

Actor alignments in the European Union before and after enlargement

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Abstract. What impact has the 2004 enlargement had on legislative decision making in the European Union (EU)? This study answers this question by examining the controversies raised by a broad selection of legislative proposals from before and after the 2004 enlargement. The analyses focus on the alignments of decision-making actors found on those controversies. Member State representatives, the European Commission and the European Parliament vary considerably in the positions they take on controversial issues before and after enlargement. Consistent patterns in actor alignments are found for only a minority of controversial issues. To the extent that consistent patterns are found, the most common involve differences in the positions of Northern and Southern Member States and old and new Member States. The North-South alignment was more common in the EU-15 and reflected Northern Member States' preference for low levels of regulatory intervention. The new-old alignment that has been evident in the post-2004 EU reflects new Member States' preference for higher levels of financial subsidies. This study argues that the persistent diversity in actor alignments contributes to the EU's capacity to cope with enlargement.

The enlargement from 15 to 27 Member States added a considerable amount of diversity to the European Union's political system. Practitioners and academics expressed concern about the possible impact of enlargement on the EU's capacity to act. The larger number of actors could have made decision making more difficult, introducing a bias toward the status quo (Hosli 1999). Similarly, König and Bräuninger (2004: 421) note that enlargement has the potential to create gridlock. Zimmer et al. (2005) expect enlargement to have widened a gulf between net-contributors and net-recipients from the EU budget in terms of their policy positions. If the EU's decision-making processes have been affected, this could have profound impacts throughout the EU and beyond because a substantial proportion of national laws in Europe are mandated by the EU.

This study provides one of the first comparative empirical assessments of the impact of enlargement on legislative decision making in the EU (see also Hix et al. 2007). It examines a new dataset with comparable information on decision making before and after the 2004 enlargement. The data on decision making before enlargement have been studied extensively in the volume *The European Union Decides* (Thomson et al. 2006). The information examined in

the present study was collected in 263 semi-structured interviews with key informants, and consists of EU actors' positions on 244 controversial issues from 93 legislative proposals from before and after the 2004 enlargement. These data are a unique resource with which to examine the impact of enlargement on the EU's decision-making processes.

The next section acknowledges existing research that informs our understanding of the European political space in legislative decision making. Researchers have identified conceptual structures, such as the integration-independence dimension and the left-right dimension, which may be evident in the policy positions examined here. The research design section details the selection of cases and procedures for collecting information on actors' positions. The analysis section starts with an aggregate-level analysis of broad patterns in actor alignments. It then goes on to more detailed analyses of actor alignments on specific issues. The main finding is that there is considerable diversity in actor alignments both before and after enlargement. Nonetheless, three noteworthy patterns are evident. First, the Commission and the European Parliament (EP) tend to take extreme positions on a broad range of policy issues. Second, in the EU-15, Northern Member States tended to favour market-based outcomes while Southern ones tended to favour more regulation. Third, since the 2004 enlargement, old Northern Member States have favoured lower subsidies, while old Southern Member States and new Member States have favoured higher subsidies. The concluding section discusses the implications of these findings. It is argued that the persistence of variation in actor alignments across issues accounts for the enduring success of the EU as a political system.

Existing research on actor alignments in the EU

Existing research on the policy positions taken by Member States' representatives in the Council of Ministers suggests different views on the extent to which there are consistent and stable alignments. Nugent (1999: 474) observes that 'cohesive and fixed alliances . . . between particular governments do not exist. Rather, governments tend to come together in different combinations on different issues.' Several other researchers also emphasise the variation in the extent to which Member States' representatives agree with each other (e.g., Wright 1996; Heyes-Renshaw & Wallace 2006: 250). On the basis of some of the information examined in the present study – the information pertaining to the EU-15 – Thomson et al. (2004: 257) conclude that 'the most important finding is the lack of structure in the positions of the actors'. Similarly, studies of Council voting records since the 2004 enlargement do not indicate that the

new Member States are a cohesive group (Hagemann 2008; Mattila 2008). In addition, the analysis of network relations among Member States since enlargement does not suggest the presence of a strong coalition of new members (Naurin & Lindahl 2008).

Other researchers suggest there is more structure to the positions that states' representatives in the Council take on a range of controversial issues. Using the same information examined by Thomson et al. (2004) pertaining to the EU-15, Zimmer et al. (2005: 413) argued that 'contrary to Thomson et al. (2004) who forecast an overall lack of structure in the positions of the legislative actors, we were able to associate actors' preferences and the resulting coalitions with specific financial, economic and protectionist interests'. Specifically, they identify a North-South alignment of Member States, as do Thomson et al. However, despite Zimmer et al.'s claim that they identified strong structures, they did not identify how frequently the North-South alignment or other alignments of Member States occur. Therefore, the present study pays particular attention to the relative frequency with which various actor alignments occur with the intention of gauging the strength of these patterns more precisely. In addition, on the basis of very preliminary data collected before the 2004 enlargement, Zimmer et al. (2005) expect that new Member States would form a strong coalition together with old Southern ones in favour of higher subsidies and more producer-friendly regulation.

Political conflict in the EU has been characterised by the integration-independence dimension (e.g., Tsebelis 1994; Tsebelis & Garrett 2000). In this characterisation, the political space is conceived of as a unidimensional policy continuum on which the status quo, actors' preferences and the decision outcome can be placed. At the extreme left of this continuum, we find the status quo – that is, the potential policy outcome that incorporates the least harmonised decision outcome. At the extreme right of the continuum, we find the preferences of the Commission and the EP. These supranational institutions are said to be natural allies on this dimension; they both prefer the most extensive harmonisation of Member States' policies. Member States are assumed to take positions between the status quo and the preferences of the Commission and EP, depending on the extent to which they support further European integration. Therefore, the integration-independence dimension implies that the nature of the controversies will concern disagreements about the level of desirable harmonisation. Moreover, this characterisation implies that actors' positions are associated with their general level of support for European integration.

The left-right dimension also structures political debate in the EU to some extent, particularly in the EP. There is strong evidence that disagreements in the EP can generally be understood in terms of the left-right dimension, with

the main party groups taking different positions (e.g., Hix et al. 2007: Chapter 9; Schmitt & Thomassen 1999; McElroy & Benoit 2007). By contrast, most previous research shows that the left-right dimension is less relevant to structuring politics in the Council of Ministers. Thomson et al. (2004: 253) find that Member State alignments in the Council correspond with the left-right position of those states' governments on only five out of 174 controversial issues.

Zimmer et al. (2005: 404) assert that 'the left-right dimension also explains the alignments of governments to a certain degree'. They go on to state that the evidence lends 'very weak support to the hypothesis that party lines or ideology determine the preference structure in the Council' (Zimmer et al. 2005: 414). Indeed, their evidence for the relevance of left-right in the Council consists of a weak Spearman-rank correlation between the positions of Member States' governments on a left-right scale, and their positions on a dimension constructed using a data reduction technique ($\rho = 0.42$; $p = 0.12$; Zimmer et al. 2005: 413). Moreover, this evidence does not indicate how frequently we encounter disagreement between left-wing and right-wing governments in the Council of Ministers.

