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The dimensionality and nature of conflict in European Union politics: On the characteristics of intergovernmental decision-making

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Abstract
This article analyses the dimensionality and nature of political conflict in the European Union Council of Ministers between 1998 and 2007. By comparing policy platforms of member state governments, multidimensional scaling techniques are employed to make inferences about the dimensionality of the Council's political space. The dimensions are interpreted performing 1250 multiple regression analyses. The results largely corroborate the assumption that cleavages are structured along geographically defined clusters of states. After Eastern enlargement (2004), a North–South divide was replaced by an East–West cleavage. The analysis moreover suggests that there are two stable conflict dimensions within the Council's political space. The first is an integration dimension that represents the support for deepening European Union integration and the transfer of sovereignty to a supranational level. The second is a 'policy' dimension, manifested predominantly in disputes over redistributive policies.

Keywords
Council of Ministers, European integration, political conflict, political space

Introduction

What is the essence of political conflict in the European Union (EU)? For the classic theories of European integration the answer is simple. Political cleavages are structured along an independence-integration divide (Haas, 1958;

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Moravcsik, 1998). However, with the EU's discretion to regulate social and economic policies steadily increasing, this perspective has been challenged. More recent accounts speculate that the transfer of these competences over issues that traditionally fuelled left–right conflict at the domestic level, has added a left–right ideological dimension to the EU political space (see Hix, 1999).

This two-dimensional perspective is questioned in turn when examining conflict within the EU's law-making institutions. There is ample evidence that the dominant divide in the European Parliament (EP) is mainly based on left–right ideology (see Gabel and Hix, 2002; Hix et al., 2006). Legislative activity in the EP may be considered uni-dimensional because most parties have a strong integrationist stance, with anti-integrationist parties being too small to give the integration dimension significance, and the institutionalization of supranational party groups enforcing ideological cohesion. The limited insights for the European Commission suggest that its internal conflicts are based on nationality (e.g. Thomson, 2008).

Conflict dimensions in the EU Council of Ministers appear to be even less clear-cut. In addition to scholars claiming that conflicts are determined by attitudes towards either EU integration (e.g. Mattila, 2004) or ideology (e.g Hagemann and Høyland, 2008), others maintain that conflict arises from divergent socio-economic preferences (Mattila, 2009; Selck, 2004; Thomson et al., 2004; Thomson, 2009; Zimmer et al., 2005). The latter often manifests itself in geographical clusters of states that disagree about redistributive policies (see Zimmer et al., 2005).

An example is the disagreement between net-contributors and net-recipients of the EU-budget. Decisions in the domain of the EU's regional cohesion policy are also usually structured along this divide (e.g. Behrens and Smyrl, 1999).

Studies, moreover, disagree about the number of dimensions in Council politics. Drüner (2007, 77), for instance, maintains that the Council's legislative decisions are 'usually one- or at most two-dimensional'. Selck (2004, 210–11), however, claims that two dimensions seem to be insufficient to model the Council's political space, and Zimmer et al. (2005) find that three dimensions appear to depict the political space better than two.

Current investigations assessing the impact of the first round of EU Eastern enlargement on political contestation within the Council do not clarify the state of affairs, either. While some argue that enlargement did not alter conflict structures significantly (Mattila, 2009; Thomson, 2009), others speculate that the 'bases on which coalitions are being formed have changed' (Hagemann, 2008, 57).

A pressing problem is that these conflicting expectations lead to different conclusions about and interpretations of Council decision-making. This not only impedes scholars' theoretical understanding of the processes shaping policy outcomes, but may inform incorrect model specifications, too. In an attempt to resolve some of the disagreements, we address four salient issues that arise from the current state of literature on Council politics. First, I (re)-assess the dimensionality of the Council's political space. In other words, I investigate the number of dimensions structuring political conflict. Second, I seek to identify the substantive nature of

these dimensions. Third, I analyse actor positions within the political space. Finally, by focussing on annual intervals between 1998 and 2007, I present an analysis covering the Eastern enlargement's impact on the Council's conflict structure.

Substantively, this study contributes to the academic dispute by analysing a subset of a newly constructed dataset called 'Positions and Salience in European Union Politics' (Veen, 2011), which offers positional and salience estimates for more than 250 political actors in the EU on nearly a dozen policy domains. The present subset contains government policy platforms for all member states between 1998 and 2007. These were computed from European election manifestos (Braun et al., 2004). The policy platforms comprise of 125 issue categories which comprehensively cover all aspects of European policy issues governments are concerned with, encompassing the EU pillars and conventional socio-economic issues. To get a sense of uncertainty for these estimates, I corrected the platforms for stochastic error using simulation (see Benoit et al., 2009). I employ multidimensional scaling (MDS) techniques to identify the dimensionality of the Council's political space. The dimensions' policy nature is identified by regressing 125 different variables over the coordinates of each MDS solution.

The analysis suggests that across the period of investigation, two dimensions appear to structure the political space. Most of the variance is explained by the integration dimension. The second dimension is the 'policy' dimension, determined by mainly redistributive conflicts. Although there is evidence for an ideological divide in two of the 10 years under investigation, the overall results do not confirm the existence of a latent left–right dimension. Enlargement did not significantly alter the dimensions of conflict. The distribution of actors in the Council's political space follows a geographical pattern. Whereas in the EU-15 there is evidence for a North–Centre–South divide, the EU-25 exhibits an East–West cleavage. The latter largely corroborates results from other Council studies. Conceivably, the integrationist and the redistributive dimensions, which are nearly orthogonally aligned, may thus facilitate side-payments of the rich to the less developed members, in exchange for support of more pro-integrationist policies (see e.g. Carrubba, 1997).

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. The following section offers a discussion of three competing perspectives on conflict in the Council. The section on research design then introduces the estimation of government policy positions. The fourth section presents the results of the analysis. The conclusion puts the findings into a wider perspective.

Integration, redistributive clashes or ideology? On conflict in the council

The reasons why we should care about the political space is because its architecture – the dimensionality, the policy nature of these dimensions and the location of actors on these dimensions – reflects the character of political conflict and collaboration, it determines likely and unlikely outcomes of decision making, and it

helps the analyst to interpret and explain political competition and outcomes (Gabel and Hix, 2002). For the Council, scholars consistently produced competing insights about the number and properties of the dimensionality of the political space.

