

The European Union in the United Nations: An Analysis of General Assembly Debates

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Abstract

This paper explores whether cohesion of policy preferences and positions on world politics among EU member states, as revealed in the framework of the annual United Nations (UN) General Debate, has increased or decreased over time. Of particular interest is whether the institutional adaptations that followed the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon – notably the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the acquisition of enhanced observer status within the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) -- have led to more coherence in the speeches delivered by government representatives of EU member states. We explore this topic based on all speeches made in UN General Debates between 1990 and 2018, for all EU member states, comparing them to the positions taken by selected global powers. We apply text-as-data techniques to these speeches as assembled in the United Nations General Debate Corpus (UNGDC). Methodologically, we apply wordscores analysis and text similarity measures, complemented by ideal point estimates based on UNGA voting and co-sponsorship data. Our results indicate increased dispersion in the positions of EU states in UN General Debates after 2011. Ideal point estimates based on voting data, by comparison, provide evidence for enhanced cohesion. This disparity is likely to derive from the patterns of representation of the EU within the UN General Debate before as compared to after 2011.

1. Introduction¹

How does the European Union (EU) as a regional integration scheme operate within the United Nations (UN)? Has the implementation of the Treaty of Lisbon and the enhanced observer status that the EU gained in 2011 led to a more cohesive EU within the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)? Can changes in EU cohesiveness be seen over time? Positions and priorities of UN member states are presented annually in the form of contributions to the UNGA General Debate, where heads of state of all UN member states address an international audience based on 15-minute speeches.² This paper analyzes, based on automated text analysis, the full corpus of General Assembly debates between 1990 to 2018.³ We explore whether the EU has become either more cohesive or less cohesive in terms of its members' priorities as expressed within these debates, accounting for major steps in the EU's recent institutional developments. The enhanced observer status, attributed based on UNGA resolution 65/276,⁴ allows the EU to participate in UNGA debates as an entity, to speak among representatives of major groups – before individual states – and to submit proposals and amendments to draft resolutions. It does not, however, provide the EU with (collective) voting rights. In the UN General Debate, the EU as a regional organization speaks alongside its individual member states. Prior to 2011, the EU speeches were delivered by the member state holding the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union (formerly the 'Council of Ministers'). From 2011 onwards, however, the EU speeches have been delivered by the president of the European Council (which since the Treaty of Lisbon is a semi-permanent position of two and one-half years, renewable once).

Earlier analyses with a similar focus have explored the question of whether the coherence and visibility of the EU has increased since the Treaty of Lisbon (e.g., Blavoukos et al. 2016). The authors explored oral interventions made by the EU and by representatives of EU member states in the context of UNGA plenary meetings as well as meetings in the framework of the UNGA's six committees. The analysis was for a total of six UNGA sessions. Blavoukos et al. found that increasingly, the EU Delegation has intervened in these meetings and presented the EU's common positions, with this decreasing the occurrence of the Council

¹ An earlier version of this paper has been presented at the 78th Annual Conference of the Midwest Political Science Association (MPSA), 14 – 18 April 2021 (online) and at the Annual convention of the International Studies Association (ISA) March 28 - April 2, 2022. We notably thank Spyros Blavoukos, Katja Biedenkopf, Hyunki Kim and Chen Kertcher for helpful comments and suggestions.

² In 2020, for the first time, the General Debate was held as a largely virtual event.

³ Jankin Mikhaylov, Slava; Baturo, Alexander; Dasandi, Niheer, 2017, "United Nations General Debate Corpus", <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/0TJX8Y>, Harvard Dataverse, V5. Also see Chelotti et al. (2021).

⁴ See United Nations General Assembly (2011).

Presidency's declarations. According to the authors, the Treaty of Lisbon and the introduction of the EU's enhanced observer status – established based on resolution 65/276 in 2011 – contribute to a more coherent EU presence at the UNGA. Similarly, Guimarães (2015) describes how on 22 September 2011, the speech by the President of the European Council in the UN General Debate, opening the 66th session of the UNGA, changed the ways in which the EU participates in the work of the organization; it was for the first time that the EU's positions were not conveyed by an EU member state (in its capacity as president of the Council), but by the (semi-permanent) President of the European Council. This development, according to the author, is likely to strengthen the role of the EU in the UN. Baturo et al. (2017) demonstrated, more generally, how member state priorities and preferences can be extracted from speeches provided in the UN General Debate, opening the respective yearly sessions of the UNGA. The analysis was based on the UNGDC 1970 to 2014. Clearly, such information can be of much value, next to insights gained from the analysis of EU voting coherence on UNGA resolutions (e.g. Yin and Hosli 2013). More recently, Chelotti et al. (2021) find that, based on an analysis of the UNGDC, EU membership has generated socialization effects that were reflected in preference convergence within the UN General Debates. Accordingly, (prospective) membership of this regional organization has led UN member states to articulate more similar positions within the UN General Debates.