Research on voting records in the Council of Ministers, however, does provide evidence for the relevance of the left-right dimension. Mattila's (2004) analysis of voting behaviour in the Council concludes that right-wing governments that are not strong supporters of European integration tend to vote against the Council majority more than left-wing governments. Similarly, Hagemann's (2008) analysis of voting records and formal statements in the Council concludes that left- and right-wing governments tend to vote differently. Therefore, the left-right dimension may not be as irrelevant to Council politics as the analysis of information on initial policy positions indicates. These different findings suggest that the left-right dimension is relevant to state representatives' overt behaviour, which is subject to outside scrutiny, but not to their policy positions.

Researchers who have examined political contestation in the Council of Ministers agree that Northern Member States take different positions than their Southern counterparts. However, they hold different views on how best to interpret this pattern. Thomson et al. (2004: 243) interpret the difference between Northern and Southern states' policy positions in terms of 'fundamentally different views on the role of the state and regulation in solving societal problems'. They support this interpretation by the fact that disagreements between Northern and Southern Member States are particularly prevalent when the controversies focus on the level of state intervention. On the basis of the fact that Northern Member States tended to be net-contributors and Southern ones net-beneficiaries, Zimmer et al. (2005) conclude that the North-South alignment is about subsidies and redistributive policies. On the

basis of voting records in the Council of Ministers, there is also evidence that Northern states differ consistently from Southern ones (Mattila 2004, 2008; Hagemann 2008). Similarly, in terms of their cooperation relations, Northern Member States tend to coalesce with other Northern states, while Southern ones tend to coalesce with other Southern states (Elgström et al. 2001; Naurin & Lindahl 2008). Elgström et al. (2001: 120) interpret this as a 'coalition based on cultural affinity'.

The present study is one of the first to examine evidence on Member States' policy positions on controversial issues that have arisen since the 2004 enlargement. So far, comparative research on states' dispositions towards policy proposals has been confined to voting records (Hagemann 2008; Mattila 2008). The present data on actors' policy positions contains considerable nuance that cannot be provided by voting records. In the EU, overt acts of opposition at the voting stage are rare events. By contrast, it is common for there to be a difference between states' initial policy positions and the decision outcomes embodied in final legislative acts. Voting records are available on 85 of the 93 legislative proposals examined here. This gives a total of 1,471 observations (67 proposals voted on in the EU-15, ten in the EU-25 and eight in the EU-27) on which we might observe a signal of dissent, either in the form of a no-vote, an abstention or a statement by a state representation in the Council minutes. There are only 124 cases of dissent (8.4 per cent). By contrast, in 1,217 of the 1,471 observations (82.7 per cent) there was at least some difference between Member States' initial policy positions and the decision outcomes embodied in the final acts.

Research design

By conceptualising and measuring disagreement spatially, we are able to study decision making more comparatively and quantitatively than would be possible with thick descriptions of each case. Controversies raised by legislative proposals are conceptualised as issue continua or scales. The proposal on the reform of the sugar sector is one of the proposals examined in this study. The main issue raised by this proposal was the size of the price cut, which would in effect reduce the EU subsidy for sugar production (Figure 1). To the right of the issue continuum we find the position of the actor in favour of the highest level of subsidy. This position was taken by the Polish representation, which called for the current intervention price to be maintained. At the left of the continuum, we find the positions of the Member States that favoured the lowest subsidies. In this case, Denmark, Sweden and Estonia supported a very large price cut of more than 39 per cent. Intermediate positions are placed

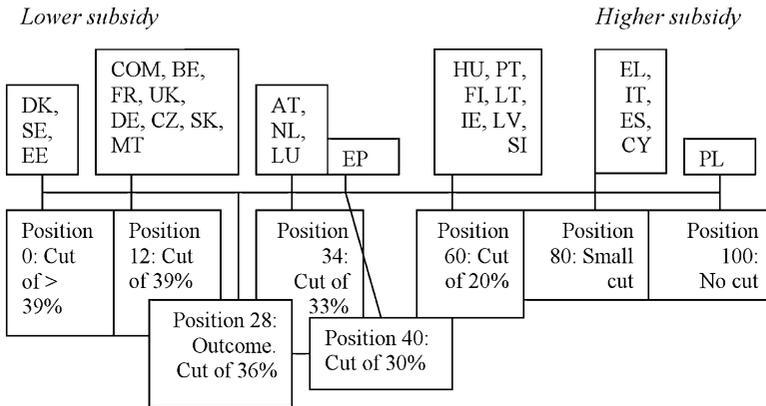


Figure 1. Positions of the actors on the sugar sector reform.

Notes: AT = Austria; BE = Belgium; CY = Cyprus; CZ = Czech Republic; DK = Denmark; EE = Estonia; FI = Finland; FR = France; DE = Germany; EL = Greece; HU = Hungary; IE = Ireland; IT = Italy; LV = Latvia; LT = Lithuania; LU = Luxembourg; MT = Malta; NL = The Netherlands; PL = Poland; PT = Portugal; SI = Slovenia; SK = Slovakia; ES = Spain; SE = Sweden; UK = United Kingdom; COM = Commission; EP = European Parliament.

between these two alternatives on a scale of 0–100 to reflect key informants' judgements on the political distances between the alternatives. For consistency, whenever relevant, we code positions in favour of higher subsidies, more regulation and more harmonisation at position 100 on the policy scales. This method of representing controversies spatially has been applied in a range of studies of decision making in national and international politics (see, e.g., Bueno de Mesquita 2003; Bueno de Mesquita & Stokman 1994). Full details of the research design decisions for the EU-15 study can be found in Thomson and Stokman (2006).

The selection of legislative proposals

The selection consists of 93 legislative proposals: 70 from the EU-15 period and 23 from the post-2004 period. Legislative proposals introduced by the Commission were selected for study according to three criteria: the time period, the type of legislative procedure and the level of political importance. Regarding the time period, each legislative proposal was on the Council's agenda in the years 1999, 2000 or after the 2004 enlargement. Legislative proposals introduced up to December 2005 were included. Concerning the decision-making procedure, the selected legislative proposals were subject to either consultation or co-decision – the two most commonly-used procedures.

Regarding political importance, the selection was restricted to proposals on which there was an indication of at least some political importance and controversy. Each proposal was mentioned in news services covering European affairs: *Agence Europe* in the EU-15 period or *Agence Europe* and *European Voice* in the post-2004 period. Furthermore, key informants had to identify at least one substantive disagreement between at least some of the actors. We included directives, regulations and decisions in the EU-15 study, but excluded decisions from the post-2004 study. The effect of changing the news services and instruments in the post-2004 study was to focus the selection on more high-profile proposals. In the EU-15 study, we found that many of the proposals we had initially selected were highly technical and not controversial at all. The policy areas represented most prominently in the selection of EU-15 proposals are agriculture and internal market, each with 14 proposals, although fisheries (seven proposals) and other policy areas are also present. Compared to the EU-15 study, the selection of proposals for the post-2004 study is more evenly distributed across different policy areas, including agriculture (five proposals), fisheries (three proposals), employment (two proposals) and environment (three proposals).¹ As reported in Table 1, we identified decision outcomes for almost all of the issues raised in the EU-15 selection, and for 57 of the 70 issues raised by the post-2004 proposals. The remaining issues from the post-2004 study are still pending.

