Governing with a Janus Face: National interests and ideology in the Council of Ministers

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The question of representation, and the existence or lack there of within the context of supranational governance, has been at the heart of numerous debates about the character of the European Union (EU). In general, this debate has taken as its starting position the notion that there are different levels and modes of representation both at the national level and within the EU. The representative, and thus democratic, character of government at the national level within the member states of the EU is rarely questioned, while the perceived ‘democratic deficit’ has been at the heart of debates about the EU for decades. Although the democratic deficit literature is broad in scope, ranging from a focus on potential and realized identities, to participation in decision-making, at least part of the debate has centered on the character of representation in the EU. In particular, this literature has focused on the existence and sufficiency of ideological representation within EU institutions.

The perceived need for greater ideological or partisan engagement at the European level has been the inspiration for both EU initiatives (see (EC) No 2004/2003 and (EC) No 1524/2007) and academic exhortations (see in particular Hix, 2008). These exhortations for greater partisanship largely focus on the European Parliament (EP), although Hix also includes the Commission in his proposed solution to “the problem” with the EU. The logic of concentrating on the European Parliament (EP) as the appropriate arena of partisanship within the EU is both obvious and accurate in so far as it has served as the main arena of partisan activity in the EU since the creation of the European Economic Community and the EP’s predecessor, the Common Assembly in 1951. Moreover, the EP’s position as the only directly elected institution in the EU might be expected to facilitate both the linkage and the representative roles of political parties at the European level.

However, the fact that the EP is the most obvious arena for partisan engagement in the EU does not mean it is the only appropriate, or even likely, venue in which ideology can influence EU decision-making. Indeed, a more comprehensive and comparative analysis of EU institutions suggests that there is a potential second partisan arena that has, thus far, been largely ignored by EU scholars seeking ideological engagement within EU institutions. This oversight is largely due to inaccurate or incomplete understandings of the institutional structures of the EU and the opportunities they present for parties and

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1 An earlier version of this project was presented at the 12th European Union Studies Association Biennial meeting in Boston, MA, March, 2011.
2 In fact, however, the ability of EP elections to realize these goals is severely limited by the continuing focus on domestic politics in most countries throughout the EP elections and the use of national parties rather than EU level parties in the electoral campaigns. These aspects of EP elections form the foundations of the common assertion that they are “second order” elections (Reif, 1980; Marsh, 1998; and Schmitt, 2004 among others).
partisanship within the EU decision-making process combined with an over-simplified understanding of the roles played by national government representatives within the EU institutions.

Without an accurate understanding of the structures that shape EU governance it is impossible to understand the behaviour of member state actors and the character of the relationship between the EU and the member states and thus, the full potential role that partisanship might play at the EU level. Furthermore, the tendency to think about member state government engagement at the EU level within a singular framework needs to be reconsidered given the different types of and mechanisms for member state – EU interaction within the EU governance structure. Representatives from the member states are not – and should not be treated as – unitary actors, particularly in countries that have coalition governments or internally divided governing parties.

Thus, a better understanding EU - member state government interaction will allow for both a more comprehensive interpretation of the character of member state actor behavior at the EU level and the various elements that shape it. In addition, the disaggregation of member state government engagement in EU level institutions suggests an additional, at least theoretically possible – if not yet actualized, forum for partisanship and ideology at the supranational level.

Understanding the Character and Structure of the EU

Historically the EU has been considered as either an intergovernmental system or a supranational one. The intergovernmental moniker suggests that the EU is best understood as a type of international organization, while the supranational model compares it more readily to a political ‘state’ within the modern understanding of the term.

The reason that neither of these two conceptualizations of the EU can be definitively considered to have won the day and universally serve as a basis for our understanding of the EU is simply that both find support in the empirical reality of EU governance. This does not, however, mean that we cannot understand the EU or that it is sui generis and, thus, an inappropriate subject for comparative analysis. It means instead that we should pay closer attention to its actual political structures and governing organization to provide the basis for a hybrid understanding that allows the intergovernmental features of EU governance to exist within a generally (and increasingly) supranational structure that can be understood as a kind of mitigated or transnational federalism.

