

Zentrum für Europäische Integrationsforschung
Center for European Integration Studies
Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn



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**New Winners
and Old Losers**
A Priori Voting Power
in the EU25

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New Winners and Old Losers

A Priori Voting Power in the EU25

Introduction

Analysis of the development of power distributions is one of the core tasks of political science. How much do the EU member states have a priori voting power in the Council of Ministers? In particular, what have the modifications in the voting weights after the various enlargements meant for the distribution of a priori voting power in the Council? We will in the following use the standardized Penrose-Banzhaf-index when analyzing the distribution of power among member-states (Banzhaf 1965 and Penrose 1946) (cf. Raunio and Wiberg 1998 and 2002).

A few words on the method for evaluation voting power are in order. Any voting system can be identified with the corresponding set of winning coalitions, i.e. those collections of voters sufficient to guarantee the passage of a decision, such as a bill in a parliament. The power of an actor in voting bodies is best conceptualized as and measured by that actor's control over voting outcomes. The more an actor controls voting outcomes, the more voting power that actor has. Control over outcomes depends crucially on how frequently one can pool one's votes with those of others to ensure that an outcome is favorable to oneself.

The Council of Ministers makes her decisions with majority rule. In these votings the member states have a fixed set of votes at their disposal (Table 1).

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Table 1: Development of the Distribution of Votes in the Council.

Country	EEC6 1957-	EEC9 1973-	EEC10 1981-	EEC12 1986-	EU15 1995-	EU25 1.5.- 31.10 2004	EU25 1.11. 2004-
Belgium	2	5	5	5	5	5	12
France	4	10	10	10	10	10	29
Germany	4	10	10	10	10	10	29
Italy	4	10	10	10	10	10	29
Luxembourg	1	2	2	2	2	2	4
Netherlands	2	5	5	5	5	5	13
Denmark		3	3	3	5	3	7
Ireland		3	3	3	3	3	7
UK		10	10	10	10	10	29
Greece			5	5	5	5	12
Portugal				5	5	5	12
Spain				8	8	8	27
Austria					4	4	10
Finland					3	3	7
Sweden					4	3	10
Poland						8	27
Czech Rep.						5	12
Hungary						5	12
Slovakia						3	7
Lithuania						3	7
Latvia						3	4
Slovenia						3	4
Estonia						3	4
Cyprus						2	4
Malta						2	3
Qualified Majority	12/17	41/58	45/63	54/76	62/87	88/124	232/321
(%)	70,59	70,69	71,43	71,05	71,26	70,97	72,27
Blocking Minority	6	18	19	23	26	37	90

In voting games it is assumed that there are only two kinds of coalitions: losing ones and winning ones. The voting power indices measure the actors' power in an abstract sense, i.e. they analyze the properties of the voting body rather than the actual game played in it. Power indices are thus based on *a priori* considerations: they do not reflect the actors' real possibilities in influencing the outcome in shaping the agenda (introduction of alternatives, decision of the voting order, and other forms of agenda manipulation), but focus upon their probability of influencing the outcome of voting when the number of votes every actor has and the decision rule are taken into account. Since in the institutions where voting takes place, the voters change and one cannot know the issues to be voted in the future, the probabilistic approach offered by the power indices is an effective and informative tool for analyzing the power of the voters and their coalitions. Power indices have been normalized for reasons of comparability so that they range from 0 to 1. An actor with no voting power at all (index value = 0) is called a dummy.

The Measure

There is a vast literature on various voting power indices. In this paper we apply the Penrose-Banzhaf-index for simplicity. A few words of clarification on this index are in order.

The Penrose-Banzhaf-index (B) is based on a coalition concept and focuses upon the swing, critical or pivotal voter, whose input in votes makes a losing coalition into a winning one. The Penrose-Banzhaf-index of a voter is the number of winning coalitions in which her defection from the coalition would render it losing – which is also called a critical defection – divided by the total number of critical defections for all voters. The Penrose-Banzhaf-index simply counts the number of coalitions in which an actor i is a swing voter. Briefly, if C is a winning coalition under a given decision rule d with actor $i \in C$, then i swings if $C - \{i\}$ is losing, that is, if the same coalition without i would be losing. The Penrose-Banzhaf-index of a party group equals the contribution of that group to all possible coalitions divided by the sum of contributions of all party groups to all coalitions. Stated oth-

erwise, player i 's Penrose-Banzhaf-index is defined as the number of swings for voter i divided by the total number of coalitions containing voter i . A swing occurs when the defection of voter i changes a coalition from winning to losing. When using the Penrose-Banzhaf-index it is assumed that all coalitions are equally probable.