Interviews with key informants

Information on controversial issues and actors' positions on these issues was collected in 263 semi-structured interviews with key informants (125 key informants in the EU-15 study and 138 informants in the post-2004 study). These interviews typically lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. The key informants were selected for their knowledge of the details of the dossiers under investigation. Usually they were participants. We require detailed information on actors' positions. This means our sources have to be close to the discussions. Individuals with different institutional affiliations were interviewed. The Commission officials interviewed (31 in the EU-15 study and 17 in the post-2004 study) were usually responsible for drafting the proposals and monitoring the subsequent discussions. The officials from the permanent representations (69 in the EU-15 study and 80 in the post-2004 study) were usually the responsible desk officers. The individuals from the EP (four in the EU-15 study and 41 in the post-2004 study) were either MEPs or their assistants.² A further nine officials from the Council secretariat and 12 from interest groups were interviewed in the EU-15 study.

Table 1. Distribution of selected proposals

| Study | EP involvement | Council voting rule | Legislative proposals | | | Type of instrument | Legislative proposals | Issues |
|--------------|----------------|---------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--------|
| | | | selected by researchers | Issues identified by experts | Issues identified by experts | | | |
| EU-15 | COD | QMV | 23 (23) | 63 (62) | | | | |
| | | Unan. | 5 (5) | 12 (12) | Directives | 30 (30) | 78 (77) | |
| Total | CNS | QMV | 22 (22) | 55 (55) | Regulations | 33 (33) | 79 (79) | |
| | | Unan. | 20 (20) | 44 (44) | Decisions | 7 (7) | 17 (17) | |
| Post-2004 EU | COD | QMV | 70 (70) | 174 (173) | | | | |
| | | Unan. | 12 (9) | 30 (21) | Directives | 10 (6) | 32 (19) | |
| Total | CNS | QMV | 4 (3) | 16 (12) | Regulations | 13 (13) | 38 (38) | |
| | | Unan. | 6 (6) | 20 (20) | Decisions | – | – | |
| Total | | | 1 (1) | 4 (4) | | | | |
| | | | 23 (19) | 70 (57) | | 23 (19) | 70 (57) | |

Notes: In parentheses are the numbers of cases with decision outcomes. COD = co-decision; CNS = consultation.

During these semi-structured interviews, each of the controversial issues was represented spatially in the form of a policy scale ranging from 0 to 100 that represents the range of the bargaining space. Informants were free to specify as many issues as they felt appropriate. However, usually two or three issues were sufficient to represent the main controversies raised by a proposal. The informants' estimates of the actors' positions refer to the decision outcomes favoured most by each of the actors at the time of the introduction of the Commission's legislative proposal, or as soon thereafter as they took a position. Whenever possible, the key informants identified the 'reference point'. This is the policy alternative that would prevail if the actors had failed to reach an agreement. The reference point is therefore a similar concept to the status quo, but need not be the same. Sometimes failure to reach an agreement would result in an outcome other than the status quo coming into effect. When obtaining the judgements, key informants were asked to substantiate their judgements extensively.

Validity and reliability tests were conducted on the informants' judgements. These tests consisted of comparing informants' judgements with information from Council and EP documents, and comparing judgements from different informants (Thomson 2006). These tests show that of all the points of discussion raised in the Council, key informants generally focus on issues that are more controversial and that are more difficult to resolve. If we wish to examine patterns in actor alignments, such controversial issues are the ones to focus upon. Informants' estimates of the positions actors favoured usually match information reported in Council documents. When they differ, these differences are due to the fact that Council documents do not refer to policy preferences, but to the decision outcomes actors were prepared to accept during the course of the negotiations. In addition, König et al. (2007) compared 31 point estimates provided by key informants from the Council with estimates from informants in the EP and found that 30 match perfectly or almost perfectly.

Analyses

In the following sub-section I apply a multidimensional scaling (MDS) technique to explore patterns in the alignments of actors. MDS techniques are useful tools for identifying structures in the positions taken by actors to the extent that these exist. MDS produces maps that reflect the patterns in the distances between actors' positions. These maps do not, however, provide insights into the substantive meaning of the structures found. One way of doing so is to identify the nature of the issues on which these structures are

evident. Therefore, to supplement the MDS analysis, I examine the alignments of actors on specific issues in the second sub-section below. This issue-level analysis reveals both the prevalence of these common alignments of actors and the extent to which they occur on certain types of issues.

Multidimensional scaling analyses

Multidimensional scaling techniques provide graphical summaries of objects – in this case, EU actors – on the basis of a matrix containing numerical information on the dissimilarities between each pair of objects. The matrices on which the following analyses are performed contain the total distances between each pair of actors, summed over all of the issues in the dataset. Therefore, if two actors take consistently different positions on many issues, there will be a relatively large number in the cell of the matrix that refers to the dissimilarity between these two actors.

The results of multidimensional scaling are often likened to a geographical map. For example, the geographical distances between cities in a country could be represented perfectly in two dimensions. The MDS solution is unlikely to get ‘North’ and ‘South’ pointing in the right direction, but with appropriate rotation of the coordinates of the objects, the MDS solution would resemble the location of the cities in relation to each other, as found on any regular map. It is up to the researcher to specify the number of dimensions in the MDS solution and to assess the extent to which the maps give an adequate representation of the dissimilarity matrices by referring to various goodness-of-fit measures.

Separate analyses were performed on the EU-15 data and the post-2004 data using the same MDS model.³ Figure 2 is a two-dimensional map of the aggregated distances between the actors before the 2004 enlargement. Two dimensions offer the most appropriate representation.⁴ There are two main patterns in the representation of actors’ positions in the EU-15. The first is that the Commission and EP tend to take positions far from the reference point, while the Member States tend to take intermediate positions. This alignment corresponds to the positions of the actors on the horizontal axis. The second pattern is that Northern Member States’ positions tend to differ from those of Southern ones. I refer to this alignment as the North-South alignment for brevity, but note that it is not perfectly correlated with geographic latitude. Finland, for instance, is not at an extreme position in this alignment.

