Why Does the EU Keep Integrating?
The Presidency Effect

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Abstract

The process of European integration – the progressive allocation of responsibility, authority and resources for policy decisions to the European Union (EU) – has no discernible teleology at its heart, and no agreed-upon finality determines its direction. It is not “natural”, automatic, or inevitable, but consists of a string of political and policy choices made in the face of real alternatives, notable opposition and numerous obstacles. Why, then, does integration proceed?

The major schools of European integration theory have established core causal variables to explain key integration choices – interests, ideas and institutions; but the process by which these factors combine to produce the remarkable outcome that is European integration is both crucial and under-explored. In a first step to disentangle the mechanisms of what can be perceived as an underlying integration momentum that cannot be reduced to bargaining outcomes, functional spill-over or substantive ideological visions of the future EU, and which makes more integration the default outcome, this paper examines the workings of the Council Presidency as a central player in EU politics: to what extent does the role of the Council Presidency bias the member state holding it towards furthering integration, irrespective of prior preferences?
Introduction

*The simple truth is that Europe has always progressed* – Javier Solana

Since the early 1950s, European leaders have made a series of decisions amounting to the progressive institutionalization of cooperation and joint policy making among a growing number of European countries. Collectively, these decisions and the deliberations preceding them have come to be known as “the process of European integration”. More specifically, “integration”, in this context, has meant the allocation of authority, resources and responsibility for policy decisions to the European level, that is, to existing or newly created EC/EU institutions.¹

No discernible teleology is at the heart of this process; no agreed-upon finality determines its direction. Indeed, each occasion for decision has presented decision makers with a range of options, including alternatives to integration; and vocal skeptics and opponents of integration have made themselves heard throughout. Their objections and disagreements underline the fact that integration is not “natural”, automatic, or inevitable, but consists of a string of political and policy choices made in the face of real alternatives and numerous obstacles. They also raise the question why integration continues to proceed, why it is even perceived as a big, connected (if not coherent or straightforward) whole from the post-WWII period until today. For the notion of a *process* of “European

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¹ The notion of “European level” institutions does not necessarily refer to “supranational” institutions. Not all EC/EU institutions are supranational in character, even though that was the distinctive trait of the core Community institutions established by the Treaty of Rome (the Commission and the European Parliament (EP)). Other Community institutions, such as the Council of Ministers, and important later additions, notably the European Council, have generally been considered to be of an intergovernmental nature, although this characterization has more recently been qualified. Cf. Westlake/Galloway 2004, 7 – 9; Wallace, Wallace and Pollack 2005, 56 – 65.
integration” is widely shared; this process is generally seen as ongoing and open-ended, some even see it as inevitable and others as an end in itself.

This is curious, because the process of European integration is not only not automatic but also unpredictable. Key integration choices cannot be fully accounted for by constellations of member state interests and distributions of bargaining power, nor by the addition of institutional agency and substantive spill-over phenomena – and hence are only unsatisfactorily explained by the major theoretical schools of European integration: structuralist approaches (most prominently neoliberal intergovernmentalism) and institutionalism. The three core causal variables – interests, ideas and institutions – established by intergovernmental, institutionalist and, more recently, ideational accounts represent necessary but not sufficient factors in the remarkable outcome that is European integration. The focus on its substantive elements does not attend to the causal impact of the process itself – the politics of European integration. Process deserves attention because it entails – and can be shown to entail – a neglected set of mechanisms that, under certain conditions, create a momentum which propels European integration forward and which cannot be reduced to bargaining outcomes, functional spill-over from existing cooperation or substantive ideological visions of where the EU is headed per se. These mechanisms have evolved with the EC/EU over time: some beginning to emerge with the earliest European institutions; all changing; some having declined with others taking their place or not; and some are threatened with abolition even today. These mechanisms are much more solid and less fragile than the integration momentum they can create: their effects are neither evident nor decisive at all times, the momentum of European integration is part of the EU.

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3 Cf. Parsons 2003, particularly 5 – 7, on the “ideational approach” to the EU.
story, not the *whole* story – if it was, we wouldn’t see any cooperation/integration fail-
ures, and no periods of stagnation. Moreover, if it were governing the process unchanged
and unabated, we might expect much more integration than we see today.

