Methodology and Resources
By Richard Gowan and Christoph Mikulaschek

The figures in ECFR's audit of European power at the UN are derived from online UN archives, listed below. Since the early 1980s, the US State Department has submitted a report to Congress on "Voting Practices at the United Nations". This shows the overall level of support for American positions, and votes on sensitive issues. ECFR's report is meant to provide a similar service to the EU, although it contains much more analysis.

The figures on support for EU positions (page 20 of the report) at the UN were based on the State Department's methodology. For each UN General Assembly (UNGA) session, we took all votes on draft resolutions adopted by the Assembly in which the EU's members voted "in favour" or "against" together.[1] Resolutions adopted without a vote were excluded from the analysis. We calculated the voting coincidence of non-EU members by dividing the number of votes cast by non-EU countries coinciding with the EU's positions by the overall number of votes, abstentions and no-shows of all non-EU countries on these resolutions, giving us a percentage score for support for EU positions.

The EU still splits on about a quarter of UNGA votes, and we excluded those from our calculations. We followed the State Department's model by also excluding votes in which the EU abstained, and by discounting abstentions and no-shows by non-EU members. When non-EU states abstained or did not participate in the vote, their vote was coded as partial disagreement, weighing half as much as full disagreement.

We applied the same calculations to China, Russia and the US – and then used the same method to calculate the level of support for the EU in human rights votes in UNGA (page 22). "Human rights votes" refers to those on resolutions from the Third Committee of UNGA, which deals with "Social, Humanitarian and Cultural" affairs.

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[1] We differed from the State Department in two ways. Firstly, we categorized votes by UNGA session, rather than by calendar year. Secondly, we did note include votes on Decisions adopted by UNGA. The State Department does include Decisions in its figures, but notes that they cover "matters of lesser importance, including procedural issues". Votes on them are also very rare – there were just two in 2007.

To show levels of support for UNGA resolutions on human rights issues in specific countries (page 24) we used a simpler technique. We show the average number of votes cast for and against these resolutions, as well as abstentions, in each session.

When categorizing individual states in relation to the EU on human rights (page 27 onwards), we decided to use a more complex technique reflecting abstentions and no-shows. If we had not used this technique, our categories would have been distorted. Had we stuck with the State Department's model, a country that showed up for just one vote a year, but voted with the EU that time, would look like a 100% supporter of EU positions.

Instead, we devised a scoring method that took all human rights votes from the last two UNGA sessions into account (the EU was united in all these). In cases where the EU voted "in favour" or "against", all countries that voted with it were assigned a score of "2". Those that voted the other way had a score of "0", and abstentions and no-shows received the score for partial disagreement, i.e. "1". Where the EU abstained, all those that did likewise got a score of "2", while those that did not got a score of "1".

By adding up all these scores for each vote, we obtained a "distance score" for each country for a given time period, which we converted into a percentage rate by dividing the distance score by the maximum possible voting coincidence scores (which a country that always voted with the EU would score during this time period). We then grouped states by other categories (region, Freedom House rating, etc.) and averaged their scores.

On Human Rights Council (HRC) votes (page 41), we used a simpler technique. We divided the various votes cast by the EU (always voting as a bloc) by the overall number of votes in each HRC session to show what percentage the EU won and lost on. On the Security Council, we chose not to use any mathematical scoring as very few resolutions actually come to a vote there – and the veto powers of the Permanent Five members (the US, France, Britain, Russia and China) distort the meaning of those votes anyway.

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Resources

Records of all UN votes are online. The summary voting record for all resolutions adopted by the General Assembly is at
http://www.un.org/Depts/dhl/resguide/gares1.htm

Details of votes on General Assembly resolutions can be found at
http://unbisnet.un.org:8080/ipac20/ipac.jsp?profile=voting&menu=search&submenu=alpha#focus

Human Rights Council information is available at
http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/

Security Council resolutions are available at
http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/unsc_resolutions.html

Details of votes on Security Council resolutions are available at
http://unbisnet.un.org:8080/ipac20/ipac.jsp?profile=voting&menu=search&submenu=alpha#focus

A list of Security Council vetoes since 1945 (not yet updated to include 2008) is at
http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/membship/veto/vetosubj.htm

The State Department's "Voting Practices at the United Nations", on which parts of ECFR's research is modeled, is at http://www.state.gov/p/io/conrpt/vtgprac/

The ECFR report also compares UN voting figures with Freedom House's "Freedom in the World", available at
http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=15

A useful earlier study of European voting patterns in the General Assembly, with a focus on European cohesion, was published by the EU Institute for Security Studies in December 2003. A PDF version is at
http://aei.pitt.edu/1613/01/occ49.pdf

A recent paper by Karen E. Smith of the LSE asks similar questions to ECFR's report:
http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/2/5/2/2/0/p252209_index.html