The Results

Let's start with taking a look at the historical development of the distribution of a priori voting power in the Council of Ministers¹.

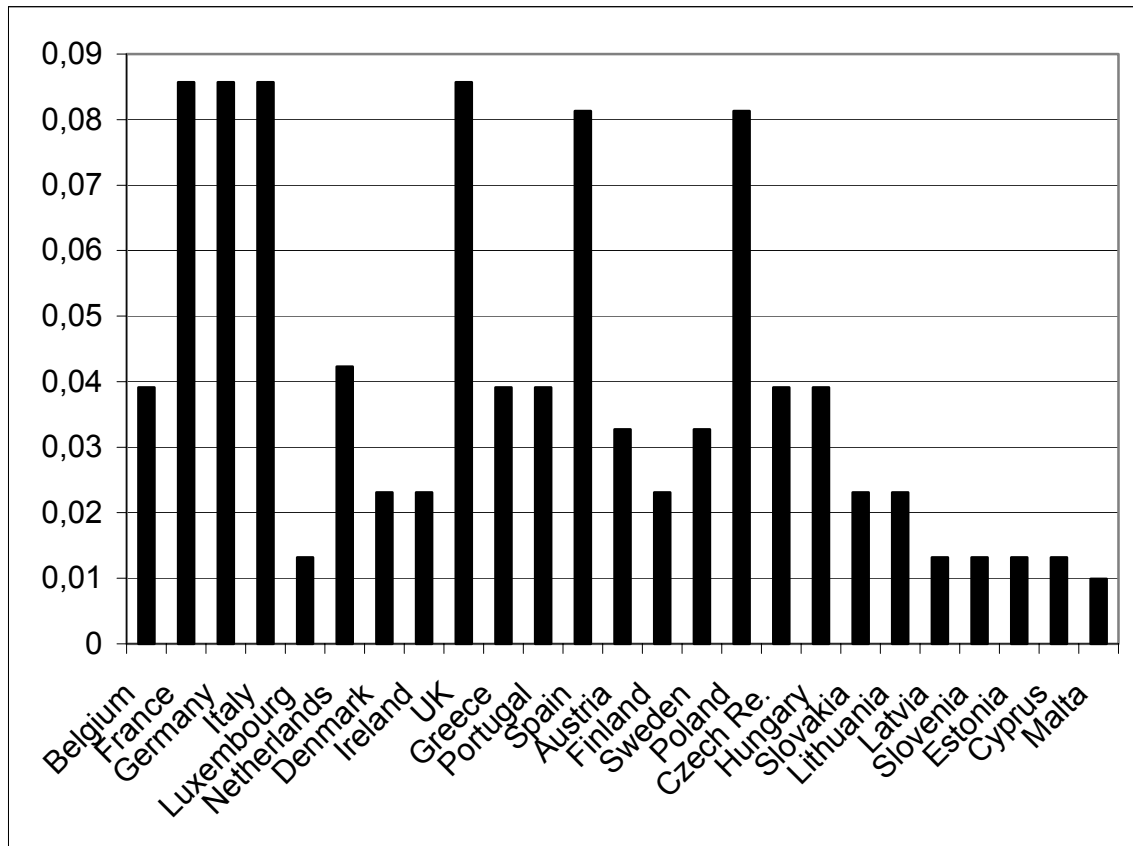
Table 2: Distribution of Standardized Penrose-Banzhaf-Voting Power in the Council.

Country	EEC6 1957-	EEC9 1973-	EEC10 1981-	EEC12 1986-	EU15 1995-	EU25 1.5.-31.10.2004	EU25 1.11.2004-
Belgium	.1429	.0915	.0820	.0666	.0587	.0420	.0391
France	.2381	.1672	.1577	.1287	.1116	.0765	.0857
Germany	.2381	.1672	.1577	.1287	.1116	.0765	.0857
Italy	.2381	.1672	.1577	.1287	.1116	.0765	.0857
Luxembourg	dummy	.0158	.0410	.0180	.0226	.0172	.0132
Netherlands	.1429	.0915	.0820	.0666	.0587	.0420	.0423
Denmark		.0662	.0410	.0459	.0359	.0255	.0231
Ireland		.0662	.0410	.0459	.0359	.0255	.0231
UK		.1672	.1577	.1287	.1116	.0765	.0857
Greece			.0820	.0666	.0587	.0420	.0391
Portugal				.0666	.0587	.0420	.0391
Spain				.1089	.0924	.0641	.0813
Austria					.0479	.0329	.0327
Finland					.0359	.0255	.0231
Sweden					.0479	.0255	.0327
Poland						.0641	.0813
Czech Rep.						.0420	.0391
Hungary						.0420	.0391
Slovakia						.0255	.0231
Lithuania						.0255	.0231
Latvia						.0255	.0132
Slovenia						.0255	.0132
Estonia						.0255	.0132
Cyprus						.0172	.0132
Malta						.0172	.0099

