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Mart Laatsit and Dr Michael Kaeding

It's the Centre-Periphery, Stupid! Cooperation Patterns in the Council of Ministers after Enlargement

MART LAATSIT¹

Ministry of Finance, Estonia

MICHAEL KAEDING²

European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA), the Netherlands

ABSTRACT Cooperation patterns in the Council of Ministers have featured particular characteristics over the last decades. Seven years after the 2004 round of enlargement, it is time to readdress the question whether long-standing cooperation patterns have endured and how the new members have fit in the existing structures. Following a comparative case study research design, the current article investigates four negotiations: the 7th Framework Programme, the Services Directive, the Driving Licence Directive and the Working Time Directive. Having conducted 40 semi-structured interviews with national representatives of ten Member States we find that some cooperation patterns, such as the north-south divide, have persisted. More specifically, the results reveal that the overall pattern leans towards a centre-periphery model with the northern Member States as the central actors.

KEY WORDS: Cooperation patterns, European Council, enlargement

¹Correspondence Address: Ministry of Finance, Suur-Ameerika 1, 15006 Tallinn, Estonia, E-mail: mart.laatsit@fin.ee

² Correspondence Address: European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA), P.O. Box 1229, 6201 BE Maastricht, the Netherlands, E-mail: m.kaeding@eipa.eu

Introduction

The recent troubles in the Eurozone have brought some of the traditional political alliances in the EU back in the spotlight. The “Franco-German” engine made a remarkable appearance at Deauville in October 2010 at a tripartite summit between France, Germany and Russia. France and Germany announced their compromise on the Eurozone’s bail-out mechanism ahead of an upcoming European Council meeting. Being presented with a *fait accompli* situation provoked wide discontent among Member States and proposals were made for alternative cooperation mechanism, such as a “vanguard group” of the six largest EU countries, as reported by Guy Dinmore in a *Financial Times* article on November 4, 2010. This leads us to wonder, whether this historical Franco-German cooperation pattern has firmly established itself after the last round of enlargement or is it only a temporary appearance? How does the cooperation of the two countries fit in the larger patterns of cooperation between the Member States and how have these patterns changed during the years after the enlargement?

Cooperation patterns in the Council of Ministers have attracted some scholarly attention. However, this particular body of literature has remained rather controversial in terms of findings. Studies (Beyers and Dierickx 1998; Elgström *et al.* 2001; Kaeding and Selck 2005) have demonstrated either a north-south divide among the EU Members States (Elgström *et al.* 2001; Kaeding and Selck 2005) or a roughly matching “centre-periphery” pattern (Beyers and Dierickx 1998). In addition, Selck and Kaeding (2004) investigated the Franco-German partnership and found evidence for the historical Franco-German partnership having lost its momentum, giving way to a “north-south” pattern.

Studies conducted after the enlargement of 2004 have given conflicting results on the nature of the patterns. Naurin and Lindhal (2008) presented evidence for a persisting north-south pattern joined by an eastern group. Mattila (2008), studying voting patterns, demonstrates that north-south remains the most visible conflict dimension in the enlarged union. Hagemann and De Clerck-Sachsse (2007) found no substantial evidence of visible geographical patterns. However, Hagemann (2008) shows some weak evidence for geographical clustering.

Thomson (2009) demonstrated consistent patterns in actor alignments to be relatively rare and a new-old alignment to appear mostly in issues concerning financial subsidies.

The aim of our research is to see whether recent developments in the EU have brought any changes to the existing cooperation patterns across Member States in the Council of the European Union. Is there any proof of the perseverance of the north-south divide or do we see the old Member States joining their forces vis-à-vis the new Member States? What effect has the 2004 enlargement had on the “locked-in” cooperation patterns in the daily business of Council working groups more generally and the Franco-German partnership in particular?

We will address this question as follows. Firstly, we assess earlier research in the field and outline the research design. Secondly, we assess if, and to what extent there have been changes to the north-south divide which has been the underlying pattern in European integration for many years. Finally, we provide a summary of the findings and conclude with suggestions for future research.