Perhaps the most elementary aspect of the EU system that requires clarification is the character of the political system itself, as this unquestionably influences the opportunities for action (partisanship, coalition behavior etc) of national government actors within the EU context. Despite a good deal of misunderstanding over the roles of the various executive bodies of the EU and the relationships between the executive and legislative branches – there can be little doubt that at its core the EU is a separation of powers system – and that this is the most appropriate type of system for a system like the EU.
A separation of powers system – with independent/autonomous (political) executive and legislative branches insures that there is a great deal of consensus in the decision making process (sometimes disparagingly referred to a ‘least common denominator’ or LCD decisions). Given the disparity of relative power (size) and the variety of interests represented by the various member states this form of political system seems most appropriate.

In contrast – a fused powers (parliamentary) type system such as that found in almost all of the member states tends to centralize decision making power and can lead to radical policy shifts (as well as the potential for significant policy instability/variability as governments change). Not only would this type of political structure generally be unacceptable to many (if not most) of the member states – it would also threaten the stability of the EU as a whole by creating clearer dichotomies between ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ and -again significant policy instability following government changes.
To understand why the European Union should be classified as a separation of powers system all that is necessary is to consider the selection and removal procedures for the various institutions of the EU and their relative autonomy. The legislative branch, consists of two chambers (as formally recognized by the Lisbon Treaty), the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers (Council of the European Union). As the lower chamber, the EP represents citizens and is directly elected by them. The Council of Ministers, on the other hand ostensibly represents the member states, and thus, is selected indirectly, effectively being chosen by the national parliaments (through the selection of their national governments). The political arm of the executive branch, the European Council, is not collectively selected by or responsible to any legislature be it the EP or the national legislatures. This institutional autonomy between the legislative and executive branches is the core defining feature of a separation of powers system.

It is also important to recognize that regardless of whether the formal title of federalism is used – the EU is a federal system. There can be no question that at its core it creates a system of shared governance in which some issue areas remain within the primary remit of the member states (education, civil law, policing), others fall within the primary remit of the EU (competition/single market, monetary policy, trade policy) and still others continue to be shared between both levels of governance (immigration, health and worker safety, the environment). The lines between these types of competences are not rigid and indeed are often contested, and clearly change overtime.

Furthermore – there is clear institutional support for federalism in the existence of different institutions to represent diverse interests – thus the EP represents the citizens of Europe (and partisanship), while the European Council and the Council of Ministers represent the member states (and presumably national interests – at least in the case of the European Council, and as I will argue below - potentially partisan ideology – in the Council of Ministers)

Where the EU deviates from the standard federal system is in the creation of two different institutions to represent the member states/subunit interests (European Council in the executive branch and Council of Ministers in the legislative branch). In most federal systems representation of the whole and the subunits is more equally balanced (generally through equal representation in the legislative branch).

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3 Although, of course, the national legislatures can recall their individual members of the European Council through a domestic (sub-unit level) change in Government.
4 Despite a variety of attempts to interpret the Commission as the “executive” of the EU, it is important to remember that the Commission is in fact only a part of the executive; the bureaucracy. When understood in this manner; the confirmation hearings held by the EP to approve Commissioners resembles senate confirmations of cabinet members in the USA more than formal votes of investiture of Governments in parliamentary systems. The formal ability of the EP to remove the Commission through a vote of “censure” is an anomaly, but given that it has never been used as a tool to govern policy outcomes (and indeed never actually been used successfully at all). The 1999 en masse resignation of the Santer Commission was clearly precipitated by the possibility by the very real possibility of a successful vote of censure by the EP, however the motivation was administrative incompetence and mismanagement – thus causing the process to resemble more an administrative oversight action than a politically driven threat of a vote of censure.
5 However, Switzerland is an interesting possible comparative example of a federal state in which attempts are made to represent the subunits indirectly in the executive branch. While individual Cantons are not
investigation is the behaviour of these institutions (and the actors within them) in terms of the extent to which they only, or primarily, represent national interests versus partisan-ideological interests or other potential interests, and the extent to which this is likely to remain the case in the future. In other words, are the patterns of interest representation (national vs. ideological) witnessed today a rigid and immutable function of the institutional structures of the EU or a more flexible characteristic of the on-going evolutionary process of European integration?