We build on such prior analyses, using automated text analysis of the UNGDC – complemented by some additional techniques – to assess the extent to which the Treaty of Lisbon and the EU's enhanced observer status at the UNGA are likely to have affected the extent of cohesiveness with which EU member states act within the UNGA and articulate their views on major issues related to world politics.

Our paper is structured as follows: Section 2 describes the background to the ways in which the EU operates as an entity within the UN, and notably within the UNGA. While section 3 explains the documents collected for this paper and the ways with which we are analyzing them, section 4 presents the results of the analysis. Finally, section 5 summarizes the main findings of our paper and concludes.

2. The EU in the UN: Coherence and Dissonance over Time

Concrete steps towards the development of a more integrated political entity were taken in Europe with the initiation of European Political Cooperation (EPC) in the 1970s. Since then, in the course of various Treaty revisions, obligations for EU member states to act cohesively within international organizations have gradually increased. This also applies to the UN and even in the Security Council, where two EU member states – France and the United Kingdom – hold a permanent seat. With Brexit having been implemented, coordination among the EU states in the UNSC may get more complicated.

In general, coordination among EU states within the UN has not always been easy, as their priorities as regards major issues in world politics may differ. This is not surprising, given the EU consists of essentially 27 sovereign states who together form a regional organization. Such ‘dissonance’ among the EU’s member states was demonstrated, for example, in the EU’s position within the UNSC on the case of Iraq, and later approaches towards the crisis in Libya. Nonetheless, over time, the EU has increasingly created patterns leading to more tools and channels for coordination, with significant steps having been taken with the implementation of the 2009 Treaty of Lisbon. EU Delegations across the world aim to coordinate the position of EU member states to enhance the organization’s capacity to ‘speak with one voice’.⁵

With the establishment of the EEAS, an actual ‘diplomatic arm’ of the EU has been created.⁶ Simultaneously, the representations of the EU globally have been turned into EU Delegations. For example, the EU Delegation in New York acts as a crucial bridge between the EU and the UN and coordinates the positions of the EU member states within the various entities at the UN headquarters. Work at the EU Delegation is characterized by a multitude of meetings held annually to create common EU positions regarding the various items on the agenda of the UNGA (as well as the UNSC). Clearly, the establishment of EU delegations has also affected the ways in which the EU operates within the main committees of the UNGA.⁷ It can be expected that with increased coordination activities of the EEAS and of the EU Delegations, EU coherence within the UNGA has increased over time; the enhanced observer status granted in 2011 is likely to have further strengthened this trend. Whether this hypothesis holds true is the main subject of our analysis.

3. Methodology and Document Selection

The documents collected for this paper are based on the UNGDC, extracted from Harvard Dataverse. Our text collection covers the time span from 1990 (Session 45) to 2018 (Session 73). These documents form a particularly suitable collection, since in the General Assembly Debates, positions and priorities of UN member states are often stated in clearer ways than in the framework of other meetings, where more ‘diplomacy’, negotiation and mechanisms to induce compromise are likely to be applicable. Presentations in the annual General Assembly Debate tend to be open, frank displays of UN member states’ positions on various aspects of world politics. Individual characteristics of representatives of UN member states – even

⁵ For a detailed overview of the role of the EU as a group within the United Nations, see Smith (2020).

⁶ E.g., see Gstöhl (2012).

⁷ On the role of the EU in the UN more generally, e.g. see Panke (2014).

personality traits – become visible in these appearances and often offer a welcome venue for the governments of UN member states to voice their concerns and opinions on a wide range of foreign policy themes.

Our analysis particularly aims to explore whether the institutional changes introduced by the implementation of the Treaty of Lisbon may have led EU member states to act more cohesively within the UN. It can be expected that enhanced coordination mechanisms based on the Treaty of Lisbon led EU member state government representatives speaking in the UNGA General Debate to display more cohesion on salient issues of world politics. The coordination mechanisms in this context, however, are likely to be less stringent than those aimed at achieving coordinated voting positions, for example, on resolutions voted on in the UNGA. In the latter case, positions are discussed and coordinated in the context of several meetings taking place at the EU Delegations in, for example, New York and Geneva (e.g., see Laatikainen 2017, Smith 2020). Similar patterns have been observed in the role of the EU Delegation to the African Union, AU (Reussner 2017). General Assembly Debates, in this sense, are likely to show less of the effects of *a priori* coordination.