Figure 3 contains a two-dimensional map of the aggregated distances among the actors after the 2004 enlargement. Again, the two-dimensional map gives an accurate summary of these aggregated distances.⁵ The post-2004 representation reveals a somewhat more complex structure with three notewor-

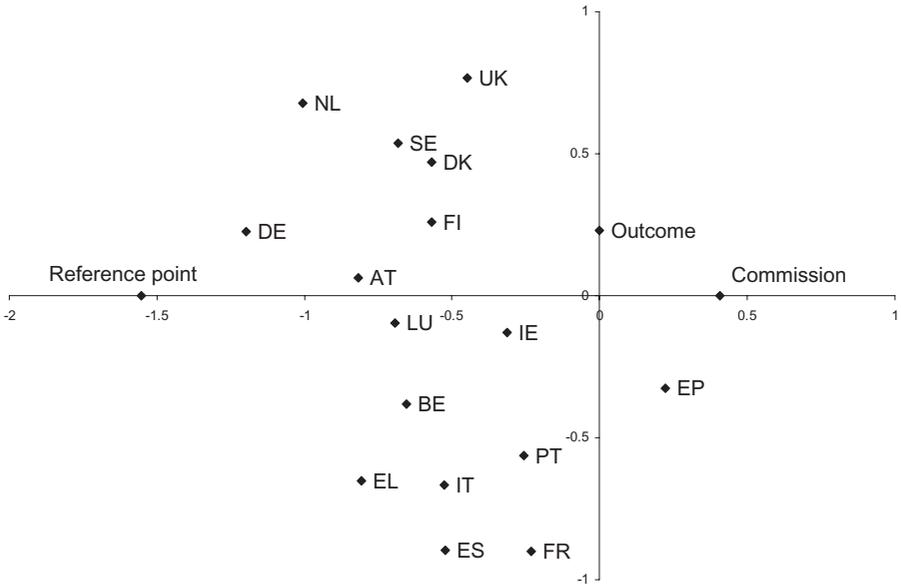


Figure 2. Structure in the actor alignments in the EU-15.

Notes: Proxscal multidimensional scaling, S-stress: 0.11; Dispersion Accounted For: 0.95, 174 issues. See Figure 1 for abbreviations.

thy features. First, the Commission and EP tend to take positions far from the reference point, while Member States take more moderate positions. Again, this pattern is reflected in the positions of the actors on the horizontal dimension. The second pattern is that among the old Member States, Northern and Southern ones tend to take different positions. The old Northern Member States are located at the top right of the graph, while the old Southern ones are located at the top left. The third pattern is new. Old Member States' policy positions differ from those of new Member States. The old Member States are located to the top of the graph, while the new ones are clustered around the middle.

Two points are worth bearing in mind when interpreting the multidimensional scaling analyses. First, the graphical representations do not provide an indication of the prevalence of these patterns. Due to the aggregation of distances across issues, it is possible that the graphical representations identify patterns that are present in only a minority of all controversial issues. Second, the graphical representations identify patterns that occur, but give no indication of the meaning of these patterns. Identifying the prevalence and meaning of these patterns requires the detailed issue-level analysis to which we now turn.

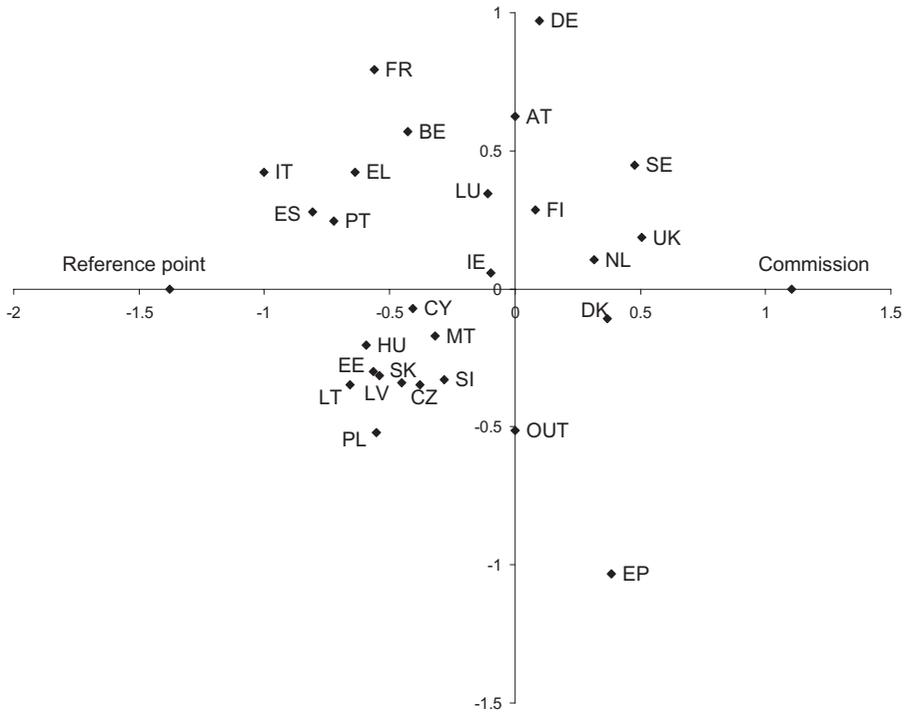


Figure 3. Structure in the actor alignments in the enlarged EU.

Notes: Proxscal multidimensional scaling. S-Stress 0.15; Dispersion Accounted For (DAF): 0.95. 70 issues. See Figure 1 for abbreviations.

Issue-level analyses

Table 2 indicates that the actor alignments identified by the MDS analyses occur in a substantial minority of controversial issues. Consider first the positions of the supranational institutions, the Commission and the EP, in relation to the reference point. In the EU-15, the Commission was a 'radical' actor in the sense that its position was at the opposite end of the issue continuum to the reference point on 34 per cent of the issues. This occurs on 27 per cent of the issues in the post-2004 study (Table 2). A comparison of the absolute distances between the Commission's positions and the reference point also indicates that there has been a slight decrease in the Commission's radicalism. In the EU-15, the Commission's positions were on average 65.10 policy scale points from the reference point (s.d. 39.19; $n = 130$). In the post-2004 EU, the Commission's positions are on average 57.78 policy scale points from the reference point (s.d. 39.33; $n = 58$). This slight reduction in radicalism falls short of statistical significance (Mann-Whitney Test, $p = 0.16$).⁶

Table 2. Frequency of actor alignments on controversial issues

| | EU-15 | Post-2004 EU |
|--|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| | Issues for which alignment was found | Issues for which alignment was found |
| Commission and reference point at opposite extremes | 59 (34%) | 19 (27%) |
| EP and reference point at opposite extremes | 49 (28%) | 14 (20%) |
| Commission and EP close ^a | 58 (33%) | 18 (26%) |
| North-South among 'old' members ^b | 58 (33%) | 17 (24%) |
| New-old division ^c | – | 21 (30%) |
| North versus South and East ^d | | 20 (29%) |
| Left-right position of member states' governments ^e | 5 (3%) | 0 (0%) |
| Total number of issues | 174 | 70 |

Notes: Since some issues did not display any of the actor alignments investigated, the percentages do not add up to 100 per cent. ^a Commission and EP's positions are equal to or less than ten scale points apart. ^b Significant ($p \leq 0.05$) Spearman rank correlation between the positions of Member States and their positions on the vertical dimension of Figure 2. ^c Significant ($p \leq 0.05$) Spearman rank correlation between the positions of Member States and a dichotomous variable indicating whether each Member State joined the EU in or after 2004. ^d Significant ($p \leq 0.05$) Spearman rank correlation between the positions of Member States and their positions on the vertical dimension of Figure 2, with the new Member States grouped at Southern extreme. ^e Significant ($p \leq 0.05$) Spearman rank correlation between the positions of Member States and the positions of those states' governments on the left-right continuum. Measures of left-right positions of governments from Huber and Inglehart (1995) for EU-15, and Benoit and Laver (2006) for post-2004 cases. Governments' left-right positions weighted by the parliamentary representation of governing parties.