Seeing the Janus Face
The basic institutional logic in federal systems is the division or representation with the central governing institution to insure that both the citizens of the whole and the subunits themselves have adequate (and usually equal) representation. In general this is accomplished through the creation of a bicameral legislature with the upper chamber representing the sub-units and the lower chamber representing citizens of the whole (e.g. USA, Germany, India). This formulation is used in the EU as well with the European Parliament representing (and elected directly by) citizens and the Council of Ministers representing the member states (with members effective selected indirectly the national legislatures). However, in the EU there is the unusual addition of a second forum for sub-unit (member state) representation within the executive branch through the European Council. This means that unlike most federal systems, in the EU the member states have representation in two forums. Moreover, one of these is legislative in character (the Council of Ministers), while the other is the political executive of the EU (European Council). Although this double representation of the subunits (member states) is unusual, it is not entirely unique. Nor does it undermine the federal character of the EU as a whole. What it does do is create a need for a more nuanced understanding of the possible representative roles of these two forums for representatives of the member states and in particular, the impact of this representative role on decision making within the Council of Ministers.

The implied assumption in much of the EU literature is that the representatives of the member states perform as their name suggests and act to represent member state interests, which can be defined geographically (Elgstrom, Bjurulf, Johansson and Sannerstedt, 2001; Kedding and Selck, 2005; Blavoukos and Pagoulatos, 2011) and/or economically (Zimmer, Schneider and Dobbins, 2005; Bailer, Mattila and Schneider, 2010). More recently, there has been an additional strand in the research on decision making in the
Council of Ministers that does work to highlight the potential, and empirically
demonstrable, role of ideology, rather than relying on static geographically defined
preferences or unified economic interests (Hageman and Hoyland, 2008; Mattila 2004,
2009). This latter spate of research has effectively demonstrated that the impact of
ideology on decision making is worthy of analysis within the Council of Ministers as well
as the European Parliament if we wish to understand the EU decision making process as a
whole. Thus, the notion that ideology, as well as, member state interests should be
considered when thinking about the behavior of national ministers within the EU council
of Ministers has been empirically established as is noted by Hagemann and Hoyland when
they conclude that “…our findings seem to support the suggestion that coalition formation
at the voting stage in the Council falls along some ideological left-right dimension”

Indeed, if we consider decision making within the Council of Ministers in a comparative
context (distinguishing between the executive and legislative branches of the EU, and
underlining its basic federal character) it is not clear why member state representatives
should be assumed to pursue national interests (geographically or economically defined)
rather than ideological preferences given that this is not the case in any other upper
chamber. Indeed, whether looking at another separation of powers system such as the
USA (Senate) or another indirectly elected upper chamber that is selected by the
governments of the sub-units as in Germany (Bundesrat), we find that, in line with
ideological explanations of decision making in the Council of Ministers, members of
upper chambers vote at least as often on the basis of partisan ideology as they do State or
Lander interests.

There is, however, another potentially problematic element of existing research on
coalition behavior in the Council of Ministers found in both the ideologically based and
more general “member state interest” based scholarship. This is the general assumption
that all of those who serve in the European Council and the Council of Ministers from a
single member state will have both the same understanding of what their national or
ideological interests are, and the same desire to serve those interests over other individual
(ideologically derived) preferences. This assumption becomes potentially problematic
when we start to consider the specific structure of the institutions of the EU in detail.