Literature review

Cooperation patterns in the Council have not been subject to extensive research, as to this date only a few major studies have been conducted in the field. Beyers and Dierickx (1998) studied the communication patterns in the EU, Elgström *et al.* (2001) conducted a research on the Swedish officials’ cooperation networks, Mattila and Lane (2001) and Kaeding and Selck (2005) mapped the coalition patterns in the Council. Hagemann and De Clerck-Sachsse (2007), Hagemann (2008) and Mattila (2008) took a look at the voting patterns in the Council and Naurin (2007) investigated the cooperation patterns in the working groups of the Council of the EU. Thomson (2009) analysed actor alignments on legislative proposals.

Before the 2004 enlargement

The four major studies which were conducted before the enlargement of the Union in 2004 were based on data of the EU-12 or EU-15. The extensive data-sets were analysed using quantitative methods and all of them confirmed the existence of a north-south – or in the case

of Beyers and Dierickx (1998) a north-centre-periphery – divide. However, each of the studies had a slightly angle, focussing either on cooperation, communication or coalition patterns.

Beyers and Dierickx's study "The Working Groups of the Council of the European Union" addressed the communication patterns in the European Union of 12 Member States (Beyers and Dierickx 1998). 117 national representatives from a selection of 13 working groups were interviewed about their communication patterns during the Belgian Presidency of 1993. The data was analysed using principal component analysis. As the main finding, three groups emerged from the dataset – periphery, centre and north, whereas no significant differences emerged between policy domains.

Elgström *et al.* analysed Swedish officials' cooperation patterns in their article "Coalitions in European Union Negotiations". Their research concentrated on expert groups, working groups and comitology committees in the EU-15, with questionnaires being answered by 275 Swedish civil servants (Elgström *et al.* 2001). Using simple percentage calculating to process the data they discovered a north-south divide in the cooperation patterns of the officials (*ibid*, pp. 121-122), supposedly based on policy interests and/or cultural affinity (*ibid*, p. 111).

Other scholars analysed the coalition patterns in the Council of Ministers during the time period of 1995-2000. Mattila and Lane (2001) used voting data while the research of Kaeding and Selck (2005) covered 174 policy issues for 70 legislative proposals and interviewed 125 persons involved in the negotiations. Using principal component analysis to process the data Kaeding and Selck (2005) were able to establish a north-south divide among the Member States' voting patterns (Kaeding and Selck 2005, p. 271) with France belonging to the southern group (*ibid*, p. 281). Using the same dataset, Selck and Kaeding (2004, p. 92) also concluded that the importance of the historical Franco-German partnership has diminished and given way to a north-south coalition pattern.

After the 2004 enlargement

Four more recent studies give conflicting results on the impact of the 2004 enlargement. Some suggest that no strict geographical patterns can be seen, even though the data give hints for some clusters (Hagemann and De Clerck-Sachsse 2007, Hagemann 2008). Others claims that the north-south pattern continues to exist (Naurin 2007; Mattila 2008). However, it has to be taken into account that the studies approached the matter differently. Hagemann and De Clerck-Sachsse (2007), Hagemann (2008) and Mattila (2008) concentrated on coalition patterns in the Council while the focal points of Naurin (2007) were cooperation patterns in the Council working groups.

Hagemann and De Clerck-Sachsse (2007) analysed the decision-making in the Council and the impact of the 2004 enlargement on it in the period 2001 – 2006. Their data was based on 52 interviews with officials of the EU institutions, the permanent representations of the Member States to the EU and external policy experts. Using a geometrical scaling method NOMINATE for analysing the data Hagemann and De Clerck-Sachsse concluded that “no strict north-south division” is apparent and that the new Member States have not been acting as a distinct bloc. However, “a few geographical clusters” such as the Nordic countries and the Central and Southern European countries emerged on a general level (Hagemann and De Clerck-Sachsse 2007, p. 23). Mattila (2008, p. 35), analysing changes in coalition patterns, concluded that there has been no significant change to the voting patterns after the enlargement.