The study for which this paper outlines the theoretical and empirical foundations
shows the existence of these mechanisms and the way they can create an integration mo-
mentum – not that it is the main explanation for the whole process, nor that it cannot be
trumped by other factors, notably the occasional dominance of national interests – but
that it matters for key integration steps and needs to be taken into account in order to
understand the development of European integration over time. To do this, the focus here
is on one – and perhaps the strongest – hypothesized mechanism responsible for creating
integration momentum – the Presidency effect. Future questions to be answered include
why and by what they are sometimes hampered or their effects limited, or why they have
been stronger in some policy areas than in others.
II. Foundations of a New Approach

The core argument of this project is that underlying the European integration process, deeply embedded in the “rules of the game” – in fact, hidden in plain sight – is a set of mechanisms which can produce an integration *momentum*, making more integration the default outcome and pushing the emerging “actorness” of the EU. These mechanisms have ideational and institutional parts, manifest in key elements of what can be conceptualized as the process of (collective) EC/EU public policy making: any instance of the integration momentum is the combined effect of the particular institutional set-up, prevailing elite ideas and popular attitudes toward European integration at a given occasion for decision.

While this argument thus includes institutionalist reasoning, it is not simply another variant of institutionalism: man-made organizations, procedures and rules – “institutions” which may or may not have reflected actors’ “interests” at their origin, but may change irrespective of structural conditions – impacting upon actors’ choices independently of structural constraints. The progress of European integration, however, is not primarily due to the activism of European agents which, in light of their interests in self-maintenance and influence-maximization, seek to form alliances with domestic groups in order to further “Europeanize” policy-making across issue-areas. While this is certainly also happening, it does not explain the continuation of integration in the face of even more strongly (nationally) institutionalized resistance. In other words, the EU’s supranational institutions, with the partial exception of the ECJ, “prevent backward movement from the status quo more than they compel specific steps forward” (Parsons 2003, 18). Moreover,

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not least in light of the low turn-out and euroskeptic results of successive elections to the European Parliament\(^5\), on the one hand, and a decrease in the Commission’s influence\(^6\), on the other, it is doubtful that national or sub-national loyalties have shifted to the European level, or that EU Commission or EP have successfully built transnational coalitions and thus triggered the deepening of integration or its spill-over to ever more policy areas.\(^7\)

Instead, I argue, the liberal intergovernmentalists are (mostly) right: European integration stands and falls with the member states. The integration process, however, is not simply the result of their preference orders and inter-governmental bargaining outcomes determined by the participants’ relative power.\(^8\) Rather, it is the product of a particular combination of national preferences with institutional and ideational factors, in the form of prevailing elite ideas and broad public opinion, in the very institutions and processes through which the member states partake in (and yes, dominate) EU decision-making. This means that institutionalists are also right: “[i]nstitutions affect outcomes” (Aspinalwall/Schneider 2000, 4), \textit{including the intergovernmentalist ones}, the Council of Ministers and the European Council.

\(^{5}\) According to the Commission, the average EU turnout has gradually declined over time from 63% in 1979 to just 45.6% in 2004 (albeit with a background of a rising number of member states and changing electoral procedures). Cf. \url{http://www.elections2004.eu.int/ep-election/sites/en/results1306/turnout_ep/turnout_table.html} [1/10/06]. Further, the euroskeptic Europe of Democracies and Diversities (EDD) group, comprising, inter alia, the Danish June Movement and the UK Independence Party (UKIP), gained 15 seats in the June 2004 EP elections (cf. \url{http://www.elections2004.eu.int/ep-election/sites/en/results1306/global.html} [1/10/06], but following the elections in 2004, the EDD group was extended to include, inter alia, MEPs from the new member states and registered as the new Independence and Democracy (IND/DEM) group – now comprising 36 members. Among the main goals of this group are the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty and opposition to further European integration (cf. \url{http://www.europarl.eu.int/inddem/political%20program.htm} [2/5/06]). Some of its delegations, notably the UKIP, advocate the complete withdrawal of their country from the EU. Cf also ‘Eurosceptics Storm the Citadel’, BBC News at \url{http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3806503.stm} [1/10/06].


\(^{8}\) Cf. Moravcsik 1998.
EU member states do not interact in a vacuum, beginning each new set of negotiations with a *tabula rasa*. Rather, they act as members of the EU’s ‘executive’ in charge of long-term governance: “[g]overnments in the Council are like legislators in any parliament: where potential benefits to the whole society (the EU) are weighed against potential losses to their individual constituents”.

As a governing institution, the Council has developed various instruments and procedures to facilitate decision-making, which in turn is governed by particular rules—these are not ad-hoc, one-off negotiations over the distribution of substantive gains, the results of which are predictable on the basis of participants’ asymmetrical interdependence. They are much more than just another instance of “general tendencies among democratic states in modern world politics”, specifically, “a distinctly modern form of power politics, peacefully pursued by democratic states for largely economic reasons through the exploitation of asymmetrical interdependence and the manipulation of institutional commitments” (Moravcsik 1998, 5).