1 All voting power computations in this paper were made by the software Power 1.4, designed by Ph D Candidate Tommi Meskanen (Department of Mathematics, University of Turku, Finland).

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Figure 1: Distribution of a priori voting power in EU25.



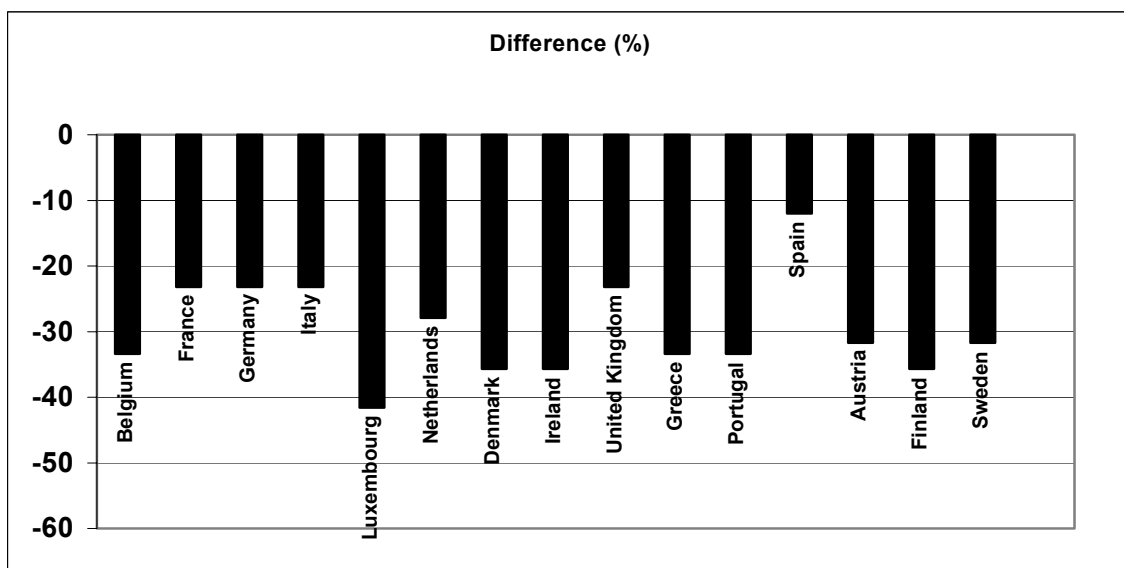
There are no strong countries: all are weak, but some weaker than others. It is noteworthy that even the strongest players have less than one tenth of the a priori voting power. On the other hand, some players are next to dummies. Malta with her less than one percent of a priori voting power is the weakest country.

Having established the current distribution of a priori voting power, we now turn to take a closer look at the differences in the voting power before and after the most recent enlargements. We start with the changes between EU15 and the current situation.

Table 3: Differences in a priori voting power EU15 vs. EU25 (1.11.2004-).

Country	EU15 1995-	EU25 1.11.2004-	Difference	Difference (%)
Belgium	.0587	.0391	-.0196	-33,4
France	.1116	.0857	-.0259	-23,2
Germany	.1116	.0857	-.0259	-23,2
Italy	.1116	.0857	-.0259	-23,2
Luxembourg	.0226	.0132	-.0094	-41,6
Netherlands	.0587	.0423	-.0164	-27,9
Denmark	.0359	.0231	-.0128	-35,7
Ireland	.0359	.0231	-.0128	-35,7
United Kingdom	.1116	.0857	-.0259	-23,2
Greece	.0587	.0391	-.0196	-33,4
Portugal	.0587	.0391	-.0196	-33,4
Spain	.0924	.0813	-.0111	-12,0
Austria	.0479	.0327	-.0152	-31,7
Finland	.0359	.0231	-.0128	-35,7
Sweden	.0479	.0327	-.0152	-31,7
Poland		.0813	.0813	
Czech Republic		.0391	.0391	
Hungary		.0391	.0391	
Slovakia		.0231	.0231	
Lithuania		.0231	.0231	
Latvia		.0132	.0132	
Slovenia		.0132	.0132	
Estonia		.0132	.0132	
Cyprus		.0132	.0132	
Malta		.0099	.0099	

Figure 2: Differences in a priori voting power EU15 vs. EU25 (1.11.2004-).



