

EU AT THE UNGA: EU, EUROPE OR OCCIDENT?

A quantitative analysis regarding sponsorship and voting behavior at the UNGA (1985-2010)

Laurent BEAUGUITTE

Affiliation : Université Paris Diderot Sorbonne Paris Cité, UMR Géographie-cités

ABSTRACT

European Union (EU) role in international organizations, and especially in the UN system, has been intensively studied this last decade. The increasing convergence at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) has been highlighted by several authors. Instead of considering EU as a starting point for the analysis, the aim of this paper is to observe global relations at the UNGA from 1985 until 2010, and to search for coherent groups, and if one of these groups can be called EU. This study is based on voting behavior and resolutions sponsorship at the plenary session and in the Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian & Cultural). Using methods from Social Network Analysis, results show that EU at the UNGA exists as a core of a bigger group involving neighbor states and like-minded member States.

RÉSUMÉ

Le rôle de l'Union européenne (UE) dans les grandes institutions internationales, et notamment à l'ONU, est étudié de façon intensive depuis plus d'une décennie. La cohésion croissante à l'Assemblée générale de l'ONU a ainsi été prouvée à maintes reprises. Plutôt que de considérer l'UE comme une donnée de départ, l'objectif est ici d'étudier les relations globales au sein de l'AG entre 1985 et 2010 et d'observer quels groupes sont mis en évidence, et si l'un d'eux peut être qualifié d'UE. Cette étude se base sur les positions de votes ainsi que sur les parrainages de résolution, en session plénière et au sein de la troisième commission (questions sociales, humanitaires et culturelles). Utilisant des méthodes issues de l'analyse des réseaux sociaux, les résultats montrent que l'UE à l'Assemblée générale existe en tant que noyau dur d'un ensemble plus vaste incluant Etats voisins ou idéologiquement et culturellement proches.

STREAM B: The conflation of "Europe" with "European Union"

KEYWORDS: EUROPEAN UNION, UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY, VOTING BEHAVIOR, RESOLUTION SPONSORSHIP

INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU) role in international organizations, and especially in the UN system, has been studied extensively this last decade [3]. When the scope is limited to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), several authors showed the increasing convergence between EU member states regarding voting behavior, speeches or resolutions sponsorship [4], even if the impact of this cohesiveness on other actors remains uncertain [5]. This socialization process involves both actual members and candidates, and this convergence generally occurs as soon as a country postulates to join the EU [2].

Instead of considering the EU group as a starting point for the analysis, this paper considers global relations in the UNGA in order to check if a group that could be called EU emerges. It must be remind that if recognized groups, including the EU, can pronounce a speech or sponsor a resolution, only states can vote at the UNGA.

The structure of the paper is as follow: the first section presents the data and methodology used to reveal groups at the UNGA. The second section presents world divisions based on voting behavior between 1985 and 2010. The third and last section presents groups revealed by the analysis of resolution sponsorship in the Third Committee.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Data selection regarding UNGA votes remains a difficult task [1]. Even if this field of research has long been explored by North-American researchers [6], no consensus exists regarding valuable criteria of inclusion. The following rules has been applied regarding vote results' selection: only votes regarding full resolutions and occurring in the plenary session were kept. Each time a resolution is putted on vote at the UNGA, member state gets for options: yes, abstention, no, not participate to the vote. These four modalities were kept. Finally, member states not participating to 30% or more on all votes occurring during a session were also deleted before analysis. Keeping them would create a strongly cohesive bloc getting nothing in common except a frequent absence at the UNGA.

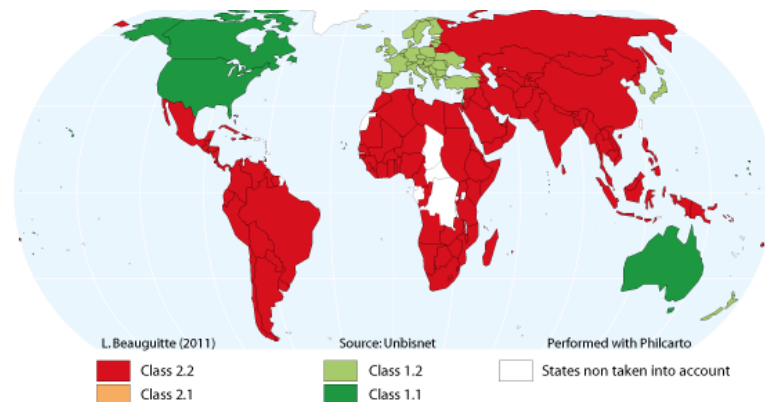
Regarding resolution sponsorship, data were collected with five year intervals for the plenary session and the Third Committee. Resolutions sponsored by a single member state were deleted before analysis. In both case, data can be represented as bipartite matrix: one matrix state – resolution regarding vote casted (4 modalities); one Boolean matrix state – resolution regarding sponsorship (1 when state A sponsors resolution x, 0 elsewhere).

Using methods from Social Network Analysis [7], these bipartite matrices were transformed in co membership matrices giving for each pair of states an index of similarity ranked from 0 to 1. When the similarity is equal to zero, it means that the two states considered always vote in a different way or always get different sponsorship strategies (when A sponsors resolution x, B does not, and reversely). When the index is equal to 1, both countries always behave the same way.