Similarly, the EP's position is at the opposite end of the issue continuum to the reference point on 28 per cent of the issues in the EU-15 study and 20 per cent of the issues in the post-2004 study (Table 2). The decrease in the EP's radicalism is more marked than the decrease in the Commission's radicalism. The average distance between the EP's positions and decision outcomes fell from 66.98 policy scale points in the EU-15 (s.d. 39.50; $n = 103$) to 49.64 policy scale points in the post-2004 cases (s.d. 38.99; $n = 53$). This reduction in radicalism is statistically significant (Mann-Whitney Test, $p = 0.01$).

A comparison of Figures 2 and 3 suggests there is less agreement between the Commission and the EP in the post-2004 EU compared to the EU-15. This is confirmed by the issue-level analysis. If we define the Commission's and the

Table 3. Types of issues raised by legislative proposals

| Type of issue – choices concerning: | EU-15 | Post-2004 EU |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| | Issues in each category | Issues in each category |
| More or less harmonisation | 40 (23%) | 27 (39%) |
| Regulation versus free market | 91 (52%) | 38 (54%) |
| Levels of financial subsidy | 26 (15%) | 15 (21%) |
| Total number of issues | 174 | 70 |

Notes: Not all issues were placed in a category. Therefore the percentages in the column do not add up to 100 per cent. All ‘financial subsidy’ issues are also ‘regulation versus free market’ issues. For the EU-15 data, 24 of the 174 issues were classified as both ‘harmonisation’ and ‘regulation versus free market’ issues. For the post-2004 EU data, ten of the 70 issues were classified as both ‘harmonisation’ and ‘regulation versus free market’ issues.

EP’s policy positions as ‘close’ when the distance between them is ten scale points or less, then the Commission and the EP were close on 33 per cent of the controversial issues in EU-15, and on 26 per cent of the controversies in the post-2004 EU (Table 2). The average distance between the positions of the Commission and the EP increased in the post-2004 EU from 36.21 policy scale points, (s.d. 39.09, n = 140) in the EU-15 to 44.38 scale points (s.d. 39.09, n = 61) in the post-2004 EU (Mann-Whitney Test, p = 0.06). The sugar sector controversy depicted in Figure 1 is an example of a case in which the Commission took a quite radical position, while the EP took a more moderate position.

We now turn to the question of whether these patterns occur when particular types of issues are raised. This requires that we first divide the issues into different categories. Table 3 shows the categorisation of each of the 244 controversial issues according to three criteria (Thomson et al. 2004: 251). Each criterion refers to the nature of differences between the policy alternatives on each issue: whether the controversial issue involves choices between different levels of European harmonisation, different levels of regulation and/or different levels of financial subsidies. A controversial issue may fall into more than one category. The issue of the minimum size of health warnings on tobacco products (COD/1999/244; Thomson & Stokman 2006: 27) is an example of an issue that involves choices about both levels of harmonisation and regulation. The level of EU subsidy for sugar production is about both regulation and subsidies. Lower subsidies do not result directly in less harmonisation across the EU since the same level of subsidies applies throughout. The most common type of controversy concerns levels of regulation

(52 per cent of issues in the EU-15 and 54 per cent in the post-2004 EU), followed by levels of harmonisation (23 and 39 per cent, respectively) and financial subsidies (15 and 21 per cent, respectively).

The positions of the supranational institutions cannot be understood solely in terms of the integration-independence dimension (cf. Tsebelis 1994; Tsebelis & Garrett 2000). Controversies about levels of harmonisation are only a minority of controversies – albeit a sizable minority. Moreover, the Commission's positions are quite far from the reference point in general, not only on issues about levels of harmonisation. Of the 78 issues on which the Commission's position is opposite to the reference point (Table 2), only 24 concern harmonisation. Similarly, the Commission's positions are not significantly more or less radical in agriculture, internal market, fisheries or other policy areas. The Commission's positions are only slightly further from the reference point on harmonisation issues (an average distance of 68.83, s.d. 36.20, $n = 54$) than on other issues (an average distance of 60.43, s.d. 40.32, $n = 134$; $p = 0.24$).

In contrast to the radicalism of the Commission, which is found across a range of issues, the EP's radicalism is concentrated more narrowly in the group of harmonisation issues. The average distance between the EP's position and the reference point is 71.55 (s.d. 37.81, $n = 44$) on harmonisation issues and 56.28 (s.d. 40.33, $n = 112$) on other issues ($p = 0.04$). For example, the controversy about the minimum size of health warnings on tobacco products is a case in which the Commission took a quite moderate position, while it was the EP that called for much stronger health warnings across Europe.

On controversies concerning levels of harmonisation, in general the positions taken by both the Commission and the EP are predictably pro-harmonisation. In this respect, the integration-independence dimension does capture an important element of the EU's political space. Figure 4 shows the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the positions of each of the actors on harmonisation issues. The circle in the middle of each confidence interval is the mean position of the relevant actor on all issues considered. The breadth of the confidence interval gives an indication of the variation in the actor's positions across all of the issues considered. Recall that each of the issues was coded in a standardised way, such that higher values indicate more pro-harmonisation positions. Although there is a considerable amount of overlap, the supranational institutions generally take more pro-integration positions than do the Member States.

Figures 5 and 6 contain similar summaries of actors' positions on regulation issues and subsidy issues. It is noteworthy that the Commission takes quite moderate positions on controversies about subsidy levels. Its positions are closer to the reference point on issues about subsidies compared to other issues: on average, 45.08 policy scale points from the reference point on subsidy

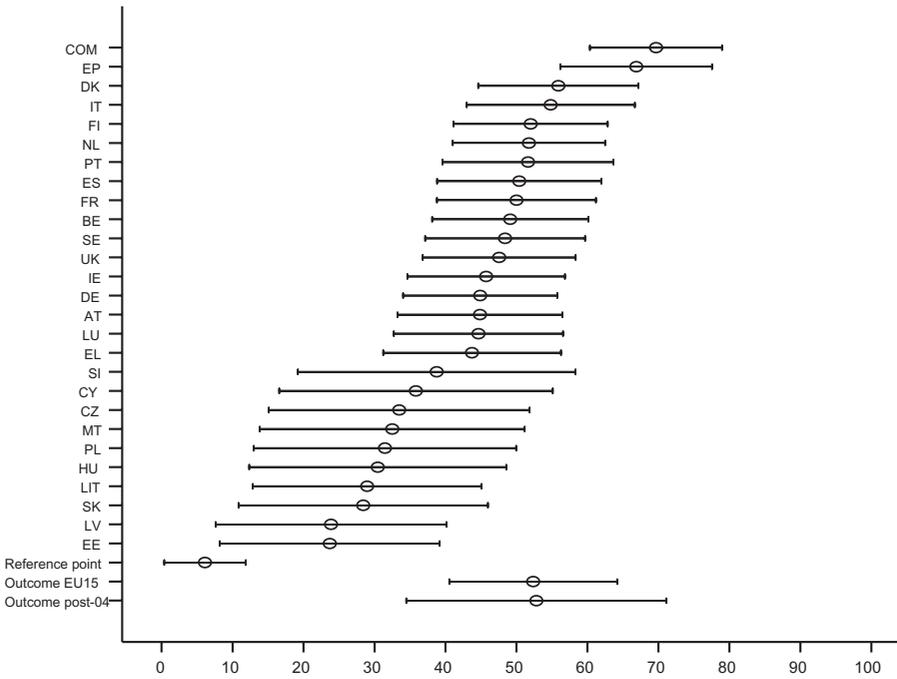


Figure 4. Confidence intervals (95 per cent) for the positions of actors on issues concerning choices between different levels of harmonisation (using information on 67 issues). Notes: Actors closer to 100 favour more harmonisation. See Figure 1 for abbreviations.