Did the enhanced coordination lead presidents or prime ministers of EU member states to articulate more coordinated positions in front of the UNGA? Or did the institutional strengthening of the coordination mechanisms rather lead to a process where representatives of EU member states take the opportunity to articulate their own worldviews – rather than the coordinated, EU-wide perspective – to the other UN member states? Both are plausible scenarios. They can best be studied by resorting to the actual speeches given by these representatives and by analyzing them with appropriate techniques.

To explore whether there is increased cohesion among EU member states in their General Assembly Debate speeches over time, we extract positions based on the UNGDC text collection for all EU member states; by computing the respective wordscores and applying additional analyses. Wordscores analysis has become a popular text analytical technique to scale policy preferences (positions) of actors on *a priori* defined policy dimensions (Laver et al, 2003; Benoit et al. 2005). The wordscores are derived by comparing the occurrence of terms in reference texts, which define the anchor (end)points of a given political dimension, to term frequencies in virgin (analyzed) texts.

For our study, we map the wordscores for three policy dimensions, namely the dimensions USA - EU, USA-Russia and USA - China, for each year and each EU member state in the time span 1990 to 2018, i.e., for a period of almost three decades of General Assembly Debates. In our analysis, the reference points for examined policy dimensions are thus defined by speeches given by the US delegates, on the one hand, and by official EU, Russian and Chinese delegates on the other hand. We assign a reference score of 1 to the

speeches by the US delegates and a reference score of -1, in sequence, for the EU. We proceed in the same way for the Russian and Chinese speeches, respectively. Accordingly, if on the US-EU policy dimension, an individual EU member state obtains a score close to 1, it means that its position (as revealed in the speech) is close to that of the US. If the score is closer to -1, by comparison, then the speech is more similar to the coordinated EU stance.

While the wordscores capture the positions of EU member states on an *a priori* defined dimension, it is important to employ them to measure an overall EU policy coherence. To this end, we compute the standard deviations (spread) of wordscores for each year in the time span 1990 to 2018 for the EU member states. Higher values of standard deviations indicate a greater (or reduced) level of incoherence (or coherence) of EU members states' positions within the UN General Assembly Debates.

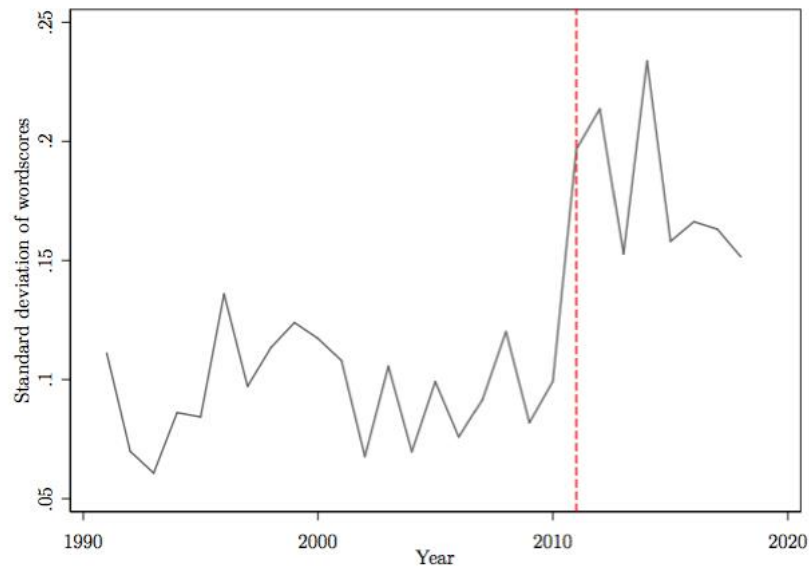
4. Analysis and Evaluation

Figure 1 depicts the standard deviations of wordscores – our measure of ‘non-coherence’ – for the US-EU policy dimension. Comparing the degree of coherence among the EU states in their governments' speeches before and after 2011, it seems the year 2011 marks a relatively sharp increase in non-coherence among their positions. This is a surprising result, as the 2011 speeches were given after the EU had been granted enhanced observer status within the UNGA (in May 2011) and the EEAS had been established.

