

The Influence of Small States in the EU: Structural Disadvantages and Counterstrategies

Diana Panke

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About the Author

Diana Panke is Lecturer in the School of Politics and International Relations, University College Dublin. Contact: Diana.Panke@ucd.ie

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The Influence of Small States in the EU: Structural Disadvantages and Counterstrategies

Diana Panke

This is work in progress, comments are most welcome!

Abstract:

The most recent rounds of European Union enlargement considerably increased the number of small member states. Of the EU-27, 19 countries have fewer votes in the Council of Ministers than the EU average. They face structural disadvantages in uploading national policies to the EU level due to less bargaining power and less of the financial and administrative resources necessary for building up policy expertise and exerting influence via arguing. This paper explores strategic disadvantages of smaller states in the EU and comprehensively maps their strategies to counterbalance them. This mapping reveals interesting differences between new and old small member states, and provides insights into the usage of intergovernmental coordination, prioritization and brokerage strategies. Some small states manage better than others to exploit the strength of their weakness and thus are more likely able to shape EU policies. The paper also develops a set of hypotheses on the influence of small states in the EU that amend both intergovernmental and supranational approaches.

The author:

Dr. Diana Panke
Lecturer in European Politics
School of Politics and International Relations
Dublin European Institute
University College Dublin
Dublin 4
Ireland

Phone: 00353 (0)1 716 7602
Fax: 00353 (0)1 716 1171
Email: diana.panke@ucd.ie
Web: http://www.ucd.ie/spire/school_staff_dp.html

Introduction¹

Which structural obstacles do small states face in shaping EU policies and how do they cope with them? Which strategies do small states apply in order to influence outcomes in the first pillar? Are all states equally active? How and under which conditions do small states' shaping activities translate into success?

These questions are important since the most recent rounds of EU-enlargements increased the number of small member states. Of the EU-27, 19 countries have fewer votes in the Council of Ministers than the EU-average. These are Malta, Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Luxemburg, Slovenia, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Lithuania, Slovakia, Austria, Bulgaria, Sweden, Belgium, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary and Portugal. They face structural disadvantages in uploading national policies to the EU-level. Firstly, they lack political power to shape EU law in the same manner as their bigger counterparts. Secondly, due to their lower GDP and often smaller population size, the amount of financial and administrative resources necessary for building up policy expertise and exert influence via arguing are more limited than in bigger and economically richer states. Thirdly, most of the small members recently joined the EU. They can neither draw on close institutionalized links to Community institutions, most importantly the European Commission, nor on prior knowledge of EU-governance, in order to shape EU policies according to their interests. Fourthly, new small states lack expertise and European proficiency to operate as policy forerunners, launching demanding regulative standards in market creating or correcting measures, to a comparable extent than old members.

One could argue that the considerable political and economic size differences between EU members are not very important. The group of small states is relatively het-

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This paper is part of an ongoing research project on the role of small member states in the European Union. The project comprehensively maps structural disadvantages and counterbalancing strategies of small states. It explores two different dependent variables. Firstly, it seeks to explain the different activity level of member states (DV 1a) and differences in strategy choices between states (DV 1b). Secondly, the project analyses scope conditions for the varying success of small states counterbalancing strategies in shaping European policies (DV 2). For further information on the status of the project, please contact Diana.Panke@ucd.ie

erogeneous, encompassing old and new members with high and low GDP per capita and different rates in support for EU-integration. In addition, there are hardly any structural cleavages between small states on the one side and big members on the other, with institutional issues, such as voting rights in the Council of Ministers, as being the only notable exception (Magnette & Nicolaidis, 2005: 83). Most issues on the European political agenda are cross-cutting in character. Thus, small states might have lesser political influence via voting, bargaining and arguing, but this poses no structural governance dilemma according to which they have to implement EU law which does systematically not reflect their political interests.

However, this paper argues that the lower shaping capacity in the agenda-setting and decision-making stages of EU policy-making is important, because of its implications for the effectiveness and legitimacy of EU governance. Small states face strategic disadvantages vis-à-vis bigger states in successfully furthering their interests on the EU-level. Despite these potential implications, there is a dual gap in EU literature to which this paper seeks to contribute. Firstly, there are numerous excellent case studies on small states in the policy-shaping process of the EU (e.g. Laffan, 2006, Björkdahl, 2007; Bunse, Magnette, & Nicolaidis, 2005; Galbreath, 2006; Maes & Verdun, 2005; Raik, 2002; Raunio & Wiberg, 2001; Sepos, 2005; Tiilikainen, 2006), but rarely comprehensive empirical overviews on how small states exert influence in EU (e.g. Hanf & Soetendorp, 1998). This paper distinguishes between three power dimensions, voting/bargaining power, argumentative power and moral/institutional power, which bring about three types of structural disadvantages for small states (II). It explores small states' strategies to counterbalance these structural disadvantages (III), maps them (IV), and discusses the empirical pattern (V). Secondly, integration theory focuses either on big states (e.g. intergovernmentalism), or does not explicitly discuss size as an explanatory variable (e.g. supranationalism). Despite their increasing importance in the context of the latest EU enlargements, systematic theoretical accounts for the influence of small states are rare. Therefore, this paper concludes with a set of hypotheses to amend prominent integration theories (VI).

II. Small states in the EU

The literature on small states usually draws attention to the fact that size is a social construction (Hanf & Soetendorp, 1998). There is not one superior measure and the

line drawn between big and small countries is debateable as well (Magnette & Nicolaidis, 2005, Thorhallsson, 2006; Thorhallsson & Wivel, 2006). In the European Union (EU), size is often determined based on economic and financial power (GDP), political power (votes in the Council, number of MEP), population, or territory. Size is a relative concept. Even if the crude line between 'small' and 'big' is drawn based on the below/above EU-27 average, the groupings vary depending on the measures used. For example, Finland would be a big state based on its territory, but a small one according to the other four criteria.

The distribution of votes in qualified majority voting in the Council of Ministers is a good starting point to determine whether a state is small or big. It measures political and economic power, which is an important shaping capacity in EU policy processes, in particular since the application of this supranational principle has been broadened with the recent Treaty reforms. Compared to unanimity, qualified majority rule is disadvantageous to small states. States with lower number of votes can less easily form winning coalitions in the Council. Additionally, the Commission often focuses on big states in agenda setting stages, knowing that they have stronger bargaining powers in the Council (Bunse et al., 2005: 35-37, 44-45).