Naurin (2007) studied both the Member States’ network capital as well as the cooperation patterns in the Council. The data was collected by 361 telephone interviews carried out with the representatives of all the Member States in 11 Council working groups in 2003 and 2006. Using multidimensional scaling it was concluded (Naurin 2007, p. 14) that “cooperation patterns in the Council working groups follow geographical patterns”. According to the research, the EU-15 had two “cores”— the north and the south, with Germany being in the middle. The 2004 enlargement did not change this pattern but added countries to both camps

(ibid, p. 20). Using the same data, Naurin and Lindahl (2008, p. 75) also claim the existence of a separate eastern group, in addition to the previously mentioned north and south.

This study takes up the scholarly call and tests the longstanding but controversial north-south argument: *cooperation in the Council of Ministers is characterised by a north-south divide*. Through four case studies, this paper will investigate whether this argument has prevailed seven years after the 2004 round of enlargement, and whether a new “eastern” dimension has emerged.

Research design

For the purposes of testing the controversial argument of a north-south divide empirically, we define cooperation as a process of consultation and exchange of information between the Member States outside the official meetings of Council working groups. In order to map the Member States’ cooperation patterns, we conducted a comparative case study on four issues: the 7th Framework Programme, Services Directive, Driving Licence Directive, and the Working Time Directive. We conducted interviews with a total of 40 representatives, four representatives from ten Member States, each of whom had been working with one of the cases.

Selection of the four cases:

The cases of the study were chosen according to the general assumption that the EU’s policies can in broad terms be divided into regulatory and distributive matters. In order to isolate the “poor vs. rich” or “net beneficent vs. net contributor” pattern (Mattila 2004; Zimmer *et al.* 2005) two of the chosen cases are of a regulatory (Services Directive and Driving Licence Directive) and two of a distributive nature (7th Framework Programme and Working Time Directive). Furthermore, the cases represent different policy areas: research, social policy, transport and the internal market. A significant criterion for the choice of cases was also the time period in which they were negotiated – the bulk of the four negotiation processes took place after the 2004 enlargement.

Selection of Member States

Ten countries – the Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany Greece, Hungary, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom – were chosen for the study bearing in mind the equal representation of the main geographical units: the north, the south, and the east (the new Member States). Each of the geographical groups comprises at least one larger and one smaller Member State in order to control for a “large vs. small” bias (Hosli 1999; Raunio and Wiberg 1998) interfering with other types of patterns.

Data from semi-structured interviews

The data on cooperation patterns was gathered by interviews, which were conducted in Brussels either face-to-face or by telephone. The representatives received the questionnaires in advance to allow for preparation in advance. Prior to the interview the respondents were asked to fill in two tables regarding their cooperation partners. First, they had to evaluate on a five-point scale (Very often, Often, Sometimes, Rarely, Never) how frequently they contacted their cooperation partners outside the official committee meetings. Secondly, they had to indicate how often they were contacted by the representatives of the ten countries outside the official committee meetings. The two tables served as the primary source for gathering data on the cooperation networks, while additional questions were posed during the interviews to shed light on the underlying reasons as well as the possible particularities of the specific case.

Results

The 7th Framework Programme: a classic old-new divide

Research is an essential part of the European Union’s pursuit in becoming the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world. It is an important component of the Lisbon agenda’s triangle alongside with education and innovation. The 7th Framework Programme is aimed to answer the European research policy needs by providing a better

regulatory framework as well as more financial resources. The Framework Programme is divided into four specific programmes, each one of which is aimed to improve a different aspect of research policy. It has a budget of 70 billion euros, which made the programme an important redistributive issue and was likely to create diverging opinions among Member States regarding the allocation of funds. (European Commission SCADPlus 2007a)

The 7th Framework Programme presented a complex set of issues to negotiate, with different sub-programmes and sub-questions to be forged out in the Council and in the European Parliament. It is no surprise that the procedure for adopting the programme lasted more than one and a half years, from April 2005 till December 2006 (European Commission PreLex 2007), stretching over the Council Presidencies of Luxemburg, United Kingdom, Austria, and Finland.

With regard to the cooperation patterns around the negotiations of the 7th Framework Programme the following aspects could be found (see Table 1). Firstly, the old Member States from both the north and the south tended to cooperate more with each other than with the new Member States, Sweden being the only country in the northern group that mentioned frequent contacts with the new Member States. Within the southern group, the two countries with the least partners among the new Member States were Spain and Greece. Interestingly, no new Member States were included in the core networks of the largest Member States – Germany, France or the UK's.