There are two potential explanations for this result. The first explanation pertains to the fact that prior to 2011, the EU position was officially presented by a member state holding the (half-yearly) rotating presidency at the Council of the EU. The representative of this government – usually the president or prime minister – might have been presenting less the ‘collective EU position’ than the perspective of his or her own government, compared to the arrangement applicable in the more recent past. In other words, if the position was at odds with the positions of other EU member states, speeches by fellow EU governments would be recorded in our analysis with wordscores clustered around zero values: they would be at an equal distance then to the position of the U.S. and to the official EU position, respectively. The second explanation for our somewhat counter-intuitive result revolves around the fact that all EU member states, prior to 2011, may have felt somewhat obliged to adhere to the overall EU position, leading to a lower spread of wordscores and accordingly, lower standard deviations. According to this line of reasoning, the establishment of the EEAS and the acquisition of the EU's enhanced observer status in 2011 could thus potentially have taken the pressure off EU states to collectively represent the EU point of view in UN General Debates and induced them to rather speak more specifically on behalf of their own member state. This could be particularly relevant for some EU states whose governments are usually seen as important

from an international perspective, among them Germany and France. Alternatively, the EEAS could have been better able to present the overarching EU position than the member states holding the rotating presidency did before; while some EU states closely adhere to this position, others present rather different views on world politics, leading to a large spread of positions on salient topics among the member states of the EU. Finally, another explanation might be that the effects of the global financial crisis have affected EU states in different ways, leading them to articulate partially opposing positions on major issues in world politics (potentially reflecting a ‘North-South division’ within the EU itself).

Figure 1. Extent of coherence among EU member states’ positions on the U.S. - EU policy dimension as assessed by wordscores (UNGA General Debates, 1990 – 2018)



Another possible explanation for the (somewhat unexpected) change after 2011 might also be that increased cohesion as regards positions on UN resolutions, induced by enhanced dynamics of coordination due to e.g. the EU’s enhanced observer status, may have led governments of EU member states to pursue another path in the General Debates framework, articulating their ‘own’ foreign policy positions more explicitly compared to discussions and voting procedures on UNGA resolutions. In a way, de facto increased coordination of positions taken within the UNGA and the UNSC could then have been ‘counterbalanced’ to a certain extent by taking up own, more nationally-oriented positions in the framework of the UN General Debates.

However, after what seems to be a fairly steep increase in the extent of ‘incoherence’ among EU member states’ positions shortly after 2010, EU coherence seems to have increased again by 2018. Once respective

data are available for this, it would be valuable to see whether this trend was continued in the years 2019 and 2020.

Figure 2. Extent of coherence of EU member states' positions on the U.S. - Russia policy dimension (UNGA General Debate, 1990 – 2018)