This paper defines small member states as countries, which possess less than the EU-27 average of votes in the Council of Ministers (12.78). 19 out of 27 countries fall into this category. These are: Malta, Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Luxemburg, Slovenia, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Lithuania, Slovakia, Austria, Bulgaria, Sweden, Belgium, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary and Portugal. The group of small states is far from being homogenous, including old and new member states, different political traditions and systems, diverse stances on further EU integration, and various national interests (e.g. Magnette & Nicolaidis, 2005). In the EU comparison, these states share not only a below average number of votes in the Council. Small states also have lower bargaining powers, due to their smaller national economies (measured on the basis of GDPs), the restricted ability to offer package deals and side-payments to other states and less valuable unilateral options to act outside the EU. Next to the restricted voting and bargaining power, small states often have a lower number of personnel and policy experts in national delegations to Brussels (administrative capacities) which might hamper their argumentative power (e.g. Donahue, Selden, & Ingraham, 2000, Raik, 2002).

Limited economic, financial and administrative capacities translate into different types of strategic disadvantages for shaping European policies. In order to analyze these disadvantages and small state strategies to counterbalance them, the following section distinguishes between three different types of power in the European policy-processes.

III. Power locations, structural disadvantages, and counterbalancing strategies

The positive relationship between states' ability to invest a variety of material and ideational resources in bargaining and arguing processes or to use voting power, on the one hand, and the successful influence of EU agenda-setting and decision making, on the other hand, has often been pointed out (e.g. Fedeli & Forte, 2001; Kerremans, 1996; Peterson & Bomberg, 1998, Wallace, Wallace, & Pollack, 2005, Moravcsik, 1993a, Sandholtz & Zysman, 1989). The small states' literature highlights that resources and strategies to facilitate national interests might be interchangeable: a weak state in one regard could be influential based on alternative resources or via other channels (similar Katzenstein, 1985, Maes & Verdun, 2005, Thorhallsson, 2006). Thus, an economically weak state might compensate the reduced bargaining or voting power in the EU by extensively drawing on ideational or institutional resources in processes of arguing.

In order to systematically examine structural disadvantages of small states and possibilities to offset them, it is essential to distinguish between three power dimensions. These are voting and bargaining power, argumentative power as well as moral and institutional power. They reflect material, ideational and institutional resources respectively. Within the EU relevant material resources do not encompass military capabilities, but rest on the economic strength of states (GDP). This strongly correlates with the number of votes in the Council and additionally influences the number of alternative unilateral or multilateral courses of actions. Hence, economic resources are important for exerting influence via bargaining and via voting (Moravcsik, 1999, Hoffmann, 1982, Laursen, 2002). Ideational resources encompass policy expertise as well as scientific and technical support. They are crucial for effective arguing in EU agenda-setting and decision-making processes (Sandholtz & Zysman, 1989, Mörth, 2000, Arter, 2000; Björkdahl, 2007). Finally, institutional resources encompass op-

portunity structures, such as the EU Presidency. This office allows exercising influence in the interest of the Union and grants office holders moral authority. Institutional resources also entail opportunities based on state-specific qualities, such as the reputation as policy forerunners or as being neutral mediators in the Council (Bengtsson, Elgström, & Tallberg, 2004, Elgström, 2003; Maes & Verdun, 2005).

All three power resources can be used to shape EU policies in accordance with national interests. Comparing small and big states across the three dimensions, it is remarkable that smaller members suffer strategic disadvantages in all three respects.

Voting and bargaining power are characterized by the ability of states to use their political or economic weight in the EU, in order to influence agenda-setting and decision-making so that outcomes reflect national interests to an extent, proportional to their bargaining assets. Small states have fewer votes in the Council, which decreases the likelihood for successful shaping. Moreover, this even influences pre-negotiation bargaining. The European Commission is more sensitive to big rather than small states (c.f. Bunse et al., 2005). In addition, small states are less able to offer side payments to bigger states in exchange for support in a specific issue (c.f. Mattila, 2004: 34-35). Lower economic power makes smaller members also more vulnerable than their bigger counterparts. Their alternatives for unilateral action or cooperation outside the EU are more limited, should cooperation fail in the EU, which leaves them worse off than bigger states (Keohane, 1984). Finally, effective bargaining requires an well-staffed administrative infrastructure with expertise, clear responsibilities and coordination procedures in order to allow states to develop and present coherent positions in Brussels (Laffan, 2006, Soetendorp & Hanf, 1998). Yet, many small states seriously grapple with their domestic coordination of European policies, which also makes effective bargaining difficult (Soetendorp & Hanf, 1998 : 192, Dosenrode von, 1998: 54, Ekengren & Sundelius, 1998: 137-140).

Smaller member states have also more limited argumentative power and are therefore, less likely to be successful via arguing or framing in the agenda-setting and decision-making stages. Policy expertise and scientific resources are crucial to persuade others from a particular position (E. Haas, 1990; Radaelli, 1995, Young, 1999). Yet, smaller states have lesser administrative capacities as well as have a lower number of experts in national delegations in Brussels and a lower number of personnel to prepare Council meetings or establish and maintain direct contacts to the Commission (e.g. Kassim & Peters, 2001: 300, Kassim, Menon, Peters, & Wright, 2000, Pappas, 1995,

Spanou, 1998, Coyle, 1994). This renders effective arguing across multiple arenas more difficult. Moreover, newer small states' contact to European interest groups and epistemic communities are less strong, so they gain fewer additional ideational resources, which could be used for argumentative strategies. Finally, small states are less able to exert argumentative influence than their bigger counterparts, since many of them are new members and have fewer experiences with EU politics and policies than older member states.

Even the last resource, moral power poses strategic disadvantages to smaller states. Again, administrative and political capacities matter (Laffan, 2006). A lower number of experts in national delegations in Brussels renders it difficult to systematically highlight small states' superior policy expertise and construct a reputation as "good citizen" interested in the European public good. Moreover, many of the small and poorer member states are not policy forerunners in regard to liberalization and costly market-regulations (e.g. demanding environmental laws), but tend to prefer lower standards (e.g. Börzel, 2003). Finally, in particular the new members among the small states, have not yet had the time to disseminate a positive image (Bengtsson et al., 2004: 319), upon which they could draw in order to gain moral authority for advancing specific policies.

