAUGING MEPs POLARITY WHEN RUSSIA IS CONCERNED

The European Parliament (EP) is viewed as a normal parliament. Voting patterns of its members (MEPs) are mainly aligned with transnational political groups, not national cleavages. Yet, it has been proven by many that MEP voting patterns are an outcome of conflicting pressures and a distorted indicator of their individual political orientations. In this study we rely on MEP written questions to the European Commission to measure the policy positions and their determinants. Using the universe of 100,000+ such questions in 2002–2015 linked with MEP country and European Political Group affiliation data, we test whether one issue of high sensitivity to their domestic audiences — Russia — makes the MEPs take their nationality seriously and pay more attention to it regardless of their transnational partisan affiliations. We rely on supervised machine learning to uncover sentiment of every question asked on a negative-positive scale. Then we contrast the sentiment of questions related to Russia with the rest of questions conditional on party and national affiliation of the MEP asking the question. We find that (i) MEP question involving Russia is twice as negative in tonality as an average question, (ii) more variation in modality of Russia-related questions is explained by MEP national affiliation than her EPG. Our findings are robust to alternative methods of sentiment extraction and to controlling for time-invariant unobserved heterogeneity of MEPs.

JEL Classification: F55.

Keywords: European politics, EU–Russia relations, European Parliament, written questions, text-as-data, sentiment mining.

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Introduction

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT (EP) IS A NORMAL PARLIAMENT. This claim has now become common truth and a point of departure for all further research into voting behaviour in the EP. Claiming that the EP is a normal parliament means two things. First, it means that members of the European Parliament (MEPs) usually vote with their transnational political groups (in other words, ideologically) and not along national lines. Second, evidence shows that two major political forces in the EP, that is, the central-right European People's Party (EPP) and the central-left Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D), often prefer ideological voting to the need of building a wide coalition to have a stronger standing in the negotiations with the Council (Hix (2001); Kreppel (2002); Kreppel and Hix (2003); Hix et al. (2003, 2005, 2007); Hix and Noury (2009)). The bold claim thus is to say that transnational partisan affiliation is the strongest predictor of voting patterns in the EP, and that ideological distance between the European Political Groups (EPGs) determines coalition building in the supranational legislature.

At the same time, one needs to bear in mind that coalition building and voting patterns in the EP present an outcome of the interaction between the MEPs' policy preferences and the institutional constraints they find themselves in. More to that it has been shown by many that to a large extent these are diverse — and potentially conflicting — institutional pressures¹ that determine whether the MEPs choose ideological or 'national' voting (the latter usually takes place when national party cares much about the issue on the agenda and forces its representatives to follow its line whatever the EPG's stance on that issue) (Hix (2002); Faas (2003); Hix (2004); Høyland (2010); Lindstädt et al. (2011, 2012); Hix and Høyland (2013: 181–182)). No wonder that the roll-call votes being the primary data for drawing conclusions about the voting patterns in the EP present a rather distorted proxy for gauging political orientations of the MEPs. The fact that the MEPs usually vote with their transnational political groups does indeed indicate that the EP is a normal parliament but does not say much about how 'normal' its members are. In other words, it helps little to judge whether the MEPs sincerely prioritize transnational ideological affiliation over their nationality.

One possible way to answer this question is to ask the MEPs themselves. This has been done on several occasions since the first direct elections in 1979 (for a brief overview, see Scully et al. (2012: 671–673); see also Scully (2005)). The report on the latest survey of the members of the 7th EP conducted in 2010 concludes:

MEPs' personal ideological preferences (left-right and pro-/anti-Europe) and which Member State they come from are more powerful predictors of their attitudes towards EU policies than their EP political group affiliation. This result is not completely consistent with the research on voting in the EP, which has shown that MEPs primarily vote along EP political group lines rather than national lines... Admittedly, individual MEP ideology correlates with EP political group membership. Nonetheless, the apparent gap between MEPs' attitudes and their voting behaviour needs to be further investigated. (Scully et al., 2012: 678)

¹By calling these pressures institutional we imply that (i) the voting incentive structure that the MEPs have due to representing simultaneously their EPGs and national parties, conditional on (ii) the electoral rules used in an MEP's national state for the EP elections, on (iii) the procedural characteristics of the vote itself (whether this is a non-legislative or legislative vote, whether a roll-call has been requested by the group or imposed on it, etc.), and on (iv) the timing of the vote, alters the way the MEPs vote.

In this paper we propose to investigate this gap without resorting to either self-reported policy positions or distorted outcomes of roll-call votes. Instead, we rely on MEPs' written questions to measure both the attitudes the MEPs have and the determinants of those attitudes, for parliamentary questions are generally believed to be an unmitigated proxy for measuring 'true preferences and interests of individual parliamentarians' (Martin (2011: 260); see also Martin and Rozenberg (2014)). The EP's Rules of Procedure indicate that when a MEP poses a question to the European Commission or the Council she is under less pressure from both the EPG and her national party, thus allowing for freer expression of personal political and policy positions.²

Using the universe of more than 100,000 such questions in 2002-2015 linked with MEP national and EPGs affiliation data, we test whether the issues of high sensitivity to their domestic politics make the MEPs take their nationality seriously whatever their transnational partisan affiliations. This test allows to show how 'normal' the MEPs are when dealing with nationally-salient issues, and whether the MEPs have gradually shifted 'their loyalties, expectations, and political activities' away from their respective national states towards 'a new centre' of the European Union emerging polity (Haas, 1958: 16) or remained national politicians in their political attitudes, in the first place (Scully (2005); Scully et al. (2012: 672)). It also allows to say whether the nationality-driven behavior, albeit less important than voting, takes place in the EP even when national parties have little interest in exerting pressures onto how their MEPs behave, and little chances to do so.

We examine Russia-related questions posed to the Commission as it has been recently shown by Braghiroli (2015) that Russia presents one such nationally salient issue. The analysis of the roll-calls on Russia taken between 2004 and 2012 shows that the MEPs' voting on Russia is determined by both partisan and — though to a much lesser extent — national affiliations. Nonetheless, the roll-call votes of the members of the EP from several Member States such as Poland or Latvia are proven to be predicted by their nationality. These nationals systematically support the EP resolutions that have a negative stance on Russia and vote against resolutions with favorable connotation given to Moscow (Braghiroli, 2015).

We rely on supervised machine learning approach proposed by Taddy (2013b) to uncover sentiment of every question asked in the EP on a negative-positive scale and, thus, to extract attitudes the MEPs express towards Russia. Then we contrast the sentiment of questions related to Russia with the rest of questions conditional on partisan and national affiliations of the MEP asking the question. Our results indicate that (i) MEP questions involving Russia are significantly more negative in tonality, (ii) more variation in negative modality of Russia-related questions is explained by MEP national affiliation than her EPG. Our findings are robust to alternative methods of sentiment extraction and account for time-invariant unobserved heterogeneity of MEPs.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. In the next section we pose our research question and

²This way, written questions are less constrained by institutional pressures in comparison not only to roll-calls but also to parliamentary speeches. Studies show that different configurations of the constraints faced by the MEPs while engaging in different activities do impact the outcomes of those activities. For instance, the textual analysis of the parliamentary speeches suggests that due to different constraints voting and speaking in the EP 'provide a different picture of ideology in the EP' with the left-right dimension, that strongly predicts the voting behavior in the EP (and makes the EP a normal parliament), being not even significantly reflected in the speeches (Proksch and Slapin, 2010b: 608).

align it with the existing literature, in Section ‘Data’ we describe the MEP questions data we gathered to test the hypotheses, in Section ‘Inferring question polarity from its text’ we discuss our approach to infer question polarity from its text. Section ‘Estimation strategy and results’ explains our regression model set up to answer the posed research question and offers the results while Section ‘Discussion’ provides an in-depth discussion of the obtained evidence. The paper is accompanied by an Online Appendix that offers description of the manual coding strategy and various robustness checks of the baseline model.

Running away from both principals: written questions as a safe haven

The members of the European Parliament serve two principals. Contrary to the idea of representative democracy, none of the two are their voters. Instead, the MEPs’ behaviour depends — almost exclusively — on what their EPGs and their national parties want them to do (Hix, 2002). The incentives the MEPs usually have while in office are part and parcel of this peculiar dependency. As initially suggested by Hix et al. (1999), actions of the representatives of the European peoples can be driven by two major incentives of either pursuing promotion and aiming at filling in important posts within the EPG and EP structures³ or seeking to achieve policy goals that correspond to the interests of their constituencies. The EPG provides resources for accomplishing both of them as the leadership of the groups in the EP is responsible for allocation of posts and legislative reports within the EP committees (Hix (2002: 688); Hix (2004: 203–204)). Defection from voting with the European Political Group thus can be detrimental for an MEP driven by those incentives.

And yet, these incentives make sense only as long as an MEP makes it into the European Parliament. This is when the ball reaches the national party’s half of the ground. As it is the leadership of the national party that decides whether to put a candidate on the party list for the European elections, there is a clear need for an MEP to follow her national party line in order to get a chance to run for re-election.⁴ This, in turn, alters the whole structure of incentives that an MEP has, making it threefold and placing re-election ahead of career prospects and policy goals (Hix (2001: 666); Hix (2002); Faas (2003); Hix (2004)).

Evidence supports this perspective and shows that in case of controversy MEPs prefer voting with their national parties and not with their EPGs⁵ (Hix and Lord (1996); Hix (2002); Gabel and Hix (2002); Faas (2003); Hix (2004); Han (2007)). In all other cases the two weaker incentives prevail and the MEPs usually vote along transnational partisan lines. This is precisely what made Hix and his co-authors claim that, ‘surprisingly like all other democratic parliaments’, the EP votes mainly along the left-right dimension (Hix et al., 2006: 509) and label the EP a normal parliament.

Thought of them from such angle, roll-calls are a rather distorted reflection of the MEPs’ political orienta-

³The significance of this incentive clearly depends on what career path an MEP is pursuing (Hix and Høyland (2013: 185); for more details, see Scarrow (1997)).

⁴Of course, one needs to bear in mind that electoral system in general and electoral connection to her constituency in particular, have some impact on how dependent an MEP is on her party. As Hix shows, ‘national parties are more able to enforce their wishes on their MEPs in systems containing electoral institutions that provide these principals with strong controls—specifically, in systems with closed-list proportional representation, small districts, or centralized candidate selection’ (Hix (2004: 219); also see Faas (2003); Farrell and Scully (2007); Hix and Høyland (2013: 184–186)).

⁵The same reelection incentive partly explains why in the case of a conflict between the national party position and the EPG position an MEP prefers to take a floor in the parliamentary debate and to argue for her national party standing on the issue (Slapin and Proksch, 2010).

tions. The very fact that the vote is recorded and, as a result, known to both her EPG and her national party, makes it difficult for an MEP not to respond to this incentive structure. Similar dynamics of caring about what two principals and, especially her national party, think of her is evident when parliamentary speeches of the MEPs are studied (Slapin and Proksch, 2010; Proksch and Slapin, 2010b).

And yet, one type of activities that the MEPs engage in while in office, is much less constrained by this incentive triad. In contrast to roll-call votes and debate speeches, parliamentary questions seem almost completely devoid of both influence and interest of the MEPs' principals. Like members of national legislatures, the MEPs face almost no procedural or institutional barriers to pose questions that are often claimed to be 'the most sincere measures of what interests legislators, free from party control' (Rozenberg and Martin (2011: 398); Martin and Rozenberg (2014)). The extent of such freedom, though, is determined by the rules that govern the way different types of questions are tabled.

The MEPs have the right to address their questions to the European Commission (which include direct questions to the High Representative of the Union) and to the Council of Ministers⁶ through three distinctive procedures. Under the Rule 128 of the Parliament's Rules of Procedure, to table a question for an oral answer with debate at least 40 MEPs need to agree to question the executive and, thus, to send their request to the EP President. Another way is when such questions are tabled by a parliamentary committee⁷ or a political group. The decision on whether a question makes it to the plenary agenda is taken by the Conference of Presidents. The Rule 129 defines the procedure for the question time with the Commissioners. This is organized at each part-session in order to discuss some specific topic set by the Conference of Presidents. The chances that an MEP's question reaches the respondent are rather obscure though, as the question time is strictly limited and questions for it are chosen through a ballot-system.

To the contrary, the institution concerned is obliged to give its answer within the allocated period of time to the MEPs' questions in written form that can be posed either individually or by groups of MEPs. The exact time frame depends on whether the question is marked as a priority question or as a non-priority one. For the latter the response takes up to six weeks, whereas for the former the answer must be given in the three weeks time. The only procedural constraint under the Rule 130 has to do with the number of questions that an MEP can table in one month.⁸ It is these particular arrangements that made Raunio in his early study of the parliamentary questions in the EP claim that when resorting to this procedure not only may the MEPs 'ask questions on all sorts of issues' but they will always 'receive an official statement from the Commission [on those issues] which they can afterwards use for their own purposes' (Raunio, 1996: 362-363).

Since that study by Raunio parliamentary questions in the EP have seen little scholarly attention. The situation started to change in late 2000s. Today most research concerns the incentives the MEPs have to resort to this procedure and draws heavily on the insights from the studies of national legislatures. This way, accountability and oversight have proven to be an important incentive for national legislators (Martin (2011);

⁶The MEPs can also pose questions to the President of the European Council and the European Central Bank.

⁷One study shows that the way the oral questions are posed reflects the specialization of the EP committees with the Agricultural committee being more likely to ask about agriculture, etc. It also emphasizes the role the EPGs play in such development (Bowler and Farrell, 1995). This is confirmed by Metz and Jäckle (2015: 38) who show that these are national groups of the MEPs who table oral questions but this is done within the EPGs, thus affiliation with a party group still remains 'the main structuring principle'.

⁸A MEP is allowed to ask one priority question per month and five non-priority questions.

Martin and Rozenberg (2014)) and the MEPs alike (Proksch and Slapin (2010a); Brack (2012: 157); Jensen et al. (2013); Font and Durán (2015)). The studies show the MEPs do use questions strategically to control the executive both at supranational and national levels. This becomes particularly evident in the way the MEPs from national opposition parties table questions to the Commission (Proksch and Slapin (2010a); Jensen et al. (2013); Font and Durán (2015)). This practice is also illustrative of the multifunctionality of written questions pointed out by Raunio (1996) who argues that they can also serve as an instrument to acquire and provide information. Jensen et al. (2013) show the MEPs from national opposition use written questions as ‘fire alarm’ to attract the Commission’s attention to the failures of domestic implementation of the EU legislation, thus simultaneously feeding the Commission with information and exercising oversight over their national governments. One specific form of providing information is when those opposing European integration in general, pose questions to state their position on the EU policies or to machinate against the Commission (Proksch and Slapin (2010a: 62); Brack (2012: 160)).