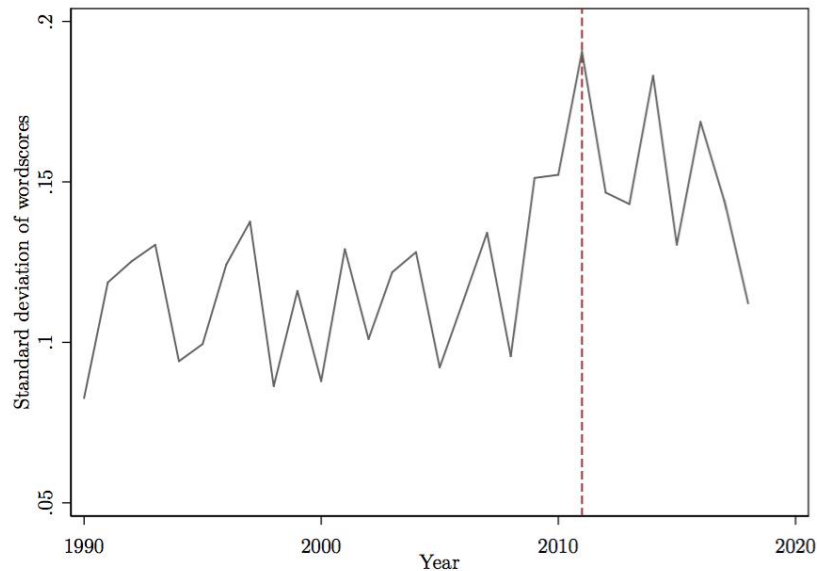


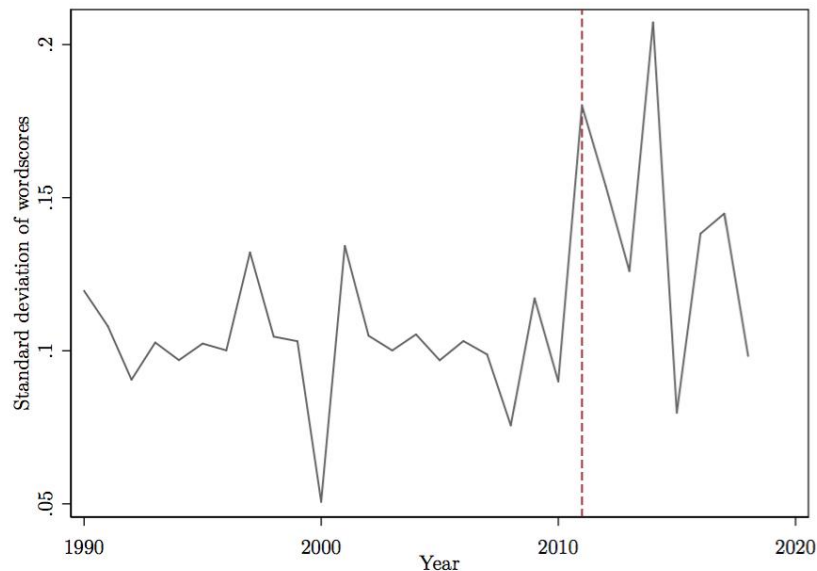
Figure 2 demonstrates the respective results when applying the US – Russia dimension to the set of EU states' UN General Debate speeches. Since this dimension does not involve the EU official position, the analysis is somewhat more straightforward: It captures the positions of individual EU member states compared to those encompassed by the delegates of the United States and Russia, respectively, as assessed by the wordscores analysis. From the General Debate of 2011 onwards -- although to a lesser extent than seen in Figure 1 -- we again observe a sharp decrease in the coherence of positions by EU member states. Thus, the establishment of the EEAS and the 2011 enhanced observer status coincided with a greater dispersion of EU member states' preferences on this dimension, as articulated in the context of the UN General Debate. Whether this relationship is a causal one of course remains unclear, as this decrease in coherence could also be due to other factors, such as reactions to the global financial crisis. Nonetheless, the finding supports the argument that the EEAS formation and increased coordination due to the EU's enhanced observer status in the UNGA have not induced increased coherence of the speeches made by governments of EU member states in the General Debate.

It could be the case that these institutional adaptations have 'liberated' EU member states from adhering to a coordinated EU position, which largely defined the contours of EU member states' General Debate

speeches before. On the other hand, we observe that this initially decreasing coherence is gradually disappearing again in recent years, by 2018 reaching levels of coherence similar to those observed prior to 2011. Hence, after a trend of deviation from the ‘common EU position’ displayed in the framework of the UN General Debate speeches, EU member states seem to have demonstrated a tendency again to follow a more coordinated stance by about 2018. We do not know whether this coordination is due to the strengthened internal foreign policy coordination mechanisms applicable within the EU or whether this is a sheer artifact of some more general global trends and developments. For example, the initiation of the Trump administration in the U.S. might have induced EU states to take up a more unified ‘front’ in the ways they reflected on global issues in front of the UNGA. Similarly, the tensions between the EU and Russia, notably due to the crisis related to the Ukraine and the position of the Crimea, are likely to have caused a more ‘coordinated’ policy response by EU member states, also as reflected by speeches in front of the UNGA. Nonetheless, the level of coherence, as shown notably in Figure 1, did not reach the pre-2011 levels again in the more recent past.

Figure 3, which depicts the extent of EU member states’ coherence on the U.S. - China policy dimension, provides results that are largely congruent with those displayed in Figure 2, although the decrease in coherence in 2011 and onwards seems to be less consistent, displaying some spikes in both directions. A notable increase in ‘incoherence’ among the EU states can be seen to have occurred around the year 2014. This could either be related to EU member states’ positions on the Belt and Road Initiative, BRI (which led to a division within the EU as to how to approach this initiative) or to discussions within the EU regarding how to interact with China on the topic of human rights. Clearly, compared to the positions taken by the representatives of the U.S. and China in their General Assembly speeches, EU member states demonstrated less internal coherence after 2011, with a general – albeit irregular -- trend towards more coherence again in the more recent past.

Figure 3. Extent of coherence of EU member states' positions on the U.S. - China policy dimension (UNGA General Debate, 1990 – 2018)