This is because the opportunity for individual ideologically driven behavior is increased in
the case of the EU upper chamber by virtue of the fact that the Council of Ministers is

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8 It should be noted, however, that most of the authors within this research area have highlighted that there
are barriers to the empirical analysis of coalition behavior in the Council of Ministers as a result of the
absence of registered roll-call votes for unsuccessful initiatives which leads to a potential underestimation
of the actual role of ideology (see especially Hagemann and Hoyland, 2008).
9 It should be noted that the authors are almost sheepish about their conclusions throughout the work noting
in the same paragraph that “…governments do, to some extent, seem to behave – at least in the official
records – as if party political lines influence their decisions” (Hagemann and Hoyland, 2008:1216).
10 It is worth noting that scholars of these upper chambers would rarely claim that voting never occurs based
on state or Lander interests, thus there is ample room for both explanations to apply. Indeed, even those who
study the European Parliament note that national interests will dominate voting behavior for some policy
areas (Kreppel, 2000, 2002).
effectively a chamber that meets only in committee, never as the full chamber. The various Council of Minister “formations” are functionally the committee structure of the Council of Ministers. The members of these committees all share some level of interest and expertise in a comparatively narrow field (be it agriculture, the environment or fiscal policy). Moreover, the majority of the work in these ‘committees’ is largely off the record allowing for less oversight by those outside of the committees. The institutional structures of the EU, thus, create an environment in which it is harder for principals, be they national legislatures or heads of government, to effectively monitor their agents (the individual national ministers within each Council formation). This structure provides an opportunity for potentially like-minded committee members (national ministers) to collaborate on policies of shared interest in a relatively autonomous environment.\(^{11}\) Although it should be noted that the likelihood of “agency drift” is higher when policies are less salient.\(^{12}\) In the end, the nature of Council of Ministers and its organization into distinct formations, without any meetings of the “full plenary” means that the structure of the institutions designed for the representation of national interests also provide an important opportunity for individual level ideological and partisan collaboration across national boundaries.

This opportunity is compounded by the knowledge that the national interest is still being effectively represented within the executive by members of the European Council. It is also more likely to be witnessed in member states that have coalition governments. The broader the coalition the more likely it is that a single shared understanding of “national interest” will not exist and the higher the probability that minister portfolios are used as pay-offs to coalition members in accordance with their interests and electoral constituencies. In other words, Green party coalition partners are likely to head the environment ministry and Liberal party coalition partners are more likely to serve as finance ministers. This pattern means that in coalition governments the representatives that are members of the various committees (formations) in the Council of Ministers are more likely to be ideological outliers with respect to their coalition partners and, as a result, there is more likely to be ‘agency loss’ between heads of government sitting in the European Council and the their ministers sitting in the various formations of the Council of Ministers.\(^ {13}\)

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\(^{11}\) This argument follows the logic of Shepsle and Weingast, (1987) in assuming that members of committees tend to be preference outliers compared to the full membership. There are others who believe that committees serve as information gatherers and in fact are representative of the median legislator (see especially Krehbiel, 1990). While this second argument is potentially accurate in national legislatures it is arguably less likely to be the case when “committee members” are actually party representatives in a national coalition government.

\(^{12}\) For example during the very contentious and high profile negotiations over the “end of life” vehicles directive (Directive 2000/53/EC), Chancellor Schröder kept a tight watch on his Environmental Minister (Jürgen Trittin) from the coalition partner Green Party to insure that his minister followed the coalition Government policy program and not a Green party agenda, effectively tying his minister’s hands during negotiations in the Council environment formation (example provided by Stefanie Baier, personal communication).