Euroscptics are also inclined to pose questions that concern their respective constituencies (Brack, 2012: 156). It was as early as in 1986 that Scholl (1986) suggested that it was possible to consider questions as a constituency-oriented activity in those cases when national electoral rules made the MEPs particularly responsive to their electorate. However, there is still an on-going debate between scholars whether written questions are indeed an efficient means of raising the issues relevant to the electorate and whether they are viewed and used as such by the MEPs (Raunio (1996: 371–376); Dann (2003: 562, 571–572)).

In this study we propose to go one step further and to analyze not why the MEPs resort to the procedure of written questions but how they ask those questions and why they phrase them the way they do. In other words, we are interested in the determinants of the sentiments expressed by the representatives of the European peoples when addressing their questions to the EU executive with regard to a particularly salient issue of Russia.

Drawing on the assumption that written questions present an unmitigated proxy for measuring MEPs’ preferences (Martin (2011); Rozenberg and Martin (2011); Martin and Rozenberg (2014)) and on the data about the determinants of the self-report attitudes of the MEPs (Scully et al., 2012) we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 1: *Variation in modality of Russia-related written questions cannot be explained by MEPs’ transnational partisan affiliation all alone and nationality is also significant in determining Russia-related sentiments expressed by MEPs.*

This expectation does not, however, preclude the MEPs from expressing their attitudes strategically. Strategic behaviour of the MEPs driven by re-election prospects is evident in the higher frequency with which the Romanian MEPs elected from lower list positions table written questions to the EU institutions (Chiru and Dimulescu, 2011). Such behavior can be explained by the desire to show to both their national parties and the electorate that they are active while in office, thus potentially increasing their electoral chances (though there is no evidence that national parties care much about these non-legislative activities of their members in the EP).

Similar logic may lie behind the sentiments expressed by the MEPs in their Russia-related questions conditional on the salience of Russia to their home countries. Taking into account that European elections are fought almost exclusively on national issues (Reif (1984); Reif and Schmitt (1980); Hix and Marsh (2007)) we can assume that the MEPs from those states where politicians or parties can partly build their electoral campaigns around Russia-related topics and where the electorate can be potentially mobilized around this theme, will be more inclined to express in their written questions those sentiments about Russia that reflect public opinion of Russia in this country (Scully et al., 2012). Even if her national party cares little about what and how is asked by its member in the EP, while campaigning this MEP can still use her questions as a proof of her responsiveness to the electorate and its concerns. Thus, building on the results presented in Braghiori (2015) study we expect that:

Hypothesis 2: *Negative modality of Russia-related written question posed by MEPs from the Baltic States and Poland is significantly determined by their nationality.*

We now proceed to explain the sources of the gathered MEP question texts, their restrictions, and assumptions made in the course of our data gathering effort.

Data

Question data Lists of written questions with attached metadata (document reference, authors, date, respondent, question type, etc.) are publicly available on the EP website,⁹ while their texts are accessible by their unique document references.¹⁰ We traversed the EP website to gather the list of such questions starting from January 2002 (earliest period with full texts available on a consistent basis) to December 2015. Then we downloaded the files with English-language question texts by their references and organized them in a text corpus of more than 100,000 documents. It is important to note that question files contain author names, but not their MEP identifiers, and about 1,000 texts do not contain author names at all. For the purpose of this paper we limit ourselves to written and priority written questions to the European Commission as they represent the lion's share of questions.

MEP data The EP website features detailed information about acting and former MEPs. We relied on *Parltrack*,¹¹ an independent effort to collect and organize information on MEPs and their activities from the EP website. For each MEP we collected his/her name, aliases, MEP identifier, birth date, gender, European Political Group monthly affiliation (to allow for changes),¹² country she represents (with monthly granularity).

⁹ Available at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegistreWeb/search/typedoc.htm> (accessed 21 April 2016).

¹⁰ For example: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegistreWeb/search/resultDetail.htm?reference=P5_Q0\(1999\)0070&fragDocu=FULL](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegistreWeb/search/resultDetail.htm?reference=P5_Q0(1999)0070&fragDocu=FULL) (accessed 21 April 2016).

¹¹ Available at <http://parltrack.euwiki.org> (accessed 21 April 2016).

¹² While we allow the MEPs to change their EPGs, we do not allow the EPGs to change. We consider a set of the EPGs as of late 2015, merging the previously separated groups. Therefore, we label ELDR and UEN as ALDE, EFD and Independence/Democracy Group — as EFDD, ITS — as ENF. This is justified by the fact that these current EPGs are direct successors of the mentioned EPGs that vanished from the EP political landscape at some point. Among all the mergers the case of the UEN and the ALDE is the least evident. The group of the Union for Europe of the Nations had always been very diverse internally, uniting the MEPs with different positions on the EU and ideologies, in general, which eventually led to the collapse of the group in 2009. So, we relied on the post-dissolution affiliations of the two main national parties within the UEN — the Italian *Alleanza Nazionale* and the Irish *Fianna Fáil*. The choice of

Then we matched question texts to MEP characteristics from *Parltrack* by author names, which required approximate string matching and manual cleaning in case of misspelled names. As a result, we managed to append MEP characteristics to all questions with non-empty author names. In what follows we consider only solo-authored written/priority written questions to the European Commission in 2002–2015.¹³

Inferring question polarity from its text

There is a plethora of methods to represent text as data (Grimmer and Stewart, 2013). In this paper we consider the problem of document sentiment classification. Given a text we need to map it to a quantitative sentiment scale. While we offer three ways to approach this problem, both human-led and automated, a complete survey of methods is given by Liu (2015).

Manual coding Primary way to retrieve sentiment from a text is to read it and express an opinion about its polarity on a quantitative scale. While this approach is used in many disciplines, it has certain limitations. First, it is difficult to scale it up for large classification problems. Second, it is difficult to retain objective assessment of sentiment for all questions. For this paper we selected all 2,700 MEP questions in 2002–2015 with word ‘Russia’ and 500 random questions without this word. For every question with word ‘Russia’ we assessed to what extent the question was really related to Russia, and for all selected 3,200+ questions we coded their modality on a five-unit scale, ranging from -2 (most negative stance) to 2 (most positive stance).¹⁴

Sentiment dictionary approach Human classification of all 100,000 questions is a laborious exercise, so we have to resort to machine learning. We started with a dictionary-based algorithm of Hu and Liu (2004). They had created a lexicon of positively and negatively charged words (6,827 words in implementation of Rinker (2016) that we used). Each time a negative word in question emerged it was given a score of -1, while a positive word was assigned a 1. The algorithm took into consideration negation words that reversed the polarity and contrary words (e.g. ‘although’, ‘but’) in aggregating the per-word sentiment scores at question text level.¹⁵ As a result, we obtained a continuous sentiment score spanning [-1;1] scale for each question.

Inverse text regression approach While dictionary-based approach is attractive due to its unobtrusiveness and scalability, it is less suited for domain-specific texts. When we are dealing with political texts it is difficult to create a dictionary that will capture all nuanced differences in text sentiment. Ideally, we need to find a way to expand our manual coding of 3,200+ MEP questions to all 100,000 questions. This can be done by learning the coded relationship between words and sentiment on a train set of coded questions and formulating a

the EPP for the Italian MEPs from the *Alleanza Nazionale* was predetermined due to domestic merger with *Popolo della Libertà*. On the contrary, the MEPs from the *Fianna Fáil* were free to choose their subsequent affiliation and chose to join the ALDE group. Respectively, we have also merged the UEN with the ALDE. More to that, the tonality of the Russia-related questions posed by the MEPs from these two groups have always been rather similar.

¹³In Online Appendix A.II (Figure A.1) we show that our results are robust to the inclusion of multiply-authored questions.

¹⁴See Online Appendix A.I for a full description of our coding effort.

¹⁵The original algorithm of Hu and Liu (2004) operated at sentence level, computing sentiment for each sentence separately. We decided to work at question level, not splitting the texts into sentences and treating each question as one long sentence.

prediction of sentiment for the remainder of questions based on their texts. For this, we used a multinomial inverse regression approach of Taddy (2013b).

First, for each question text $i \in (1, \dots, N)$ in the corpus of N questions we counted the number of times each unique word stems $m \in (1, \dots, M)$ occurred in this question full text: $\mathbf{v}_i = (w_{i,1}, \dots, w_{i,m} \dots, w_{i,M})$.¹⁶ Row binding of question count vectors \mathbf{v}_i produced a document-term matrix **DTM**. Its $\text{DTM}_{(i,m)}$ element shows how many times word stem m occurs in question i . After stemming and stop word removal we obtained a $(115,881 \times 110,562)$ document-term matrix of written and priority written question to the Commission or the Council.¹⁷ Then we removed the words that occurred in less than 0.01 per cent of questions (i.e. 11 texts) or in more than 99.99 per cent (i.e. 115,869 texts) and documents that had zero word counts. This reduced our DTM size to $(115,879 \times 17,394)$.

Second, we regressed word counts w_m on sentiment for the coded 3,200+ questions. This is an inverse regression that estimates the distribution of word counts given response. Due to high dimensionality of the response variable in this problem (17,394) Taddy (2013b) proposed the gamma-LASSO estimation algorithm with regularization. The results of this inverse regression are reported in Table 1 in terms of frequent word stems that exert largest positive or negative influence on coded question sentiment. While one cannot interpret the information therein in causal sense (Taddy, 2013a: 421), it yields useful insights on the drivers of negative and positive sentiment. The former is primarily related to human rights and political freedoms whereas the latter is influenced by development: economic and scientific.

Third, we created a low-dimensional sufficient reduction (Taddy, 2013b: 757) of word counts for prediction of question sentiment. This low-dimensional information on textual content of questions was then used in an ordered logit forward regression of coded question sentiment on sufficient reduction of its word counts. We achieved 58.6 per cent of correctly predicted sentiment scores with this approach on our manually coded data (prediction results are tabulated in Table 2).

We observed that this sentiment classifier has pronounced misclassification rate when it comes to extreme cases of -2 or 2 questions. Indeed, in the course of our manual coding we found that in certain questions the prevalence of negatively charged words can be mitigated by one positive statement that concludes the question.¹⁸ Nonetheless, we believe that a threefold improvement in the rate of correctly classified questions over the random classifier and growing use of inverse regression classifier to uncover political sentiment in the literature (Taddy (2013a), Gentzkow et al. (2015)) makes it an appropriate algorithm for our problem.

Inverse text regression approach combined with manual coding To assess the performance of the above three sentiment classifiers of questions about Russia we plot the yearly evolution of uncovered sentiment in Figure 1.

¹⁶Stemming is done with Porter stemmer. We also removed common English-language stop words (e.g. ‘the’, ‘a’, ‘I’) from our vocabulary of words.

¹⁷To maximise learning set we decided not to exclude questions to the Council at this stage.

¹⁸Consider a question about Kaliningrad in Online Appendix A.I as an example of a subdued difference.

Table 1: Most influential unigrams from MEP question texts learned on manually coded data

stem	Negative tone		stem	Positive tone	
	frequency	meaning		frequency	meaning
navalni	36	Alexey Navalny, Russian opposition leader	gm3	10	Billion cubic meters (of natural gas)
jail	21		harp	8	Ban on harp seal trade
homophobia	21		arthriti	7	Research on arthritis
khodorkovski	20	Mikhail Khodorkovskiy, Russian opposition leader	guinea-bissau	5	Nature preservation concerns
pussi	20	Pussy Riot, Russian punk rock band	diari	5	ambiguous
pasko	19	Grigory Pasko, Russian ecologist	clariti	4	
savchenko	17	Nadezhda Savchenko, Ukrainian officer	interregion	4	
evict	16		izar-fen	4	Izar-Fene shipyards in Galicia
conscienc	13		six-parti	4	2005 six-party talks in Beijing on North Korean nuclear program
maigov	12	Rouslan Maigov, Chechen asylum seeker	25th	3	25th EU–Russia Summit
lgbti	12	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex community	phare	2	Phare and Tacis EU initiative
verdict	11		fischler	2	Franz Fischler, EU Commissioner for Agriculture
hama	10	Hamas, Palestinian organization	groningen	2	Groningen gas field
zana	10	Leyla Zana, Kurdish politician	pedro	2	ambiguous
picket	10		varela	2	MEP Daniel Varela Suanzes-Carpegna

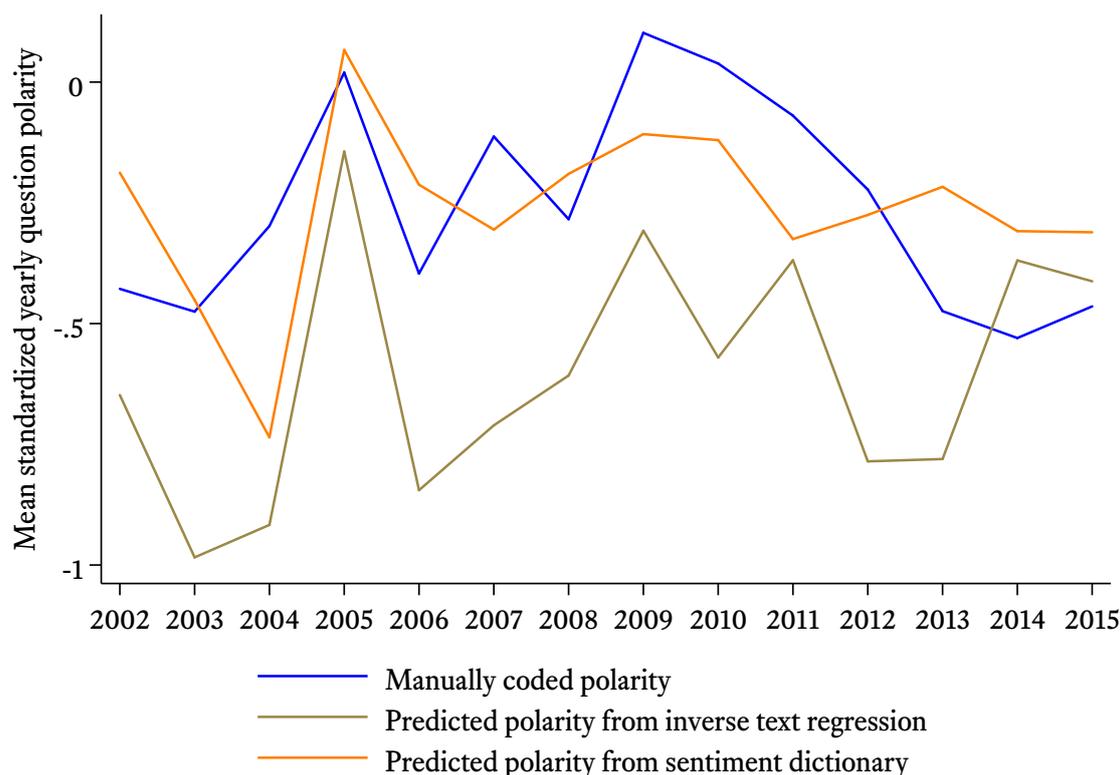
Note: this table shows top-15 unigrams by their effect on log odds for a unit decrease (left panel) or increase (right panel) in question polarity. We sort unigrams first by the effect size, and then by their overall frequency in question texts. Estimates come from a multinomial inverse regression of unigram counts in question texts on manually coded question polarity (Taddy, 2013b). Question polarity was manually coded for all written or priority written MEP questions to the EU Council or Commission in 2002–2015 containing word ‘Russia’ (2735 texts) and 500 random questions asked in 2002–2008 (see Online Appendix A.I for description of coding). We split all question texts into unigrams, removed English-language stop words, stemmed unigrams with Porter stemmer and removed unigrams that appear in less than 0.01 per cent of questions (i.e. 11 texts) or in more than 99.99 per cent (i.e. 115,869 texts). Dimensionality of the estimated multinomial inverse regression problem was 3,234 manually coded polarities \times 17,394 unigrams.