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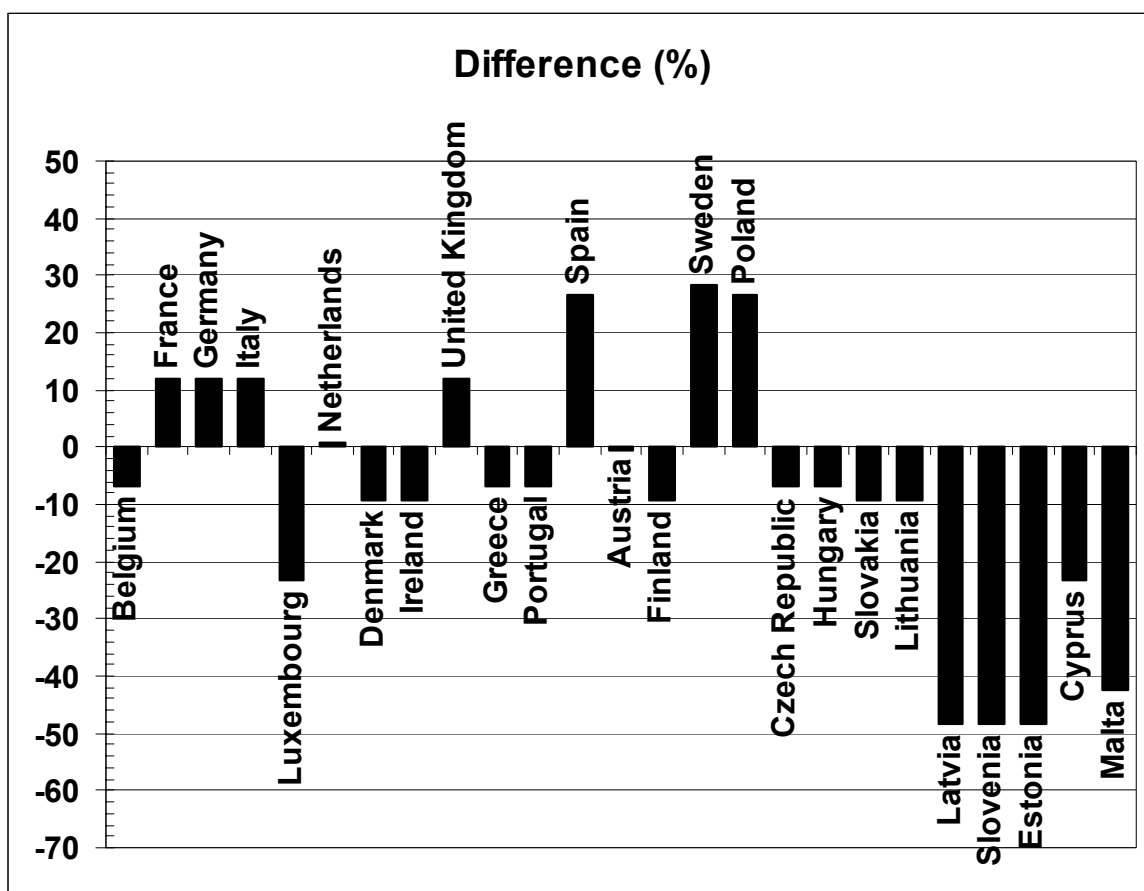
Figure 2 shows that every old member state loses power compared to the EU15-situation. In other words: Every old EU-member state loses apriori voting power, but some more than others.

Let us now proceed with a look at the differences that has occurred during last year, when the weights were modified starting 1st of November.

Table 4: Differences in a priori voting power 1.5.2004 – 31.10.2004 EU25 vs. 1.11.2004- EU25.