Table 1: Power Types and Strategic Disadvantages to Small States

Power Type and Location		Disadvantages of small states
Voting and bargaining power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bargaining & coalition building in the agenda setting stages • bargaining, coalition building & voting during decision-making processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • low bargaining and voting power: less votes, less valuable unilateral options to act, lower number of personnel in national delegations to polish bargaining strategies • many of the small states are new members and have less developed contacts to other states
Argumentative power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • advancing national interests through arguing or framing during agenda-setting and decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fewer ideational capacities (lower number of experts in national delegations) and lower argumentative power • many of the small states are new members and have less developed contacts to the workings groups of the Commission and European interest groups
Moral and institutional power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • norm advocacy through moral authority based on policy forerunner or good citizen reputations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • restricted institutional capacities and lower moral power: poorer states are hardly regarded as policy forerunners • small new members had no time to construct a good reputation in pursuing common European goods

Small states face structural disadvantages in all dimensions. Yet, they can engage in counterbalancing bargaining, arguing and moral-authority based strategies, in order to make their interests heard in the EU.

In EU policy-processes bargaining frequently takes place in the shadow of votes (Christiansen, Falkner, & Jörgensen, 2002; Dürr & Mateo, 2004; Elgström & Jönsson, 2000; Laursen, 2002). Thus, bargaining as well as voting power are important in shape European policies (Moravcsik, 1993a, 1998). Limited bargaining power and a low number of votes can be counterbalanced with two strategies: institutionalized coordination on a regional basis and strategic partnerships with bigger states. Examples for the former are the Baltic group, the Benelux, the Nordic cooperation and the Visegrád group. With these institutionalized forms of intergovernmental coordination the members can develop collective bargaining positions, increase their collective bargaining leverage, and shape EU policies more effectively than through unilateral action. One example of successful influence in the EU was the ‘Northern Dimension Initiative’ (c.f. Arter, 2000, Tiilikainen, 2006). The most well-known strategic partnership is the German-Franco tandem (Wallace & Wallace, 2000) or the Spanish-Portuguese partnership (Magone, 2001: 184). These forms of institutionalized multi- or bilateral cooperation can counterbalance restricted bargaining or voting powers, but presuppose homogenous interests within groups and between partners.

Processes of arguing are important in EU policy-making processes and take place in many vertically differentiated settings, such as the workings groups of the Council of Ministers or the COREPER, or the European Commission (Elgström & Jönsson, 2000, Joerges & Neyer, 1997). Shortcomings in argumentative power can be compensated through direct contacts to the European Commission. This way, small states gain additional background information on the issue at stake in order to compensate for limited domestic administrative and cognitive capacities. This could considerably save domestic costs for and time to gather expertise and might also help to speed up domestic coordination processes for the formulation of national negotiation positions. Contacts to the European Commission can be beneficial for small states for a second reason. If states know the content of a dossier in advance, they can start to think about national implications and start in preparing a position even before the draft proposal is dealt with in the Council. Saving time for the national coordination of positions additionally helps to counterbalance shortcomings in administrative resources. Also, it opens windows of opportunity for longer periods of consultations

with stakeholders and experts, for extracting good arguments to defend national interests in Council negotiations later on. A second argumentative counterbalancing strategy is the prioritization of issues. Selective engagement allows small states to concentrate their limited capacities on salient issues, while they do not spend much time, personnel and administrative and financial resources on less important questions.² If extremely low priorities are not dealt with at all, the overall workload will be reduced and scarce resources can be saved. In addition, the prioritization of important issues makes it easier for ministries in small states and their permanent representations in Brussels to establish links to relevant actors for a proposal at stake. Contacts to European and national epistemic communities and interest groups can be used to obtain information on policy implications and on technical and scientific backgrounds and in order to get insights on interests and beliefs of other actors (e.g. P. M. Haas, 1992). Based on this, small states can construct an eventually persuasive argumentative strategy, backed by up to date scientific knowledge. One example of setting priorities is Belgium's concentration on the European Monetary Union (c.f. Maes & Verdun, 2005). In addition, small states place big hopes into direct contacts to the European Commission in order to use this channel of exerting voice (without investing many resources) and increase the sensitivity of the Commission towards a particular small state interest. For example, using direct access was key in safeguarding institutional equality among states (Bunse et al., 2005: 6, 22-23).

A third bundle of counterbalancing strategies relates to moral and institutional power. Almost all states perceive small states as not particularly powerful and able to shape EU policies according to their self-interests (c.f. IV). Hence, small states can use their size as an asset for gaining influence masked in neutrality (Arter, 2000: 679, 683; Thorhallsson, 2006; Thorhallsson & Wivel, 2006; Tiilikainen, 2006: 81-82). They can act as "impartial mediators" between different bigger states or upgrade common interests and, thereby, systematically promote their own policy preferences in the Council through the backdoor.³ An example is Finland's preparation of the decision to grant Turkey a candidate status, a process during which Finland explicitly highlighted its neutrality (Bengtsson et al., 2004: 321). Another source of moral authority stems from the institutional opportunity structure of the EU Presidency. Firstly, the Presi-

² Prioritization could at least partially explain the finding that smaller member states vote less often against the Council majority than bigger member states (Mattila, 2004: 30, 34-5).

³ However, honest brokers might also prevent policy-developments against their interests, rather than actively and positively pursuing them under the cover of neutrality.

gency allows small states to actively shape the European political agenda in drawing on the authority of the post as guiding the interests of the Union (Dimitrakopoulos & Passas, 2004; Elgström, 2003). Denmark, for example, used this office in order to promote their interests in the process of enlargement and promised financial means to candidate states without prior EU consensus (Bengtsson et al., 2004: 324, Pedersen, 2003). Similarly, Greece shaped outcomes during its presidency in line with self-interests (Dimitrakopoulos & Passas, 2004). Secondly, small states can approach the Presidency of the day and highlight particular problems they might have with a dossier and hope that the Presidency draw on its institutional authority and will accommodate their concerns.

IV. Mapping Small States' Activities

Case studies have shown that small states have developed a variety of institutionalized and ad-hoc mechanisms to influence European policies. This section systematically maps the importance and frequency of these activities based on a series of questionnaires on states' strategies in the EU. In order to create a representative dataset 298 questionnaires were circulated among small member states between October 2007 and April 2008. The survey controlled for policy-variation and asked economic/employment ministries, environmental/agricultural ministries,⁴ foreign and finance ministries and the permanent representations in Brussels. Depending on the response rate of the first round of questionnaires, each ministry/permanent representation received between two and fourteen forms. The total response rate was 31 percent. Responses came from at least four different fields (ministries and permanent representation) for each state and each state replied with four to twelve questionnaires.