Table 2: Distribution of manually coded MEP question polarities and predicted polarities after ordered logit forward regression of manually coded question polarity on multinomial inverse regression sufficient reduction projection of unigram counts in question texts

Predicted polarity	Manually coded question polarity				
	-2	-1	0	1	2
-2	383	102	18	1	0
-1	179	416	230	27	1
0	35	460	1067	232	27
1	0	0	7	20	19
2	0	0	0	0	10

Note: this figure tabulates manually coded question polarities of all written or priority written MEP questions to the EU Council or Commission in 2002–2015 containing word ‘Russia’ (2735 texts) and 500 random questions asked in 2002–2008 (see Online Appendix A.I for description of coding) versus multinomial inverse regression-predicted polarities. Predictions come from ordered logit forward regression of manually coded question polarity on multinomial inverse regression sufficient reduction projection of unigram counts in question texts (Taddy, 2013b). We split all question texts into unigrams, removed English-language stop words, stemmed unigrams with Porter stemmer and removed unigrams that appear in less than 0.01 per cent of questions (i.e. 11 texts) or in more than 99.99 per cent (i.e. 115,869 texts). Dimensionality of the estimated multinomial inverse regression problem was 17,394 unigrams \times 3,234 manually coded polarities.

Figure 1: Yearly polarity of MEP questions about Russia under different algorithms



Note: this figure reports yearly polarity of MEP questions about Russia to the European Commission asked under Rules 130(1, 5) of the EP Rules of Procedure. Question polarity is centered and standardized (zero mean and unit variance) to be comparable across algorithms. Blue line shows manually coded polarity of all Russia-related questions. Brown line represents predicted polarity after ordered logit forward regression of manually coded question polarity on multinomial inverse regression sufficient reduction projection of unigram counts in question texts (Taddy, 2013b; see Section “Inferring question polarity from its text” para “Inverse text regression approach” for details). Orange line reports predicted polarity from Hu and Liu (2004) sentiment dictionary-based algorithm, implemented and modified in R package `sentimentr` (Rinker, 2016).

The blue line of the manually coded question sentiment in Figure 1 offers a benchmark performance. We observe that inverse text regression-predicted document sentiment exhibits more variation than that predicted with sentiment dictionary algorithm of Hu and Liu (2004). This is the benefit of a domain-specific machine learning on manually coded data: we can uncover more nuanced words affecting polarity in comparison with a general dictionary approach. However, the algorithm of Taddy (2013b) does not capture the worsening stance of Russia-related questions from 2009. Therefore, for our baseline question polarity metric we decide to combine multinomial inverse regression sufficient reduction forward regression-predicted question polarity and manually coded polarity (when it is available).¹⁹

While the time variation in tonality of questions is self-explanatory and generally follows the ups and downs in the EU–Russia relations, the drastic rise in positivity of the 2005 questions is puzzling. Indeed, we might have expected the reverse dynamics given the ‘big bang’ enlargement of 2004 and new MEPs from Central and Eastern European states joining the EP. More to that, surprisingly, in 2005 the Commission received the absolute minimum of the Russia-related questions in the period between 2002 and 2015.²⁰ The explanation

¹⁹Online Appendix Figure A.2 shows that our results do not qualitatively change when we choose alternative metric as our baseline.

²⁰The annual numbers of questions that have been included in our statistical model conditional on the solo-authorship and the institution concerned are the following: 23 questions for each year in 2002 and 2003; 29 questions in 2004; 16 — in 2005; 43 — in

for this seems threefold.

First, before the enlargement the EU was working hard on several specific issues related to Russia directly which were in ‘need to be tackled’ (Flenley, 2005: 443). No wonder that before 2005 the MEPs regularly — and often manifestly negatively — asked about the progress made by the EU in this direction. Second, while the practice of questioning the executives is common for the national legislatures in the old Member States, the parliamentarians from the accession countries have had much less experience in using the procedure at home (Proksch and Slapin, 2010a: 70). Therefore, the changes in the composition of the supranational legislature did not provoke any substantive changes to the numbers or tonality of the questions asked by the MEPs, at least in the first years after the enlargement when the new MEPs were still adapting to the EU institutional environment. Third, the overall positive developments since the EU–Russia Summit in May 2003, the EU support for the Russian accession to the WTO and the agreement on the Four Common Spaces in 2005 can also partly explain both the decrease in the number of questions and more positive stances expressed in them.

Estimation strategy and results

Baseline model Consider a set \mathcal{M} of members of European Parliament. Each parliamentarian $m \in \mathcal{M}$ represents a given country $c \in \mathcal{C} \equiv \{\text{Austria, Belgium, } \dots, \text{Sweden, United Kingdom}\}$ and has a given European Political Group affiliation $g \in \mathcal{G} \equiv \{\text{ALDE, ECR, } \dots, \text{Non-affiliated}\}$ in a given year $y \in \mathcal{Y} \equiv \{2002, 2003, \dots, 2015\}$. This parliamentarian asks a question q that can either be ‘about Russia’ or not: $q \in \mathcal{Q} \equiv \{\text{about Russia, not about Russia}\}$.²¹ We consider only solo-authored written and priority written questions directed to the European Commission, so define $r \in \mathcal{R} \equiv \{\text{written, priority written}\}$. Polarity of question q can take five distinct values, ordered from most negative to most positive: $\{-2, -1, 0, 1, 2\}$.

We decompose this polarity of question q with type r (written or priority written) asked by parliamentarian m

2006; 45 — in 2007; 50 — in 2008; 33 — in 2009; 58 — in 2010; 79 — in 2011; 94 — in 2012; 136 — in 2013; 144 — in 2014; 187 — in 2015.

²¹Online Appendix A.I details our definition of this category.

from country c , European Political Group g in year y with the aid of the below regression model:

$$\begin{aligned}
\text{question} & \\
\text{polarity}_{q,m,c,g,y} & = \alpha + \overbrace{\beta \mathbb{I}_{q=\text{about Russia}}}^{\text{Russia polarity effect}} \\
& + \overbrace{\sum_{i \in \mathcal{C}} \gamma \mathbb{I}_{q=\text{about Russia}} \times \mathbb{I}_{i=c}}^{\text{by-country Russia polarity effect}} + \underbrace{\sum_{j \in \mathcal{G}} \delta \mathbb{I}_{q=\text{about Russia}} \times \mathbb{I}_{j=g}}_{\text{by-EPG Russia polarity effect}} \\
& + \underbrace{\sum_{i \in \mathcal{C}} \boldsymbol{\eta} \mathbb{I}_{i=c}}_{\text{by-country polarity effect}} + \underbrace{\sum_{j \in \mathcal{G}} \boldsymbol{\theta} \mathbb{I}_{j=g}}_{\text{by-EPG polarity effect}} \tag{1} \\
& + \underbrace{\sum_{k \in \mathcal{Y}} \zeta \mathbb{I}_{k=y}}_{\text{by-year polarity effect}} + \underbrace{\sum_{l \in \mathcal{R}} \kappa \mathbb{I}_{l=r}}_{\text{by-question type polarity effect}} \\
& + \underbrace{\vartheta MEP\ age_m + \lambda MEP\ male_m}_{\text{MEP personal polarity effect}} + \underbrace{\varepsilon_{q,m,c,g,y}}_{\text{unobserved question polarity}},
\end{aligned}$$

where $\mathbb{I}_{(\cdot)}$ is an indicator function equal to unity if its condition is satisfied and to nil otherwise, regular greek letters indicate regression coefficient scalars, bold greek letters indicate vectors of regression coefficients, $\varepsilon_{q,m,c,g,y} \stackrel{\text{i.i.d}}{\sim} \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma_\varepsilon^2)$.²²

Equation (1) allows for multiple channels of question polarity variation. First, it recognizes yearly variation in question polarity due to changing agenda in the EP with a set of 13 ζ question year dummies. Second, it allows for different polarity of written and priority written questions with a κ question type dummy. Third, it captures time-invariant by-country differences in question polarity with 27 $\boldsymbol{\eta}$ MEP country dummies. Fourth, it enables question polarity to vary between European Political Groups of MEPs with 8 $\boldsymbol{\theta}$ EPG dummies. Fifth, it captures the influence of MEP individual characteristics (age and gender) with scalars ϑ and λ . Sixth, and most importantly, equation (1) allows for 3 channels of question being about Russia to affect its polarity. Scalar β expresses the influence of Russia-related questions on polarity that is common across countries and EPGs. In contrast, vector $\boldsymbol{\gamma}$ encloses the by-country variation in polarity of Russia-related questions. Similarly, vector $\boldsymbol{\delta}$ expresses the by-EPG variation in polarity of questions about Russia.

Adjusted predictions at representative values Vectors $\boldsymbol{\gamma}$ and $\boldsymbol{\delta}$ are central to this paper. Since they isolate the MEP national and political group effects on polarity of questions relating to a particular issue area (Russia), we can compare the magnitude of their point estimates to understand which channel prevails. It is therefore straightforward to obtain $\boldsymbol{\gamma}$ and $\boldsymbol{\delta}$ from model (1) with ordinary least squares and identity link function or by using a non-identity link function such as logistic function (e.g. ordered logit framework).

However, for expositional clarity we go one step further. Having estimated (1), we calculate predicted values of question polarity at a specified set of covariate values (adjusted predictions at representative values). For every MEP country $c \in \mathcal{C}$ in (1) we fix its corresponding regressors (elements of $\boldsymbol{\gamma}$ and $\boldsymbol{\eta}$) at unity (regressors

²²Strictly speaking, we include $|\mathcal{C}| - 1$ country indicators $\mathbb{I}_{(\cdot)}$ in model (1), where $|\cdot|$ is set cardinality. But this information is suppressed in summation subscript for notational clarity. Same applies to EPG, year sets, and interactions.

for other countries become nil) while holding non-country covariates at their mean values. Then we fix question ‘about Russia’ regressors (β , γ , δ) at zero or one and report the two predicted question polarity values for each country — one when question is related to Russia and one when it is not. Standard errors of predicted values are calculated with the delta method. Similar procedure is also performed for every MEP European Political Group $g \in \mathcal{G}$. The adjusted predictions at representative values of MEP country or EPG after ordinary least squares estimation of (1) are reported in Figure 2.²³ Blue ● markers show predicted polarity of questions not ‘about Russia’ whereas red ● show predicted polarity of Russia-related questions.

Robustness checks While constructing our MEP questions data set and specifying the baseline model (1) we have made several assumptions. In Online Appendix A.II we relax them and engage into sensitivity analysis of our key results. Our findings are robust to (i) inclusion of multiply-authored questions (Online Appendix Figure A.1), (ii) alternative definitions of question polarity (Online Appendix Figure A.2), (iii) non-linear link function (Online Appendix Figure A.3). Finally, our results hold when we control for unobserved time-invariant heterogeneity of MEPs (Online Appendix Figure A.4).

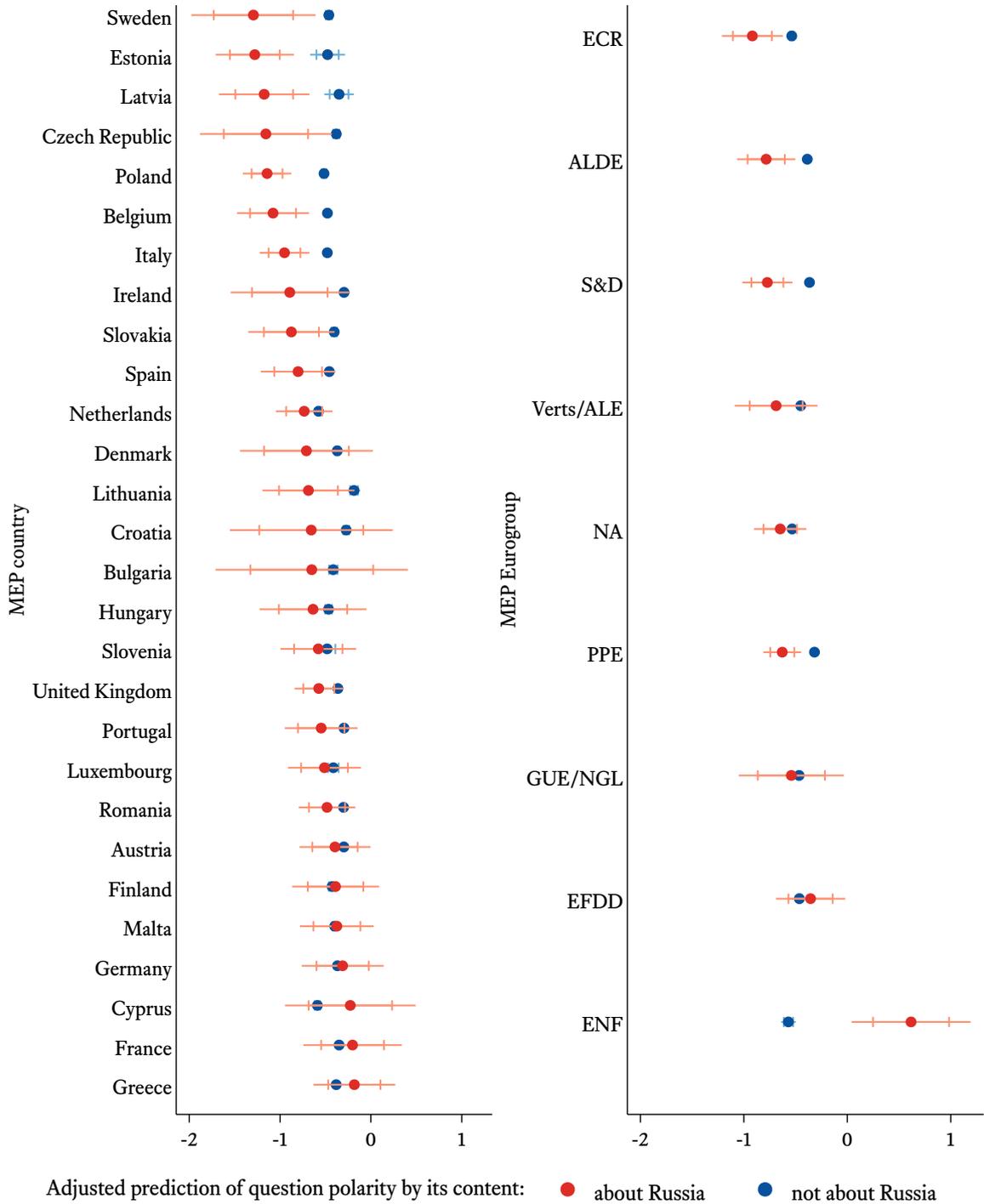
Discussion

The findings reflected in Figure 2 clearly show that both ideological (transnational) and national affiliations significantly contribute to the sentiments expressed by the MEP in their written questions about Russia addressed to the Commission. These results are completely in line with our Hypothesis 1 and they do suggest that written questions are used by the MEPs to express their policy positions freer as compared to voting. While voting behaviour is usually determined by the MEPs’ political group affiliations and, thus, serves as a convincing argument to call the EP a normal parliament that votes along ideological and not national lines, written questions show that when free from their principals’ control the MEPs themselves are not that ‘normal’. The very fact that the attitudes towards Russia manifest in their written questions are influenced by both the EPG affiliations and their nationalities makes us believe that the MEPs remain national politicians to a large extent, at least when dealing with such controversial and domestically sensitive issues as Russia.