\(^{13}\) The fact that the European Council and the Council of Ministers effectively share their administrative staff (Coreper) in some ways makes such agency loss less likely – although here as well ‘capture’ can occur. As a result it may be that B points (those that are directly discussed by the Council of Ministers) are more amenable to divergence/conflict as they are not pre-determined by the shared administration. However these are also those decisions that are most likely to be heavily scrutinized because of their controversial character.
Thus, the Council of Ministers, like the European Council provides representation for every member state – but unlike the European Council – each country is represented by more than one individual (although there is only one per formation). In countries with single party governments this multiple character may not affect voting behaviour, however, in member states with coalition governments (or internally divided majority parties) it is likely that representatives will come from multiple different partisan and/or ideological backgrounds and this may impact their voting behaviour. At the very least it is feasible that this could influence their interpretation of ‘the national interest’ leading to differing interpretations. Moreover, the variety of issues dealt with in the Council of Ministers is much greater than those considered directly by the European Council and of a character that often defies singular conceptualizations of the national interest.

This potential division between the Council of Ministers and the European Council is compounded by the nature of decision-making within each institution. The European Council facilitates the representation of national interests, not only by having one just representative per country (the head of Government) – but also in the mechanism of decision-making (generally unanimity and 1 vote per country). The focus on the national interest is further reinforced by the character of the issues with which it is primarily concerned (foreign policy and broad agenda setting). Meanwhile, in the Council of Ministers, qualified majority voting (QMV) creates an opportunity for coalition formation that does not exist under unanimity rules. In addition, the variety of issues dealt with, as well as their frequently “regulatory” character; provide greater opportunities for ideological partisan influence above and beyond national interests.

Furthermore, the ‘separation of powers’ structure of the EU (discussed above) minimizes need for fixed (hard) coalitions allowing partisan behaviour to be more fluid and coalitions to shift by amendment or proposal both in the EP and in the Council of Ministers. Even in the EP this ability has led to patterns of coalition formation that are much more fluid than those found in the member states. As a result we find national voting patterns on a small set of issues (agriculture, the budget), generally left-right partisan voting on some issues (worker and workplace safety) and cross-party ‘grand coalitions’ on still others (environmental, health) (Kreppel, 2000). Similar patterns of subject specific coalition formations within the Council of Ministers have also been found, although the results are still somewhat tentative given the limitation of the available data (Mattila, 2004, 2009; Blavoukos and Pagoulatos, 2011).  

What this discussion of the Council of Ministers and European Council highlights is that although the opportunities for partisan interest representation by national/member state

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14 It should be noted, however, that there are very real problems with statistical analyses of roll call votes in the Council of Ministers – the primary one being that there is just one failed vote on record. In most cases a proposal that does not command the necessary support is simply not dealt with – this creates a significant bias in the votes – as does the relatively rare use of the formal vote (about 25% of the time) and the tendency of the vote to be highly skewed with just 1 or 2 votes against (including abstentions). Hagemann and Hoyland (2008) suggest alternative methods of statistical analysis using MCMC to try to resolve these concerns, but even they note that their procedures lead to lower levels of specificity which make data interpretation potentially problematic (pp. 1213-1216).
actors are more limited at the EU level than those for national representation, they are present. Moreover, recent research suggests that ideology does play a role in coalition formation between member state representatives at the EU level within the Council of Ministers. Thus, ideology is not absent from the arenas of member state government engagement within the EU governing process. At this level, perhaps a helpful comparison is to the German Bundesrat – which is similarly composed of representatives to the central government from the state (or Lander) governments. It is interesting to note that while today few doubt that most voting within the Bundesrat is along ideological or party lines – historically this was much less the case. Indeed, in the 1950s and even into the 1960s evidence of a much higher rate of regional interest based voting and cross-party coalitions within the Bundesrat has been demonstrated (Shikano, 2008). Given the existing evidence of at least a limited role for ideology in coalition formation over the past 15 years, a similar transformation should not be ruled out within the context of the Council of Ministers over time.