The below mapping of small state strategies shows country averages (table 2). It is representative, because it encompasses compressive data based on responses from ministries and permanent representations and controls for different policy fields. For the purpose of this working paper, I standardized the responses according to a 1-3 scale, corresponding to high, medium and low categories of usage. This allows making answers comparable across strategies and captures differences and similarities between small member states without exaggerating dissimilarities.

⁴ Not every small state has different ministries for the fields agriculture and environment (for example, in Cyprus and Malta one ministry deals with both issues) and for economy and employment issues.

Table 2: Mapping of Small States Strategies⁵

	Institutionalized coordination	Strategic bilateral partnerships to big countries	Prioritization of issues	Contacts to the Commission	“Honest brokers” in the Council	Presidency as opportunity structure for national interests ⁶
Austria	1	3	2	3	2	1
Belgium	3	2	1	3	2	2
Bulgaria	1	1	2	1	1	1
Cyprus	1	1	2	1	1	2
Czech Republic	2	2	3	1	1	2
Denmark	3	2	2	3	3	3
Estonia	2	1	3	2	1	1
Finland	3	1	2	2	2	1
Greece	1	1	1	2	1	3
Hungary	2	1	3	3	1	2
Ireland	1	3	3	3	2	2
Latvia	2	1	2	2	1	2
Lithuania	2	1	3	1	1	1
Luxembourg	3	3	3	3	2	1
Malta	1	3	1	2	1	2
Portugal	1	2	2	2	2	2
Slovenia	1	2	2	3	2	2
Sweden	3	1	3	2	2	1
Slovak Republic	2	1	2	2	1	3

* frequency of usage/importance of strategies

1 seldom/low

2 occasionally/medium

3 frequently/strong

A mapping ranking the member states according to their activity scores captures differences between states more prolonged (1 being the lowest, 19 the highest score) (table 3). Nevertheless, it basically reveals similar insights as the mapping based on absolute numbers (compare tables 2 and 3). Denmark is the most active state followed by Luxembourg, Ireland and Belgium, and Bulgaria is the least active state, preceded by Cyprus, Greece and Lithuania.

⁵ Please note: this figure has last been updated in April 2008, questionnaires that arrived afterwards are not yet included in this mapping.

⁶ Since not every state has yet held the Presidency and since states can also approach the Presidency in order to sensibilise the latter on their problems, the question aimed for its importance for pursuing national interests through the Presidency, rather than they way states use the office once they hold it.

Table 3: Relative ranking of member states⁷

	institutionalised coordination	strategic bilateral partnerships	contact to Commission	prioritization	role of presidency	neutral brokerage in Council	total score	rank
Austria	4.5	17	17	7	5.5	11	62	13
Belgium	18.5	15	15	1	11.5	17.5	78.5	16
Bulgaria	4.5	3	1	11	1	4.5	25	1
Cyprus	4.5	4	3	7	11.5	3	33	2
Czech Republic	11.5	10	2	17	7	6	53.5	9
Denmark	16	14	18	7	18.5	19	92.5	19
Estonia	11.5	1	8	14	4	9	47.5	5
Finland	16	7	9.5	9	5.5	12	59	11
Greece	4.5	5	9.5	2.5	18.5	4.5	44.5	3
Hungary	11.5	12	13	15	15.5	1.5	68.5	14
Ireland	4.5	19	19	18.5	7	16	84	17
Latvia	11.5	2	5	13	11.5	7.5	50.5	6
Lithuania	11.5	9	6	11	2	7.5	47	4
Luxemburg	18.5	18	15	18.5	7	14	91	18
Malta	4.5	16	7	2.5	14	10	54	8
Portugal	4.5	11	11	5	11.5	14	57	10
Slovak Republic	11.5	8	4	11	17	1.5	53	7
Slovenia	4.5	13	12	4	15.5	17.5	66.5	13
Sweden	16	6	15	16	3	14	70	15

What pattern can be observed? In discussing the empirical mapping of small states activities, the next sections on variation within strategies, between strategies and between states systematically include interview insights with self evaluations and the evaluation of other states. In addition, secondary literature is taken into account where available. This triangulation lends strong support to the mapping on questionnaire-basis.

V. Pattern of Strategies

Country variation within strategies

Not all small states use institutionalized coordination with other EU members as a means to increase the collective bargaining power. Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Malta, Portugal and Slovenia do not engage in multilateral forms of policy

⁷ Please note: this figure has last been updated in April 2008, questionnaires that arrived afterwards are not yet included in this mapping.

coordination. Multilateral institutionalized coordination takes place on the basis of geographic proximity. There are two Nordic, one Central and one Eastern European region, in which states established common institutions in order to identify and eventually also promote common interests. These regional forums differ significantly in their degree of institutionalization, the coherency of shared member states interests and the frequency to which the platforms are used to increase the bargaining leverage and voting power in EU negotiations. The strongest form of regional multilateral coordination is the Benelux group composed of Belgium, Luxemburg and the Netherlands. Over the years, the Benelux platform has been often and successfully used in order to strengthen the voice of its members in EU policy-making processes (Benelux, 2007, Benelux General Secretariat, 2007). Denmark, Finland and Sweden enhance their bargaining and voting powers in the EU via the Nordic cooperation, which also includes the non-EU members Norway and Iceland. The Nordic cooperation is highly institutionalized but flexible. It allows for of intergovernmental and parliamentary policy consultation and coordination in various constellations (e.g. The Nordic Council and Nordic Council of Ministers, 2003).⁸ As the Benelux, the Nordic cooperation is strongly institutionalized, institutionally differentiated, and relatively frequently used (e.g. The Nordic Council and Nordic Council of Ministers, 2007, The Nordic Council and Nordic Council of Ministers, 2003). By contrast, the Visegrád and the Baltic groups are less strongly institutionalized and less frequently used. Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland form the Visegrád group (V4). The V4 is not strongly institutionalized and it is not the primary loci of collaboration between its members (Dankova, 2003: 3). Since the four members have few common interests, they utilize the Visegrád group not very successful (Hejsek, 2003: 1, Prasil, 2006: 3, Minarik, 2004).⁹ Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania form the Baltic group, which is institutionalized to a medium extent:¹⁰ Meetings are often regarded as successful coordination devices, but take place in an irregular, infrequent manner, depending on pre-

⁸ Its institutional structure encompasses the Nordic Council (1952) as consultative platform and the Nordic Council of Ministers (1971), which operates as agenda setter and also implements decisions of the Nordic Council.