The fact that our findings are consistent in this respect with the results of the MEPs’ self-report surveys (Scully et al., 2012) also suggest that written questions in the EP can be used as a proxy for measuring the MEPs’ policy attitudes not mitigated by their EPGs’ and national parties’ control. On the methodological note though, further investigation into the EU-related policy positions that the representatives of the European peoples express in their written questions is needed as in this study we have taken one particularly salient issue of Russia that as such can trigger national sentiments and turn them into the significant determinant of the tonality of the questions.

²³In all regressions we drop observations belonging to singleton groups (groups with only one observation (Correia, 2015)) to ensure unbiased estimation of the variance-covariance matrix. Additionally, we rely on Huber-Eicker-White procedure to obtain consistent estimates of standard errors. We do not perform one- or multi-way clustering of standard errors due to the fact that neither the number of MEP countries nor EPGs exceeds the rule-of-thumb minimum number of clusters (Cameron and Miller, 2015). Clustering on ‘too few’ groups leads to downward bias in cluster-robust standard errors.

Figure 2: Adjusted predictions of question polarity at representative MEP country or EPG membership values



Note: blue ● markers show adjusted predictions of polarity of MEP questions from OLS-estimated model (1) that are not about Russia, at representative values of MEP country (left panel) or European Political Group (right panel), holding other regressors at their mean values. Red ● markers show adjusted predictions of question polarity for Russia-related questions at representative MEP country/EPG values. We consider only solo-authored MEP questions to the European Commission asked under Rules 130(1, 5) of the EP Rules of Procedure in 2002–2015. Question polarity comes from either manual coding or predicted polarity after ordered logit forward regression of manually coded question polarity on multinomial inverse regression sufficient reduction projection of unigram counts in question texts (Taddy, 2013b; see Section ‘Inferring question polarity from its text’ para ‘Inverse text regression approach combined with manual coding’ for details). Spikes show 99 per cent Huber-Eicker-White robust confidence intervals derived from the delta method. Ticks on spikes mark 90 per cent Huber-Eicker-White robust confidence intervals.

Indeed, Russia presents a difficult and controversial issue for the EU, which becomes particularly apparent in the fact that the EP often takes a tougher position with regard to Moscow as compared to other EU institutions and, especially, the Council (Gowen (2009: 117); Fernandes (2016a: 83)). Fernandes goes as far as to call the EP ‘a ‘whistle blower’ that has voiced direct and harsh critics against EU policies towards Moscow and against Putin’s rule’ (Fernandes, 2016b: 164–165). Such behaviour, most evident in the way the MEPs vote on the EP resolutions condemning Russia of violating human rights and political freedoms, is often explained by the fact that the EP has much less responsibility in the Union’s foreign affairs and thus, has a bigger room for maneuver in promoting value-driven, less pragmatic, and less diplomatic approach in dealing with third countries, and Russia in particular (Braghiroli (2015: 60–61); Fernandes (2016a: 83–84); Fernandes (2016b: 164, 167–168)).

With this in mind, it should not come as a surprise that the sentiment expressed by the MEPs in their written questions about Russia is on average twice as negative as the tonality of an average written question posed to the Commission.²⁴ The MEPs, thus, are not only tougher than other institutions when dealing with Russia-related issues but are also tougher than they are themselves on average. The fact that the EP and its members consider themselves as value entrepreneurs in the EU foreign policies towards the Kremlin is also reflected in the share of questions about protecting human rights and promoting political freedoms in Russia. In the written questions about the EU’s Eastern neighbor the MEPs raise issues of human rights and political freedoms two-and-a-half times as often as on average.²⁵ And yet, it is fair to say that Russia is not the sole target of the MEPs critique. China is also often openly criticized by the European parliamentarians (Fernandes, 2016b: 167), and the tonality of written questions about Turkey is even more negative on average compared to the Russian case.²⁶

Despite this overall negative stance, it is also often claimed that the EP is internally divided with respect to Russia-related issues, and that cleavages run across both transnational ideological and national lines with the fault line between the old and new Member States being the focus of particular attention (Carta and Braghiroli (2011: 276–281); Braghiroli (2015); Fernandes (2016a: 83); Fernandes (2016b: 165–168)). Our findings confirm these claims, often based on anecdotal evidence and interviews,²⁷ conclusively (see, e.g., Fernandes (2016a: 83); Fernandes (2016b: 166–167)).

Figure 2 shows the average sentiment expressed by the MEPs in their written questions about Russia in 2002–2015 compared to the average sentiment of the questions that have nothing to do with Russia, with both sentiments conditional on the MEPs’ nationality and their EPGs. In accordance with our Hypothesis 2 the ‘usual suspects’, as Braghiroli (2015) calls them, are in the top of the chart of the nationals adopting the most negative stance towards Russia in the EP. More to that, the MEPs from the Baltic States and Poland are significantly²⁸ more negative when asking about Russia.

²⁴-0.82 v. -0.42, respectively, on our -2 – 2 five-unit scale.

²⁵14.4 per cent of Russia-related MEP questions in our data contain word combination ‘human rights’ or ‘political freedom’, compared with 5.8 per cent prevalence of these terms in all questions.

²⁶-0.91 (on our -2 – 2 five-unit scale) for the questions that mention words ‘Turkey’ or ‘Turkish’.

²⁷With the exception of two quantitative studies of voting on Russia in the EP (Carta and Braghiroli (2011: 276–281); Braghiroli (2015)). Yet, ‘national’ (as opposed to transnational ideological) voting on Russia cannot say much about the policy positions the MEPs have towards Russia but can be a simple reflection of the position adopted by the leadership of the national parties of the MEPs.

²⁸For the Estonian, Latvian, and Polish MEPs this holds with 99 per cent certainty whereas for Lithuanian parliamentarians it holds

Baltic States and Poland The sentiments expressed in the written questions are but one confirmation that more than two decades of independence, the membership in the EU and NATO have not changed the perceptions the Baltic States have towards Russia which continues to be viewed as an existential threat to them (Mälksoo (2006); Lašas and Galbreath (2013: 149–151); Ehin and Berg (2013: 4–5)). Precisely because of that Russia remains a very sensitive issue for both Baltic politicians and population, and the ‘Russian question’ is still present in the everyday public and political discourse in these states. This, in turn, is reflected in how legislators from these countries behave nationally and at the supranational level of the EP.

Our theoretical expectations that the MEPs from Baltic States use their Russia-related questions at home are confirmed by qualitative evidence. Responding to the public concerns about Russia in their countries, the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian members of the European Parliament resort to their questions in order to boost their electoral support and to increase their chances for re-election, as the questions and the anxieties about Moscow indicate their responsiveness to their voters’ preferences. While questions per se do not get a lot of media attention, some MEPs from the Baltic States do refer to them in the press releases about their activities in the EP. References to their Russia-related questions to the Commission and the High Representative constantly appear on their websites. For instance, in September 2014 Petras Auštrevičius, Lithuanian MEP from the ALDE group, informed his electorate about the fact that he had urged the Commission to react to the detention of the Lithuanian ship by the Russian authorities that presented the ‘insolent provocation’ of Moscow against his country.²⁹ Another example is Urmas Paet’s question with regard to the *Rosatom* intention to build a nuclear waste storage near Russian town of Sosnovy Bor close to the border with Estonia that was posted in his blog in October 2015.³⁰

Such questions often make it to the national news as did the question by Inese Vaidere, the EPP MEP from Latvia, who had stated in her question the need to launch a propaganda-free Russian-language TV channel for the Russian-speaking Latvians who are generally exposed to ‘the Russian government-controlled television channels broadcasting biased news reports and an unprecedented amount of misinformation’.³¹

This holds true for the Polish MEPs as well. Both historical memories and current political discourse in Poland which is to some extent structured around the perception of Russia as one of the greatest threats for the Polish sovereignty (Killingsworth et al., 2010: 365–366, 370), not least because of the energy dependency on Russia, make the Polish MEPs actively promote a particular vision of the EU–Russia relations and push the policies that boost EU solidarity vis-à-vis Moscow, be it in energy policy domain (Roth, 2011: 616–617) or in the Eastern dimension of the European neighborhood policy (Kaminska, 2010: 80).

This evidence suggests that the MEPs from those Member States where Russia is a constant issue on the national political agenda do express their sentiments strategically in the written questions in order to prove their responsiveness to their electorate sensitivities and concerns about the EU’s Eastern neighbor. Quantitative studies that systematically assess the responsiveness of the MEPs to their constituencies on the nationally

true with 90 per cent certainty.

²⁹ Available at <http://www.austrevicius.lt/?p=1543> (accessed 21 April 2016).

³⁰ Available at <https://urmaspaet.eu/2015/10/18/euroopa-komisjon-jalgib-vene-rosatomi-plaani-rajada-sosnovoi-bori-suur-radioaktiivsete-jaatmete-hoidla/> (accessed 21 April 2016).

³¹ Available at <http://laiki.lv/vaidere-nepieciestas-eiropas-tv-kanals-krievu-valoda/> (accessed 21 April 2016).

sensitive issues would therefore contribute to the discussion about the incentives the MEPs have for posing parliamentary questions and for expressing specific sentiments in them.

Sweden, Czech Republic, Slovakia The particularly negative tonality of the parliamentarians from Sweden, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia is also not puzzling as these countries are often viewed as having the most skeptical stance on Russia. In their index of friendliness towards Moscow Carta and Braghiroli (2011: 272–273) call these states the ‘normative adamant’ while Leonard and Popescu (2007) put them into the group of ‘Frosty Pragmatists’ in their relations with Russia.³² The sentiments of the Irish, Dutch, and Danish MEPs should neither come as a surprise as their countries are also traditionally viewed as ‘frosty pragmatists’, with Denmark and Sweden believed to be the major supporters of the Baltic States and Poland in their policy positions on Russia (Lašas and Galbreath, 2013: 164).

Puzzle of ‘friendly pragmatists’ Warm attitudes expressed by the French and German parliamentarians can be explained by the way Paris and Berlin views Moscow as their strategic partner despite the reservations about autocratic nature of the Russian political regime.³³ In this respect, the most unexpected results are offered by the Italians, Spaniards, and Belgians who are in the top-10 nationals with the most negative stance on Russia in the EP. Both studies discussed above assess these countries to be among the most positive toward Russia making it either into the group of ‘Strategic Partners’ or the ‘Friendly Pragmatists’ group (Carta and Braghiroli (2011: 272), Leonard and Popescu (2007)).

Three remarks are required here. First, as pointed out by Braghiroli (2015: 68), the ‘MEPs do not, in any way, represent their national governments’, thus their positions can diverge significantly from the foreign policy line advocated and promoted by their respective national governments (this can be particularly true for the Italian MEPs who served in the EP during the times when the Italian government was headed by Silvio Berlusconi who is well-known for his close ties with Vladimir Putin). Another possible explanation draws on the assumption that the MEPs view themselves as value entrepreneurs and thus are more sensitive to the wrong-doings of the Russian authorities whatever the position of their domestic governments. Third, it can be assumed that in their written questions the Italian, Spanish, and Belgian MEPs tend to be more responsive to their electorate whose attitudes towards Russia are not as positive as the stances of their national authorities, especially recently.^{34,35}

European Political Groups The findings with regard to the sentiments expressed by the MEPs as the representatives of their EPGs seem a bit more puzzling. Our results suggest that the MEPs from all political groups but the EFDD and the ENF, tend to be more skeptical when posing questions about Russia than in

³²With the exception of Slovakia that according to these authors makes it to the ‘Friendly Pragmatists’ group.

³³The same logic applies to the Greek and Cyprian MEPs as their countries are believed to be the ‘Trojan Horses’ of the EU with respect to Russia as well as to the parliamentarians from Malta, Finland, Austria, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovenia, Hungary, and Bulgaria that all make up the ‘Friendly Pragmatists’ group (Leonard and Popescu, 2007).

³⁴For the Italian and Spanish public opinion about Russia, see the Pew Research Centre surveys for the years 2013–2015 (Pew Research Center, 2013, 2014, 2015).

³⁵For a much more nuanced perspective on the bilateral relations of the EU Member States and Russia, see the recent volume edited by David et al. (2013).

general, whereas the average voting stance proposed as a measurement instrument to study the 6th and 7th EP by Braghiroli (2015: 64–66, 70–72) indicates positive voting patterns not only by the EFD³⁶ but also by the GUE/NGL (especially during the 6th EP), and the two major forces in the Parliament — the EPP (after its split and creation of the ECR in the 7th EP, referenced as PPE in the charts) and the S&D. Even if we attempt to explain a rather moderate but still negative stance adopted by the central-right MEPs from the EPP in their Russia-related questions by the fact that the time frame of the study includes seven years³⁷ when the EPP also included the future ECR MEPs who would later be known in the 7th EP for their particularly negative voting on Moscow-related resolutions and systematic expression of the most negative sentiments about Russia in their questions, the change of heart by the S&D MEPs still requires elucidation. In his discussion of the positive voting patterns of the two mainstream groups in the 7th EP Braghiroli (2015: 71) suggests that due to the fact that the majority of the national governments present in the Council are formed by the national parties making part of either the EPP or the S&D, ‘they are very likely to disincentive parliamentary voting behavior that might overrule unanimously agreed package deals or parliamentary motions that might push EU–Russia relationships in undesired direction’. Likewise, we can now assume that not liable to the two principals, the members of the EPP and the S&D express their policy positions freer in their written questions, and that those policy positions tend to be more negative than those reflected in their voting behaviour.