In order to reveal world partition regarding voting behavior, the method used is the search of structural equivalence based on the CONCOR algorithm: the principal is to launch on a distance matrix an iteration of correlations. The result of the method is a subdivision in 2, 4, 8 etc. blocks grouping actors that get similar relational properties. Regarding resolution sponsorship, I keep similarities greater than 80%, which means that, for each session considered, only pairs of countries getting a same strategy 80% of the time are kept. The representation of these results allows a finer appreciation of EU member states relational properties when the UNGA is considered globally.

UNGA GROUPS BASED ON VOTING BEHAVIOR

When all resolutions casted on votes are taken into account, world partitions revealed do not isolated EU member states from a bigger group involving what could be called "Occident" (this "Occident" including Japan and, for the last period, South Korea). The map 1 shows the 4 groups obtained in 2009.



Map 1: World partition based on voting behavior using structural equivalence in 2009

What appears on the last period considered is a sort of large Western Europe, including EU members, EU candidates and EU “could-be” members like Norway or Sweden. But countries like Japan, New Zealand or South Korea belong to this same group. The main structure revealed is a clear North – South division of the world where EU is just an indistinct piece of the North part. The Occidental lecture of UNGA partition appears rather relevant in this case.

UNGA GROUPS BASE ON RESOLUTION SPONSORSHIP

Considering resolution sponsorship at the Third Committee, graphs obtained using the same threshold for similarity (0.8) are quite different for the three sessions used here as examples. Basic properties of these graphs are indicated in the table 1: order (number of nodes), size (number of links), density (number of actual links divided by number of possible links), number of components (connected sub-graphs), and the percentage of links involving EU member states.

| Indicator | Session 41 (1986-87) | Session 51 (1996-97) | Session 61 (2006-2007) |
|--|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Order | 12 | 15 | 47 |
| Size | 10 | 13 | 267 |
| Density | 0.15 | 0.12 | 0.25 |
| Components | 4 | 3 | 7 |
| Percentage of links involving EU member states | 0 | 0.69 | 0.76 |

Table 1: Properties regarding graphs on resolution sponsorship at the Third Committee

The figure 1 shows the component involving EU members plus like-minded states. The EU clearly adopted a cohesive strategy regarding resolution sponsoring. What appears however examining the graph on the last session examined is the proximity between EU member states and some non EU member states. Basically, we find one more time a sort of “occidental” group rather than the EU *strict sensu*.

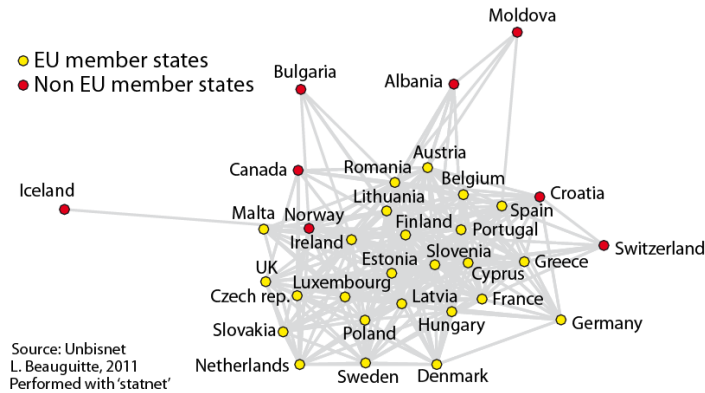


Figure 1: Highest similarities of sponsorship at the Third Committee (session 61)

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

The few examples illustrated here can not constitute a decisive proof regarding the EU actorness at the UNGA: tests should be made on different topics and sessions. However, it appears, when considering all relations in terms of voting behavior and of resolution sponsorship, that EU does not appear isolated from “could-be” EU members and “like-minded” states like Canada or New-Zealand. The gap between something that could be named “North” (or “Occident”) and the rest of the world prevents the apparition of an autonomous entity limited by EU borders.

REFERENCES

1. **Beauguitte, Laurent**, Les votes de l'Assemblée générale de l'ONU de 1985 à nos jours. Pistes (carto)graphiques, M@ppemonde, Nr 97, 2010.
2. **Beauguitte, Laurent**, L'Assemblée générale de l'ONU de 1985 à nos jours : acteur et reflet du Système-Monde, Thèse de doctorat, Université Paris 7, 2011.
3. **Gowan, Richard and Brantner, Franziska**, A Global Force for Human Rights? An Audit of European Power at the UN, European Council on Foreign Relations, Policy paper, 2008.
4. **Kissack, Robert**, Pursuing effective multilateralism. The European Union, International Organisations and the Politics of Decision Making, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, coll. “Palgrave Studies in European Union”, 2010.
5. **Laatikainen, K.V. and Smith, K.E. (dir.)**, The European Union at the United Nations. Intersecting Multilateralisms, Basingstoke, Palgrave, coll. “Palgrave Studies in European Union Politics”, 2006.
6. **Lucarelli, Sofia and Fioramonti, Lorenzo (dir.)**, External perceptions of the European Union as a Global Actor, Londres et New York, Routledge, coll. “GARNET Series: Europe in the World”, 2010.
7. **Voeten, Erik**, Clashes in the Assembly, International Organization, Vol. 54, Nr 2, pp. 185-215, 2000.
8. **Wasserman, Stanley and Faust, Katherine**, Social Network Analysis: Methods and Applications, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, coll. “Structural analysis in the social sciences”, 1994.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Laurent BEAUGUITTE
 beauguittelaurent@parisgeo.cnrs.fr
 Université Paris Diderot Sorbonne Paris Cité, UMR Géographie-cités