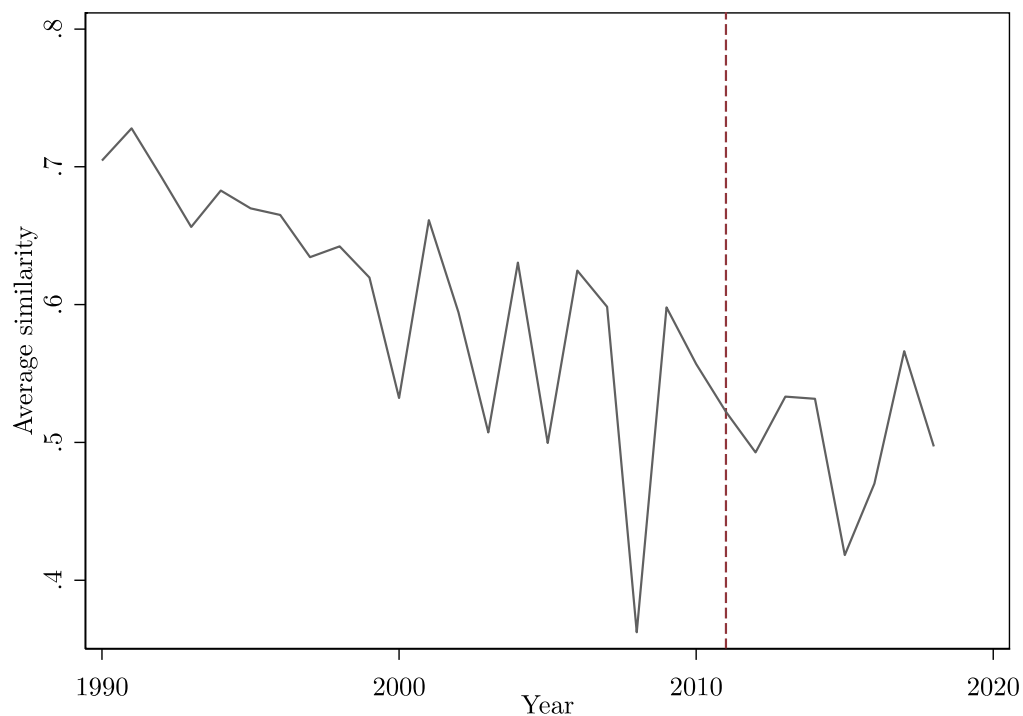


For the time space 1990 to 2018 the analysis demonstrates that the institutional adaptations within the EU, the acquisition of enhanced observer status and the related enhanced coordination mechanisms via the EU Delegations, against our earlier expectations, did not initially lead EU member states to voice similar positions on world politics in front of the UNGA. On the contrary, the heads of state or government of EU members may have seen the UN General Debate as an opportunity to voice their national perspectives and concerns more explicitly, deviating from the general trend inducing EU states to coordinate their positions (e.g., on UNGA resolutions voted on, or within the UN Security Council). Over time, however, as our empirical analysis reveals, the contents of the speeches by delegates of EU states have again become somewhat more ‘aligned’, potentially reflecting a delayed reaction to overall coordination processes within the EU.

To further corroborate the findings stemming from our wordscores analysis, we compute text similarity measures between the speeches representing the official EU position (again the speeches of the EU states holding the rotating presidency in the Council prior to 2011 and the speeches by the president of the European Council thereafter) and speeches by the government representatives of individual EU member states. Methodologically, we employ cosine similarity measures ranging from 0 (implying texts have nothing in common) to 1 (reflecting the fact that it is exactly the same text). Naturally, higher scores correspond with greater similarity. Contrary to the Jaccard similarity, which takes into account a unique occurrence of words, the cosine similarity relies on the total frequency of words and is one of the most

common measurements of text similarity, not least for measuring the similarity between word embeddings. As was the case for the wordscores analysis above, the similarity measures are derived for all EU member states and for all years in the time span 1990 to 2018. For each year, the degree of similarity between EU member states' speeches and the official EU speech is calculated as an arithmetic average of similarity scores for all EU states in a given year (i.e., we do not weigh EU members based on criteria such as, for example, population size or economic power, as within the UN, each state essentially has the right to an individual 'voice' and full representation). A greater average text similarity value naturally represents a higher degree of similarity of the respective speeches.

Figure 4. Extent of similarity between EU member states speeches and the official EU position (UNGA General Debate, 1990 – 2018)



As the results displayed in Figure 4 reveal, in the course of the 1990s, the similarity of speeches by EU member states and the EU as a collective (represented by the speech of the president of the European Council) was much higher than it was in later time spans.⁸ Although we do not see a sharp decline in the

⁸ The results in Figure 4, compared to Figures 1-3, have to be interpreted in 'reverse' ways, as higher dispersion of wordscores displays higher divergence, but higher similarity scores reflect higher degrees of 'cohesion'.

similarity index in the year 2011 (the ‘main point of assessment’ in our analysis), we still observe that the text similarity scores show a declining trend. This provides additional evidence for the finding that the institutional adaptations resulting from the Treaty of Lisbon did not lead to more cohesion among EU states in the framework of UN General Assembly Debates. This additional analysis, moreover, shows that around the time of the global financial crisis, EU member states in their UN General Assembly speeches seem to have deviated quite strongly, on average, from the collective EU position – demonstrating divisions within the EU as to how to tackle and respond to the effects of the crisis.