Europe of Nations and Freedom The last interesting, even if expected, finding is the sentiment expressed by the far-right MEPs from the ENF. It is clear from Figure 2 that the ENF members present an extreme outlier in the sense of both the positivity of their sentiments towards Moscow and the difference between the tonality of their Russia-related questions and those questions that do not deal with Russia. These results are almost self-explanatory if one considers the ENF position with regard to EU’s current policies towards the Kremlin, and the ideological drivers behind activities of its members, both today and in the past.

For most of the time period under the study the far-right MEPs have not been affiliated with any political group and have been unable to form one of their own to voice a common position on the EU developments and decisions.³⁸ At the same time this never stopped them from sharing and expressing rather united position with regards to Russia. Former members of the ITS when being non-attached MEPs and the members of the newly created ENF have always demonstrated particularly positive stances towards Russia and, what is more, have some close ties with Russian authorities — not only after the significant support and sponsorship was given by the Kremlin to those parties during the last elections, but also before, dating back to the existence of the ITS (Klapisis (2015); Krekó et al. (2015)).

Today the group is openly and actively advocating closer relations with Russia and the necessity to ease out present tensions. This position roams not only from speech to speech given by the ENF representatives but also from question to question, as do the corresponding positive sentiments. Since the establishment of the group and till the end of 2015 the ENF members sent 26 Russia-related questions to the Commission and

³⁶The EFD is a predecessor of the EFDD, active during the 7th EP. See footnote 12 detailing our approach to merging the EPGs.

³⁷From 2002 to 2009.

³⁸With two exceptions being the ‘Identity, Traditions, Sovereignty’ (ITS) group that was formed in 2007 and collapsed eleven months later due to the internal conflicts and the successive ENF formed in June 2015 and on the go since then.

almost all of them were marked by very positive sentiments towards the Kremlin often pictured as a strategic partner of the EU. This loyalty towards Russia is in fact also evident in how the MEPs affiliated with the ENF vote (Krekó et al., 2015). Often both voting behaviour and questions related to Russia do not only show the positive sentiments the ENF members have about Russia but also their overall negative views on the EU current policies, including the external dimension.

Conclusion

The findings presented in this study show that both nationality and the EPG affiliation significantly affect the tonality of the MEP written questions related to Russia. These results suggest that the MEPs, when free from their principals' control as in the case of questioning the supranational executive, remain national politicians, in the first place, at least while addressing domestically salient issues, such as Russia. The results also allow to assume that the EP is a normal parliament primarily due to the institutional constraints faced by the MEP when voting and not because the MEPs themselves have turned into the truly 'European' parliamentarians whose transnational ideological affiliations are the strongest predictor of their political orientations. In this respect, our data have made it possible to confirm the results based on the self-report survey that point out the importance of nationality as a determinant of the MEPs' attitudes without resorting to this self-report evidence.

Yet, our focus on Russia-related sentiments can limit the applicability of these findings to the general patterns of the way the MEPs phrase their questions to the Commission as domestically sensitive issues could trigger nationality-driven behaviour, while the sentiments about more general issues related to the EU politics and policies could still be mostly determined by the transnational ideological affiliations of the MEPs.

This, in turn, leads us to suggest two possible ways to proceed with research into the 'questioning' behaviour of the European parliamentarians. First, further investigation into the determinants of the sentiments expressed by the MEPs about a wider range of the EU-related policy issues is needed to state conclusively whether the MEPs are still national politicians oriented, first and foremost, to their domestic electorates. Second, further quantitative studies that relate nationally sensitive issues central to the domestic politics, and the sentiments expressed by the MEPs from such states about these issues, will allow to uncover whether the MEPs are indeed responsive to their electorates' concerns and whether written questions can be viewed as a constituency-oriented activity and used strategically by the MEPs as such, as our findings on the Baltic States and Poland suggest.

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Online Appendix

A.I Description of question polarity coding procedure

We analyzed the universe of questions using a supervised machine learning approach to sentiment-analysis based on the manually gauged semantic orientation of questions in which MEPs express their opinion on Russia. In doing so we extracted both polarity of texts and its strength. Coded sample consisted of 2735 questions containing word 'Russia' asked by MEPs to the EU Council or the Commission in 2002–2015. The coding proceeded in two stages. First, we analyzed each question in the sample for the presence of a valid sensible opinion on Russia in the text. It is worth stating that for the coding we significantly relied on the context. For instance, questions sent after the introduction of the food embargo by the Russian authorities in August 2014 in which MEPs asked for assistance to their countries or particular sectoral groups with the single reference to the Russian sanctions were not coded as questions about Russia.

One such question sent by the Italian MEP Giovanni La Via on 11 December 2014 is given below.

Subject: Cuts in the common agricultural policy

The European Commission has cut the budget for the common agricultural policy by about EUR 448 million for 2015. As the European agricultural sector is suffering a period of recession due to the Russian embargo, the Commission should instead be acting to budget for greater resources.

1. How, therefore, does the Commission intend to support European farmers whose allocated funding is reduced due to foreign policy?
2. Could it explain if it has already estimated the impact which these cuts might have on the agricultural sector?³⁹

Accordingly, if MEPs had highlighted the effects of sanctions repeatedly, went on with direct accusations of Russia being responsible for economic instability or, on the contrary, called for negotiations to decrease the tensions, questions were coded as questions about Russia. That is the case of question by the German MEP Bernd Lucke asked on 5 December 2014.

Subject: Russian counter-sanctions

For the purposes of quantifying the effects of Russian counter-sanctions on German businesses, can the Commission answer the following three questions:

1. On its website, the Commission has posted a list of agricultural export products affected by the Russian embargo for which compensation is to be granted accordingly. From which budgetary funds will such compensation be granted, and in which budget lines has the Commission put funds aside in order to implement the assistance package?
2. Is the Commission aware of the fact that the said embargo is severely affecting not only farmers but also e.g. wood importers? How dangerous does the Commission consider the Russian embargo to be to the economic livelihood of wood importers?
3. Following on from the two questions above, does the Commission believe that support should also be given to wood importers affected by the Russian embargo?⁴⁰

The same logic applied to all the questions in which Russian actions were mentioned as a background for describing other issues of concerns for the MEPs.

³⁹Question P8_QE(2014)010111

⁴⁰Question P8_QE(2014)009637

Second, we used five-unit scale for non-binary polarity classification. Score -2 was assigned to the questions with the most negative stance, 0 — to the neutral questions, and 2 — to the questions with the most positive stance. Scores -1 and 1 were attributed to the moderately negative and positive questions, respectively.

Accordingly, question got -2 score if the MEP had used multiple negative expressions to define Russia, Russian policy, Russian authorities etc. or used abusive words in the text (*'draconian restrictions on the human rights'*, *'police brutality against opposition in Russia'*, *'issue of human rights violation and more specifically LGBT rights'*, *'[Russian] subsequent occupation of sovereign Georgian territory'*, *'hazardous tools of Russian propaganda'*, and alike).

Score -1 was assigned to the questions where the MEPs had expressed concerns about particular issues using negative wording (*'risks arising from Russia's transportation of oil'*, *'[Russia's] policy that can have damaging environmental consequences'*, *'European investors are not sufficiently protected by the legal system in Russia'*).

0 score was attributed to those questions where the MEPs had asked the Commission about Russia without expressing any particular sentiment about Russia (i.e. *'What representation has the Commission made to the Russian Government about the arrest of Gary Kasparov, the leader of the United Civil Front?'*⁴¹).

Questions got 1 score if the MEPs had described Russia using positive wording or mentioning positive developments in the country (*'good time to further enhance relations with powerful European neighbor'*, *'more balanced cooperation with Russia, EU-Russia partnership... is needed'*).

2 score was assigned to the questions where in addition the MEPs had described Russia in multiple positive terms, highlighted the importance of Russia as a strategic partner, and actively called for the cooperation (*'make Russia a privileged partner'*, *'trust between the Euro-Atlantic region and Russia must be rebuilt'*, *'ensure the continuation of the necessary, unique and deep-rooted cooperation between Estonian and Russian scientists'*).

However, not all the questions were clear-cut as regards the sentiments expressed. In some questions the MEPs defined Russia extremely negatively but also referred to the importance of partnership and EU assistance or interference. In such cases the overall tonality was increased by 1 or 2 points (from -2 to -1 or to 0), depending on the context of the question and stated issue.

The question posed by Ashley Mote on 21 June 2005 presents one such case. The MEP uses a variety of negative expressions for migration from Kaliningrad in the first part of the question (*'running migration sore, 'great concern', 'illegal immigrants'*) that according to coding strategy should make us assign -2 score to the question. And yet, in the second part of the question, he asks the Commission to help Russia overcome the problem and its consequences. As a result, -1 score was attributed to this question.

Subject: Kaliningrad

May I have a Commission statement clarifying the position of Kaliningrad?

This former Soviet enclave within the European Union has been a running migration sore from Russia to the countries of Western Europe for the last 15 years. It remains a matter of great concern to the people living in the surrounding areas, despite Lithuania now being a member of the EU.

⁴¹Question P6_QE(2007)2235 by Robert Kilroy-Silk, 25 April 2007

What actions are planned to stop the flow of Russian illegal immigrants using Kaliningrad to reach the West?

What changes are planned for the bilateral agreement between Kaliningrad and Lithuania?

What plans are being made to construct effective border controls?⁴²

Finally, we performed a similar coding exercise with respect to 500 random questions not containing word ‘Russia’ to assess their polarity. While those questions that mentioned Russia usually had an easily identifiable subject matter, it was relatively more difficult to define the central theme of the questions from the random sample. In most cases the MEPs referred to several subject matters in one question and often expressed different sentiments when turning from one topic to another. This had some impact on the coding strategy with regard to these questions. In general, we followed the lines that had been used in the case of the Russia-related questions and assessed the overall tonality of the random questions applying the same five-unit scale. Yet, sometimes we had to overlook the direct connection between the words used and the subject matters addressed by the MEPs.

A.II Robustness checks

Multiply-authored questions In our data we link question data to author characteristics. When questions are solo-authored, this is a simple one-to-one mapping of MEP country, EPG, age, gender to question text. However, our data also features multiply-authored questions, and it is unclear how to aggregate MEP characteristics over several authors.⁴³ For our baseline we do not consider questions with more than one author at all. Even though they represent a minority (6.3 per cent) of written/priority written questions to the European Commission, their omission might alter the findings if multiply-authored questions are more/less strongly-worded. In Figure A.1 we juxtapose adjusted predictions from the baseline mode (blue ● and red ● markers) and those from a model with multiple-authored questions included (blue ■ and red ■ markers). To incorporate MEP-level data in the latter model we consider the characteristics of the first MEP asking the question from the EP metadata. Results appear to be robust to the inclusion of multiply-authored questions. The only irregularity is due to Slovenia. In our baseline model Slovenia × question ‘about Russia’ interaction term was omitted as singleton: MEPs from this country have asked only two questions about Russia, both multiple-authored. Therefore, the performance of Slovenia in the model with multiply-authored questions is a mere artifact of data.

Alternative algorithms to calculate question polarity In Section ‘Inferring question polarity from its text’ we outlined three ways to compute question polarity from its text — manual coding, inverse text regression of Taddy (2013b), and sentiment dictionary approach of Hu and Liu (2004) — and used a combination of manual coding and inverse text regression predictions (when question was not manually coded) in our baseline model. Figure 1 has exposed divergencies in yearly polarity of questions ‘about Russia’ across methods, so we need to ensure our findings on polarity are robust to the choice of polarity

⁴²Question P6_QE(2005)2201

⁴³For example, question with EP document reference P7_QE(2012)011514 titled “Information on measures to tackle youth unemployment” has the largest number of authors in our data — 117.

algorithm. Figure A.2 contrasts adjusted predictions from the baseline model (blue ● and red ● markers), a model where we considered only inverse text regression-predicted polarities (blue ■ and red ■ markers), and a model with polarities based on sentiment dictionary approach (blue ▲ and red ▲ markers).⁴⁴ Since the latter polarity is on a continuous scale, we use two x -axes in this figure. Most results are robust to using the inverse text regression-predicted polarity only, with ENF point estimate being a notable exception. The direction of differences when using sentiment dictionary polarity stays similar to the baseline but their magnitude is subdued. It is reasonable to expect less pronounced differences with sentiment dictionary approach: MEP question polarity is determined not only by the use of words with strong positive/negative connotation ('good'/'bad') but also by words that are neutral in the dictionary ('establishment', 'development') and can only be labelled as positive after supervised machine learning on manually coded polarity data.

Non-linear link function Our baseline question polarity is a discrete ordered $\{-2, -1, 0, 1, 2\}$ variable. This formulation violates the Gauss-Markov assumptions of the workhorse OLS estimator. Therefore, as a robustness check we consider a logit link function instead of an identity link function in (1). We formulate an ordered logit optimization problem of (1), find its optimum with Maximum Likelihood, and compute adjusted predictions at representative values of MEP country/EPG group in Figure A.3 (blue ■ and red ■ markers). Polarity predictions from OLS (blue ● and red ● markers) appear very close, suggesting that it is appropriate to consider a simple identity link function in lieu of a computationally expensive logit formulation.

Unobserved MEP heterogeneity and omitted variable bias Our baseline model (1) sweeps away any unobserved time-invariant difference between MEP countries/EPGs with the respective dummies. However, we cannot control for the remaining MEP-level unobserved variation with MEP fixed effects because the regressors of interest (γ and δ) do not vary a lot within MEPs: parliamentarians rarely change their EPG affiliations and almost never — countries they represent. Two potential sources of question polarity variation — MEP ideology and his/her national party affiliation — are therefore not accounted for in the baseline model. A popular way to account for unobserved sources of variation is to assume randomly MEP-varying intercepts $\alpha_m \stackrel{\text{i.i.d.}}{\sim} \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma_\alpha^2)$. For Figure A.4 we estimate this random effects model with Feasible Generalized Least Squares and report its adjusted predictions (blue ■ and red ■ markers) in relation to the baseline model (blue ● and red ● markers). The results are very similar.