Secondly, the new Member States tended to cooperate more with each other than with the old Member States. The old Member States from the north with whom they had close connections were, with a few exceptions, either neighbouring states (also including the “overseas” neighbours, such as Finland and Sweden for Estonia) or countries holding the Presidency. For example, during their respective presidencies, Austria and Finland were among the countries most often contacted by the new Member States.

At first glance no north-south pattern becomes evident. Rather, there seems to be an old vs. new member state divide wherein both the old and the new Member States cooperate more within their own group respectively, and the old ones have only scarce contacts, if any, with

the newcomers Member States. Nevertheless, the cooperation patterns of the four new Member States show more cooperation with the northern group than with the southern countries.

Table 1. Member States' cooperation partners in the 7th Framework Programme negotiations

	New Member States				North			South		
	CZ	EE	HU	PL	DE	SE	UK	FR	EL	ES
New Member States	Cyprus								X	
	Czech Republic			x		x				x
	Estonia					x				
	Hungary					x				
	Latvia	x	X							
	Lithuania	x	X		X					
	Malta		X		X					
	Poland			X						x
	Slovakia	X		x	X					
	Slovenia	X			X					X
North	Austria*	x		x	X		X		X	
	Belgium						x			x
	Denmark						X			
	Finland*	x	X		x	x	X	X		x
	Germany			X	x		X	x	x	x
	Irish Republic	x					x	X		x
	Luxembourg*				x			X		
	Netherlands	x		x		x	x	X		x
	Sweden	X	X			x		X		X
	United Kingdom*	x		X		x	x		x	X
South	Greece									x
	France	X		X		X	x			X
	Italy				x		x	x	X	X
	Portugal					x			X	X
	Spain			X		x		x	X	

Notes: * marks countries who held the Council Presidency during the negotiations; X – countries contacted “very often”; x – countries contacted “often”.

The Services Directive – a classic north-south divide

The Services Directive marks an important milestone in completing the internal market by providing an improved environment for the free movement of services. The main objectives of the Services Directive were to “ease freedom of establishment for providers and the freedom of provision of services in the EU”, to strengthen “the rights of recipients of

services”, “to promote the quality of services”, and “to establish effective administrative cooperation among the Member States” (European Commission SCADPlus 2007b). As a politically sensitive and controversial issue, it took almost two years to forge it out in the different institutions.

Due to the high level of politicisation of the directive, not much leeway was left for the representatives in defining their positions and the margins for negotiating. This is also apparent in their cooperation patterns as the rationale behind forming the cooperation networks – as mentioned by all representatives interviewed – was the commonality of positions, while personal relations and cultural factors allegedly played a less significant role.

Three groups of states clearly emerge from the selection, their differences being mainly ideological. The groups are as follows: the liberals, the less-liberals and the “ones in between” (i.e. countries with mixed positions, combining elements from both of the major camps; for the full picture, see Table 2). To the first group belong the majority of the new Member States – the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia – and some of the old Member States: Finland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the UK.

The less-liberal group was mainly composed of old Member States – Austria, Belgium, Germany, Greece, France and Portugal – but also two new Member States Cyprus and Malta. The “in-between” group included Denmark, Sweden, Italy and Spain. The first two groups were quite clearly distinguishable from each other with no frequent contact apart from occasional cooperation, such as between the UK and France, Greece and Ireland. Meanwhile, both of the abovementioned groups cooperated with the “in-between” countries and *vice versa*.

The data suggests that the political cleavage runs to a great extent along a north-south divide. According to the northern group’s and the new Member States’ responses, the southern states hardly ever cooperated with countries outside their own group, France being the only exception. Nevertheless, the southern Member States’ patterns include some countries from the other groups, somewhat tempering the argument for a sharp north-south

division. Also, it is important to point out that some of the geographically northern states like Sweden, Denmark and Belgium did not belong to the liberal camp.