Country	EU25 1.5.- 31.10.2004	EU25 1.11.2004-	Difference	Difference (%)
Belgium	.042	.0391	-.0029	-6,9
France	.0765	.0857	.0092	12,0
Germany	.0765	.0857	.0092	12,0
Italy	.0765	.0857	.0092	12,0
Luxembourg	.0172	.0132	-.0040	-23,3
Netherlands	.042	.0423	.0003	0,7
Denmark	.0255	.0231	-.0024	-9,4
Ireland	.0255	.0231	-.0024	-9,4
United Kingdom	.0765	.0857	.0092	12,0
Greece	.042	.0391	-.0029	-6,9
Portugal	.042	.0391	-.0029	-6,9
Spain	.0641	.0813	.0172	26,8
Austria	.0329	.0327	-.0002	-0,6
Finland	.0255	.0231	-.0024	-9,4
Sweden	.0255	.0327	.0072	28,2
Poland	.0641	.0813	.0172	26,8
Czech Republic	.042	.0391	-.0029	-6,9
Hungary	.042	.0391	-.0029	-6,9
Slovakia	.0255	.0231	-.0024	-9,4
Lithuania	.0255	.0231	-.0024	-9,4
Latvia	.0255	.0132	-.0123	-48,2
Slovenia	.0255	.0132	-.0123	-48,2
Estonia	.0255	.0132	-.0123	-48,2
Cyprus	.0172	.0132	-.0040	-23,3
Malta	.0172	.0099	-.0073	-42,4

Figure 3: Differences in a priori voting power 1.5.2004 – 31.10.2004 EU25 vs. 1.11.2004- EU25.



The results are mixed: some lose, but some also win, quite remarkably. Especially the large countries win as compared to the previous situation. And they win by no means modestly. Some smaller countries win, too. The new member states, bar Poland, loose.

Winners are: Sweden, Spain, Poland, France, Germany, Italy, UK, Netherlands.

Losers are: Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia, Malta, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Lithuania, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Portugal, Belgium, Austria.

Practical and Political Consequences

What are the most important practical and political consequences of these calculations?

First a word of whether these kinds of calculations will have any practical impact at all. It has been known for quite some time that for instance the contradictory notions of majority requirements in the Nice Treaty were overseen in the heat of the debate – they should not have been.

There was a problem with respect to the votes needed for qualified majority and blocking minority caused by the contradictory declarations annexed to the Treaty of Nice. According to the declaration 20, the qualified majority constitutes of “at least 258 votes in favor”, but in the declaration 21, the blocking minority is regulated to consist of “91 votes”. This latter figure would imply that only 255 votes in favor would constitute the qualified majority ($345 - 90 = 255$). This contradiction was engineered in the post-Nice – negotiations, but without a satisfactory result. The Coreper decided in February 2001 that the latter declaration should be taken as the starting point for solving this problem. The Danish Presidency drafted various alternatives during the latter half of the 2002, and finally the convention decided that the qualified majority is 232, the blocking minority is thus 90.

It took many weeks of delicate diplomatic negotiating to sort this out. It should not have occurred in the first place – and it tells something about the trivial algebraic competencies of the delegations that The contradiction passed into the text without anyone noticing the contradictions.

Here any political scientist worth his diploma would have been most helpful. This would namely have been one of the first regulations a political scientist would look into given a new text. Distribution of power is at the very core interest of political science. Consequently political scientists are very keen in analyzing various coalitional possibilities. The opportunities to form winning coalitions is one way of describing the distribution of power within a political institution. When fragmentation increases, decision making get more difficult.

There is more to governance than arithmetic, though. Politics, even European integration is a matter of people. Even with the enlargement, much will remain the same. In the words of one witty UK minister in his diary for 18 February 1986:

“Not, really, that it makes the slightest difference to the conclusions of a meeting what Ministers say at it [Council of Ministers]. Everything is decided, horse-traded off, by officials at COREPER, the Council of Permanent Representatives. The Ministers arrive on the scene at the last minute, hot, tired, ill, or drunk (sometimes all of these together), read out their piece, and depart.

Strange, really. Because the EC constitution is quite well drawn. The Council of Ministers is sovereign, and can/could boss COREPER around.

But, as always in politics, democratic or autocratic, it's the chaps on the spot who call the shot.

