



Small States – Big Negotiations:

Decision-Making Rules and Small State Influence in EU Treaty Negotiations

Tiia LEHTONEN

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Abstract

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This study examines the impact of the decision-making rules, procedures and practices of the European Union on the ability of small Member States to influence Treaty negotiation outcomes, and assesses the causality of this influence in Treaty-revision. Within Treaty-making processes, actor influence is here expected to vary according to the institutional preconditions, and small states are presumed to benefit from particular type of decision-making rules to the disadvantage of others. The fundamental aim of the study is therefore to investigate the conditions under which small state influence increases in European Union Treaty-negotiations. To explain this puzzle, a distinction is made between two types of Treaty-making processes, those of the Intergovernmental Conferences and the Convention, which allows for subsequent comparisons between the decision-making rules of *unanimity* and *restricted consensus*. In order to empirically test the underlying hypotheses, explicit units of observation are chosen from the IGCs of Amsterdam, Nice and 2003-04, and the Convention on the Future of the EU. In-depth comparisons are made between four small Member States – Belgium, Denmark, Finland and Ireland – and their *de facto* influence is process-traced through three substantial issues of the institutional reform: the composition of the Commission, the extension of qualified majority voting and the reform of Council Presidency. The empirical analysis focuses on both informal and formal levels of decision-making dynamics, and a further analytical distinction is made between bargaining and deliberation modes of conflict-resolution. Drawing initially on theories of rational choice institutionalism (RCI) and liberal intergovernmentalism (LI), the unanimity rule as applied in the IGCs is expected to strengthen the formal position of an individual small state by providing, respectively, a veto-right for each negotiator and promoting asymmetric interdependency. The empirical findings confirm the major underlying hypothesis concerning the correlation between the adopted decision-making rules and the small states' impact on distributional outcomes in the EU Treaty-amending negotiations on the one hand, and the superiority of the unanimity rule for small states on the other. Yet, a couple of additional key success factors – other than can be explained exclusively along the conjectures of RCI or LI schools – are also identified in the study.



Bio Tiia Lehtonen is currently affiliated as a researcher at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs. Within their European Union research programme her particular focus lays on the internal dynamics of the Union, and the job includes observing and analysing the overall institutional developments, decision-making practises, Treaty-revisions and national ratification processes in the aftermath of the Lisbon negotiations, as well as individual Council Presidencies and the Finnish EU policies. Since joining the FIIA's EU programme she has engaged in various domestic EU debates both in public and grass-root levels. She has recently published a mid-term evaluation (in the form of a Briefing Paper) of the on-going Czech EU Presidency. As part of her work she has also been teaching European Foreign, Security and Defence Policies to undergraduate students at the University of Helsinki. Before coming to the EUI Tiia worked as a researcher at the Jean Monnet Centre at the University of Turku in Finland, where she also obtained her Master's Degree. Her areas of interest include small state studies, rational choice and institutionalist schools of thought, federalist, intergovernmental and supranational integration theories, negotiation practices and decision-making methods in the EU.