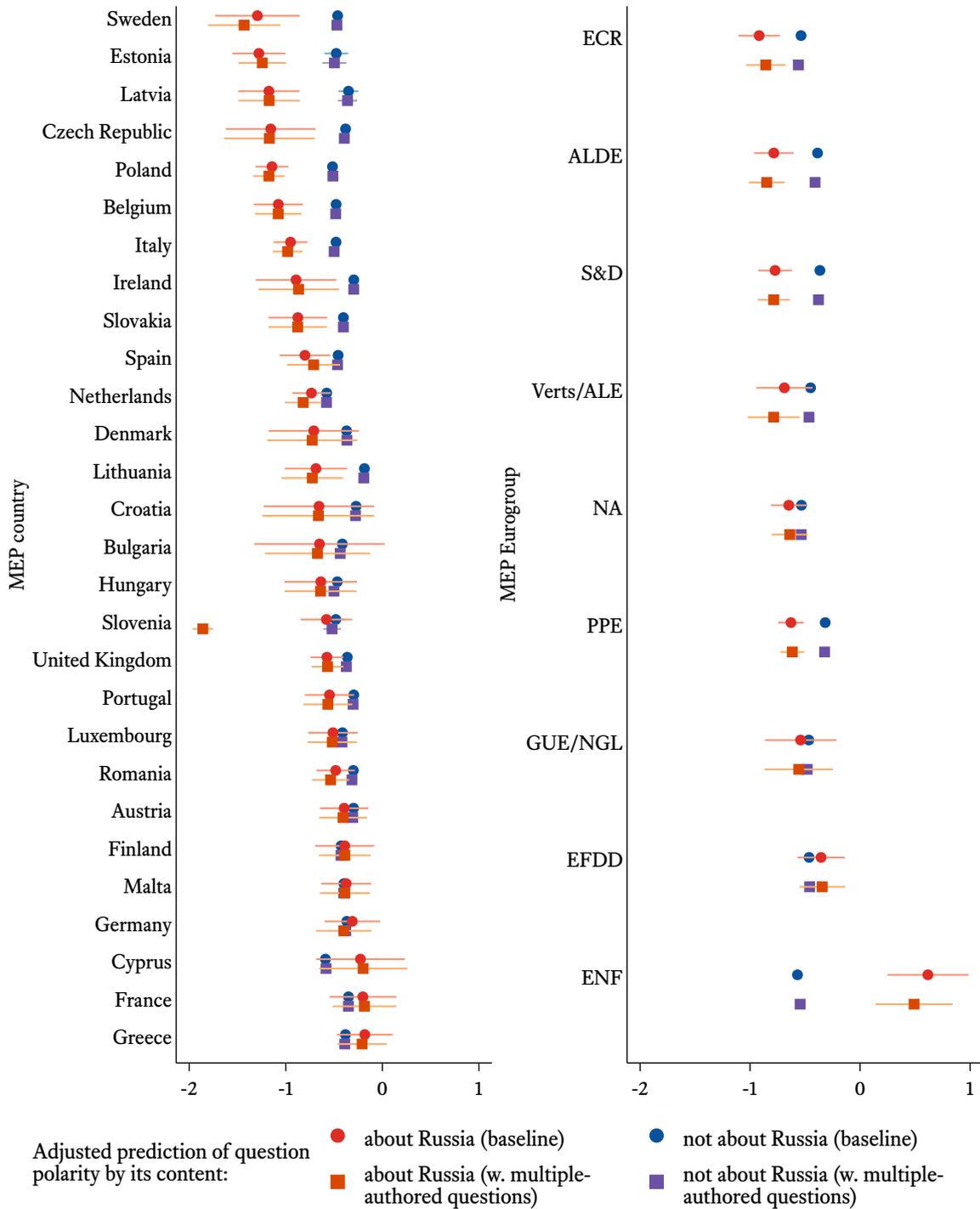
Random intercepts model, however, is valid only when its exogeneity assumption is satisfied: both ε and α are orthogonal to the model covariates. There are many reasons for this assumption to be violated: for instance, unobserved MEP ideology can be time-varying and, therefore, correlated with year dummies in the regression. To relax this problematic assumption of the random effects model we consider the correlated random effects model of Mundlak (1978) as well. It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a detailed

⁴⁴To compare regression coefficient values across models, refer to Online Appendix Table A.1.

discussion of the estimator⁴⁵ and we will only outline its intuition here. This estimator augments model (1) with MEP-specific means of question-varying variables to account for the between-MEP heterogeneity. The Feasible GLS estimate of Mundlak correlated random effects model is shown to be equivalent to MEP fixed effects estimate, with the benefit of simultaneously identifying time-invariant MEP-level coefficients ($\gamma, \eta, \delta, \theta$). Adjusted predictions from this model are presented in Figure A.4 as blue ▲ and red ▲ markers. Our findings appear to be robust to controlling for unobserved heterogeneity of MEPs.

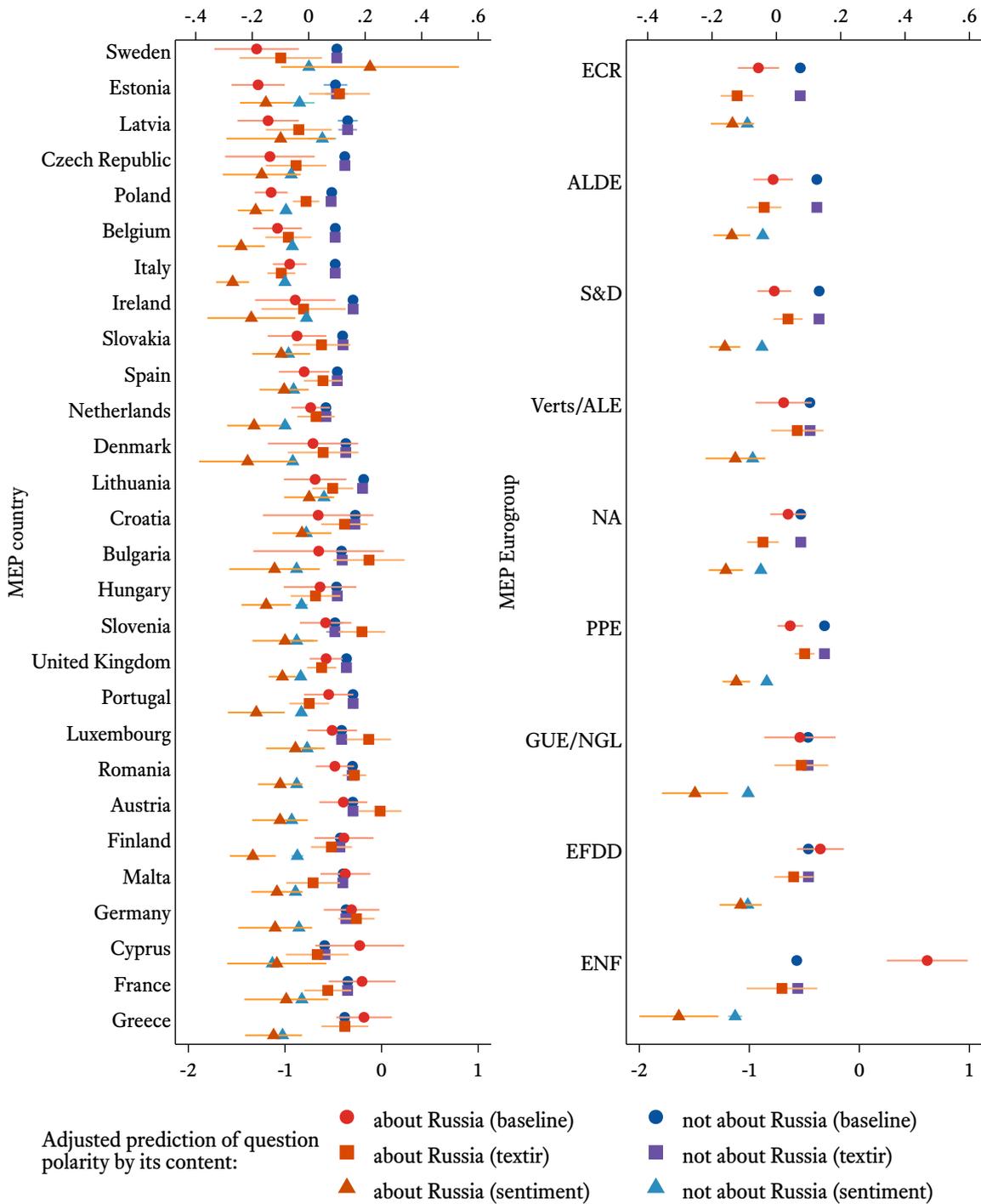
⁴⁵See Krishnakumar (2006) for its properties and Bell and Jones (2015) for its introduction to the political science literature.

Figure A.1: Robustness of adjusted predictions of question polarity at representative MEP country or EPG membership values to inclusion of multiply-authored questions



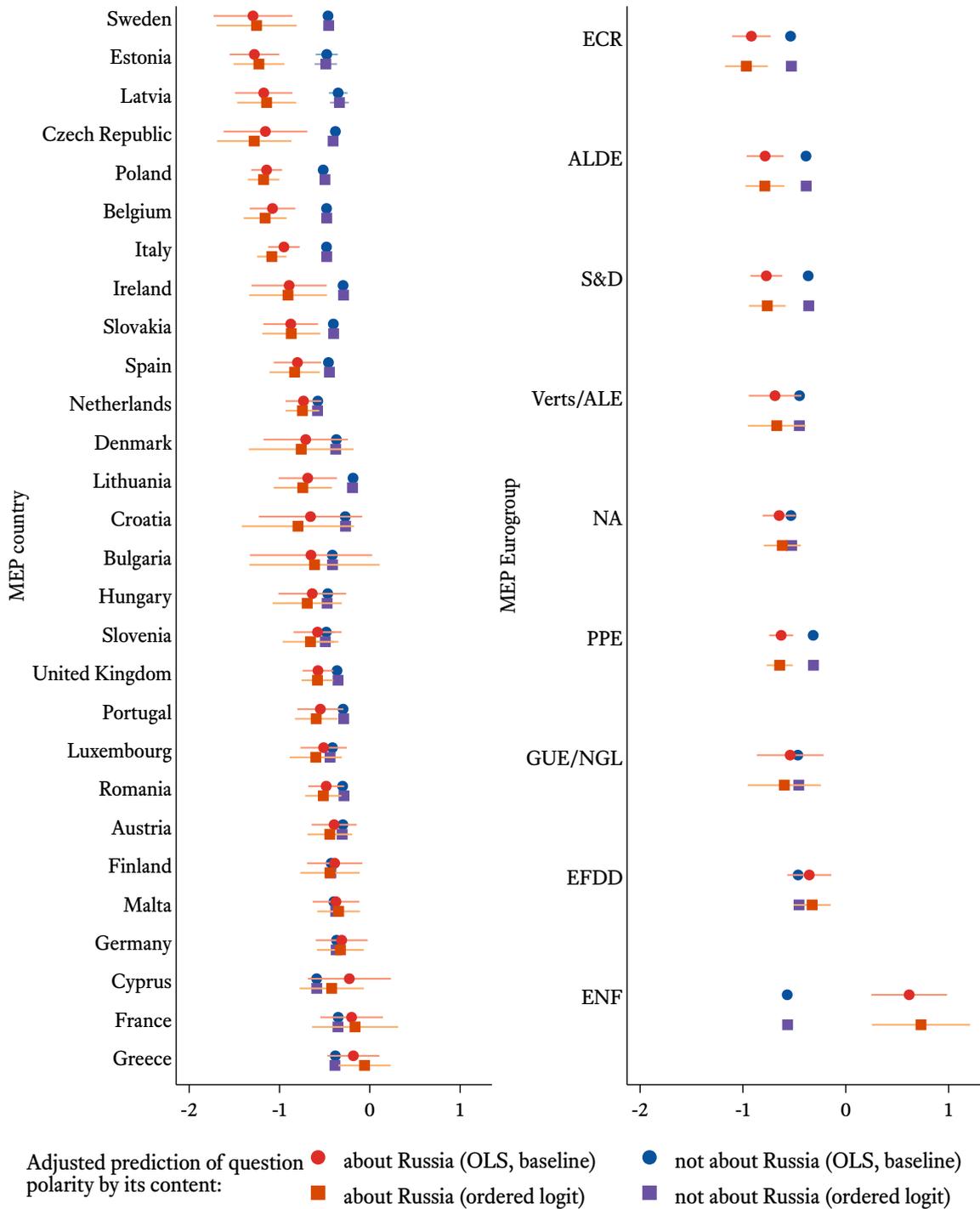
Note: blue ● markers show adjusted predictions of polarity of MEP questions from OLS-estimated baseline model (1) that are not about Russia, at representative values of MEP country (left panel) or European Political Group (right panel), holding other regressors at their mean values. Red ● markers show adjusted predictions of question polarity for Russia-related questions at representative MEP country/EPG values. In the baseline model we consider only solo-authored MEP questions to the European Commission asked under Rules 130(1, 5) of the EP Rules of Procedure in 2002–2015. Blue ■ and red ■ markers show adjusted predictions of polarity of, respectively, MEP non-Russia and Russia-related questions from OLS-estimated model when we consider both the solo-authored and multiple-authored questions to the European Commission. When questions have multiple authors we take the characteristics of the first MEP asking the question (as it appears on EP website). Question polarity comes from either manual coding or predicted polarity after ordered logit forward regression of manually coded question polarity on multinomial inverse regression sufficient reduction projection of unigram counts in question texts (Taddy, 2013b; see Section ‘Inferring question polarity from its text’ para ‘Inverse text regression approach combined with manual coding’ for details). Spikes show 90 per cent Huber-Eicker-White robust confidence intervals derived from the delta method.