This section provides a theoretical discussion of political conflict in the Council based on the insights and findings from past and current studies. In doing so, the discussion puts the competing explanatory models, in other words 'deepening integration', 'reshuffling money' and 'partisan preferences' into perspective, while discussing their validity and applicability to the Council. The conclusion is that the partisan hypothesis appears to lack unequivocal theoretical support when considering politics in the Council. This finding is partly supported by the empirical literature. In contrast, the integrationist and redistributive dimensions seem to fit better into our understanding of the Council's political space.

Three perspectives on political conflict

The hypothesis that ideology and partisanship structure the EU political space enjoys ever increasing popularity (e.g. Lindberg et al., 2008). Informed by an analysis of recorded votes in the Council, both Hagemann and Høyland (2008) and Mattila (2004) argue that party group affiliation determines the lines of the Council's intra-institutional conflict, too.

The theoretical foundation of this claim is grounded in the Lipset/Rokkan model of political cleavages (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). In short, the party systems of the mid-20th century reflected conflict between social groups that had its origins in the period before universal suffrage. Despite the original conflicts gradually losing their salience, these dimensions remained of importance in partisan, electoral and parliamentary politics of democratic regimes.

Hix (2008, 1255) points out that the EU has evolved from an international organization into a political system and that, following Cox and McCubbins' (1993) partisan theory of legislative politics, parties are relevant to 'co-ordinate actors' behaviour on a range of complex (multidimensional) policy issues in a repeated game inside institutions,' for example the Council.

This can be complemented with a Schattschneiderian take on political competition. Arguing that politics is in essence an exchange of conflict and cooperation, a game of division and unification, Schattschneider (1960) maintains that cleavages in domestic politics are usually reduced to a partisan divide. For Schattschneider, there are billions of political conflicts, but only a few are significant. The degree of intensity informs the significance. Most intense conflicts dominate politics. Similarly to the Lipset/Rokkan model, issues between social groups are the most intense and contentious in domestic politics. Naturally, the representation of interest of these groups is manifested in political parties. With significant powers and roles of the nation state having been transferred to the EU, one may expect that the Council's political space should therefore also increasingly exhibit a partisan cleavage.

Opponents of this perspective may argue, however, that the Lipset/Rokkan model and Schattschneider's concept both rest on a fundamental prerequisite: the institutionalization of partisanship. 'What happens in politics *depends on the way in which people are divided* into factions, parties, [...], etc' (Schattschneider, 1960, 62, original emphasis). An institutionalization in the partisan sense, however, is effectively missing in the Council. There are no formal arrangements that allocate governments into ideologically defined parties or factions. Without factions, however, there are neither means to enhance 'party' cohesion in the Council nor to discipline dissenters. As yet, the existence of informal mechanisms serving as possible proxies has not been demonstrated either. Moreover, critics may argue that the evident socio-economic distances between member states, which is surely even more problematic in an enlarged EU, makes it rather unlikely that partisanship alone can mobilize support.

Theoretically, therefore, the expectation of an important partisan divide in the Council is problematic. This tentative conclusion, however, only holds for the Council, and is certainly not generalizable to the other EU institutions.[1] Apart from theory, however, the empirical evidence also fails to support notions of partisan politics in Council decision-making. Substantively, only studies based on the analysis of Council roll-call votes find evidence for a partisan cleavage (e.g. Hagemann and Høyland, 2008; Mattila, 2004). Using expert interviews, Thomson et al. (2004, 253) reveal that coalitions among governments correspond with the partisan divide on only five out of 174 controversial issues. This is supported by Zimmer et al. (2005, 414), who show that this dimension only offers 'very weak support to the hypothesis that party lines or ideology determine the preference structure in the Council.'

This leaves the integration and redistribution perspectives. The assumption that an integration-independence cleavage structures Council decision-making has been maintained predominantly with regard to the negotiation and ratification of the EU's intergovernmental treaties (Bräuninger et al., 2001; Hug and König, 2002). This dimension divides the supranationalists and nationalists among the governments. In policy terms, it implies that policy conflict arises around matters such as the delegation of competences to the supranational level or the desirable level of harmonization of regulatory measures. The issue of sovereignty is not restricted to the Community pillar. It also encompasses matters surrounding the Common Foreign and Security Policy or Justice and Home Affairs. Arguably, the history of EU integration has been characterized by the gradual transfer of national sovereignty to the EU. The Council, either alone or in conjunction with the EP, has been deciding upon these issues on a day-to-day basis.

Nevertheless, most studies suggest that the integration dimension is only of minor importance in shaping the architecture of the Council's political space. Mattila (2004), for instance, claims that countries with pro-integration preferences are less likely to vote against the majority. Rather, the dimension appears to have significance among the EU institutions. Selck (2004, p. 209) indicates that the Commission, the EP and the Council can be roughly ordered on an integration

dimension in the EU's political space, with the Commission and the Parliament usually occupying a more supranationalist position than the member states (cf. Tsebelis and Garrett, 2000). Although Thomson et al. (2004, 256) argue that such ordering may rather pertain to a dimension that is phrased in terms of policy change, Thomson (2009, 767) shows that 'in general the positions taken by both the Commission and the EP are predictably pro-harmonisation [...], in this respect, the integration-independence dimension does capture an important element of the EU's political space.'

According to most scholars, the dominant dimension in Council politics has a redistributive character (e.g. Selck, 2004; Zimmer et al., 2005). This anticipates conflict over the extent to which the Council enacts economic and social policies that reallocate wealth.[2] The line of conflict correlates with a geographic divide between members. In the EU-15, this is mainly between Northern and Southern members. The recent accession is argued to have not significantly altered this cleavage. Instead, it added an Eastern cluster of states to the existing divide (Mattila, 2008, 2009). Whereas the weaker economies demand regulation and redistribution, the stronger economies advocate liberalization and cutting subsidies to other members. For Zimmer et al. (2005), the cleavage can also therefore be interpreted as a conflict between net-receivers and net-contributors to the EU-budget.