issues (s.d. 41.33, n = 38) compared to 67.34 on other issues (s.d. 37.56, n = 150, p = 0.00). The Commission generally favours lower levels of subsidy than do Member States. This pattern is an exception to the general radicalism of the Commission’s positions. In general, Member States seek higher, or at least not lower, subsidies than the Commission prefers. The case of the sugar sector reform referred to earlier is an example of this.

The MDS analyses identified a clear North-South alignment in the EU-15, and to some extent a division between old Northern and Southern members in the post-2004 EU. Table 2 indicates that there was a significant North-South alignment on 33 per cent of the issues in the EU-15 study and 24 per cent of the issues in the post-2004 study. In the EU-15, the issues on which there was disagreement between Northern and Southern states disproportionately concerned choices between regulation and market-based solutions to policy questions. In general, the Northerners supported less regulation than did the Southerners. In the EU-15, 46 per cent of regulation issues invoked a North-South disagreement, while only 19 per cent of non-regulation issues invoked a North-South disagreement (Table 4).

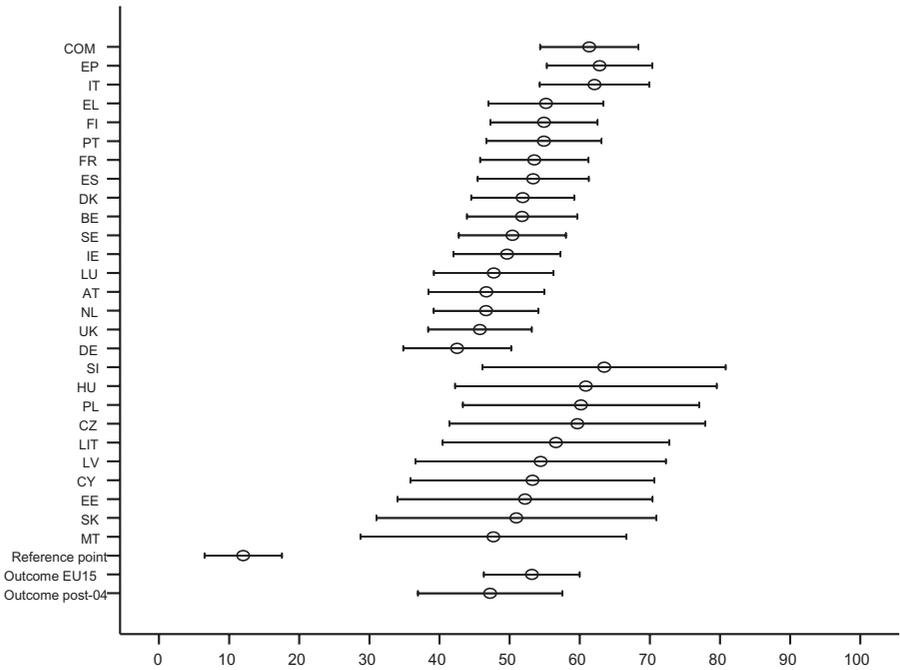


Figure 5. Confidence intervals (95 per cent) for the positions of actors on issues concerning strength of regulatory intervention (using information on 129 issues).

Note: Actors closer to 100 favour stronger regulation. See Figure 1 for abbreviations.

New Member States take consistently different positions than the old ones on 30 per cent of the issues in the post-2004 study (Table 2). To what extent is the old-new alignment associated with particular types of issues? There are two regularities worth noting. First, new Member States tend to favour policies that preserve more national autonomy and diversity, while old Member States generally tend to favour policies that involve somewhat higher levels of European harmonisation. This is a weak tendency, not a pronounced pattern. Figure 4 shows that old Member States are on average more in favour of harmonisation (to the right of the figure) than are the new ones. Note that the confidence intervals for the new Member States are somewhat wider because these are calculated on the basis fewer issues, from the post-2004 study only. Of the 27 harmonisation issues from the post-2004 study, 11 (41 per cent) evoked a disagreement between old and new Member States. Of the remaining 43 issues from the post-2004 study, only ten (23 per cent) evoked a disagreement between old and new members (Chi^2 , $p = 0.12$). An example of this tendency is the legislative proposal to amend the working time directive (COD/2004/209). Some of the new Member States have been the staunchest supporters of the

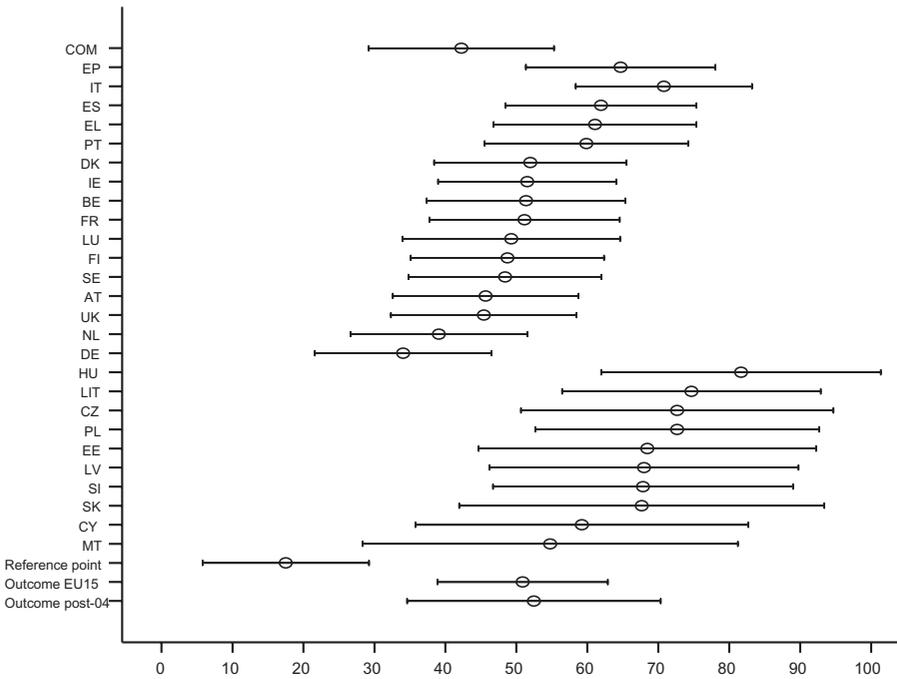


Figure 6. Confidence intervals (95 per cent) for the positions of actors on issues concerning levels of financial subsidies (using information on 41 issues).
 Note: Actors closer to 100 favour higher subsidies. See Figure 1 for abbreviations.

