

Cleavages and rationality: patterns of coalition-building in the Council of Ministers of the European Union

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Structure

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Why study coalitions in the Council?

- 1 *Institutional reason.* Great legislative power of the Council
- 2 *Structural reason.* The Council of Ministers is the most “nationalized” institution of the European Union (Beyers & Dierickx, 1997:440)
- 3 *Procedural reason.* Unanimity and qualified majority voting (QMV) is in the core of the decision-making within the Council (not always the case)



EU countries tend to create coalitions in order to take a stronger position in the discussion of the Council agenda (Aguilar-Fernández, 1994; Lampinen & Uusikylä, 1998; Haverland, 2000)

What determines the coalition behavior of the EU Member States?

- 1 *Geography*. North-South (Kaeding & Selck, 2005; Plechanovová, 2011) and East-West cleavages (Goetz, 2005; Mattila, 2009; Clark & Jones, 2011)
- 2 *Power*. “Hubs of power” attract smaller states to strengthen their bargaining position (Peterson, 1995; Tallberg, 2002)
- 3 *Goodness of fit*. (Non-)compliance costs determine the decision to join a coalition to block or support the vote on the respective legislation (Börzel et al., 2007; Steunenbergh & Toshkov, 2009; Sager & Thomann, 2018)
- 4 *Ideology*. Coalition-building in the Council of Ministers depends on the ideological positions of the governments of the EU states (Hagemann & Hoyland, 2008; Mattila, 2009; Hayes-Renshaw, 2017)
- 5 *Duration of the EU membership*. EU-15 vs “new” member states (Zimmer et al.; Mattila 2008)

Hypotheses

- H1.** *If a country is located in Eastern Europe, it seeks to join a coalition with states of this region.*
- H2.** *If a country is located in Western Europe, it seeks to join a coalition with states of this region.*
- H3.** *If a country is located in Northern Europe, it seeks to join a coalition with states of this region.*
- H4.** *If a country is located in Southern Europe, it seeks to join a coalition with states of this region.*
- H5.** *The bigger the economic strength and influence of the country, the more likely it is in a coalition with smaller states.*
- H6.** *The less the state's legislation complies with the Council agenda, the more the state is inclined to join the coalition opposing this agenda.*
- H7.** *If the country's ruling party adheres to leftist views, Minister of the state seeks to create a coalition with the Ministers of states where the ruling parties hold similar views (similarly for another part of the ideological spectrum).*
- H8.** *If a country joined the EU in 2004 or later, it seeks to create a coalition with the "new" EU members.*

- 1 Roll call voting data for 28 countries from December 2003 to May 2019 (source: *Monthly Summary of Council Acts*, Council of Ministers portal)
- 2 Data on voting procedures for all legislative and non-legislative acts, including the information on the voting choices of the Member States' representatives: "for", "against" or abstention

Table 1. Contested legislative acts and other acts in the Council of Ministers of the European Union, December 2003 – May 2019

	Legislative acts	Other acts	Total
Uncontested	83.3 (1,892)	90.6 (4,171)	86.9 (6,063)
Abstentions	4.9 (112)	3.1 (143)	4.0 (255)
Negative votes	11.8 (267)	6.3 (289)	9.1 (556)
Total	100 (2,271)	100 (4,603)	100 (6,874)

Contesting coalitions in the Council of Ministers

Contesting coalitions arise when the EU countries choose to abstain from voting on a particular issue or vote against it (Hagemann, 2007; Mattila, 2009)

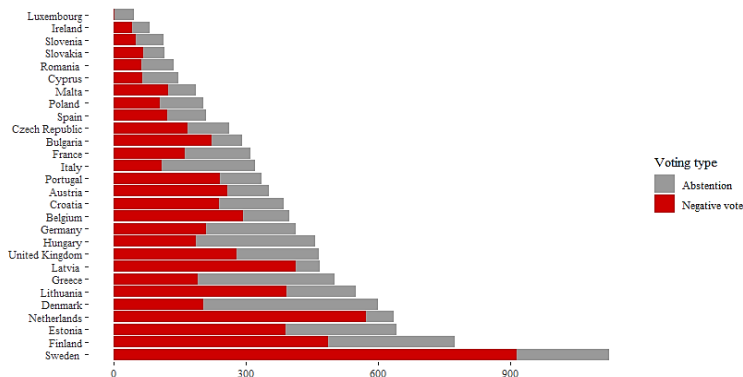


Figure 1. Contesting voting in the Council of Ministers of the European Union, December 2003 – May 2019 (total, per country)

Contesting coalitions in the Council of Ministers

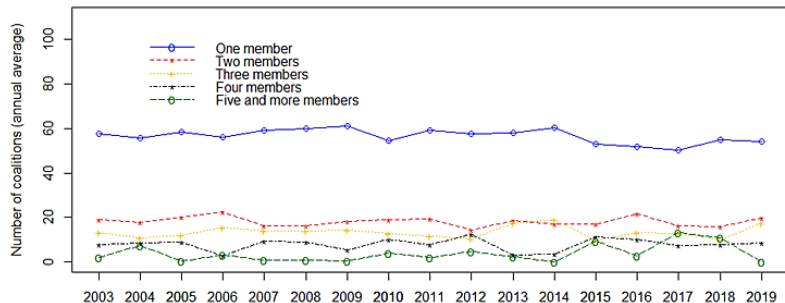


Figure 2. Contesting coalitions in the Council of Ministers of the European Union, December 2003–May 2019 (annual average)

Contesting coalitions: does geography and time matter?