Now what I should have done – what every Minister should have been doing is – after the ‘Conference’, to call the officials in, get fully briefed on the next subjects to come before COREPER, and instruct them on their ‘Line to Take’. So that, in good time, the Minister would know what was happening, what had been conceded, what was still open to play for.” (Clark 1993, 139)

There is little hope that this will change during our lifetime. The EU policy process is strengthening the executive branch in all national political systems, but also in the EU itself. The role and power of the Eurocrats will increase in many ways. National parliaments will not be able to cope, i.e. steer and control the integration process with the pressed schedules and widening informational asymmetries. Parliaments can in the best of all constellations react, but they have little or no hope of being genuinely proactive with respect to integration goal-setting or achievement evaluation.

In all honesty: it is not probable that these calculations will have any significant impact on the behavior of any of the relevant players within the EU-machinery. The true decision-makers within the EU-governance do not base their strategic moves on these kinds of a priori calculations, but rather on some other forms of pragmatic considerations. It is then another matter whether they should get themselves familiar with the current research results in the field. There is not much hope that this advancement of technical-scientific expertise would grow fast in the relevant policy planning

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quarters in the capitals of the member states. In the words of one senior diplomat after having taken part in a briefing covering some of the functionally equivalent of a priori voting power calculations: these calculations are a form of academic perversion that does not reflect political realities all too well. It is still to be hoped for that even basic research results would get the credit they deserve even from pragmatic authorities.

It is a well-established fact that voting does not occur often in the Council of Ministers. Somehow it is an indication of policy failure, if the Council has voted.

Why is it the case that the Council votes only rarely? Some explanations can be given. First of all the nature of the processing of issues within the Council leads to the non-occurrence of voting as all member states have had their opportunity to modify the issue according to their wishes even before the issue is finally formally decided upon.

The voting statistics should also be read with the context in mind. It is rather the rule than exception that Council decision making is not done on the basis of issues isolated from each others. All kinds of issues are packaged together.

Logrolling of many kinds takes place. Some of the deals are only implicit. For outsiders, such as the research community, such political deals are hard to pin down. Sometimes the relevant players even refuse to admit their existence. To demonstrate their existence is not an easy task.

The current battle between federalists and their opponents will continue. Eventual new coalition patterns will emerge. The enlargement process has enhanced at least the following cleavages:

Old vs. new members

Large vs. small states

Rich vs. poor

The old members will perhaps think that the new members will lower the tone, and that they are after the old member's money. Old members will, of course, put up a show of bonhomie, but this does hide the fact that some of

the old member's have never been keen on letting ten new countries in. The new countries are a bit worried that the rest secretly look down on them. And of course they do. Voters fear their small states might be swamped by the Union – or by the big member states.

It is a safe bet that the European *demos* will not be enthusiastic about enlargement – to the extent that one even exists. The populations in the member states remain intellectually and otherwise uncurious of any aspect of the EU. Interest in integration is low and EP elections do not mobilize voters. Turnout will remain low.

The accession countries seem interested mainly in getting their share of Europe's most wasteful practice, which devotes half (over € 40 billion a year) the EU budget to support mostly unproductive farmers. There is little hope in reforming completely the Common Agricultural Policy. The CAP is not only about saving the countryside: 80 % of the EU's farm subsidies go to the 20 % of the union's farmers with the biggest farms. Because EU subsidies are linked to production, they encourage intensive, industrial farming. The commission's current proposal would cut the link between farm subsidies and production. The same sum would continue to pour into the European countryside, but increasingly be directed towards environmental protection and rural development, and away from intensive farming.

Where does this lead? The great European family could be looking seriously dysfunctional. The union is not linearly deepening integration on all fronts simultaneously.

Also unexpected alliances are emerging. European diplomacy will be more complex. There will be several orchestras with bilateral, trilateral and quadrilateral alliances on different issues.

There are many ways to improve the way the EU is run. Not only is it important what the constitution explicitly contains. It is also important what it does not even implicitly contain.

Designing the future EU is not an easy task: one have to reconcile the interests of big states and small, of rich and poor, of nation states and integrated institutions. Whatever solution has been settled, it will not be per-

manent. There is no such thing as an end result in constitutional engineering. The dangers of making the entire system more complicated or less democratically accountable – or both – are evident. The big ones, especially the UK and France, tend, in reality, but perhaps not always in their rhetoric, to see strong EU institutions as a threat to their national sovereignty.

The wrangle over who does what within the EU institutions is stirring great controversy. Getting the balance right, or at least acceptable, is complex because the EU's hybrid nature as a union of states and of peoples.

At the end of the day, there will always be more of those who are more interested in deal-making than declarations. Whatever comes out of these deals must inevitably bear the marks of messy compromise but generally deserve support.