Moreover, knowing that coalitions can and do form between member state governments along ideological lines it is also worthwhile – despite the weakness of the available voting data – to try to think more carefully about possible individual voting behaviours in the various formations of the Council of Ministers in comparative context. In particular, if we conceptualize the Council of Ministers as a legislature of committees – that simply never meets in full plenary. Drawing upon the various literatures of voting behaviour in committees we can consider the appropriateness of the informational and distributive models of voting and coalition formation. If indeed Council formations can effectively be understood as distributive committees there would be no reason to expect members to pursue singular ‘national interests’ in many cases.

There has been (to my knowledge) no scholarly attempt to examine the question of inter-institutional conflict in this respect. In general, the ‘Council’ (meaning the European Council and the Council of Ministers) is assumed to act in unison - in support of national interests (intergovernmental perspective) and in opposition to the supranational (and partisan) EP. It may well be that this is indeed the case, but the possibility for members of the legislative upper chamber to act according to (individual) ideological/partisan preferences should not be ignored. The importance of this possibility becomes especially important when we again consider the question in comparative context.

**From Member States to European Union: The implications**

In many ways the on-going debate about the character of the European Union as a whole is linked to our understanding of the representative roles of its various institutions. Those who see the EU as an intergovernmental organization focus on the perceived primacy of national interest representation in the European Council and the Council of Ministers. Those who understand the EU as a supranational, quasi or neo state focus on the supranational and partisan based representation of interests that occurs in the European Parliament (and perhaps the Commission). The reality of course is not so clear cut. The mere existence of institutions that provide representation opportunities for both the sub-units (member states) and the whole suggest an inherently federal structure, and the
allocation of decision-making powers between the center and the sub units reinforces this understanding (as noted above). But the tension between supranational and intergovernmental interpretations persists.

The intergovernmental interpretation of member state relations within the EU is supported by the continued reliance on unanimous decision making in almost all areas of foreign and security policy, and a number of other core policy arenas where national sovereignty is still too sensitive an issue to allow efforts at integration to progress further. In addition, the EU institutions have only limited ability to effectively enforce compliance with EU regulations at the national level. Partially this is a function of minimal resources and a reliance on ‘fire-alarm’ monitoring for the most part. In addition, however, there is also a clear lack of coercive power on the part of the EU. In some cases fines can be levied and funding initiatives withheld, but even these powers are often ineffectual. Compliance often rests on ‘shaming’ rather than coercion – which is far more appropriate in the realm of international relations (and international organizations) than within a single formal political system (or state).

It should be noted, however, that a number of policy domains that were once thought to be the inviolate domain of the member states have edged toward shared competence – as witnessed by the revisions in the Lisbon Treaty which do away with the pillar structure and move many policy domains into the core decision making structure. In fact, the decision to define the QMV based codecision procedure as the ‘normal procedure’ highlights this shift and the rapid increase in use of QMV decision-making. Although – a counter balance to this trend is the more frequent recourse to the ‘open method of coordination (versus the so-called ‘community method’) in some more controversial policy arenas.

On the supranational side of the argument is the simple fact that so many policy arenas are the shared or sole jurisdiction of the EU. Most notable of these is of course monetary policy – and all issues related to the single market – keeping in mind the fact that the single market has come to implicate everything from gender equality to environmental protection and cigarette bans. Within many of these policy areas (and indeed an increasing number of them) the normal decision making rule (QMV) is used. The fact that very few formal votes are taken does not minimize the significance of a potential vote (and indeed may serve to inspire consensus to avoid defeat). QMV carries with it a clear loss of national sovereignty – and in many cases the restrictions on national policy making are substantial imposing costs on significant societal groups.

15 While on the one hand the Lisbon Treaty has made inroads in some arenas, recent concerns over new waves of immigrants from the Middle East and Northern Africa have led to calls to limit Schengen open borders regulations. The constant push and pull between centralization and decentralization is endemic in most formally federal systems as well.