5. Exploring Cohesion: Alternative Approaches

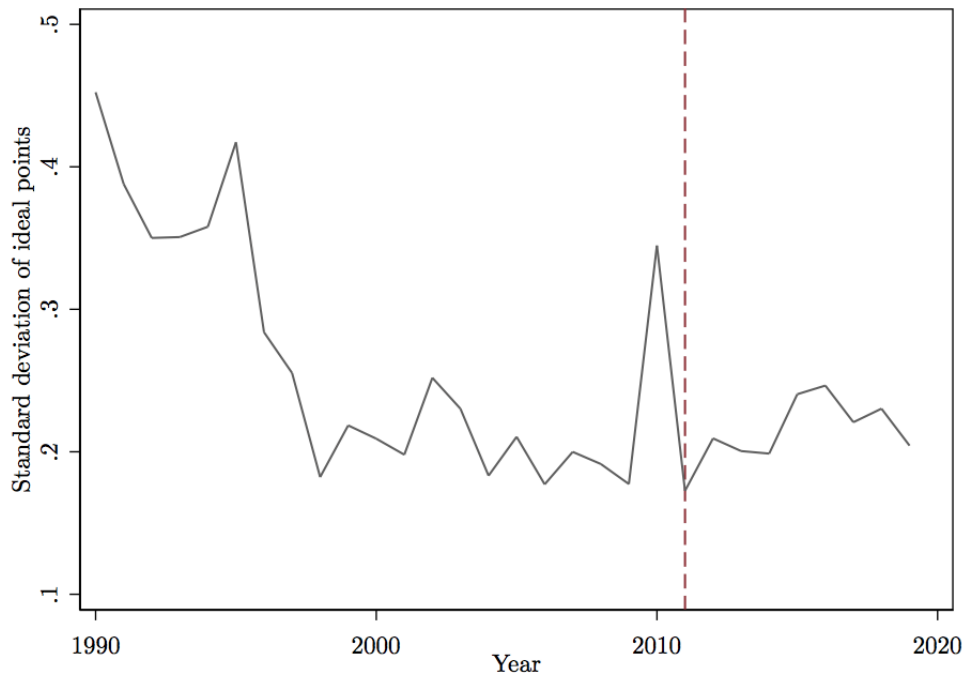
Moving beyond text-as-data techniques, we now further examine whether other indicators capturing EU member states’ preferences reveal the same trend of convergence or divergence over time and notably, changes around the year 2011. To this end, we first employ ideal point estimates based on techniques as devised by Bailey et al. (2017), for the time span 1990 to 2019.⁹ Similar to the extent of coherence assessed earlier, of which the results are displayed in Figures 1 to 4 above, we now compute the standard deviation of ideal points. They are derived as follows. As a (single) policy dimension, positions towards the US are used, as derived by Bailey et al. (2017), reflecting the positions of states vis-à-vis what the authors label a ‘US-led liberal order’. The ideal points have several advantages over dyadic similarity indicators, including more valid intertemporal comparisons.

Based on this alternative assessment, which uses votes cast on (disputed) UNGA resolutions in the UNGA as a basis, we observe a relatively high extent of non-coherence among EU member states before about 1998, which then, however, decreases by about 2000. It is conceivable that this ‘alignment’ of EU member states’ positions around the start of the new millennium is related to the increased dynamics at the time towards the creation of the Euro as a single European currency and the establishment of the European Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). It could also be the case that efforts within the EU in terms of further integration after the internal market had been completed enhanced efforts to align on a policy dimension such as a global liberal order.

⁹ For this data collection, information is available also for the year 2019. See

<https://dataverse.harvard.edu/file.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/LEJUQZ/WU1MCH&version=27>
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Figure 5. Extent of coherence of EU member states' positions based on ideal point estimates (UNGA votes, 1990 - 2019)



The extent of ‘incoherence’, assessed by this technique, has dropped to about 0.2 just before the year 2000 and has oscillated around this level since then. The results, however, also reveal a spike in the degree of ‘non-coherence’ around the year 2010 – an effect that could again be explained by developments mentioned above, notably effects of the global financial crisis, creating contrasting reactions among the EU states as to how best to deal with this challenge.

While the ideal point estimates do not corroborate all findings discussed above – including the lower extent of cohesion among EU states in UN General Debate speeches after as compared to before 2011, as revealed by the wordscores and text similarity assessments – they corroborate the finding that the institutional changes induced by the Treaty of Lisbon did not always lead EU member states to ‘speak with one voice’ on the international level. Cohesion within the UNGA as concerns politically disputed resolutions (i.e., resolutions voted on by the assembly), has remained approximately equal for almost two decades (although an increase in non-coherence materialized around the year 2010). The institutional adaptations implemented in 2011, however, do not reveal a specific effect on the extent of EU cohesion.

Our second (alternative) approach to measure the coherence of EU positions before and after the establishment of the EEAS in 2011 employs the dataset on resolution co-sponsorship in the UNGA as recently presented by Finke (2021). Based on this data, we have created a variable capturing the degree to

which the EU member states tend to jointly co-sponsor UN resolutions. In other words, this variable contains information on the share of EU member states being listed as authors of such resolutions. Thus, a score of 50 percent indicates that half of the EU membership is involved in the co-sponsorship.