Research design

To analyse the Council's political space, previous studies have predominantly employed the DEU project's data (e.g. Thomson et al., 2006) or roll-call votes (e.g. Hagemann, 2007). To test their findings and possibly extend our insights, I propose to resort to an alternative data source: with the statistics from the 'Euromanifestos' project (EMP) (Braun et al., 2004), the coded content of party platforms for EP elections from all European countries.

The EMP employs a coding scheme consisting of 125 thematic coding categories, comprising the Comparative Manifesto Projects' (CMP) (Budge et al., 2001) original coding categories and extending it by 69 categories relating to the political system and policies of the EU. This not only allows for a more fine-grained analysis of the manifestos, but it may also enhance estimates' reliability as the increase in categories reduces the problem of misclassification due to overlapping or vague boundaries haunting the CMP (cf. Mikhaylov et al., 2010). In general, however, the well-known critique relating to reliability of the CMP statistics (see e.g. Benoit et al., 2009; Mikhaylov et al., 2010), has equal validity for the EMP data.

This article employs a subset of the 'Positions and Salience in European Union Politics' dataset (Veen, 2011), containing government policy platforms for all member states between 1998 and 2007. This period of investigation was chosen to supplement positional and salience estimates of governments on nine policy domains contained in the main dataset with roll-call votes from the Council.

All point estimates come with estimates of uncertainty derived from correcting for stochastic error using simulation (Benoit et al., 2009). For detailed information, readers are referred to Veen (2011). To get some intuition about the data collection process, however, the remainder of this section critically discusses the research design to generate government policy platforms from Euromanifestos.

Electoral platforms or party programmes constitute unique political texts. They are written manifestations of a parties' political motives and ambitions; a 'set of key central statements of party positions [. . .] subject of extensive prior debate and negotiations inside the party' (Budge et al., 1987, 18). Manifestos are generally not designed to inform voters about a party's goals and ambitions. That would be a waste of resources, since only a minority of voters do indeed consult these documents. Manifestos are rather 'contracts' that define party lines within and among parties. Presumably, manifestos are therefore sincere in that they are generally not geared towards the median voter. This may explain why parties are mostly observed as trying to realize their election pledges when in office (see e.g. Costello and Thomson, 2008).

In this study, Euromanifestos are aggregated into government policy platforms, a description chosen to denote the artificial nature of these 'documents'. A government policy platform X_g is computed as the sum of each coalition party's i out of n policy position p weighted by its 'power' in government (Kim and Fording, 2001, 161)[3]

$$\text{Government Platform } X_g = \sum_{i=1}^{n} p \frac{\text{Power in Government}_i}{\text{Total Power in Government}} \quad (1)$$

To get a sense of noise in the data, estimates of uncertainty for all government policy platforms were produced.[4] I subsequently used this information to choose between metric and non-metric MDS. In computing uncertainty, I followed Benoit et al. (2009), who proceed to reconstruct the stochastic processes that generate manifestos by way of simulation. The authors bootstrap the analysis of each coded manifesto, based on re-sampling from the set of issue categories in each manifesto.

This data collection is based on assumptions not necessarily deeply grounded in theory (but see Veen, 2011). To assume a linear relationship between parties' policy goals for EP elections and their behaviour as members of governments in the Council may be problematic; conceiving of parties' weighted positions as government positions could perhaps not mirror government preference-formation particularly well. However, there is also support for this decision. Using the model with CMP estimates, Kim and Fording (2001, 2002) show that resulting government positions exhibit a surprisingly high resemblance to actual behaviour. Similarly, in the context of the EU Council, both Franchino (2007) and König (2007) successfully study decision-making processes with government positions from CMP data. Moreover, the validity tests in Veen (2011) seem to confirm that although the

model's theoretical basis may appear rudimentary, it appears to produce encouragingly accurate positional estimates on many Council policy domains.

Another problematic issue might relate to the fact that the data is collected only once in five years (i.e. with EP elections), under the assumption that the preferences of parties do not change. Only the composition of the national governments changes during these intervals, either due to national elections or changes in government composition. However, this may underestimate the dynamics of preference configuration in the Council. While there appears to be no remedy to this problem when using EMP statistics, the studies' government estimates nonetheless seem to exhibit good face validity over time (Veen, 2011).

A final and related caveat concerns the influence of the EU agenda on positions as articulated in manifestos. Key-issues such as enlargement or the constitutionalization process of the Constitutional Treaty occurring at the time of writing may have biased the texts' content. However, one may argue that these events have had an impact on EU politics for several years. Hence, a possible temporal bias introduced by these items should not distort the study's inferences significantly since these issues also remained valid for a longer period of time.

To conclude, Euromanifestos can provide an alternative source of information to study political behaviour in the Council. This of course does not mean that the methodology developed to transform party manifestos into government policy platforms works in all ways. Encouragingly, however, the data tested in Veen (2011) show good validity and may potentially yield substantive supplementary insights to findings from more established tools of the trade.

Multidimensional scaling

To analyse the latent structure of conflict in the Council, scholars have relied on factor analytic techniques (e.g. Selck, 2004), correspondence analysis (e.g. Zimmer et al., 2005) and MDS (e.g. Mattila and Lane, 2001; Thomson et al., 2004; Thomson, 2009). All serve the purpose of producing 'maps of conflict' in an inductive fashion. I reject the use of factor analysis in this study due to data constraints. The data constitute a consonance (or proximity) relation between government platforms and issue categories. Factor analysis has proven to produce deceptive results with proximity data. Its application should be limited to dominance (or order) relations. Correspondence analysis is not used because it can only employ the χ^2-distance as a similarity measure. This, however, cannot be theoretically related to substantive assumptions about distances between Council members. Multidimensional scaling in turn is not restricted to non-negative data and can process different types of data such as frequencies, rankings or correlations. It does produce unbiased results with proximity data.

I therefore employ MDS techniques. In its simplest form, MDS is a geometric mapping technique for data to fit the observed (dis)similarities among a set of objects to their distances in the resulting configuration. Put differently, MDS attempts to find the structure in a set of proximity measures between objects.

This is accomplished by assigning observations to specific locations in a conceptual low-dimensional space such that the distances between points in the space match the given (dis)similarities as closely as possible. A distinction can be made between metric (linear relation between observed (dis)similarities and distances in the configuration) and non-metric MDS (monotonic relationships).