Table 2. Member States' cooperation partners in the Services Directive negotiations

	New Member States				North			South		
	CZ	EE	HU	PL	DE	SE	UK	FR	EL	ES
New Member States	Cyprus									
	Czech Republic		x	x	X			X		x
	Estonia				X		x	x		x
	Hungary		x		X					x
	Latvia	x	x		x		x			x
	Lithuania	x	x		X		x			x
	Malta								X	
	Poland		x	X				x		X
	Slovakia	x	x		X			x		x
	Slovenia	x	x		x			x		x
North	Austria*	x		x		x	x	X		
	Belgium								X	x
	Denmark						x			x
	Finland*	x	x				x	X		x
	Germany			X	x				X	
	Irish Republic	X	x	X	x			X	X	x
	Luxembourg*	X	x				x	X		X
	Netherlands	X	x	X	x			X		X
	Sweden	X							X	x
	United Kingdom*	X	x	X	X	X	x		x	X
South	Greece									
	France	x		X		X		x	X	
	Italy		x					X	x	x
	Portugal							x	X	
	Spain			x				x		

Notes: * marks countries who held the Council Presidency during the negotiations; X – countries contacted “very often”; x – countries contacted “often”.

Regarding the plausibility of old vs. new member state divide it is apparent that both the liberal and the less-liberal groups included both old and new Member States. Interestingly, however, the only new Member States in the less-liberal camp were Malta and Cyprus. This leads to suggest that in the area of the free movement of services, there is a strong distinction between the southern new members and the northern new members, reinforcing the overall

north-south argument. All-in-all, the Services Directive reveals a clear-cut ideological divide between the northern and the southern Member States.

Driving Licence Directive revisited – centre-periphery divide

The Driving Licence Directive recasts the existing 2003 legislation, harmonising the conditions for issuing national driving licences. The Directive's aim is to enable reciprocal recognition of licences and thus make it easier for people to travel within the Union or to settle in a Member State other than the one in which they have obtained their driving licence. (European Commission SCADPlus 2007c)

In particular, the Directive introduced substantive changes, in order to achieve the following aims. Firstly, to reduce the possibilities for fraud by replacing the paper driving licence with a plastic card. Secondly, to ensure the free movement of people by stipulating that all licences will have the same period of validity and will be valid in all Member States, unconditionally, for the same administrative period. Thirdly, in order to improve road safety, the Directive introduces a new category of licence for mopeds and harmonises the frequency of medical checks for professional drivers. (European Commission SCADPlus 2007c)

Table 3. Member States' cooperation partners in the Driving Licence Directive negotiations

	New Member States				North			South			
	CZ	EE	HU	PL	DE	SE	UK	FR	EL	ES	
New Member States	Cyprus								X		
	Czech Republic			x	x	x		x			
	Estonia										
	Hungary	X			X	x	x	x			
	Latvia		X								
	Lithuania		X								
	Malta						x	x	x		
	Poland	X		X		x	x			x	
	Slovakia				x	x	x				
	Slovenia					x					
North	Austria*	x		X	X	x	X	x		x	
	Belgium			x	x			X			
	Denmark					x	X	x			
	Finland*	x				x	X	X			
	Germany	x	X	X	x		X	X	X	x	
	Irish Republic*	x	x	x	x	X	x	X			x
	Luxembourg*				x	X			X	x	x
	Netherlands*	x	x	x	x	X	x		x		x
	Sweden					x					
	United Kingdom*	x	x	x		X	x			x	x
South	Greece				x			x			
	France	x			X				x	X	
	Italy*	x			x			X	x	x	
	Portugal									X	
	Spain					x		X	x		

Notes: * marks countries who held the Council Presidency during the negotiations; X – countries contacted “very often”; x – countries contacted “often”.

With regard to the cooperation patterns, it is apparent that the new Member States cooperated most with the countries belonging to the northern group. The number of countries within their own group whom they contacted “very often” or “often” was almost two times smaller and only two countries from the southern group were contacted often.

The northern group's cooperation pattern is surprisingly similar to that of the new Member States': most of their partners belonged to the same, northern group, followed by the new Member States. No significant north-south cooperation could be observed for all of the northern countries. Neither the Swedish nor the UK representative mentioned the southern countries as important partners, only Germany considered the majority of the southern countries important actors in its cooperation network.