Figure A.2: Robustness of adjusted predictions of question polarity at representative MEP country or EPG membership values to alternative definitions of question polarity



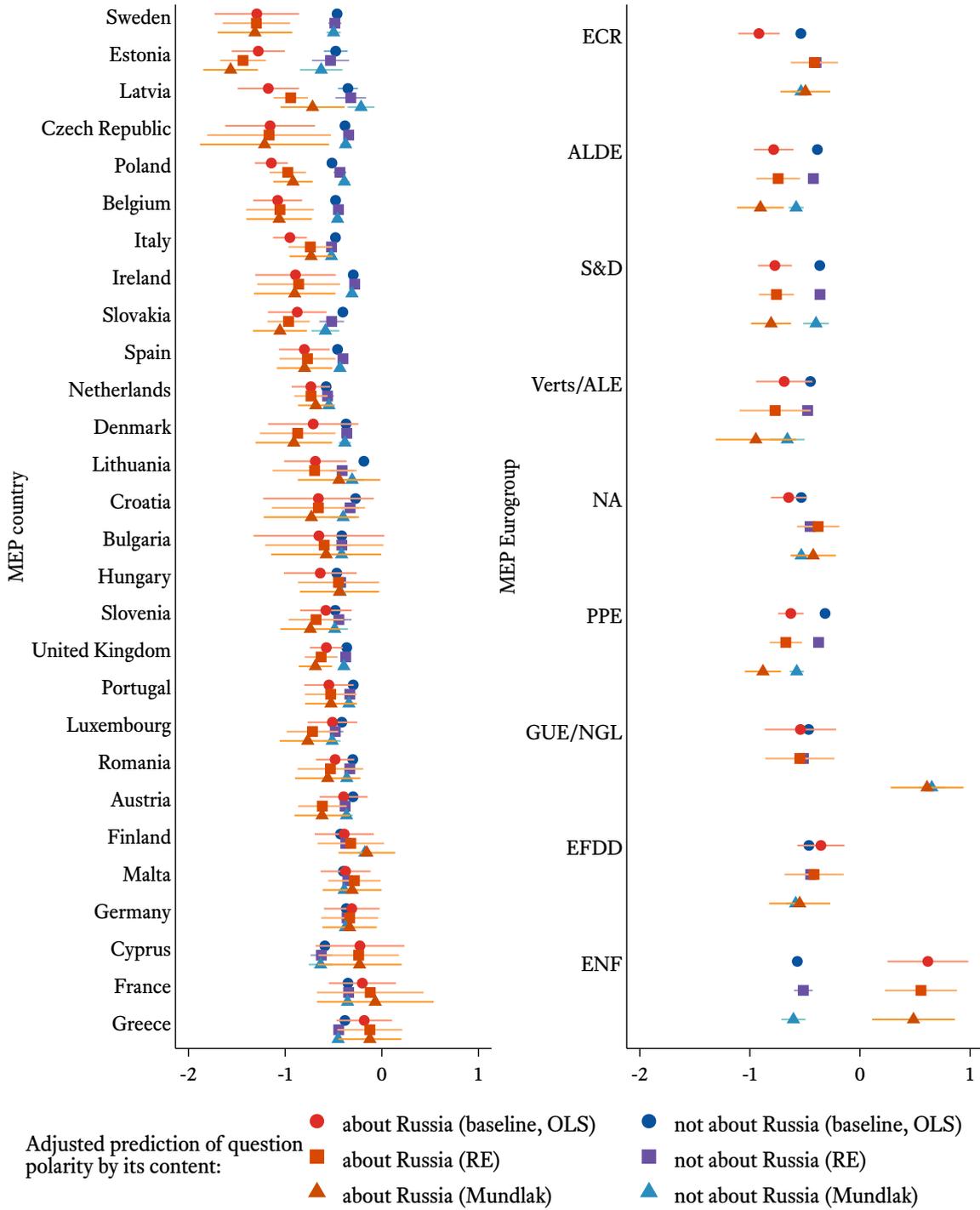
Note: blue ● markers show adjusted predictions of polarity of MEP questions from OLS-estimated baseline model (1) that are not about Russia, at representative values of MEP country (left panel) or European Political Group (right panel), holding other regressors at their mean values. Red ● markers show adjusted predictions of question polarity for Russia-related questions at representative MEP country/EPG values. We consider only solo-authored MEP questions to the European Commission asked under Rules 130(1, 5) of the EP Rules of Procedure in 2002–2015. Question polarity (lower x -axis) in the baseline model comes from either manual coding or predicted polarity after ordered logit forward regression of manually coded question polarity on multinomial inverse regression sufficient reduction projection of unigram counts in question texts (Taddy, 2013b; see Section ‘Inferring question polarity from its text’ para ‘Inverse text regression approach combined with manual coding’ for details). Blue ■ and red ■ markers show adjusted predictions of polarity of, respectively, MEP non-Russia and Russia-related questions from OLS-estimated model when question polarity (lower x -axis) is defined as coming from inverse text regression-predicted values only (see Section ‘Inferring question polarity from its text’ para ‘Inverse text regression approach’). Blue ▲ and red ▲ markers show adjusted predictions of non-Russia/Russia polarity from OLS of (1) when polarity is computed from Hu and Liu (2004) sentiment dictionary-based algorithm (upper x -axis). Spikes show 90 per cent Huber-Eicker-White robust confidence intervals derived from the delta method.

Figure A.3: Robustness of adjusted predictions of question polarity at representative MEP country or EPG membership values to alternative definition of model link function



Note: blue ● markers show adjusted predictions of polarity of MEP questions from OLS-estimated baseline model (1) that are not about Russia, at representative values of MEP country (left panel) or European Political Group (right panel), holding other regressors at their mean values. Red ● markers show adjusted predictions of question polarity for Russia-related questions at representative MEP country/EPG values. We consider only solo-authored MEP questions to the European Commission asked under Rules 130(1, 5) of the EP Rules of Procedure in 2002–2015. Question polarity comes from either manual coding or predicted polarity after ordered logit forward regression of manually coded question polarity on multinomial inverse regression sufficient reduction projection of unigram counts in question texts (Taddy, 2013b; see Section ‘Inferring question polarity from its text’ para ‘Inverse text regression approach combined with manual coding’ for details). Blue ■ and red ■ markers show adjusted predictions of polarity of, respectively, MEP non-Russia and Russia-related questions from Maximum Likelihood-estimated model (1) with logit link function (ordered logit of question polarity: $\{-2, -1, 0, 1, 2\}$). Spikes show 90 per cent Huber-Eicker-White robust confidence intervals derived from the delta method.

Figure A.4: Robustness of adjusted predictions of question polarity at representative MEP country or EPG membership values when controlling for unobserved MEP-level heterogeneity



Note: blue ● markers show adjusted predictions of polarity of MEP questions from OLS-estimated baseline model (1) that are not about Russia, at representative values of MEP country (left panel) or European Political Group (right panel), holding other regressors at their mean values. Red ● markers show adjusted predictions of question polarity for Russia-related questions at representative MEP country/EPG values. We consider only solo-authored MEP questions to the European Commission asked under Rules 130(1, 5) of the EP Rules of Procedure in 2002–2015. Question polarity comes from either manual coding or predicted polarity after ordered logit forward regression of manually coded question polarity on multinomial inverse regression sufficient reduction projection of unigram counts in question texts (Taddy, 2013b; see Section ‘Inferring question polarity from its text’ para ‘Inverse text regression approach combined with manual coding’ for details). Blue ■ and red ■ markers show adjusted predictions of polarity of, respectively, MEP non-Russia and Russia-related questions from Feasible Generalized Least Squares-estimated model (1) with MEP-level random effects $\alpha_m \stackrel{i.i.d.}{\sim} \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma_\alpha^2)$. Blue ▲ and red ▲ markers show adjusted predictions of non-Russia/Russia polarity from FGLS-estimated (1) with Correlated Random Effects approach (Mundlak, 1978). For this estimator we augment model (1) with MEP-specific means of question-varying variables and proceed with random-effects estimation. Spikes show 90 per cent Huber-Eicker-White robust confidence intervals derived from the delta method.

Table A.1: Coefficients on interaction terms from underlying regression models

Dependent variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Question polarity as specified in the table footer					
question about Russia	-0.244 (0.188)	0.0531 (0.166)	-0.0415 (0.0701)	-0.348* (0.192)	-0.370* (0.204)	-0.288 (0.181)
question about Russia × Austria	<i>Reference MEP country category</i>					
question about Russia × Belgium	-0.501** (0.215)	-0.765*** (0.202)	-0.140* (0.0798)	-0.369 (0.256)	-0.352 (0.262)	-0.495** (0.209)
question about Russia × Bulgaria	-0.139 (0.442)	-0.00237 (0.267)	-0.0366 (0.117)	0.0534 (0.389)	0.0927 (0.279)	-0.136 (0.367)
question about Russia × Croatia	-0.287 (0.382)	-0.388* (0.204)	0.0262 (0.0897)	-0.0925 (0.315)	-0.0765 (0.322)	-0.285 (0.385)
question about Russia × Cyprus	0.460 (0.322)	-0.361 (0.245)	0.0571 (0.123)	0.622** (0.305)	0.656** (0.315)	0.484 (0.320)
question about Russia × Czech Republic	-0.678** (0.321)	-0.786*** (0.240)	-0.0629 (0.105)	-0.588 (0.414)	-0.586 (0.432)	-0.676** (0.321)
question about Russia × Denmark	-0.242 (0.324)	-0.515* (0.264)	-0.119 (0.121)	-0.272 (0.279)	-0.276 (0.286)	-0.259 (0.322)
question about Russia × Estonia	-0.704*** (0.243)	-0.249 (0.250)	-0.0782 (0.0896)	-0.669*** (0.193)	-0.685*** (0.204)	-0.647*** (0.230)
question about Russia × Finland	0.136 (0.248)	-0.369* (0.195)	-0.116 (0.0808)	0.287 (0.271)	0.273 (0.279)	0.140 (0.229)
question about Russia × France	0.246 (0.250)	-0.486** (0.191)	-0.0138 (0.107)	0.459 (0.374)	0.539 (0.407)	0.265 (0.245)
question about Russia × Germany	0.155 (0.277)	-0.171 (0.184)	-0.0429 (0.101)	0.263 (0.244)	0.294 (0.248)	0.0794 (0.235)
question about Russia × Greece	0.297 (0.229)	-0.281 (0.195)	0.00966 (0.0850)	0.558** (0.256)	0.581** (0.215)	0.279 (0.215)
question about Russia × Hungary	-0.0735 (0.276)	-0.506** (0.211)	-0.0840 (0.0812)	0.214 (0.284)	0.246 (0.296)	-0.0390 (0.275)
question about Russia × Ireland	-0.500* (0.200)	-0.794*** (0.303)	-0.154 (0.114)	-0.344 (0.312)	-0.340 (0.318)	-0.470 (0.300)
question about Russia × Italy	-0.374** (0.175)	-0.839*** (0.149)	-0.144** (0.0697)	0.0164 (0.189)	0.0425 (0.201)	-0.381** (0.173)
question about Russia × Latvia	-0.727*** (0.257)	-0.786*** (0.253)	-0.107 (0.136)	-0.385** (0.200)	-0.249 (0.251)	-0.711*** (0.256)
question about Russia × Lithuania	-0.405 (0.254)	-0.590*** (0.193)	-0.0112 (0.0833)	-0.0491 (0.285)	0.117 (0.278)	-0.434* (0.230)
question about Russia × Luxembourg	<i>Omitted category due to insufficient observations</i>					
question about Russia × Malta	0.121 (0.221)	-0.589*** (0.221)	-0.0244 (0.0813)	0.303 (0.243)	0.335 (0.252)	0.111 (0.222)
question about Russia × Netherlands	-0.0603 (0.398)	-0.383** (0.162)	-0.0681 (0.0847)	0.0648 (0.294)	0.117 (0.211)	-0.141 (0.245)
question about Russia × Poland	-0.530*** (0.215)	-0.540*** (0.158)	-0.0660 (0.0715)	-0.304 (0.309)	-0.279 (0.203)	-0.562*** (0.179)
question about Russia × Portugal	-0.154 (0.221)	-0.735*** (0.187)	-0.118 (0.0870)	0.0381 (0.226)	0.0672 (0.203)	-0.161 (0.219)
question about Russia × Romania	-0.0848 (0.396)	-0.258 (0.157)	-0.0170 (0.0791)	0.0351 (0.254)	0.0559 (0.216)	-0.121 (0.325)
question about Russia × Slovakia	-0.374 (0.243)	-0.504** (0.211)	0.0155 (0.0880)	-0.210 (0.197)	-0.218 (0.218)	-0.373 (0.242)
question about Russia × Slovenia	<i>Omitted category due to insufficient observations</i>					
question about Russia × Spain	-0.246 (0.226)	-0.428** (0.188)	0.00780 (0.0817)	-0.131 (0.241)	-0.113 (0.250)	-0.148 (0.231)
question about Russia × Sweden	-0.733** (0.214)	-0.861*** (0.296)	0.258 (0.103)	-0.576** (0.224)	-0.561* (0.293)	-0.861*** (0.280)
question about Russia × United Kingdom	-0.113 (0.348)	-0.537*** (0.132)	-0.0234 (0.0576)	-0.0182 (0.140)	-0.0424 (0.155)	-0.0943 (0.147)
question about Russia × ALDE	<i>Reference MEP European Political Group category</i>					
question about Russia × ECR	0.0166 (0.154)	-0.0942 (0.126)	0.0501 (0.0512)	0.304* (0.172)	0.364** (0.172)	0.143 (0.145)
question about Russia × EFDD	0.506*** (0.175)	0.344** (0.148)	0.0743 (0.0546)	0.350* (0.201)	0.361* (0.200)	0.554*** (0.164)
question about Russia × ENF	1.583*** (0.253)	0.335 (0.220)	-0.0786 (0.0842)	1.388*** (0.235)	1.415*** (0.237)	1.476*** (0.237)
question about Russia × GUE/NGL	0.322 (0.214)	0.417** (0.164)	-0.0688 (0.0697)	0.287 (0.212)	0.282 (0.210)	0.362* (0.204)
question about Russia × NA	0.282* (0.151)	0.135 (0.135)	-0.0121 (0.0495)	0.393** (0.164)	0.433*** (0.165)	0.336** (0.144)
question about Russia × PPE	0.0858 (0.127)	0.298*** (0.102)	0.00163 (0.0418)	0.0222 (0.140)	0.0172 (0.143)	0.146 (0.115)
question about Russia × S&D	-0.00989 (0.138)	0.196* (0.118)	-0.0191 (0.0447)	-0.0763 (0.150)	-0.0836 (0.149)	0.0320 (0.128)
question about Russia × Verts/ALE	0.159 (0.188)	0.362** (0.172)	0.0423 (0.0642)	0.0247 (0.232)	0.0385 (0.238)	0.118 (0.170)
Questions	99,855	99,855	99,855	99,855	99,855	106,622
R ²	0.041	0.040	0.017	—	—	0.040
Estimator	OLS					
Question polarity variable	textir + coded	textir	sentiment dict.	textir + coded	Mundlak (1978) textir + coded	textir + coded
Multiply-authored questions	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Number of MEPs	1,807	1,807	1,807	1,807	1,807	—

Note: Huber-Eicker-White standard errors in parentheses. All models, unless otherwise noted, are estimated with OLS on solo-authored MEP questions to the the European Commission under Rule 130(1, 5) in 2002–2015. “textir + coded” means question polarity coming from either manual coding or predicted polarity after ordered logit forward regression of manually coded question polarity on multinomial inverse regression sufficient reduction projection of unigram counts in question texts (Taddy, 2013b; see Section “Inferring question polarity from its text” para “Inverse text regression approach combined with manual coding” for details). “textir” means question polarity coming from inverse text regression-predicted values only (see Section para “Inverse text regression approach”). “sentiment dict.” means question polarity coming from Hu and Liu (2004) sentiment dictionary-based algorithm (upper x -axis). “RE” means Feasible Generalized Least Squares-estimated model (1) with MEP-level random effects $\alpha_m \stackrel{i.i.d}{\sim} \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma_\alpha^2)$. “Mundlak (1978)” means FGLS-estimated (1) with Correlated Random Effects approach (Mundlak, 1978). For this estimator we augment model (1) with MEP-specific means of question-varying variables and proceed with random-effects estimation. All terms from equation (1) are included in the models but are not reported here. Stars show significance: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Table A.2: Stepwise construction of baseline question polarity regression model