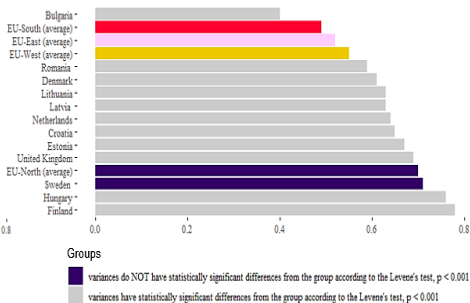
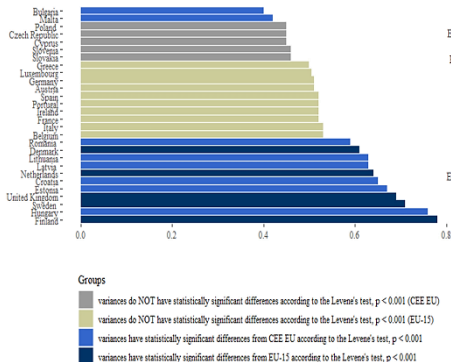
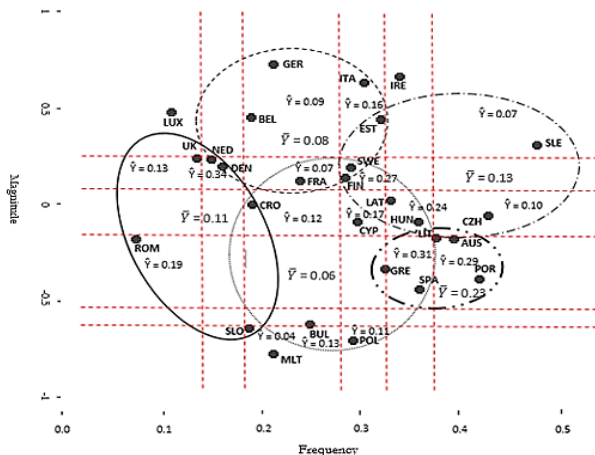


Figure 3. Variances of the rate of participation in contesting coalitions in the European Union countries, December 2003 – May 2019

Figure 4. Variances of the rate of participation in contesting coalitions in the European Union geographical groups, December 2003 – May 2019

Nuclear and sectoral coalitions in the Council



Note: $\bar{\gamma}$ is calculated for nuclear coalitions with statistical significance $p < 0.05$. $\hat{\gamma}$ is calculated for sectors with statistical significance $p < 0.05$.

Figure 5. Nuclear and sectoral coalitions in the Council of Ministers of the European Union, December 2003–May 2019

Table 2 Regression analysis results for coalition-building in the Council of Ministers of the European Union

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
EU group (Western Europe)	0.017* (0.008)	0.021* (0.027)	0.099* (0.057)	0.031* (0.018)	0.049* (0.019)
EU group (Eastern Europe)	0.050* (0.022)	0.043 (0.067)	-0.058 (0.121)	-0.022* (0.007)	-0.036* (0.012)
EU group (Southern Europe)	-0.064 (0.099)	-	-	-	-
EU group (Northern Europe)	-0.045 (0.089)	-	-	-	-
New EU states (after 2004)	0.073*** (0.038)	-	-	-	-
GDP	-	0.106 (0.354)	0.053 (0.119)	0.027 (0.065)	0.049 (0.089)
Size of territory	-	0.034 (0.055)	0.072 (0.145)	0.088 (0.154)	0.077 (0.148)
Presidency of the Council	-	0.129** (0.067)	-	-	0.061* (0.027)
Contributions to the EU budget	-	-0.006 (0.012)	-0.003 (0.011)	-	-0.004 (0.013)
G7 membership	-	-0.038 (0.093)	-	-	-
Compliance with Agriculture and Fisheries	-	-	-0.089*** (0.044)	-0.125*** (0.071)	-0.085*** (0.039)
Compliance with Economic and Financial Affairs	-	-	-0.103** (0.059)	-0.112** (0.069)	-0.055** (0.027)
Compliance with Energy	-	-	-0.013 (0.037)	-0.020 (0.049)	-0.008 (0.023)

Regression analysis

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Compliance with Environment	-	-	-0.079*** (0.065)	-0.087*** (0.070)	-0.070*** (0.054)
Compliance with Transport	-	-	-0.009 (0.033)	-0.011 (0.045)	-0.001 (0.002)
Final consumption expenditure of households and NPISH	-	-	-	-0.003*** (0.001)	-0.009*** (0.004)
General government gross debt	-	-	-	-0.012*** (0.003)	-0.010*** (0.002)
Share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption	-	-	-	-0.007** (0.002)	-0.014** (0.005)
Energy productivity	-	-	-	-0.004*** (0.001)	-0.003*** (0.001)
Final energy consumption	-	-	-	-0.024** (0.011)	-0.027** (0.014)
Greenhouse gas emissions	-	-	-	-0.005*** (0.002)	-0.017*** (0.008)
Left-right	-	-	-	-	0.038** (0.013)
Left-right (spectrum)	-	-	-	-	0.007 (0.022)
EU attitude	-	-	-	-	-0.154 (0.269)
Constant	1.87*** (0.60)	1.47*** (0.48)	1.76*** (0.57)	1.92*** (0.73)	1.98*** (0.76)
Observations		5160	5160	5160	5160
R ²	0.23	0.21	0.35	0.48	0.52
Adjusted R ²	0.18	0.16	0.23	0.33	0.35

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

- 1 First cleavage divides the Council along the *west-east* geographical line. No similar trend for *north-south*.
- 2 Second cleavage, which is essentially superimposed on the first, is related to the *duration of the EU membership*.
- 3 The coalition behavior of the EU Member States in the Council of Ministers is determined not only by the rigid framework of their geographical and 'temporal' groups, but also by *rational* and *ideological* intentions.
- 4 Two directions for further research: the **role of ideology** and the influence of the **President of the Council of Ministers** on the coalition-building.

Thank you for your attention!