United Kingdom’s position that the possibility of opting out from this directive should be kept.

Second, disagreement between old and new Member States is disproportionately concentrated on issues about levels of financial subsidies. New members predictably tend to favour higher subsidies. On issues that do not concern levels of financial subsidy, 24 per cent evoke disagreements between old and new members, while 53 per cent of subsidy issues do (Table 5). In all cases, most of the new members favoured higher subsidies. This general pattern can also be detected in the confidence intervals in Figure 6, which indicate that the new Member States generally seek somewhat higher levels of subsidies than do the old ones. For example, on the proposal for a regulation to finance environmental projects (LIFE plus; COD/2004/218), new members called for higher subsidies with a view to promoting environmental projects that would benefit their territories.

In the enlarged EU, there is also a tendency for old Northern members to take different positions than both old Southern members and new members.

Table 4. Alignments on 'regulation versus market' issues

| | | EU-15 Regulation versus market issue? | | Post-2004 EU Regulation versus market issue? | |
|---------------------------|-----|---|----------|--|----------|
| | | No | Yes | No | Yes |
| North-South divide | No | 67 (81%) | 49 (54%) | 26 (81%) | 27 (71%) |
| | Yes | 16 (19%) | 42 (46%) | 6 (19%) | 11 (29%) |
| p-value | | 0.00 | | 0.32 | |
| Old-new divide | No | – | – | 23 (72%) | 26 (68%) |
| | Yes | – | – | 9 (28%) | 12 (32%) |
| p-value | | 0.75 | | | |
| North versus South & East | No | – | – | 26 (81%) | 24 (63%) |
| | Yes | – | – | 6 (19%) | 14 (37%) |
| p-value | | 0.10 | | | |
| Total | | 83 | 91 | 32 | 38 |
| N | | 174 | | 70 | |

Notes: p-values are from Chi² tests. See note to Table 2 for definitions of 'North-South', 'Old-new' and 'North versus South & East' alignments.

This finding supports Zimmer et al.'s (2005) expectation that a coalition of old Southern and new Member States would form. There is evidence of a North versus South & East divide on 20 of the 70 controversial issues from the post-2004 study. These 20 issues obviously contain some (seven) of the 20 issues on which there is a North-South divide among old Member States and some (13) of the 21 issues on which there is new-old division. However, the issues on which there is a North versus South & East alignment are a distinct group. This alignment occurs predominantly in issues concerning financial subsidies (Table 5). Some 73 per cent of subsidy issues in the post-2004 EU evoke this North versus South & East alignment. The old Southern members and new members invariably support higher levels of subsidies than do the old Northern members. There is also a weaker tendency for the North versus South & East alignment to emerge on issues about levels of regulation (Table 4). On these issues old Northern members generally support lower levels of regulation.

Two other possible alignments of actors were examined and found to be uncommon. First, the alignment of Member States according to the left-right position of their governments is rare (Table 2).⁷ Second, Thomson et al. (2004) report few significant correlations between the prevalence of pro-European attitudes in each country and states' positions on controversial issues.

Table 5. Alignments on ‘financial subsidy’ issues (percentages)

| | | EU-15 | | Post-2004 EU | |
|---------------------------|-----|--------------------------|----------|--------------------------|----------|
| | | Financial subsidy issue? | | Financial subsidy issue? | |
| | | No | Yes | No | Yes |
| North-South divide | No | 101 (68%) | 15 (58%) | 44 (80%) | 9 (60%) |
| | Yes | 47 (32%) | 11 (42%) | 11 (20%) | 6 (40%) |
| p-value | | 0.29 | | 0.17 | |
| Old-new divide | No | – | – | 42 (76%) | 7 (47%) |
| | Yes | – | – | 13 (24%) | 8 (53%) |
| p-value | | | | 0.05 | |
| North versus South & East | No | – | – | 46 (84%) | 4 (27%) |
| | Yes | – | – | 9 (16%) | 11 (73%) |
| p-value | | | | 0.00 | |
| Total | | 148 | 26 | 55 | 15 |
| N | | 174 | | 70 | |

Notes: p-value in EU-15 refers to Chi² test; p-values for post-2004 EU refer to Fischer’s exact test. See note to Table 2 for definitions of ‘North-South’, ‘Old-new’ and ‘North versus South & East’ alignments.

The information contained in Figures 4–6 indicates that at the aggregate level decision outcomes are both congruent with actors’ positions and involve policy change. The last two confidence intervals at the bottom of each figure refer to the spread of decision outcomes before and after the 2004 enlargement. It is remarkable that these confidence intervals overlap with the confidence intervals for the positions of all of the relevant actors. Therefore, at the aggregate level there is no significant difference between decision outcomes and the positions of any actor. While a Member State’s representatives may disagree with a particular decision outcome, as when the Polish representation disagreed with the outcome of the sugar sector reform mentioned above, these disagreements are balanced by agreements with outcomes on other issues. Although decision outcomes are congruent with all actors’ positions, they also involve significant policy change. None of the confidence intervals for the outcomes overlap with the confidence intervals for the reference points. Recall that the reference point is the decision outcome in the event of failure to agree. Such failure to agree would often imply the continuation of the status quo.

Conclusion

Actor alignments in the EU, both before and after enlargement, display weak structures. Member States that share the same position on any given contro-

versy take different positions on other controversies. Variation in political actors' policy demands is central to pluralist democratic theory (e.g., Dahl 1989: 251–254). Cross-cutting cleavages mean that groups have competing demands on some issues and are allies on other issues. A winning-coalition of actors on one issue is likely to consist of actors with diverse policy demands on another issue. Groups that are accustomed to being in the minority are unlikely to repudiate minority interests when they happen to be in the majority. Such persistent diversity sustains the consensus-orientated mode of EU decision making, whereby protracted efforts are made to respond to the interests of all decision-making actors involved. Indeed, in an analysis related to the present study, Arregui and Thomson (forthcoming) show that all Member States enjoy similar levels of bargaining success, as indicated by the congruence between their policy positions and decision outcomes.

This conclusion chimes in harmony with Laitin's (2002) findings regarding the emergence of a pan-European cosmopolitan culture. Citizens in the EU's new Member States are increasingly indistinguishable from citizens in old members in terms of key cultural markers. Similarly, the positions of new members' governments are usually indistinguishable from the positions of old members' governments. This allays some of the concerns expressed in ominous predictions about the impact of enlargement on increased conflict and legislative gridlock (e.g., Hosli 1999; König & Bräuninger 2004: 421; Zimmer et al. 2005). Laitin's (2002: 58) intuition is that 'the more Eastern European states are embedded in European institutional structures, the more there will be a shift in cultural norms toward the European standard'. If he is right, then the political integration observed in the present study will be associated with further cultural integration. Future research will need to address whether the patterns found in the first years after the 2004 enlargement persist. It is possible that Laitin's intuition is wrong, and that the new members will become increasingly cohesive and assertive in the future. However, given the diverse political and economic conditions in the new Member States, it is unlikely that their positions will become both more cohesive among themselves and distinct from the positions of old members. Moreover, prior to enlargement, the new Member States underwent a long process of deep reform of their legal systems, economies and administrative cultures (Cameron 2004). This led to a degree of preference alignment among old and new Member States that is not readily reversible.