As the computed estimates of uncertainty for the government policy platforms suggest that there is considerable uncertainty, a non-metric MDS is performed with observations untied.

For this, I chose the PROXSCAL (PROXimity SCALing) algorithm for non-metric data. This algorithm seeks to identify a least squares representation of a set of objects. Due to the large number of objects in the set (governments × years), a representation per year has been chosen. The number of governments is sufficient to theoretically yield three statistically stable dimensions for the EU-15 and five for the EU-25. Following the discussion of the architecture of the political space in the theoretical section? On conflict in the council', this should be more than adequate. To identify the global minimum and to avoid local minima, 100 multiple random starts for each solution were specified.

A distance measure: On the impossibility of separability in EU politics. The government policy platforms comprise of the relative emphasis for issues and policies in Euromanifestos coded into 125 categories. The hypothesis is that the 'closer' governments are in spatial terms, the more emphasis they will place on the same categories. Assuming that the set of 125 categories contain all topics of policy concern to member state governments, the distance between government platforms should be measured, including all variables. The metric chosen here is the Euclidean metric.

The choice for this metric requires qualification as some scholars argue that it 'should *not* be used in models of real political decision-making' (Benoit and Laver, 2006, 33, original emphasis). The main criticism relating to the Euclidean metric is that 'individual preferences over policy are treated as if they were primitive and unconstrained preferences' (Milyo, 2000, 274). Hence, one assumes that an actor's preferences are single-peaked, non-separable and exogenously determined while independent of other endogenous preferences. Utility thus declines monotonically in distance from the ideal point. Although belonging to the core foundations of rational-choice theory, in particular the assumption of separability is questioned in the context of spatial analysis of political dimensions. If one assumes separability of issues, the use of the city-block metric makes more sense.

However, political conflict is in fact inseparable. To validate this claim, one must again resort to a Schattschneiderian perspective on politics. Schattschneider (1960) conceives of politics as a mixture of conflict and cooperation. Moreover, for him politics evolve along factional lines. Between these factions is conflict, structured by political cleavages. If new dimensions of conflict are introduced, then the dividing lines are no longer between factions, but cross-cutting. This may result in 'a radical shift of alignment, [...] at a cost of change in the relations and priorities'

of the faction members (Schattschneider, 1960, 65). As every new conflict dimension produces new allocations of powers threatening a party's integrity, the faction leader will always try to reduce dimensionality of conflict. Linking contentious issues prevents rebellion and increases cohesion. Accordingly, the issues in the remaining conflict dimensions will therefore be interdependent, and hence non-separable. If they were separable, the result could potentially lead to policy deadlock, because log-rolling and institutional or political memory would be difficult to maintain. The assumption of non-separability is thus non-political from this perspective.

In the Council of Ministers, with its several thematic sub-councils, the assumption of separability may be more relevant than in a domestic party context. However, the instability of coalition alignments (Thomson et al., 2004; Thomson, 2009), a decision-making process comprising of nested games and log-rolling being part of Council deliberations, all hint towards conflict dimensions in the Council being non-separable. Treating the components as strictly integral, any study should therefore employ the Euclidean metric or an alternative metric with similar properties.

For this reason I chose the Euclidean distance. It not only adheres to the vital notion of non-separability but also relates 'closely to our intuitive understanding of distances' (van der Brug, 2001, 130). The formula for deriving distances between government policy platforms is:

$$d(a,b) = \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^{n} |a_i - b_i|^2} \tag{2}$$

where $d(a, b)$ is the difference between policy platforms a and b, a_i is the proportion of coded sentences in policy platform a, dedicated to category i, while b_i is the proportion of coded sentences in policy platform b, dedicated to category i and i is the index of issue categories. Because each of the 125 issue categories represent a proportion of sentences of each government, the sum of all categories equals 100 percent, or one. Therefore, the maximum distance between two policy platforms is one and the minimum distance is zero.

Outlier treatment and dimensional interpretation. In this study, dimensionality is conceived of as the number of coordinate axes needed to locate a point in space. A dimension is similar to a factor in factor analysis. Whereas dimensional interpretation often involves a single interpretation for each dimension in space, dimensionality is not necessarily the number of relevant characteristics involved (Kruskal and Wish, 1978, 49). A two dimensional space can have several interpretable directions or characteristics. The number of characteristics can also be less than the dimensionality of the space. In a four dimensional space, one may only be able to interpret two or three dimensions.

Dimensionality is estimated in terms of the goodness-of-fit of the MDS configuration. The first step was the visual inspection of the scree plots. The scree plot plots the stress, i.e. the overall measure of how the distances in the configuration ordinally fit the data as a function of dimensionality. The key is to look for an identifiable 'elbow' in the slope of the resulting line; that is to choose the number of dimensions where a bend in the curve occurs. In cases where I could not identify an elbow, I consulted a Shepard diagram to judge which dimensionality provides the best fit of outliers against transformed proximities.

Finally, I drew multidimensional plots to assess whether there is an equal spatial distribution of actors across all dimensions or whether a single government accounts for only a particular dimension. In the latter cases, I consulted the raw data to identify the cause. In the three cases where countries caused such a problem (France (2002), Greece (2000) and Cyprus (2004)), the inspection of the data revealed that nearly 40 percent of all emphasis was placed on only one of the 125 issue categories.[5] This translated into a government being placed in an extreme position in the MDS configuration. To smooth this effect, I reduced the emphasis on these categories accordingly. However, to maintain the relative positions of actors vis-a-vis, I only made these reductions in tiny steps. While the relative spatial distribution is preserved, this treatment ensures that any unnecessary additional dimension is removed. Figure 1 illustrates this for the Greek government in 2000. After treatment, Greece's distance on the *x*-axis relative to other actors decreases significantly. However, it continues to be the country with the most leftward position on that axis.

Figure A1 in the web-appendix shows the screeplots for each analysis between 1998 and 2007 after outliers have been treated. In three cases the decision whether to plot two or three dimensions is unclear. After inspection of the Shepard diagrams (not illustrated here), it becomes clear that only the year 2004 requires a three dimensional space. The years 2002 and 2005 can be represented adequately with a two-dimensional configuration.

