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The proposal of allocation of seats in the European Parliament – the shifted root

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Abstract

The issue of allocation of seats in the European Parliament among the Member States of the EU has been the subject of several studies and proposals of algorithms of allocation. The rejection by the Parliament of the Cambridge Compromise means that the issue is still pertinent. This article presents a new method of forming the composition of the EP based on the well-known algorithms of Pukelsheim and Ramirez, called the shifted root. The composition of the Parliament obtained with the use of this method is also given, followed by a discussion of the results.

Keywords: European Parliament; degressive proportionality; shifted root, allocation function; boundary conditions.

1. Introduction

The division of seats in the European Parliament among the EU Member States still remains an unresolved problem. The significant increase in the importance of the EP witnessed in recent years, in particular following the strengthening of its role by the Lisbon Treaty, has resulted in the growing interest of the Member States in the numbers of their representation in this organ of UE. With regard to the seats allocation the Treaty states that:

The European Parliament shall be composed of representatives of the Union's citizens. They shall not exceed seven hundred and fifty in number, plus the President. Representation of citizens shall be degressively

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proportional, with a minimum threshold of six members per Member State. No Member State shall be allocated more than ninety-six seats.

The motivation of the Committee on the Constitutional Affairs (AFCO) report dated Oct 3, presented six principles which, according to the Committee, could introduce more precision into the rule of degressive proportionality. Two of these constitute the essence of this method:

The principle of fair distribution – no State will have more seats than a larger Member State or smaller amount of seats than a smaller Member State.

The principle of relative proportionality – the ratio of the population size to the number of seats is greater the larger the State, and smaller the smaller the State.

Hence degressive proportionality is based on two conditions. The first is completely natural and states that the larger the country, the greater is its right to a large number of seats. The second condition, which is the essence of degressive proportionality, declares that the MEP of a larger country represents a greater number of the population than an MEP of a smaller country. This implies that the population/seats ratio has to grow in line with the growth of the populations of the member states. Despite the fact that the numerical limitations contained in the Treaty are of an unequal nature, several recommendations of the AFCO and resolutions of the EP stress that the given numerical values should be applied in order to achieve the maximum diversification of the allocation of the seats. The greatest possible diversification of the numbers of seats apportioned to individual states is also considered as relevant. The problem of diversification was analyzed in the paper (Dniestrzański, 2011a). Therefore, the majority of proposals regarding the problem of the seats allocation assumes that the smallest country obtains 6 seats in the EP, and the biggest 96 seats, while the whole Parliament numbers 751 MEPs. These limitations are as follows:

B1. minimum number of seats allocated to a state is 6,

B2. maximum number of seats allocated to a state is 96,

B3. the total number of seats in the EP amounts to 751.

Further on in this article the limitations B1 – B3 will be referred to as the boundary conditions of the degressively proportional division. The influence of the boundary conditions on the possibilities of the seats allocation was the subject of a broader analysis in (Łyko, 2012).

Since the beginnings of the EP, the allocation of seats among the Member States has not been proportional. A more detailed analysis of its composition during subsequent terms of office shows that, in particular after accession by the new members, even though it was not required by any legal act, the allocation of the seats during several of the terms followed the principle of degressive proportionality, i.e. the growing population/ seats ratio, alongside the growing number of populations of the member states. It seems that this principle intuitively constituted a natural alternative in a situation where there was no possibility of applying a proportional division. The first exception, before the legal sanctioning of the degressive proportionality by the Lisbon Treaty, was the composition of the EP in 1995, following the accession by Austria, Finland and Sweden. At that time incompatibility occurred with the principle of degressive proportionality – the representation of Sweden was too small compared to the larger Portugal. The population/ seats ratio amounted to 400 745 for Sweden, and was higher than the corresponding coefficient 400 703 for Portugal. One of the reasons behind the problems with applying degressive proportionality has been undoubtedly the fast expansion of the EU. In 1994 there were 12 Member States, and nowadays there are28. With such a large number of Member States, an allocation of seats which has to follow certain limitations is not simple without the construction of a precise algorithm. Over the last ten years, representatives of science and politics have proposed several possible solutions of this issue. Some precise studies appeared in publications even before the signing of the Treaty on Dec 13, 2007, as a reaction to the earlier discussions on this subject. With hindsight, two of those proposals still seem to be significant, and are considered as a possibility of a decisive solution in this matter. They are the parabolic method of Ramirez and the method of shifted proportionality of Pukelsheim. A profound analysis of the mathematical properties of the function, which can be useful for this problem, can be found in the paper (Słomczyński & Życzkowski, 2011).