16 In addition – though not covered directly here – the EU – or rather its treaties – confer direct rights on EU citizens – which do not need transposition into national law (direct effect). These rights are supported by an impressively powerful court which serves as the last court of appeal for all EU related issues. The ECJ is unabashedly supranational both in function and disposition.
Moreover, as the previous discussion makes clear there is ample opportunity for ideological partisanship across the institutional divide. That is to say that both the representatives of the whole (in the European Parliament) and the representatives of the sub-units (in the Council of Ministers) have both the potential and the incentives to engage in legislative decision-making from a partisan perspective rather than an entirely national one. The intergovernmental understanding of the EU pre-supposes that actors engage in EU decision-making from a national perspective with national, not ideological, interests and preferences as the foremost determinant of their actions. This is clearly not the case in the EP, but it is also increasingly questionable within the Council of Ministers.

The fact that both of these perspectives have very strong pillars of support both in the scholarly literature and in the practical functioning of the EU should be enough to provide the incentive for the development of a hybrid understanding of the European Union that allows not only for both aspects to coexist – but for their levels of support and breadth of applicability to vary over time, across policy domains and between institutions.

**A Hybrid Understanding of the EU**

Most federal systems specifically designate a second legislative chamber to serve as the forum for member state (sub-unit) representation - whether these are directly elected or selected by the sub-unit governments themselves. As the Lisbon Treaty has made clear (for the first time formally) the Council of Ministers serves this function for the EU. What is unusual, however, is the additional opportunity the member states have for engaging in EU governance through the European Council – the political executive of the EU. Here the primacy of national interest (over ideological partisanship) is even protected to a degree by the unanimity rule, which makes coalition formation less meaningful and that governs most of its decision making.

To date there has been relatively little analysis of the role of partisanship and ideology in the voting behaviour of members of the Council of Ministers, although attention to the possibility is clearly growing (Mattila, 2004, 2009; Hagemann and Hoyland, 2008). This lacuna is in part a function of the weakness of the available data given the tendency to work for consensus and avoid formal votes, as well as the norm of not voting unless the passage of a proposal is assured despite some limited opposition. As a result there are comparatively few votes overall for a legislative chamber, most record relatively little opposition (1 or two member states in most cases), and there is only one recorded failure of a proposal. These problems the potential for many forms of empirical testing, particularly limited the possibility for analyzing coalition formation within specific formations and individual behaviour relative to others from their member state.\(^\text{17}\)

Thus – while there is a presumption of voting in the national interest by representatives from the national governments we do not actually have mixed evidence in support of the

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\(^{17}\) The absence of votes in a full plenary mode means that we cannot compare voting outcomes in committee to the preferences and outcomes of voting on the full floor as is generally done in analyses of committees in other legislatures.
assertion that this is the only – or even primary motivation for voting. In addition, we have as yet no empirical analyses that examine individual behaviour and the potential for Council formations to serve as distributive (preference outlier) committees. Moreover, we have few clear data resources we can use to gain better insight in the short-term.

Unlike many federal systems that were formed around the goal of a common defense – the EU began with economics. As a result the most integrated (federalized) policy areas are those related to the single market and the common currency. Foreign and security policy have been laggards and as a result the more intergovernmental characteristics of the EU structure are most visible in these arenas. And as these are generally the prerogative of the executive branch the overlap with the intergovernmental European Council is reinforced.

It may be that as the number and significance of the policy arenas which are subject to unanimity and remain largely outside of the community method shrinks (as has been occurring with time) the role of the member state governments within the executive branch will diminish (and that of the new President might be expanded) – but this will be a development that occurs organically and over time – not something that can be excepted in the near or moderate future.

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18 It is worth noting that some patterns of coalition formation across regions (Elgstrom, Bjurulf, Johansson and Sannerstedt, 2001; Keading and Selck, 2005; Blavoukos and Pagoulatos, 2011) or along economic lines (Zimmer, Schneider and Dobbins, 2005; Bailer, Mattila and Schneider, 2010) have also been found and would appear to support a ‘national-interest’ interpretation of voting behaviour.