The most important question of all: how to keep these increasingly complex institutions under democratic control? The convention was not particularly keen on adding real and effective transparency to the EU-machinery. On this score, it seems to have got its priorities wrong. Democratic accountability has never been one of the EU's strong sides. Little in this respect is going to change in the near future.

It is typical for EU-reforms that they start with grandiose hopes for Europe's future – and produce results that are watered down compromises all can live with. The end result is not as far going as the hard core integrationists would like it to be – and not so far going as the Eurosceptics fear. There has always been space in the EU for both ultra-visionary architecture and down to earth pragmatism. The Inter-governmental conference after the convention was, as they usually have been, end up in a drawn-out negotiation and hasty decisions in the final 24 hours. There has always been a workable set of proposals that can command enough of general support. The most ardent centralisers will be disappointed – and the Eurosceptics will still react with shock. This has been so for many years. Hardly anything suggests that the union will not resort to its long-standing method of back-room deals during its future developments.

Enlargement will bring about many new opportunities. The markets are growing eastwards. The union will comprise more individuals than ever.

Enlargement will not only produce opportunities. New threats are also emerging. Crime from the east is one of the deep fears of the citizens of the old member states.

Prejudices will prevail for a long time. It will take quite some time before the Dutch realize that all the Poles are not so conservative as they believe them to be, and that all the Dutch will not be as wildly liberal as many of the Poles seem to think. There is premarital sex in Poland – and an ordinary Dutch does not spend his time high on heroin killing sick grandmothers in their beds (euthanasia) or unborn children (abortion) on a monthly basis.

It would be unwise to take assurances at face value that the Union has no plans to extend its powers. After all, plans can change; few people would sign a contract letting their neighbors demolish their house, based on an oral assurance that they had no such intention. New constellations, new plans.

As long as there is no clear division of labor among the union institutions and member states will the EU appear to the common man and woman as an incomprehensible mess, where the feeling of individual political helplessness enhances. As individuals we are tempted to throw in the towel and say: we don't understand this and for this reason we will turn our backs to the EU.

The range of opinions in the EU is so wide that many governments are bound to object to bits of the constitution.

Even if governments do unite around the convention's proposals, there is still another hurdle: to win the popular assent. History suggests that plans for tighter European integration stand a good chance of being rejected if people are actually asked their opinion. But it is not just unexpected events in the world that can derail constitutional conventions. There is also a chance that delegates will simply fail to agree – or fail to sell the agreed proposal to the public. In the present circumstances, both risks are fairly

high. Already eight countries have decided to have a referendum over the constitution. Nobody can guarantee a positive outcome.

There will be new initiatives by some more enthusiastic federalists to create a core of countries to push forward European integration. These proposals will be seen as signs of new pushes towards developing a multi-speed Europe. The principle of creating pioneer groups of EU members in certain policy areas is gaining ground in member states. An increasing number of countries must be expected to support moves to allow member states to forge ahead in certain policy fields to stop an enlarged union of 25 or more countries grinding to a halt.

A guarantee that countries can choose whether to take part in some controversial aspects of EU integration may also make it easier to persuade skeptical member states to ratify the new constitution: countries can more than before pick the areas in which they want to become active. Coalitions of the willing will emerge around various policy fields. Active participation in one field does not necessitate participation in some other field. Some countries, notably Britain, originally an advocate of a multi-speed Europe, is concerned if the concept led to the fragmentation of the EU into two blocs, with an inner hard core, led by France and Germany embarking on more integration across a wide front. The principle of enhanced co-operation was written into the Amsterdam Treaty but it has not been applied since it came into force in May 1999.

However, there are already essential examples of EU core groups forming in key policy areas under different mechanisms, notably with the 12 member states using the single currency and in the passport-free Schengen travel area. Although the most enthusiastic federalists consider a multi-speed Europe second best, it is inevitable in an enlarged union. With 25 countries there will be different degrees on integration, so that the avant-garde does not have to wait for the slowest. The risk is that the EU would be able to speak with a less united vote.