The southern countries' pattern mirrors that of the new Member States. They cooperated intensely with other southern countries and the northern Member States, whereas contacts with the new Member States were scarce.

Hence, in the case of the Driving License Directive we can clearly see the emergence of the centre-periphery pattern. Both the new Member States and the southern countries cooperated with states within their own group and with the northern group, but there was no significant connection between the new Member States and the south. Meanwhile, the northern group found its main cooperation partners among other northern states while not cooperating significantly with neither the southern group or with the new Member States.

Working Time Directive – “too early to call”

The Directive lays down minimum general safety and health requirements for the organisation of working time. It regulates the periods of daily rest, breaks, weekly rest, annual leave and aspects of night work and shift work. Sectoral provisions have been developed for road transport, work at sea and civil aviation. (European Commission SCADPlus 2007d)

The directive defines working time as “the period during which the worker is working, at the employer's disposal and carrying out his activity or duties, in accordance with national laws and/or practice”. Member States adopt the necessary measures to ensure every worker a minimum daily rest period of 11 consecutive hours per 24-hour period, a rest break, where the working day is longer than six hours and a minimum uninterrupted rest period of 24 hours for each seven-day period, which is added to the 11 hours' daily rest. Also, the directive limits

the maximum weekly working time, including overtime, to 48 hours and grants employees the right for a paid annual leave of at least four weeks. (European Commission SCADPlus 2007d)

In the case of the Working Time Directive¹, the new Member States cooperated most intensely with the other new Member States, followed by countries from the northern group. Cooperation with the southern countries was not as active as only France stood out as an important partner for all the four representatives of the new Member States interviewed. Also, it was apparent that countries holding the Presidency (e.g. the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Austria, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, France) were indicated more often as important partners than the rest of the countries.

Countries belonging to the northern group had as many contacts with the representatives of countries from their own group as from the southern group and the new Member States. Curiously, Cyprus, Malta, Italy and Greece were left out from the northern group's pattern, suggesting a bias towards a north-south divide. The southern group, however, cooperated equally often with countries from their own group as with the northern group and the new Member States. The importance of the new Member States in the southern countries' pattern was roughly equal to the other southern countries.

The overall image suggests a centre-periphery pattern. The new Member States and the southern group cooperated the most with countries belonging to their own group and with the northern countries. Meanwhile, the northern countries themselves cooperated first and foremost with other countries in their own group, followed by the new Member States. The southern countries, however, cooperated slightly more with the northern group than with the new Member States or the other southern countries.

Table 4. Member States' cooperation partners in the Working Time Directive negotiations

	New Member States				North			South		
	CZ	EE	HU	PL	DE	SE	UK	FR	EL	ES
New Member States	Cyprus							x		
	Czech Republic*		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Estonia	x		x	x	x	x			
	Hungary	X	x		x	x	X	X		x
	Latvia		X		x	x	x			
	Lithuania	x	X		x	x	x			
	Malta						x			
	Poland	x	X	X		x	x	X	x	x
	Slovakia	X	x	x	x	x		x		
	Slovenia*	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x
North	Austria*	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Belgium			X		x	x	x		
	Denmark					x	x	x	x	
	Finland*	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
	Germany*	x	x	x	X		x	X	X	x
	Irish Republic*						x	x		
	Luxembourg*			x	x	X	x	x	x	
	Netherlands*	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Sweden					x		x		
	United Kingdom*	x		x		X	x		X	x
South	Greece									
	France*	x	x	X	X	X	x	X		X
	Italy							x	x	x
	Portugal*	x			x	x	x		x	x
	Spain			X		x		x	x	

Notes: * marks countries who held the Council Presidency during the negotiations; X – countries contacted “very often”; x – countries contacted “often”.

Discussion

In this chapter we look at all the four cases together, firstly to check if we can find regularities across the cases. Secondly to see, how our data compares with the existing body of literature on cooperation patterns. Thirdly we discuss if there is evidence for a “Franco-German engine”.²

Comparing countries' patterns across the four cases

In order to see the overall image we placed all of the data from the four cases into one table in hope that this would help us overcome the issue/policy specific patterns to some extent and arrive at conclusions of a more general level. Firstly, we looked at the overall spread of the data points (i.e. countries contacted “often” or “very often”) and secondly, we checked for matches in the countries’ data points across the cases.