This leads to the interpretation of dimensions. As humans tend to 'find patterns where they do not exist' (Kruskal and Wish, 1978, 36), I use multiple linear regression to diagnose the substantive meaning of the dimensions. In doing so, the procedure outlined in Kruskal and Wish (1978, 35–43) was followed. To illustrate this procedure, one supposes that there are vectors assumed to have a systematic relationship with the objects in an MDS configuration. By regressing each of these vectors over the coordinates of the MDS solution, one can therefore interpret the conflict dimensions' substance and direction. The regression analysis also yields information about the amount of variance each vector accounts for. In accordance with other manifesto research employing this technique (see van der Brug, 2001), the independent variables represent the 125 issue categories on which the government policy platforms are based. Covering a period of 10 years, 1,250 multiple regression analyses are required to identify the substantive character of the conflict dimensions in the Council. The beta coefficients are then taken to calculate the slope of each dimension. Above I smoothed some of the government positions.

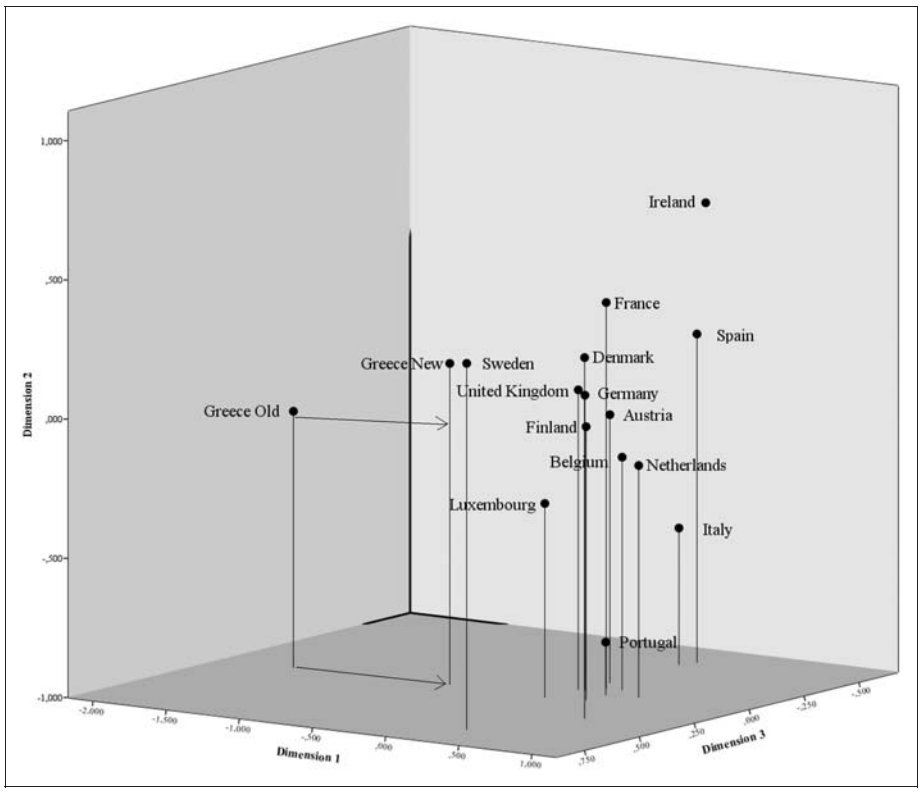

Figure 1. Spatial position of Greece before and after outlier treatment (2000).

This helps to reduce bias in the regression analysis, which is prone to be influenced by outliers. However, each significant regression result was double-checked for outliers and, where necessary, excluded from the interpretation of dimensions.

Analysis

Having discussed the theoretical expectations and the research design, this section presents the analysis of the Council's political space. The results of the 10 MDS solutions subjected to multiple regression analysis are reported in Table 1. Only the vectors that have the most systematic relationship with the configuration are reported. Selection criteria are a p-value of ≤ 0.001 and an explained variance of ≥ 0.60. This r^2 is at the lowest level for a meaningful interpretation of the dimensions. However, Kruskal and Wish (1978) note that a minimal requirement for a meaningful interpretation is that the analysis should be significant at the 0.1 level or lower. This is satisfied for all results reported.

Table 1 moreover provides goodness-of-fit measures for each individual MDS configuration. The Dispersion-Accounted-For (DAF) and Tucker's coefficient of

Table 1. Regression analysis of government policy platforms over ordinal MDS solutions

		Coordinates				Goodness of fit of MDS solution		
Year	Dimension label	1st Dim	2nd Dim	3rd Dim	R^2	Stress	DAF	Tucker's Coefficient
1998	Deepening the EU (108)	−0.886	−0.288	N.A	0.87	0.011	0.988	0.994
	Strong European Governance (305)	−0.338	0.859	N.A	0.85			
	Market Regulation (403)	0.778	0.062	N.A	0.61			
1999	Deepening the EU (108)	−0.776	−0.543	N.A	0.90	0.017	0.984	0.992
	Economic Planning (404)	−0.338	0.331	N.A	0.66			
2000	Deepening the EU (108)	0.898	−0.194	N.A	0.85	0.019	0.981	0.990
	EC/EU Structural Fund (4041)	−0.006	0.958	N.A	0.65			
2001	Deepening the EU (108)	−0.737	−0.555	N.A	0.85	0.015	0.985	0.992
	Democratic EU (202)	−0.673	0.446	N.A	0.65			
	Labour Groups:Negative (411)	−0.044	−0.206	N.A	0.80			
2002	Deepening the EU (108)	0.222	0.826	N.A	0.73	0.016	0.984	0.992
	Market Regulation (403)	0.001	−0.860	N.A	0.74			
	Environmental Protection (501)	−0.792	−0.452	N.A	0.83			
	Common Agricultural Policy (7031)	0.814	−0.244	N.A	0.72			
2003	Deepening the EU (108)	0.268	−0.800	N.A	0.71	0.016	0.984	0.991
	Market Regulation (403)	0.008	0.862	N.A	0.74			
	Environmental Protection (501)	−0.775	0.438	N.A	0.79			
	Common Agricultural Policy (7031)	0.819	−0.249	N.A	0.73			
2004	Internationalism (107)	−0.256	−0.095	−0.733	0.61	0.012	0.987	0.994
	Democratic EU (202)	−0.647	0.508	−0.283	0.76			
	Strong European Governance (305)	0.584	0.689	0.012	0.82			
	Social Justice (503)	−0.585	0.599	−0.019	0.70			
2005	Strong European Governance (305)	−0.717	−0.575	N.A	0.85	0.026	0.974	0.987
	Environmental Protection (501)	0.699	−0.496	N.A	0.73			
2006	Deepening the EU (108)	0.510	−0.582	N.A	0.60	0.023	0.977	0.988
	Strong European Governance (305)	0.934	−0.047	N.A	0.88			
	Environmental Protection (501)	−0.266	−0.759	N.A	0.65			
2007	Strong European Governance (305)	−0.918	−0.094	N.A	0.85	0.026	0.973	0.987
	Environmental Protection (501)	0.149	0.795	N.A	0.66			