Far too little thought has been given to the legal and economic ramifications of the grand constitutional proclamations. The creation of European citizenship, for instance, together with the prohibition of discrimination on

the basis of national citizenship. Both were implicit in the earlier treaties and are central to the European idea: Europeans have joined together and should not discriminate against each other. But the new constitution would give these principles the status of constitutional law. If applied to other rights enumerated in the constitution, they could create social harmonisation by the back door. This would not be without consequences for the European economy. Under the current principle of inclusion, an EU citizen who moves from one EU country to another to work is immediately and fully integrated into the social system of the host country. Those who migrate for reasons other than employment receive no welfare benefits apart from emergency health care. However, the new constitution could mean that the inclusion principle would apply to all migrants from EU countries, including those who do not come to work. This is not explicitly stated, but the courts would probably interpret the concept of social inclusion more generously than they do already. If having work is no longer required before a migrant can benefit from the welfare state, some fear that the floodgates will be opened: masses of refugees would flow from eastern Europe to seek their fortune. To prevent this chaos, EU migrants should have to wait for full welfare benefits, such as rent subsidies and public housing, while enjoying access to public services and other benefits they pay for via taxes and social insurance contributions. If differential treatment is not allowed, countries will be forced to compete to trim welfare benefits so that they are no more attractive as destinations than their neighbors. Welfare states would not survive. Harmonization of social standards could prevent a downward spiral. But economic conditions are far too varied for this to work.

But there are other realities bearing in on the EU from the outside. The union's most urgent need is to piece together the common foreign and security policy it has claimed to have. Success can hardly be guaranteed. But without the added coherence offered by meaningful reforms, the union is more likely to fail.

Some members of the EU are suffering from "enlargement fatigue" and want to slow down the process. The logic of the events themselves will not fulfill this wishful thinking. There are, particularly in Germany, those who

still think that the inclusion of the post-communist countries into the EU pose a Trojan donkey –kind of threat. The New, post-communist converts to the American ideal, may split Europe, they claim.

In the convention especially the small states suffered, according to the Finnish foreign minister Erkki Tuomioja (sd), from the Stockholm syndrome, i.e. the psychological state in which the victims of a kidnapping, or persons detained against their free will – prisoners – develop a relationship with their captor(s). (The syndrome has been named this way after the famous bank robbery of Kreditbanken, Stockholm which lasted from August 23 to August 28, 1973: the victims kept on defending their captors even after their six days physical detention was over. They showed a reticent behaviour in the following legal procedures too.) After having been frightened will all kinds of bad things and further going solutions, the representatives of the small countries were relieved that some of the not-welcomed changes were successfully rejected – and halted their criticism. Isolation from perspectives other than those of the leader of the convention made many to give up their resistance; and the convention succeeded in producing a consensus document.

Many parts of the non-governmental sector will be influenced by enlargement. Not only trade unions and other interest organizations will find a new need to coordinate their interest activities. Also other civil organizations will try to get more connected to their European sister and brother organizations. Ties will be closer and a huge harmonization process will take place.

Parties. European parties will become more important. With so many new players there is a strongly felt need for aggregating decision making to some manageable level. Parties are the glue that keeps the acts together. With near identical ideological goals the parties will be able to produce – There is, however, one big reservation to this: the parties must have resources, above all intellectual resources to constantly feed the decision making process with new initiatives, reform packages, broad visions. It is not self-evident that the current parties will have there resources – nor that they will get them in the near future.

EU membership and the process of European integration consolidate centralization of power and top-down decision-making, through providing party leadership (as cabinet members) with an arena (EU) where the party organization exercises little if any control over party representatives. The logic behind the argument is simple and rests on informational asymmetries resulting from the uneven participatory rights of national politicians in the EU political system. European integration strengthens leadership autonomy, a process already under way independently of integration. The result is increasingly centralized party, defined as one that features the concentration of effective decision-making authority in the national party organs, with a premium placed on a smaller number of individuals participating in the decision. Centralization is reinforced by exogenous, cross-national factors – the political dynamics of the EU policy process.

Through their regular participation in the Council and the European Council, the leading party figures as ministers gain access to a decision-making arena where the rest of the national party exerts little if any control. While electoral considerations naturally limit the autonomy of party leaders, they nevertheless possess considerable discretion to make agreements at the European level. European integration will weaken links between national parties and interest groups, firstly because an increasing number of important policy decisions are taken at the European level either by the Council or the Commission, and secondly because EU directives and competition rules set limits to patronage.

As ever, much will depend on the economy. The outlook for Europe's economy is hardly optimistic: growth is slow and the troubles are huge – and increasing not least due to the ageing of the populations.

The two negative outcomes in the referenda on the constitutional treaty in France and The Netherlands will undoubtedly slow down integration. To predict the future would be foolish. EU must take a pause for consideration. Maybe that's in the end good for Europe and its citizens.

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