Looking at all of the Member States that were pointed out by the representatives as having been contacted “often” or “very often” in the four cases, we find evidence for a centre-periphery pattern. Out of the total number of 420 data points, countries belonging to the northern group were mentioned 209 times (see Table 5), the new Member States 141 times and the southern states 70 times. Each of the three groups had the most contacts with the northern group. Curiously, regarding the southern group, there was only a small difference between the number of times the southern countries had mentioned the new Member States and the other countries. However, to a certain extent this can be explained by the fact that in our dataset Cyprus and Malta are placed among the new Member States. Treating them as southern states would give the southern group more weight. Admittedly, we also have to take into account that the new Member States were slightly overrepresented in our data-set – they were represented by four countries, while there were only three countries from both the north and the south.

Table 5. Count of Member States contacted “often” or “very often”

	New Member States (CZ, EE, HU, PL)	North (DE, SE, UK)	South (EL, ES, FR)	Total
New Member States	68	43	30	141
North	80	75	54	209
South	17	19	34	70

Notes: The table shows the number of times the interviewees mentioned having cooperated with the other Member States. The horizontal row indicates the countries interviewed, while the vertical row shows all Member States. For example, the representatives of the four new Member States mentioned the other new Member States as important partners 68 times, countries from the northern group 80 and the southern group 17 times.

To compare the individual countries' cooperation patterns we placed the data of the four cases of one country next to each other and assessed to what extent they match. Highlighting the cases where at least three representatives of one member state had mentioned the same Member States as their important partner, the same centre-periphery pattern appears as in the overall picture - the North is in the centre and not many linkages emerge between the peripheral groups. Interestingly, the main part of the southern states' "core network" lies within their own group. We can also see that, with a few exceptions, the main partners of a member state tend to be either countries from the same geographical area or influential Member States, such as large Member States or the Presidencies.

The main observation that can be made looking at the individual pattern of countries is that the countries in the northern group tend to focus mostly on their own group whereas both the new Member States and the southern countries are looking for cooperation both within their own group as well as with the northern group. The contacts between the new Member States and the southern countries are scarce. Not surprisingly, France proves an exception to the described pattern as a country with which both groups often seek contact. All in all, this provides evidence for a core-periphery pattern.

Comparison with earlier research

As indicated above, previous research has demonstrated the existence of a north-south cooperation pattern in EU decision-making. Taking into account the countries' individual cooperation patterns and especially the matches between the four cases we only find weak evidence to support the north-south pattern in the cases of the 7th Framework Programme, the Driving Licence Directive and the Working Time Directive, but some confirming evidence in the case of the Services Directive.

It is evident that both the southern countries and the new Member States communicate often with countries from the northern group. The northern group countries themselves focus on cooperation within their group and a relatively small number of contacts occur with the countries outside the northern group. Their most important partner in the southern group is France, which accounts for the bulk of the contacts. The northern groups' contacts with the new Member States are more diverse and the relative frequency of contact is also slightly higher than with the south.

Concerning the core partners, a north-south divide can be reconfirmed to a certain extent but a core-periphery pattern is more evident. The new Member States have even more cooperation partners in the northern group than within their own group. The same applies to the southern Member States (mainly because of the extended cooperation pattern of Spain) while the northern states cooperate first and foremost with other countries in their group. We can therefore suggest that there is more evidence for a centre-periphery pattern (Beyers and Dierickx, 1998) than for alternative patterns.

The "Franco-German engine"

The continuing existence of the Franco-German partnership (Wood, 1995; Pedersen, 1998; Selck and Kaeding, 2004) can only be proven halfway. We could see the two countries cooperating systematically with each other but we did not find evidence for them being central for other Member States' cooperation networks.

France and Germany stood out in our data-set as the only pair of states which had frequent mutual contacts with each other in all of the four cases. Remarkably, in all cases but one they stated that contacts took place “very often”. This indicates that the Franco-German tandem works – both states see each other as essential partners across different issues.