⁹ Even in instances in which they shared concerns, such as the early accession to the Schengen agreement, or getting a higher number of European deputies during the Nice IGC, the four states did not consistently act in concert in the EU (Prasil, 2006: 3, Hejsek, 2003: 2, Nikodem, 2004: 2).

¹⁰ It encompasses intergovernmental consultation and coordination and occasional contacts between the three parliaments (Baltic Assembly, 2007).

existing shared policy interests (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia, 2003: 2, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia, 2003: 1, Baltic Assembly, 2007).

Strategic bilateral partnerships with powerful states are less often applied than institutionalized regional coordination. A well known form of such partnerships takes place between Portugal and its bigger neighbour Spain (c.f. Morata, 1998: 113, Magone, 2001: 184). There are several issue-specific partnerships, such as between Ireland and France in agricultural policies or Austria and Germany the transport area (c.f. Luif, 1998: 126). In these settings, bilateral consultations are frequently evoked in preparatory stages and ongoing policy-making processes. If partnerships are not purely of an ad-hoc character, there is issue-specific variation: Smaller partners especially side with their bigger ones, when they are not strongly interested in a particular issue. With the exception of Malta, which due to its history has medium strong and occasionally used ties to the UK, and to a lesser extent the Czech Republic and Slovenia, new small members have not yet entered into institutionalized bilateral partnerships with a bigger state. Although Hungary and the Slovak Republic are geographically close to Poland, frequent bilateral intergovernmental contacts to coordinate joint EU positions with this big state are absent. This is partially due to their limited number of common positions on EU policies (Krothvil, 2003; Trzakowski, 2003; Vida, 2003, Prasil, 2006: 1-3, Hejsek, 2003: 2-3). In addition, some of new small member states tend to establish bilateral contacts to old small rather than old big states, such as Cyprus with Greece, or Slovenia with Austria. Compared to older small EU members, recently acceded states rely less frequently on institutionalised forms of intergovernmental cooperation and have difficulties to find bigger allies in order to support their positions in bargaining processes (Nikodem, 2004: 1).¹¹

The prioritization of issues is a strategy to concentrate limited administrative, personnel and cognitive resources on policies with high saliency. This allows generating expertise in drawing on a variety of domestic and transnational experts, interest groups or epistemic communities. High quality arguments backed up by up-to-date knowledge, in turn, are more likely to persuade other actors in negotiations. Foreign Ministries and country representations in Brussels cover the whole range of policies, often

¹¹ Compared to old and new small states, the control group of big member states has much stronger ties to other big states, in particular to the UK, France and Germany.

with a slightly lesser degree of prioritization, whereas selective engagement is very common for almost all ministries in smaller member states. Especially Ireland, Luxembourg, the Czech Republic, Sweden, Estonia and Hungary systematically focus their energy on a limited number of issues with higher importance for their country (for Ireland see also Laffan, 2006: 705). Other countries, such as Belgium, Malta, and Greece, have lower prioritization rates and adopt a more comprehensive approach to EU negotiations (for Denmark see also Pedersen, 2001). Comparing small and big states, it is striking that bigger states focus on 5.3 issues on average, while the average share of prioritized issues is 2.9 for small states. In this sense, the prioritization strategy is indeed a genuine small states tactic to counterbalance size-related disadvantages.

In general, the survey shows that the frequency of contacts is considerably higher for the permanent representations in Brussels than for the individual ministries back home. The intensity of contacts between national departments and the European Commission varies between states and across policy fields. It is highest for the foreign ministries, which contact the Commission at least on a weekly basis on the average. By contrast, environment, employment and economic ministries pursue national interests in directly approaching the Commission mostly on a monthly basis. Overall, old small members have more frequent interactions with the Commission, than the group of recently acceded Eastern states. Ireland, Denmark, Austria closely followed by Belgium, Luxembourg and Sweden most frequently contact the European Commission. Slovenia and Hungary also seek to establish very close ties to the European Commission, but have not yet reached frequency levels of the most active old member states (c.f. interview Permanent Representation #6, 09 May 2008).¹²

The questionnaire also asked for the perception of whether small states are more often impartial than big states in the Council of Ministers. This revealed that small states are indeed perceived as much more neutral than big states. If small states are often regarded as impartial or too petite to effectively shape European policy outcomes ac-

¹² “When you are new in a group, and after 4 years you are still somehow new. You think that the decision-making fora is the Council and you concentrate on that. We have now learned that it is as well very important to have contacts with the Commission and that you will be efficient. The preparatory stage is very important. We are trying to do as much as possible. But I must admit that in that regard we and many other member states are still not active enough.” (interview Permanent Representation #6, 09 May 2008).

ording to their national interests, they might act as potential mediators between bigger states (Arter, 2000: 679, 683; Thorhallsson, 2006; Thorhallsson & Wivel, 2006; Tiilikainen, 2006: 81-82). In using an ascribed veil of neutrality, small states could seemingly act as “impartial brokers”, while they selectively advance those positions which are favourable to themselves. The survey revealed that small states act not very often as “honest brokers” but do so at best on an annual basis. Denmark as well as Belgium and Slovenia most frequently advance their positions in acting as “honest brokers” in the Council. The rate is even less than once a year for Austria, Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Portugal, Sweden and the Slovak Republic. Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta and the Slovak Republic almost never embark upon their neutrality in order to advance particular positions through the backdoor. The limited application of the “honest broker” strategy is puzzling in the wake of the general perception of big and small states that small states are more neutral than bigger ones. One reason for the general rare usage could be that many small states prioritize issues and are members of either bilateral strategic relationships or regional institutionalized groups, so that they might side with their partners whenever the issue salience is low.