Note: Coordinates are normalized regression coefficients. The table only includes vectors where $R^2 \geq 0.60$ and $p \leq 0.001$. Regression coefficients reported are not disproportionally influenced by outliers. Numbers in parentheses refer to the original EMP coding category. Please consult the EMP coding book for the precise content of each coding category (Braun et al., 2004).

congruence are goodness of fit measures where higher means 'better fit'. On average the solutions account for 98 percent of the variance. The raw stress coefficient is a measure of misfit where lower means 'better fit'. All solutions have a stress of around 0.02, which is generally considered excellent fit.

Some general inferences can be made from Table 1. The architecture of the Council's political space may be explained best by a two-dimensional representation. This contrasts with Selck (2004) and Zimmer et al. (2005), who expect more than two dimensions. Encouragingly, there is indeed no evidence for a unidimensional space.

In this respect, it is noteworthy that during the accession year 2004, the political space experienced an expansion to three conflict dimensions. Although bordering upon speculation, this may be more than a mere statistical artefact. As the new member states needed to adopt and socialize to formal and informal rules of Council deliberations, and all governments faced increased policy complexity as a result of enlargement, a three-dimensional space may have been needed to facilitate the prevention of gridlock. This agrees with the finding that legislative output in the Council has not been affected by enlargement (see e.g. Best et al., 2008). The fact that dimensionality has been reduced to two after the first year of enlargement is moreover congruent with the rational choice paradigm. As transaction costs increase significantly with the number of dimensions in the decision-making process (Hinich and Munger, 1994), to limit the dimensionality of Council politics is in the interest of all actors involved.

This leads to the issue of the substantive nature of the conflict dimensions. With only 29 out of 1250 multiple regressions satisfying the selection criteria, only few meaningful dimensional interpretations are compatible with the data. For each year under investigation, either the variable 'Deepening the EU' or 'Strong European Union' correlate strongly with the solutions' coordinates.[6] These vectors are therefore an indicator that an integration dimension structures conflict in the Council's political space. This is an important finding. First, it supports the study's theoretical assumptions about Council deliberations. Second, it questions previous studies that maintain that integration is meaningful *among* the EU's law-making bodies, yet not *within* the Council.

Less pronounced, yet also consistent over time, a second dimension constituting 'policy' cleavages in the Council can also be identified. The correlation with the coordinates is not as strong as that of the integration dimension. However, the variables 'Market Regulation', 'Economic Planning', 'EU/EC Structural Funds', 'Common Agricultural Policy' and 'Environmental Protection' all seem to corroborate the literatures' prevailing hypothesis that it is predominantly the direct or indirect redistribution of goods that divides member states. Regarding the definition of redistribution, one may conceive of regulation of the market through economic planning or environmental protection as an indirect means of redistribution in the EU. Since member states exhibit significant socio-economic differences, regulatory measures can directly impact upon a countries' competitiveness, resulting in a reallocation of wealth with different means. This may explain why less-developed member states demand comparatively more regulatory measures (Thomson, 2009).

These two conflict dimensions are in line with the findings of Carrubba (1997), who alleges that the redistributive dimension in essence constitutes side-payments

of the rich to the less developed member states in exchange for support for more pro-integration policies.

Overall, there is no convincing evidence to assume a left–right cleavage in the Council. For two years only ideological interpretations were statistically significant: 'Labour Groups: Negative' in 2001 and 'Social Justice' in 2004. Yet these findings are insufficient to suspect a manifest left–right cleavage. This conclusion is in line with the theoretical discussion in the section 'Integration, redistributive clashes or ideology? On conflict in the council'. Mobilization of support, it seems, may best be explained by socio-economic factors in Council collective decision-making.

The spatial dimension of conflict

Many Council studies emphasize spatial proximity of socio-economical similar countries. In the EU-15, one speculates that this had led to a North–Centre–South divide.[7] As a result of Eastern enlargement, scholars largely believe that the North–South divide prevails, but is being supplemented by an additional Eastern cluster (see Mattila, 2009).

Figure 2 shows the positions of EU-15 governments in a two-dimensional space in 2000. Upon closer inspection, three groups of governments become visible. In the upper-left corner there are Spain, Greece, Italy and Ireland. These countries are advocates of an extension of the EU structural funds. In the centre of the configuration are countries often associated with 'core-Europe.' In the lower-left corner one finds the Euro-sceptic Northern countries Denmark and Sweden. To a certain degree, Finland can also be associated with this group. This plot does not of course provide a perfect geographic representation of the EU. Portugal and France appear to diverge from the group of states they are usually associated with. Nevertheless, this spatial representation does confirm rather than reject the hypothesis that there has been a geographic divide in the EU-15 Council. This North–South pattern remains visible throughout all MDS solutions from 1998 to 2003, that yet cannot be reported here for obvious reasons. Another important finding is the pivotal position of Germany and the UK.[8] It appears that they function as facilitators between the 'North' and the 'South'. A similar conclusion has been reached by Naurin and Lindahl (2008), analysing EU countries' networking capabilities in the Council.