Placing this partnership in the overall pattern we can see that both France and Germany were mentioned as important partners by all the representatives only in the case of the Working Time Directive. Germany was also mentioned as an important partner by almost all of the representatives interviewed in the case of the Driving Licence Directive but neither of the two countries played an outstanding role in the 7th Framework Programme or the Services Directive. It is nevertheless important to note that usually the countries mentioned most often were the ones holding the Presidency, which was not the case for either Germany or France.

Not surprisingly, Germany carries more weight in the perception of the new Member States and France is regarded as an important partner by the southern countries. In the eyes of the northern group their position is roughly equal.

Our findings suggest that while neither Germany nor France appears to be the sole leader within the union, they both exercise significant influence in their respective geographical areas. Working together in a tandem they can form a formidable team as long as they pursue the same interests.

Conclusion

Seven years after the 2004 round of enlargement of the European Union, this contribution revisits the cooperation patterns in the Council to see how the accession of ten new Member States has changed the situation. Data on the Services Directive, the Working Time Directive, the Driving Licence Directive and the 7th Framework Programme for Research show that cooperation patterns have changed over the last years from a predominantly north-south divide towards a stronger centre-periphery pattern.

Each of the abovementioned four cases demonstrated a different pattern. In the case of the 7th Framework Programme, we could see an old-new divide as the northern states themselves were more inclined towards the south, whereas both the new Member States and the south sought cooperation with the northern group. In the case of the Services Directive the divide is clearly of ideological nature, following to a certain extent the north-south line. The cases of the Working Time Directive and Driving Licence Directive demonstrate a centre-periphery pattern where both the new Member States and the southern group seek to cooperate with the north, while the countries of the northern group focus primarily on cooperation within their own group.

Hence the continued existence of the north-south divide after the 2004 enlargement can only be confirmed half-way. The countries in the northern group tend to cooperate mainly with other northern countries and slightly more with new Member States than with the southern countries. The new Member States cooperate as much with the northern group than with their own group (and less so with the southern countries) whereas the southern group is inclined to collaborate the most with the northern group. This suggests a centre-periphery pattern with the northern group as the central actor.

With regard to our second research question, whether the “Franco-German engine” still plays a role after the 2004 enlargement, our data show strong cooperation between the two countries. However, they both tend to have more influence in their respective regions – France in the south and Germany in the north and among the new Member States.

It can also be concluded that the main cooperation partners in the four cases were likely to be either neighbours or key actors such as the largest Member States or the countries holding the Presidency. This characteristic should deserve further scholarly attention in the future (Tallberg 2004; Thomson 2008; Warntjen 2008). Considering the clear “Northern” bias in EU presidencies over the last years³ we are in need of longitudinal research designs to check whether we witness different “waves of cooperation patterns” in the Council.

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Notes

1. Please note that the Directive was eventually not adopted by the co-legislators. The Conciliation Committee was unable to find a compromise text, which was to be put forward to the Strasbourg plenary 4-7 May 2009 (the last plenary before the EP elections). Basically three issues were on the table: the opt-out clause, the definition of on-call time, and the issue of multiple contracts. The opt-out clause remained the main stumbling block, with the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament unable to reconcile their positions
2. It is relevant to point out the limitations of the analysis. Firstly, regarding the individual patterns of each country and particularly the anomalies in the southern group, a selection of ten Member States and four cases is clearly not enough to make valid generalisations and rule out case-specific tendencies. Secondly, one of the reasons for why the northern group ranked as an important partner among all the three groups could be found in the fact that all the four Presidencies leading the discussions in the four cases happened to be among the northern group. Evidently, the patterns of the three groups mirrored too much country- and case-specific tendencies to be taken as valid proof. Therefore, in future research more countries and possibly also more cases should be included in the data-set in order to make plausible claims about the overall coalition pattern. This research has nevertheless managed to demonstrate the patterns of four distinct cases, shedding some light on the cooperation patterns in the field of research, social, transport policy and internal market issues.
3. In the period of 2002-2009, the following countries have held the presidency (in chronological order): Spain, Denmark, Greece, Italy, Irish Republic, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, United Kingdom, Austria, Finland, Germany, Portugal, Slovenia, France, Czech Republic, Sweden.

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