The Presidency offers another window of opportunity to at least sometimes pursue national interests masked as European concerns (c.f. Elgström, 2003). Since not all EU-27 states have yet held the presidency, the insights are solely based on responses to the questionnaire which asked for the general importance of the role of the Presidency. The questionnaire did not distinguish between the frequency as to which a state actively used its chair position (holding the Presidency) or proactively approached the Presidency of the day during working group or COREPER negotiations in order to lobby for own positions in periods of not holding this post. Case study insights on Denmark, Finland and Sweden indicate that older members are less neutral and more frequently pursue national self-interests through office Presidency than newer states, which are more sensitive to create and protect a good reputation in the EU (Bengtsson et al., 2004: 319, Dimitrakopoulos & Passas, 2004; Pedersen, 2003). While the survey also found that Denmark and Greece promoted national interests through the Presidency, it also revealed that differences between the groups of old and new small states are not highly pronounced. Denmark, Greece, followed by the Czech Republic, Latvia, Belgium and Cyprus put the strongest emphasis on pursuing na-

tional interests though the Presidency of the day. Bulgaria, Lithuania, Sweden and Estonia do not regard the Presidency as a good window of opportunity for equally pursuing national and European interests.

Variation between States

As the relative ranking showed, member states differ in their overall activity to engage in counterbalancing strategies. The below table is based on the absolute ranking, adding the scores on a country basis. If one crudely quantifies frequent, occasional and seldom usages with three, two and one respectively, the level of activity ranges between seven and sixteen activity points for all small members. Denmark is most active followed by Luxembourg, Ireland and Belgium, while Bulgaria and Cyprus followed by Greece and Lithuania are least active. All other small states range from 10 to 12 influence points and constitute a big middle-field.

Table 4: Activity Level of States¹³

16	15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7
Denmark	Luxembourg	Ireland	Belgium	Austria Hungary Slovenia Sweden	Czech Republic Finland Slovak Republic Portugal	Estonia Latvia Malta	Greece Lithuania	Cyprus	Bulgaria

This shows that old member states are overall more active in counterbalancing structural disadvantages than new member states. Yet, some old members such as Greece do not score high, while the new members Hungary and Slovenia are relatively active in strategies to counterbalance structural disadvantages. If we take a closer look into the different strategies, we find further differences between old and new small members in many of the individual strategies.

The prospects to counterbalance structural bargaining drawbacks through institutionalized regional cooperation vary between old and new states. Benelux and the Northern cooperation, in which older small members interact, are more highly institutionalized than the Baltic cooperation and the V4, both of which are composed of new member states. Moreover, effective regional cooperation requires institutionalization

¹³ Please note: this figure has last been updated in April 2008, questionnaires that arrived afterwards are not yet included in this mapping.

and a harmony of interests among the partners, which seems to be more often than not absent in the Visregard group (interview Permanent Representation #4, 10 April 2008).¹⁴ Compared to multilateral coordination, strategic bilateral partnerships decrease the heterogeneity of interests. Yet, on average, old members have much stronger bilateral partnerships, and interact with two or more bigger states on a weekly basis, than new members, which contact bigger members monthly or less often. At the same time, newer small states often have frequent contacts to around three to four other small countries. Finally, older states such as Ireland and Portugal are in close contact to states holding the Presidency, while many of the newer states are less flexible in establishing such temporary intergovernmental networks (interview Permanent Representation #1, 10 April 2008, interview Permanent Representation #5, 10 April 2008). Thus, newer small states face more difficulties to find allies with high bargaining leverage or strong argumentative capabilities to support their positions (e.g. Nikodem, 2004: 1).

Contacts to the Commission are important for big and small old and new states alike. Yet, permanent representations and many individual ministries of older small states are at least in weakly contact, while ministries of states that joined the EU in the last decade approach the Commission on a monthly or even less frequent basis. This is not too surprising given that old states had more time to establish networks to European actors.¹⁵ While old small states, such as Ireland, Denmark, and Austria contact the European Commission much more frequently than new small states, the second argumentative counterbalancing strategy, the prioritization of issues, is more often used by new small states. Next to Ireland and Luxembourg, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, followed by Bulgaria, Latvia and the Slovak Republic only focus on a maximum of 2.9 and respectively 4.9 issues at a time. Hence, new small member states might – to some extent – balance argumentative disadvantage vis-à-vis older small states based on a lower frequency of contacts to the Commission.

¹⁴ The heterogeneity of interests increases additionally, if regional groups engage in consultation with each other (e.g. Baltic group and Benelux, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia, 2007).

¹⁵ Since the European Commission is frequently portrayed as a friend to small states (c.f. Bunse et al., 2005, interview Permanent Representation #2, 10 April 2008), the questionnaire also included a question on the sensitivity of the Commission. (Question number four stated “How sensitive is the European Commission to concerns of smaller member states compared to bigger states?” Answer options were: “very sensitive to small states; sensitive to small states; as sensitive as to big states; less sensitive than to big states.”) This revealed that, on average, older small member states regard the Commission as almost neutral, with a tiny inclination of being more sensitive to small than to big state interests. By contrast, big states and small new member states perceived the Commission as being slightly more sensitive to big states’ concerns.

If we take a look into the realm of moral power, the most striking observation is that new small states place big hopes into EU presidencies. Only Estonia, Lithuania and Bulgaria regard the presidency not as a good opportunity structure to effectively further national interests. On the other end of the spectrum, the Slovak Republic together with Denmark and Greece regard the presidency as very important for the shaping of European policies according to own aspirations. The pattern is not stable for the second moral and institutional resource-based strategy. New member states tend less often act as impartial mediators than old member states, which, with the exception of more active Denmark, do so on average only less than once a year. The questionnaire responses to both moral power based strategies could indicate that new member states are concerned in building up positive reputations in day-to-day interactions in the Council, the COREPER or working groups rather than exploiting alleged neutrality for introducing self-interests through the backdoor (similar Bengtsson et al., 2004: 319, Dimitrakopoulos & Passas, 2004; Pedersen, 2003). In the longer term, new small states might be more willing to use moral or institutional authority in order to pursue national interests, in particular when they will take their turn in serving as a Presidency.

Variation between Strategies

Small member states are a heterogeneous group. Except of the their low number of votes in the Council of Ministers, the associated lower share of bargaining and argumentative power, their fewer administrative and personnel capacities, and the fact that they consequently face structural disadvantages in shaping European policies, they have little in common. Thus it is not too surprising that no counterbalancing strategy is used at the same frequency by all countries alike (see tables 2-5).

Table 5: Frequency of Strategies¹⁶

Institutionalized coordination	Strategic bilateral partnerships to big countries	Prioritization of issues	Contacts to the Commission	“Honest brokers” in the Council	Presidency as opportunity structure for national interests
35	32	42	41	29	34

¹⁶ Please note: this figure has last been updated in April 2008, questionnaires that arrived afterwards are not yet included in this mapping.