Figure 6. Extent of coherence of EU member states assessed based on co-sponsorship data (UN resolutions, 1995 - 2016)



We interpret higher scores as an indicator of a stronger coherence. Based on these scores (Figure 6), we observe that the degree of coherence has steeply increased in the time span 1995-2000. In this phase, the joint co-sponsorship score reached as much as 64 percent, but declined in the years afterwards. The lowest score (40 percent), as Figure 6 demonstrates, was attained in 2006. After that, coherence based on the co-sponsorship measure has stabilized at a level of about 50 percent. Of course, in this time span, the EU experienced a strong enlargement, from a membership of 15 in 1995 to 25 by 2004. However, our analysis does not reveal a structural break around the year 2011, suggesting that the effect of major institutional changes within the EU did not directly translate into higher levels of co-sponsorship.

6. Conclusions

How have EU member states revealed their preferences in the context of UNGA General Debates over time and has coordination among them tended to increase? This paper explores, based on a wordscores analysis and text similarity measures, the positions of EU member states compared to those voiced by the EU as an entity, Russia and China between 1990 and 2018. In our empirical analysis, these are the three ‘dimensions’ assessed.

Our analysis reveals that institutional changes induced by the Treaty of Lisbon and the acquisition of the EU’s enhanced observer status in the UNGA as a partial consequence of the changes, did not lead EU member state governments to articulate more similar positions within the UNGA General Debates on general issues of ‘world politics’. This means they kept their ‘freedom’ to voice their own governments’ views and positions, which contrasts with the several other enhanced coordination efforts among EU states to ‘speak with one voice’ within the UN. In more recent years, nonetheless, it seems that even within the UN General Debates, somewhat more EU alignment can again be seen (possibly as a reaction to the visions of e.g. the U.S. under the Trump administration on global affairs or China’s worldviews as articulated within the organization).

To complement our analysis, we have also conducted ideal point estimates based on voting records in UNGA voting procedures. Underlying the analysis is the dimension (used by Bailey et al. 2017) of attitudes towards ‘the US-led liberal order’. Results of this analysis partially corroborate the findings of the earlier explorations, but differ by demonstrating a trend towards more cohesion up to about the year 2000, a spike in non-cohesion around 2010 and then a (somewhat irregular) trend of moderate cohesion in more recent years. Clearly, voting on UNGA resolutions reflects more of a collective ‘EU stance’, not least due to the various coordination mechanisms in place since the implementation of the Treaty of Lisbon. By comparison, in our analysis of co-sponsorship of UN resolutions, we do not find effects (yet) of increased EU coordination.

It seems that in UNGA General Debates, heads of state or government of EU member states tend to articulate their (national) priorities and views on salient issues in world politics in a more individualized way, with more coordination only having gradually materialized in the more recent past. This contrasts with more alignment, for example, in the framework of positions and votes on resolutions tabled within the UNGA (and even the UNSC), where a multitude of meetings conducted by the EU Delegations increase the extent to which EU member states act as a ‘unity’ on the various issues dealt with by the UN.

Our paper has only analyzed a selection of potential dimensions on which EU member states might have aligned or shown divergence within the UNGA General Debates. However, EU member state positions compared to those articulated by the U.S., Russia and China, as well as the EU as an entity, can still be expected to be central to assess the extent of ‘divergence’ among the governments of EU states over time in terms of their views on salient issues of world politics. The year 2011 may have constituted a ‘watershed moment’ in terms of adapted institutional foundations to the EU’s capacity to act as a unit within the UN, but in the context of the annual UNGA General Debate, its member states have nonetheless advocated their own positions and priorities, with coordinated perspectives only gradually materializing in later years. These results also testify to the observation that the UN still works based on the principle of ‘one country, one vote’ (or ‘one country, one worldview’), as captured in these individualized speeches of the governments of an otherwise tightly-knit regional integration scheme (the EU). Our ideal point estimates based on UNGA voting data, by comparison, reflect a more ‘cohesive’ EU in voting processes, reflecting the intensive patterns of coordination preceding discussions and votes on salient topics addressed by the General Assembly.

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Appendix

EU Member states holding the rotating presidency in the Council of the European Union (at the time when the respective United Nations General Debates were held):

1990	Italy
1991	Netherlands
1992	United Kingdom
1993	Belgium
1994	Germany
1995	Spain
1996	Ireland
1997	Luxembourg
1998	Austria
1999	Finland
2000	France
2001	Belgium
2002	Denmark
2003	Italy
2004	Netherlands
2005	UK
2006	Finland
2007	Portugal
2008	France
2009	Sweden
2010	Belgium