Figures 3a and 3b illustrate the positions of the EU-25 in 2005 and 2007. Considering the 'old' EU governments first, in general one cannot infer a clear geographical pattern in the configurations that reflect the North–South divide which previously existed in the EU-15. A geographical divide only emerges if the full EU-25 are taken into account. In 2005, the former Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs) – save Poland – are located in the upper quarter of the political space. Their shared hesitance to agree with stronger European governance and to harmonize environmental policies is reflected in this plot. However, the spatial divide between governments is less clear cut than prior to Eastern

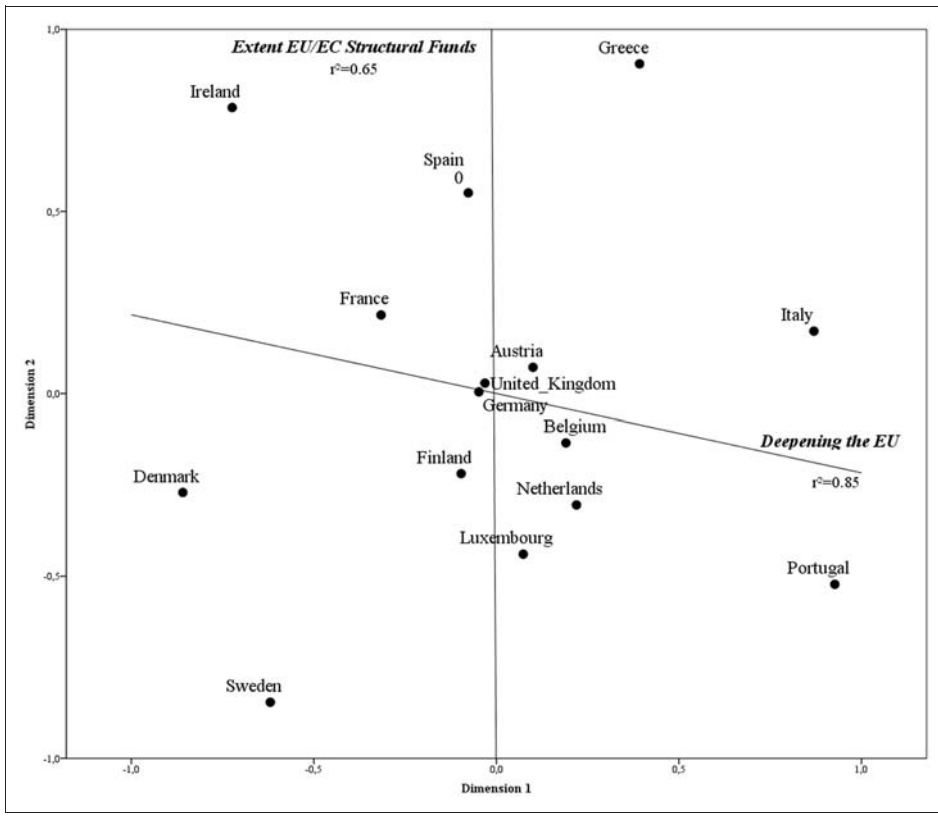

Figure 2. Two-dimensional MDS solution for EU-15 governments (2000).

enlargement. This picture changes with time. For the MDS configuration in 2007, there is a slightly more pronounced East–West cleavage between governments, with all CEECs located in the lower half of the plot. Again, although far from being perfect, this does hint towards the assumption that the EU Eastern enlargement resulted in a shift from a North–South to an East–West divide. In this respect, one may speculate that the CEECs could have emancipated themselves over time from the old member states. At the very least, the tentative results illustrate that fuzzy geographical borders seem to have been replaced with a clearer division between East and West.

To conclude, considering both the findings from the statistical analysis and the visual inspection of the MDS configurations, it appears that the Council's political space, with the integrationist and 'policy' dimension, facilitates side-payments of the rich to the less developed members, in exchange for support for more pro-integrationist policies. The location of the actors both before and after enlargement, is certainly suggestive for the presence of such a relationship.