On average, selective engagement is most often used, followed by contacting the Commission. Is this good news for the prospects to successfully upload policies to the EU-level? The tentative answer is: probably not. Overall, contacts to the Commission are more frequent for older than for newer small states and are regarded as very promising to shape European policies. However, the Commission is a strategic actor. As such, it is more responsive to states with strong bargaining power, in particular in regulative and re-distributive policies, which account for the vast majority of policies dealt with on EU-level (Bunse et al., 2005: 44). In addition, selective engagement saves resources and allows bundling efforts on single issues in order to convince the Commission or other states of a particular problem-perception or solution. Yet, this does not necessarily mean that arguments of small states are more persuasive than those of bigger ones. In addition, even good arguments backed by expertise do not necessarily shape outcomes, since interactions on the various levels of Council negotiations can easily shift into either bargaining or voting as two alternative mechanisms of decision-taking.

“Honest brokerage” followed by strategic bilateral partnerships with bigger states are least frequently invoked, followed by institutionalized cooperation and by the exploitation of the EU presidency. Small states that joined the EU in the last decade do less extensively act in a window dressing manner as “honest brokers” in the Council of Ministers or during IGCs. So far Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovakia have almost never relied on this counterbalancing strategy. Although empirical studies indicate that the Presidency is often successfully used to act as political entrepreneur of European interests and of national agendas (e.g. in studies in Elgström, 2003), the questionnaire shows that is less frequently exploited for the latter purpose. This could reflect a strive of some newcomers to build up and safeguard good reputations within the EU, which might be thwarted by “abuses” of EU institutions (Bengtsson et al., 2004: 319). Alternatively, the low popularity of both moral and institutional authority based strategies among old and new small states could reflect loyalties within bilateral partnerships and within institutionalised regional cooperation. States that have no important interest in a particular issue (eventually due to prioritization) might side with ‘their’ respective partners instead of trying to act as ‘honest brokers’.

VI. Theorizing Small States' Influence

In particular realist and neo-realist theories of international relations, but also liberal institutionalists considered size as a determining factor in world politics (e.g. Morgenthau, 1948, Waltz, 1979, Keohane, 1984). In contrast, federalism, functionalism, and intergovernmentalism as the first generation of regional integration theories have either neglected country size as an explanatory variable for dynamics and outcomes (Deutsch & al., 1957, Mitrany, 1943), or focused predominantly on interests and bargaining behaviours of big states (e.g. Hoffmann, 1966, 1989). Second generation approaches, such as neo-functionalism, liberal intergovernmentalism and supranationalism, include sub-state actors and/or European actors, such as the Commission of the European Court of Justice (E. B. Haas, 1961, 1970, Moravcsik, 1993b, Sandholtz & Zysman, 1989, Stone Sweet, 2000). Yet, they do not systematically address differences in the roles of small and big states in EU policy-making processes, but concentrate their attention on the big three (the UK, France, Germany, e.g. Moravcsik, 1998) or the bigger five (including Spain and Italy, e.g. Stone Sweet, 2000).

The previous discussion focused on six different bargaining, argumentative and meditative strategies. This section develops a set of hypotheses on the prospects of small states to successfully counterbalance structural disadvantages and effectively shape European policies, which supplement prominent liberal-intergovernmental and supranational approaches.¹⁷

Liberal intergovernmentalism basically contends that national policy interests are shaped by aggregated domestic interests in the first step. In a second step, states with high bargaining power (based on the share of votes and the size of the economy (alternative courses of action)) can influence outcomes in EU negotiations, if they manage to form winning coalitions (e.g. through compromise, package deals, side-payments). The causal mechanism rests on bargaining dynamics. Hence, small states strategies to counterbalance disadvantages in bargaining and moral power can be con-

¹⁷ The dependent variable “chances of small states to influence policy outcomes” is conceptualized dichotomously as either high or low. The hypotheses are formulated in a probabilistic manner, since policy outcomes depend not only on small state strategies, but also on other variables such as the interest constellation among all actors, other bargaining, coalition building, argumentative and meditative efforts, as well as policy-specific conditions such as the urgency of problems.

sistently incorporated into liberal intergovernmentalist theory. Thus, small states are more likely to successfully shape policy outcomes through:

- regional coordination in the agenda setting and decision-making stages, if all governments were responsive to their domestic interests and if the internal coherence of the group is high.
- strategic partnerships in the agenda setting and decision-making stages, if the positions of domestic interests between the small and the big states are similar.
- ‘honest brokerage’ in the Council of Ministers, if none of the involved big states is a strategic partner of the small state, and if the domestic constituency of the small state is not too keen on an issue to hamper the small state’s reputation as being impartial.
- the Presidency, if self-interests are masked as European interests and fit to the overall European agenda.

Supranational institutionalist approaches argue that policy outcomes and integration dynamics are shaped by processes of political or judicial argumentation, typically involving supranational actors, such as the Commission or the ECJ. The better argument resonates well with sub-state and European interests, wins the competition of ideas, and shapes outcomes. Since the causal mechanism basically rests on argumentative dynamics, small states strategies based on argumentative and moral power can be coherently integrated into supranational institutionalism. Thus, small states are more likely to successfully shape policy outcomes through:

- contacts with the European Commission in the agenda setting stage, if the issue at stake allows to appeal to the Commission’s concern of institutional equality among states or if the arguments are persuasive fitting to the framing of the problem or to already shared policy and scientific ideas.
- the strategy of prioritization, if states manage to cumulate expertise and innovative policies, and develop sound argumentative strategies that are convincing to the Commission in the agenda-setting and to other states in the decision-making stages (e.g. that resonate well with already shared beliefs).
- ‘honest brokerage’ in the Council, if none of the involved big states is a strategic partner of the small state and if the issue matter is not known as having high saliency for the small state itself.
- the Presidency, if self-interests are masked as European interests and fit to the overall European agenda.

These hypotheses fit to liberal intergovernmentalism and institutionalist supranational approaches respectively in a theoretically coherent manner. They allow for fine-grained assessments of how and under which conditions small member states might successfully shape policy outcomes in the EU. The scope conditions for effective strategies are policy-specific (e.g. institutional vs. regulative or redistributive policies) or case-sensitive (e.g. issue saliency, positions of domestic interests, resonance to

shared ideas). This indicates that none of the six counterbalancing strategies of small states is per se a “via regia”. One and the same small state might sometimes succeed in uploading endeavours, but fail to shape EU policies in other instances – even in applying the same strategy.