The European Commission is a preference outlier compared to Member States both before and after the 2004 enlargement. This radicalism is not confined to issues that concern choices between different levels of harmonisation, but is found in many types of issues and across policy areas. The Commission's radicalism is central to conceptions of it as a supranational actor

whose interests are distinct from those of Member States (e.g., Pollack 2003; Tsebelis & Garrett 2000). Despite the distinctiveness of the Commission's positions, recent studies have questioned the view that it is an independent supranational actor that is insulated from national interests. Hug (2003), for instance, views the Commission as an agent in a principal-agent relationship with Member States. Wonka (2007) argues that the nomination of Commissioners by Member States is designed to influence the Commission's positions, and the evidence presented by Thomson (2008) supports this. Hooghe (2005) shows that Commission officials' national affiliation explains variation in their opinions. Consequently, there is considerable scope for future research on the conditions under which the Commission takes radical positions, possibly influenced by relationships with individual national governments.

An important change since the 2004 enlargement is that the EP has been asserting itself more independently from the Commission than it did in the past. This development is perhaps less attributable to enlargement than to the increasing maturity of the EP as a political institution (Hix et al. 2007). With increasingly cohesive party groups whose conflicts are played out on the left-right dimension, it follows that the EP's collective opinions do not necessarily correspond to the Commission's policy positions.

Despite the diversity of policy positions taken by old and new Member States, on a substantial minority of issues old members take notably different positions than new members. In addition, there is evidence of a division between old Northern Member States on one side and old Southern Member States and new Member States on the other side. These patterns are evident on three types of issues to varying extents. First, on issues concerning choices about the level of harmonisation there is a weak tendency for new Member States to favour somewhat less harmonisation than old members. After suffering decades of foreign interference from Moscow, many Central and East European governments are reluctant to accept what they perceive to be unnecessary limits on national discretion. Second, on issues about levels of regulatory intervention, there is a weak tendency for old Northern members to support lower levels of regulation, while old Southern members and new members support higher levels of regulation. Third, on issues about levels of financial subsidies, there is a strong tendency for old Northern members to support lower subsidies while old Southern members and new members support higher subsidies. This latter and strongest pattern is fully in line with Zimmer et al.'s (2005) expectation. Bear in mind, however, that financial subsidies constitute only a minority of the controversies identified.

Future research will examine whether enlargement has been accompanied by change in the processes through which actors' policy positions are transformed into decision outcomes. The analyses of the information from the

EU-15 study reported in Thomson et al. (2006) compared a range of decision-making models. An important conclusion of that study was that one of a number of consensus-based models predicted decision outcomes more accurately than other models. Such model-guided analysis moves beyond the truism that decision making in the EU is based on consensus by detailing the nature of that consensus and how it is reached. While such modelling is left for future research, the descriptive analyses presented here are suggestive in this respect. Decision outcomes in the enlarged EU also appear to be compromises that are located around the centre of the distributions of actors' policy positions. As in the EU-15, when we examine a range of controversial issues at the aggregate level, decision outcomes in the enlarged EU are broadly in line with the interests of all Member States. The absence of clear winners and losers supports the continuation of consensus-based decision making and the EU's capacity to cope with enlargement.

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Notes

1. The 23 proposals included in the EU-25 study are: sugar sector reform (CNS/2005/118); animal welfare (CNS/2005/009); agricultural fund (CNS/2004/161); CAP financing (CNS/2004/164); fisheries fund (CNS/2004/169); hake fish conservation (CNS/2003/318); conservation of fish in Biscay area (CNS/2003/327); the Regional Development Fund (COD/2004/167), including the general regulation of the Regional Development Fund (AVC/2004/163) also dealt with in the same co-decision package; the working time directive (COD/2004/209); LIFE environmental programme (COD/2004/218); the European Neighbourhood Instrument (COD/2004/219); port services (COD/2004/240); passengers with reduced mobility (COD/2005/007); data retention (COD/2005/182); waste (COD/2005/281); spirits (COD/2005/028); intellectual property rights (COD/2005/127); air pollution (COD/2005/183); pensions (COD/2005/214); broadcasting (COD/2005/260); payment services (COD/2005/245); visa information system (COD/2004/287).

2. A larger number of informants from the EP were interviewed in the post-2004 study. This was necessary because part of that study, which will be reported elsewhere, examines the positions taken by actors within the EP.
3. The present study applies an individual difference model, INDOSCAL (Carroll & Chang 1972; Cox & Cox 2000: Chapter 10). The EU-15 data were also analysed extensively using multidimensional scaling by Thomson et al. (2004) using a slightly different MDS model. The MDS technique applied here is preferable since it allows the spatial representation of the objects to be manipulated to a greater degree by the original dissimilarities between the objects (Cox & Cox 2000: 211). Nonetheless, the results are practically identical. The matrices on which the following analyses are performed are symmetrical: the distance between actor A and actor B is the same as the distance between actor B and actor A. Thomson et al. (2004) also analysed asymmetrical matrices, in which the distances were weighted by the levels of salience each actor attached to each issue. The results did not differ substantively. In addition, issues subject to different legislative procedures (consultation and co-decision) and different policy areas were examined separately. The results did not differ substantively from those on the basis of the aggregated information presented here. Multidimensional scaling procedures can assume either ratio-level information or ordinal-level information. I report the results assuming ratio-level information, but the results for the ordinal-level assumption are substantively the same. Indifferent actors (actors with no positions on an issue), as well as missing reference points and outcomes, are coded as having a distance of zero to all other actors. I examined alternative ways of dealing with missing positions, none of which substantially altered the results. For presentation purposes, the orientation of the MDS solutions was changed so that the Commission and reference point are at position zero on the y-axis, with the reference point to the left and the Commission to the right, and so that the outcome is at position zero on the x-axis.
4. One-dimensional solution: S-Stress 0.46, Dispersion Accounted For (DAF) 0.75; two-dimensional solution (Figure 2): S-Stress 0.11, DAF 0.95; three-dimensional solution: S-Stress 0.07, DAF 0.98; four-dimensional solution: S-Stress 0.04, DAF 0.99.
5. One-dimensional solution: S-Stress 0.36, Dispersion Accounted For (DAF) 0.82; two-dimensional solution (Figure 3): S-Stress 0.15, DAF 0.95; three-dimensional solution: S-Stress 0.08, DAF 0.97; four-dimensional solution: S-Stress 0.03, DAF 0.99.
6. Note that the number of observations does not add up to the total number of issues in the dataset due to the fact that on some issues there is no clear reference point on the policy scale. These cases were excluded from these analyses.
7. In addition to the left-right positions of governments as measured by expert judgements (Huber & Inglehart 1995; Benoit & Laver 2006) reported in Table 2, Thomson et al. (2004) also applied estimates of governments' left-right positions based on election programmes (Budge et al. 2001). These alternative measures gave similar results. Benoit and Laver's (2006) 'taxes versus spending' dimension gave similar results.

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