Model Dependent variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
	Question polarity from manual coding or after inverse text regression predictions								
question about Russia	-0.415*** (0.0339)	-0.381*** (0.0312)	-0.388*** (0.0339)	-0.360*** (0.0331)	-0.358*** (0.0336)	-0.358*** (0.0332)	0.0508 (0.201)	-0.469*** (0.0322)	-0.244 (0.188)
question about Russia × Austria	<i>Reference MEP country category</i>								
question about Russia × Belgium							-0.745*** (0.238)		-0.501** (0.197)
question about Russia × Bulgaria							-0.413 (0.161)		-0.139 (0.162)
question about Russia × Croatia							-0.529 (0.211)		-0.287 (0.162)
question about Russia × Cyprus							0.176 (0.181)		0.460 (0.252)
question about Russia × Czech Republic							-0.865** (0.201)		-0.678** (0.201)
question about Russia × Denmark							-0.534* (0.211)		-0.242 (0.224)
question about Russia × Estonia							-0.999*** (0.212)		-0.704*** (0.249)
question about Russia × Finland							-0.0786 (0.228)		0.136 (0.248)
question about Russia × France							0.160 (0.238)		0.246 (0.224)
question about Russia × Germany							-0.0348 (0.229)		0.155 (0.229)
question about Russia × Greece							0.342 (0.224)		0.297 (0.229)
question about Russia × Hungary							-0.315 (0.224)		-0.0735 (0.224)
question about Russia × Ireland							-0.644** (0.241)		-0.500* (0.241)
question about Russia × Italy							-0.381** (0.171)		-0.374** (0.171)
question about Russia × Latvia							-0.985*** (0.247)		-0.727*** (0.227)
question about Russia × Lithuania							-0.592** (0.242)		-0.405 (0.242)
question about Russia × Luxembourg	<i>Omitted category due to insufficient observations</i>								
question about Russia × Malta							-0.131 (0.220)		0.121 (0.220)
question about Russia × Netherlands							-0.250 (0.160)		-0.0603 (0.160)
question about Russia × Poland							-0.771*** (0.158)		-0.530*** (0.162)
question about Russia × Portugal							-0.364* (0.202)		-0.154 (0.202)
question about Russia × Romania							-0.306* (0.164)		-0.0848 (0.164)
question about Russia × Slovakia							-0.657*** (0.226)		-0.374 (0.240)
question about Russia × Slovenia	<i>Omitted category due to insufficient observations</i>								
question about Russia × Spain							-0.439** (0.214)		-0.246 (0.224)
question about Russia × Sweden							-0.899*** (0.220)		-0.733*** (0.220)
question about Russia × United Kingdom							-0.204 (0.164)		-0.113 (0.164)
question about Russia × ALDE	<i>Reference MEP European Political Group category</i>								
question about Russia × ECR								-0.219* (0.116)	0.0166 (0.116)
question about Russia × EFDD								0.558*** (0.138)	0.505*** (0.138)
question about Russia × ENF								1.559*** (0.140)	1.583*** (0.140)
question about Russia × GUE/NGL								0.389* (0.168)	0.322 (0.168)
question about Russia × NA								0.367*** (0.120)	0.282* (0.120)
question about Russia × PPE								0.0851 (0.111)	0.0858 (0.111)
question about Russia × S&D								-0.0156 (0.171)	-0.00989 (0.171)
question about Russia × Verts/ALE								0.275 (0.171)	0.159 (0.169)
Austria	<i>Reference MEP country category</i>								
Belgium	-0.109*** (0.031)			-0.178*** (0.041)	-0.186*** (0.041)	-0.184*** (0.041)	-0.180*** (0.041)	-0.184*** (0.041)	-0.181*** (0.041)
Bulgaria	-0.0214 (0.0209)			-0.102** (0.030)	-0.106*** (0.030)	-0.116*** (0.032)	-0.117*** (0.032)	-0.117*** (0.032)	-0.117*** (0.032)
Croatia	0.131*** (0.021)			0.0407* (0.020)	0.0175 (0.020)	0.0249 (0.020)	0.0276 (0.020)	0.0239 (0.020)	0.0261 (0.020)
Cyprus	-0.205*** (0.021)			-0.293*** (0.021)	-0.296*** (0.021)	-0.287*** (0.021)	-0.290*** (0.021)	-0.287*** (0.021)	-0.291*** (0.021)
Czech Republic	0.0124 (0.021)			-0.0818*** (0.021)	-0.0867*** (0.021)	-0.0901*** (0.021)	-0.0817*** (0.021)	-0.0921*** (0.021)	-0.831*** (0.021)
Denmark	-0.00709 (0.021)			-0.0622*** (0.021)	-0.0709*** (0.021)	-0.0729*** (0.021)	-0.0723*** (0.021)	-0.0723*** (0.021)	-0.0724*** (0.021)
Estonia	-0.165** (0.021)			-0.256*** (0.021)	-0.270*** (0.021)	-0.272*** (0.021)	-0.256*** (0.021)	-0.256*** (0.021)	-0.256*** (0.021)
Finland	-0.00686 (0.021)			-0.103** (0.021)	-0.110** (0.021)	-0.115** (0.021)	-0.128** (0.021)	-0.116** (0.021)	-0.130** (0.021)
France	0.0408*** (0.021)			-0.0502*** (0.021)	-0.0534*** (0.021)	-0.0499*** (0.021)	-0.0518*** (0.021)	-0.0504*** (0.021)	-0.0522*** (0.021)
Germany	0.0314** (0.021)			-0.0620*** (0.021)	-0.0687*** (0.021)	-0.0693*** (0.021)	-0.0693*** (0.021)	-0.0701*** (0.021)	-0.0705*** (0.021)
Greece	-0.0137 (0.021)			-0.0820*** (0.021)	-0.0912*** (0.021)	-0.0823*** (0.021)	-0.0836*** (0.021)	-0.0831*** (0.021)	-0.0839*** (0.021)
Hungary	-0.0591** (0.021)			-0.162*** (0.021)	-0.167*** (0.021)	-0.166*** (0.021)	-0.167*** (0.021)	-0.166*** (0.021)	-0.168*** (0.021)
Ireland	0.109*** (0.021)			0.00443 (0.021)	-0.00889 (0.021)	0.00155 (0.021)	0.00246 (0.021)	0.00581 (0.021)	0.00527 (0.021)
Italy	-0.0993*** (0.021)			-0.163*** (0.021)	-0.178*** (0.021)	-0.183*** (0.021)	-0.182*** (0.021)	-0.184*** (0.021)	-0.182*** (0.021)
Latvia	-0.00129 (0.021)			-0.113* (0.021)	-0.116* (0.021)	-0.116* (0.021)	-0.0512 (0.021)	-0.109 (0.021)	-0.0527 (0.021)
Lithuania	0.180*** (0.021)			0.0966*** (0.021)	0.0884*** (0.021)	0.102*** (0.021)	0.113*** (0.021)	0.101*** (0.021)	0.112*** (0.021)
Luxembourg	-0.0240 (0.021)			-0.128** (0.021)	-0.137** (0.021)	-0.116** (0.021)	-0.114** (0.021)	-0.117** (0.021)	-0.116** (0.021)
Malta	0.0576** (0.021)			-0.0729*** (0.021)	-0.0809*** (0.021)	-0.0926*** (0.021)	-0.0989*** (0.021)	-0.0989*** (0.021)	-0.100*** (0.021)
Netherlands	-0.221*** (0.021)			-0.268*** (0.021)	-0.274*** (0.021)	-0.272*** (0.021)	-0.278*** (0.021)	-0.278*** (0.021)	-0.278*** (0.021)
Poland	-0.210*** (0.021)			-0.244*** (0.021)	-0.246*** (0.021)	-0.246*** (0.021)	-0.216*** (0.021)	-0.231*** (0.021)	-0.218*** (0.021)
Portugal	0.112*** (0.021)			0.0115 (0.021)	0.00581 (0.021)	0.00227 (0.021)	0.00282 (0.021)	0.00180 (0.021)	0.00195 (0.021)
Romania	0.152*** (0.021)			0.0242 (0.021)	0.0110 (0.021)	-0.00151 (0.021)	-0.00147 (0.021)	-0.00221 (0.021)	-0.00297 (0.021)
Slovakia	0.00787 (0.021)			-0.0930*** (0.021)	-0.0929*** (0.021)	-0.109*** (0.021)	-0.104*** (0.021)	-0.110*** (0.021)	-0.106*** (0.021)
Slovenia	-0.0424 (0.021)			-0.170*** (0.021)	-0.178*** (0.021)	-0.184*** (0.021)	-0.182*** (0.021)	-0.185*** (0.021)	-0.184*** (0.021)
Spain	-0.0795*** (0.021)			-0.154*** (0.021)	-0.165*** (0.021)	-0.160*** (0.021)	-0.159*** (0.021)	-0.161*** (0.021)	-0.160*** (0.021)
Sweden	-0.1026*** (0.021)			-0.155*** (0.021)	-0.157*** (0.021)	-0.169*** (0.021)	-0.164*** (0.021)	-0.169*** (0.021)	-0.165*** (0.021)
United Kingdom	-0.0369*** (0.021)			-0.0632*** (0.021)	-0.0689*** (0.021)	-0.0634*** (0.021)	-0.0643*** (0.021)	-0.0659*** (0.021)	-0.0652*** (0.021)
ALDE	<i>Reference MEP European Political Group category</i>								
ECR	-0.157*** (0.021)			-0.159*** (0.021)	-0.161*** (0.021)	-0.158*** (0.021)	-0.152*** (0.021)	-0.148*** (0.021)	-0.150*** (0.021)
EFDD	-0.0808*** (0.021)			-0.0844*** (0.021)	-0.0777*** (0.021)	-0.0722*** (0.021)	-0.0737*** (0.021)	-0.0764*** (0.021)	-0.0767*** (0.021)
ENF	-0.154*** (0.021)			-0.159*** (0.021)	-0.171*** (0.021)	-0.163*** (0.021)	-0.165*** (0.021)	-0.183*** (0.021)	-0.183*** (0.021)
GUE/NGL	-0.0631*** (0.021)			-0.0793*** (0.021)	-0.0810*** (0.021)	-0.0786*** (0.021)	-0.0779*** (0.021)	-0.0805*** (0.021)	-0.0793*** (0.021)
NA	-0.116*** (0.021)			-0.142*** (0.021)	-0.152*** (0.021)	-0.142*** (0.021)	-0.147*** (0.021)	-0.147*** (0.021)	-0.146*** (0.021)
PPE	0.0940*** (0.021)			0.0650*** (0.021)	0.0679*** (0.021)	0.0706*** (0.021)	0.0701*** (0.021)	0.0693*** (0.021)	0.0697*** (0.021)
S&D	0.0472*** (0.021)			0.0201*** (0.021)	0.0222*** (0.021)	0.0214*** (0.021)	0.0209*** (0.021)	0.0213*** (0.021)	0.0212*** (0.021)
Verts/ALE	-0.0678*** (0.021)			-0.0607*** (0.021)	-0.0587*** (0.021)	-0.0617*** (0.021)	-0.0622*** (0.021)	-0.0635*** (0.021)	-0.0630*** (0.021)
2002	<i>Reference question year category</i>								
2003				0.0322** (0.021)	0.0313** (0.021)	0.0313** (0.021)	0.0318** (0.021)	0.0307** (0.021)	0.0316** (0.021)
2004				-0.0522*** (0.021)	-0.0515*** (0.021)	-0.0515*** (0.021)	-0.0518*** (0.021)	-0.0518*** (0.021)	-0.0512*** (0.021)
2005				-0.0523*** (0.021)	-0.0523*** (0.021)	-0.0523*** (0.021)	-0.0515*** (0.021)	-0.0522*** (0.021)	-0.0515*** (0.021)
2006				-0.0792*** (0.021)	-0.0787*** (0.021)	-0.0787*** (0.021)	-0.0778*** (0.021)	-0.0789*** (0.021)	-0.0781*** (0.021)
2007				-0.0364*** (0.021)	-0.0346*** (0.021)	-0.0346*** (0.021)	-0.0342*** (0.021)	-0.0349*** (0.021)	-0.0339*** (0.021)
2008				-0.0521*** (0.021)	-0.0488*** (0.021)	-0.0488*** (0.021)	-0.0485*** (0.021)	-0.0488*** (0.021)	-0.0486*** (0.021)
2009				0.0580*** (0.021)	0.0588*** (0.021)	0.0589*** (0.021)	0.0589*** (0.021)	0.0587*** (0.021)	0.0586*** (0.021)
2010				0.00986 (0.021)	0.00682 (0.021)	0.00692 (0.021)	0.00692 (0.021)	0.00689 (0.021)	0.00696 (0.021)
2011				-0.0379*** (0.021)	-0.0389*** (0.021)	-0.0391*** (0.021)	-0.0393*** (0.021)	-0.0393*** (0.021)	-0.0393*** (0.021)
2012				-0.0702*** (0.021)	-0.0702*** (0.021)	-0.0713*** (0.021)	-0.0714*** (0.021)	-0.0712*** (0.021)	-0.0712*** (0.021)
2013				-0.0466*** (0.021)	-0.0472*** (0.021)	-0.0468*** (0.021)	-0.0475*** (0.021)	-0.0475*** (0.021)	-0.0469*** (0.021)
2014				-0.0248* (0.021)	-0.0280** (0.021)	-0.0274** (0.021)	-0.0274** (0.021)	-0.0280** (0.021)	-0.0271** (0.021)
2015				-0.0109 (0.021)	-0.0136 (0.021)	-0.0137 (0.021)	-0.0140 (0.021)	-0.0140 (0.021)	-0.0139 (0.021)
priority written question	<i>Reference question type category</i>								
written question				0.0507*** (0.0062)	0.0506*** (0.0062)	0.0505*** (0.0062)	0.0505*** (0.0062)	0.0505*** (0.0062)	0.0503*** (0.0062)
MEP age						-0.00133*** (0.00027)	-0.00137*** (0.00027)	-0.00136*** (0.00027)	-0.00138*** (0.00027)
MEP male						-0.0240*** (0.0004)	-0.0236*** (0.0004)	-0.02	