Under *ceteris paribus* conditions, some strategies should theoretically be more effective in influencing policy outcomes than others, since the number of scope conditions and the likelihood that they are met differs. In an intergovernmentalist perspective the least effective small state strategy should be the use of the Presidency followed by “honest brokerage”. The former can only be applied when the particular state is taking its turn with the Presidency and additionally requires that national interests do not obviously deviate but resonate well with the broader European agenda. The latter is only successful under two very restrictive scope-conditions, namely that none of the involved big states is a strategic partner of the small state and that the affected domestic interests are not strong concerning the issue at hand. In particular the second presumption is hardly met, since a particular issue must be salient so that a small state invests scarce resources to actively shape policies rather than just voting in line with the Council majority. In terms of scope conditions, regional coordination is also very demanding. A common win-set requires not only converging interests of all affected governments, but also of the domestic interests in all states, which additionally have to remain stable during the cooperation. By contrast, the success of bilateral strategic partnerships depends on a lesser number of external constraints. It requires only a substantive overlap of governmental positions and domestic interests in two countries. Thus, in an intergovernmental perspective states, such as Greece and the Slovak Republic that strongly rely on the “honest broker” or the “Presidency” strategies, but rarely turn to bilateral contacts to big EU members should be less influential. By contrast, states such as Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta and Austria that have strong bilateral relationships should be most influential, followed by states that are active members of strong institutionalized forms of regional coordination, such as Belgium.

In a supranational perspective, contacts to the European Commission are the least demanding and, thus, most influential strategy, although there are several scope conditions. By contrast, the prioritization strategy is suited to bundle resources in order to build up argumentative capacities for most important issues as a precondition for argumentative policy shaping rather than to actually exerting influence. In order to translate arguments into outcomes, further scope conditions, such as the resonance

with already shared beliefs, have to be met. Finally, supranational theory would agree with intergovernmental accounts that “neutral mediation” and “instrumentalizing the Presidency” cannot be often applied successfully, because of the high number of very demanding preconditions. Supranationalist accounts would expect that, for example, Luxembourg, Ireland and Hungary, followed by Denmark, Estonia, Slovenia and Sweden are more successful in uploading their policies to the EU than members with less frequent contacts to the Commission and with lower prioritization. *Ceteris paribus*, the least prospects to effectively shape EU policies have Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece and Malta followed by Finland, Latvia, Portugal and the Slovak Republic as states with infrequent contacts to the European Commission, which additionally do not highly prioritize issues.

Modified intergovernmental and supranational approaches offer competing hypotheses. However, their empirical test, carefully tracing processes of successful and unsuccessful attempts to influence European policies and systematically controlling for all specified scope conditions as well as for *ceteris paribus* conditions is beyond the scope of this paper.

VII. Conclusions

After the latest rounds of enlargement, the European Union consists of many more small than big member states. This paper argued that size differences could translate into three types of strategic disadvantages for small members in shaping EU policies according to national interests. Compared to their bigger counterparts, small states have lower shares of bargaining and voting powers. In addition, their argumentative powers are limited, not the least due to the average smaller size of their delegations in EU negotiations, the lower administrative and financial capacities and the fact that many small states are less experienced in the EU since they joined the latter recently. Finally, small states and in particular the new members have a comparative disadvantage in moral power as well, because they cannot draw on histories of being a good EU citizen and on good reputations as policy forerunners and motors of EU integration.

Against the background that systematic shaping disadvantages might have negative consequences for the EU’s legitimacy and effectiveness, this paper inquired into counterstrategies of small states. Alongside the three power dimensions, it identi-

fied six strategies. Limited bargaining power can be balanced through regional coordination and through bilateral partnerships to bigger members. Contacts to the Commission and prioritization strategies can counteract argumentative power shortcomings. Disadvantages in moral power can be compensated by using the Presidency as an opportunity to pursue own interests within the broader agenda or in acting as alleged “impartial mediators” in the Council or during IGCs. Thus, small states face three types of disadvantages vis-à-vis bigger states, but have no tied hands in uploading national policies to the EU level.

One of the most important insights of this paper is that there is considerable variation in both, the activity levels of small states and their choice of strategies. Most strikingly, Denmark, Luxemburg, Ireland and Belgium are most active, while Bulgaria, Cyprus, Lithuania and Greece are least active. To explain the variation in the activity-level as well as in the strategic choice of different states is beyond the scope of this paper, but subject to ongoing research of the author.¹⁸

This paper showed that overall, selective engagement is most often used strategy, followed by contacts to the Commission. Compared to that, the exploitation of the Council Presidency, honest brokerage’ and strategic bilateral partnerships are less prominent. The group of small states is heterogeneous and the most striking differences are between new and old small states. Diverse preferences of strategies might very likely reflect differences of historical legacies. On average, old members tend to have stronger bilateral partnerships to bigger states, more frequent contacts to the European Commission and more often use mediator roles as channels for self-interests. Newer small states, by contrast, prefer multilateral over bilateral intergovernmental coordination, regard pursuing national interests through the Council as inappropriate or not promising and shift their hopes for shaping the European agenda according to their interests to the their time of Presidency. Other than that, there are no subgroups.

Moreover, within each of the three power dimensions, counterbalancing strategies are to some extent exchangeable means to pursue national interests. As to bargaining and voting power, small states tend to either put strong emphasis on regional coordination or on bilateral partnerships. For argumentative power, many states

¹⁸ For more information on the status of this research, please contact Diana.Panke@ucd.ie

tend to either have close contacts to the Commission, or concentrate their efforts only on issues of high importance. In the realm of moral power, several small states are inclined to either use the Presidency for national interests masked as European ones or use their alleged impartiality to 'mediate' in favour of their own position in the Council or during IGCs.

Based on the observations of these empirical patterns, this paper offered a set of fine-grained intergovernmental and supranational hypotheses on the prospects of small states strategies to successfully influence policy outcomes. They expect that the success of small states is most likely crucially influenced by policy and case-specific scope conditions, such as the type of policy, the constellation of domestic interest groups, the issue salience, or the resonance of problem structures, policy approaches and scientific ideas. The systematic test of these refined hypotheses is also up to future research (c.f. footnote 15). For now, we could reasonably expect that small states can counterbalance size-related disadvantages a great deal (albeit with inter-state variation) and shape EU policies according to their interests to a greater extent than expected by prominent integration theories. If it would empirically hold true, this would be good news for the legitimacy and effectiveness of EU integration.

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