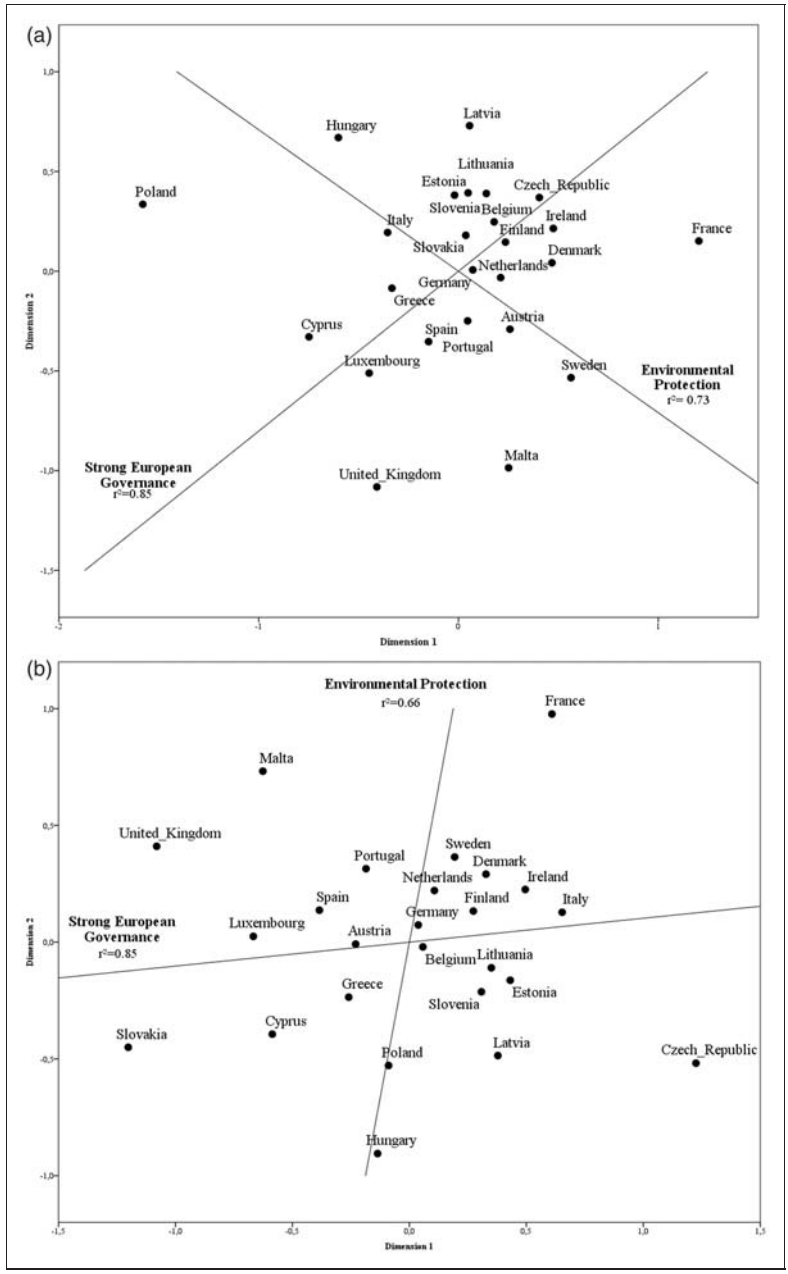

Figure 3. The spatial dimension of conflict in the EU-25. (a) Two-dimentional MDS solution for EU-25 governments (2005). (b) Two-dimentional MDS solution for EU-25 governments (2007).

Conclusion

This article presented an analysis of the Council's political space. The findings are significant in four ways. First, they corroborate the assumption that a geographic rather than ideological divide structures conflict in the Council. Second, this is yet another study stressing that the much-feared Eastern enlargement did not significantly alter political conflict in this institution. Indeed, while there has been a shift from a North–South to an East–West divide, the dimensionality and nature of conflict has remained relatively stable. Third, the study shows that the Council's political space comprises two conflict dimensions. Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, the substantive interpretation suggests that these dimensions can best be described by an integration and a 'policy' dimension. Whereas the latter is found in most major studies on the Council, the significance of the former has so far been underestimated.

From a methodological perspective, these findings are certainly interesting since they show that a non-obvious and novel data source to study the Council can produce findings that are compatible with existing quantitative and qualitative research. While the approach is certainly not without problems, it may nonetheless constitute a salient alternative to test or build upon the valuable insights produced by other quantitative studies such as expert interviews or roll-call data.

Earlier I stressed that understanding the political space's architecture is required to correctly specify Council decision-making. Based on the analysis, one can propose a model of the political space that assumes that decision-making is a struggle between groups of actors aligned according to two conflict dimensions. These enable log-rolling between these groups, constituting trade-offs between integrationist and redistributive preferences. While early studies formulated and found similar mechanisms (e.g. Carrubba, 1997; Hosli, 1996), future research should even more explicitly test whether the behaviour of governments in the Council is in accordance with this model. One possible avenue is to assess whether these hypothesized patterns occur among legislative proposals included in the DEU dataset.

Certainly, this study does not have the final say in studying the Council's political space. Future investigations are needed, for instance, to elaborate upon the geographic notion of actor positions. Arguably, there must be more sounding explanations for the 'North', 'South', 'East' and 'West', than simply the countries' position on a map. Scholars already speculate that it may be the shared culture that shapes these regions, while others suspect geographical patterns to coincide with socio-economic clusters of states. A comprehensive analysis of the latent factors that shape geographic patterns in the Council's political space would certainly constitute a much-needed scholarly endeavour.

Notes

1. Exemptions certainly constitute legislative issues that can be 'captured' by parties to pursue electoral interests, in other words legislation that stimulates sufficient domestic attention and contestation. Here, ideology has a comparatively larger influence on the policy outcome, as shown by Miklin (2009) in his analysis of the services directive.

2. For Thomson et al. (2004, 255) such dimension cannot only be viewed in terms of redistribution, but also to comprise issues concerning choices between regulatory and market-based solutions to policy questions. However, the inclusion of the status quo point in their study may have led to a possible misclassification of the dimensions. When using MDS to analyse data such as the Decision-Making in the European Union (DEU) data employed by Thomson and his colleagues, the results are potentially distorted because the analysis of the distances between governments is influenced by the governments' distances to the status quo.
3. Power in government can either be measured as the number of seats party *i* occupies in parliament relative to the other coalition members or the proportion of portfolios it holds. Which to choose is a matter of taste. There is a proportional relationship between the relative share of seats and the number of portfolios allocated to a party in office (Gamson, 1961). Here, the share of seats was chosen. The necessary information was collected from the *European Journal of Political Research* political yearbooks and the election notes in *Electoral Studies*. This operationalization assumes that there is no party-political deviance of portfolio holders from the government position in the Council. Considering COREPER's role as the capital's watchdog while being simultaneously the gate-keeper of the ministers – thus determining what and how issues appear on their agenda (Bostock, 2002), this operationalization is reasonable.
4. A government policy platform looks similar to a coded European party manifesto. It also contains the proportional emphasis on the EMP's 125 issue categories, the only difference being that the government policy platform is artificially constructed; it is the result of summing and weighing coalition parties' coded manifestos.
5. France experienced a significant increase in emphasis in 'Constitutionalism in Europe' (203) with the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) in office (ca. 25% of manuscript). Greece placed great emphasis on Strong European Governance (305) (ca. 38%), even after New Democracy (ND) succeeded Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK). The Cyprus government devoted ca. 40 percent to category 305. This disproportional issue emphasis may possibly be explained by two factors. First, sometimes a party must unproportionally cover an issue to address the clientele that is pivotal in the next election. Second, there may be country-specific factors such as the autonomy of governance in Cyprus stressed by all parties in each campaign that can lead to disproportional issue emphasis.
6. The variable 'Strong European Governance' is derived from the EMP category 'political authority'. For the EU level, the coding book describes this category as 'Favourable mentions of strong government in Europe, the EC/EU (f.i. the Commission), including government stability [. . .]' (Braun et al., 2004). This is the reason why this category was re-labelled in this study.
7. Ireland is often counted as a non-geographic member of the southern countries.
8. Germany and the UK's position in the centre of the MDS solution is not the result of a high stress value. On the contrary, while the mean stress is at 0.0189, the UK has a stress of 0.0060 and Germany 0.0033. This low stress value suggests that their pivotal positions are therefore genuine.

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