In other words, in the context of EU and particularly European Council negotiations, the liberal intergovernmentalist view that the relative value of agreement for member states is “dictated” by asymmetrical interdependence which “above all” determines their relative power, which in turn “decisively shapes” interstate bargaining outcomes (ibid., 7), needs to be amended. Council negotiations defy Nash bargaining theory on a range of dimensions.

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9 Cf. Hix 2005 (chapters 2-2 & 3-8), who describes Commission and Council as the two parts of the ‘dual executive’ of the EU, the former in charge of short-term and the latter of long-term ‘government’.
10 Ibid., in particular chapter 3.
11 The claim that “the behavior of EC member governments is normal” (Moravcsik 1998, 4/5, emphasis in the original) in this sense begs the question of why there are no other EU-shaped creations out there, why the EU is indeed “a unique, multileveled, transnational political system” (ibid., 1) which “ranks among the most extraordinary achievements in modern world politics” (ibid., emphasis added)? The explanation that “[i]f the motivations of postwar European leaders were distinctive, it was because their countries were touched more intensely by economic trends common to all advanced industrialized democracies” (ibid., 5) seems a bit unsatisfactory in light of this feat.
First, they are not ‘classic’ intergovernmental negotiations: member states do not negotiate as representatives of nothing but their own national interests, but as members of a bigger whole based on an extensive *acquis communautaire*, representing at the very least considerable sunk costs, and arguably part of their identity. This is reinforced by the representation of the whole, the EU/EC, in the negotiations through a Commission representative. Most importantly, however, this is due to the fact that these negotiations, especially at the level of the European Council, are meticulously planned, prepared, shaped and steered by the Council Presidency, whose central role all member states take on in turns.

Second, Council negotiations are institutionalized, even routinized to an extent that increasingly undermines any clear-cut distinction of national vs. common/EC/EU interests. Nowhere is this more evident than in budget negotiations. The mere fact that member states *are* members and do participate in a never-ending string of negotiations means their interests are more than national, as they agree to pay the maintenance price for their ‘negotiation forum’. In the extreme, as the EU becomes ‘the way things are done’, any deal is better than no deal, because only a deal secures the ability to act. Consequently, member states’ respective BATNAs (best alternatives to a negotiated agreement)\(^{12}\) become increasingly irrelevant/less attractive and their win-sets stretch\(^{13}\), because issues are not just linked but also dealt with recurrently until ‘settled’, and the next negotiation always looms.

Further, the EU reality of quasi-continuous bargaining on multiple levels and in several specialized yet partially overlapping fora not only underpins the notion that European

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\(^{13}\) Cf. Putnam 1988.
integration, far from being merely the cumulative result of consecutive ‘completed’ bargains, is an ongoing process, but has very tangible effects on policy making: even more than COREPER influences Council meetings, the Council of Ministers can become a player in its own right in influencing the outcome of European Council negotiations alongside the Commission, the Presidency, and the other member governments. Ministerial Councils – especially ECOFIN and the Agricultural Council – have been known to consider their deliberations and decisions to be beyond outside scrutiny (including that of their governments)\(^{14}\); in other cases, members of the European Council have found it necessary to ignore or contradict Council decisions, or ministers have collaborated in Council decisions that were against their principals’ preferences.\(^{15}\) The EU’s decision making machine, in other words, by broadening and deepening access to decisions beyond the very top of national political hierarchies not only complicates the process of ascertaining ‘the national interest’, but also strains the fault lines within the less-than-unitary member governments, especially those based on coalitions.

Third, ideational factors compound institutional factors, in particular the role assigned to the rotating Council Presidency, in affecting the relative value of agreement for member states to an extent that leaves little room for the assertion that it is being “dictated” by asymmetrical interdependence. These ideational factors are based in the historical phenomenon of a general post-World War II consensus in Europe that integration is ‘a good thing’ and in the related widespread belief in the inevitability of progressive European

\(^{14}\) E.g. Ludlow 2002, esp. 22.
\(^{15}\) E.g. ibid., esp. 58.
integration.\footnote{The idea of a unified Europe is much older, of course, and has been assigned various purposes over time. Cf. “European Unity. The History of an Idea”, The Economist, 12/30/03; Bauerkämpfer 2004, 40; Rifkin 2004; as well as successive Eurobarometer Surveys.} Out of this general support for national participation in the European project have grown manifest if diffuse public expectations regarding the outcomes of the routinized Council meetings and the ‘success’ of Council Presidencies.\footnote{Reactions to Council meetings frequently include disappointment about the results, though not demands that they cease.}

Thus, member governments’ political commitment to the European Union is continuously renewed and deepened in a never-ending string of ritualized meetings on the multiple levels of governance in the European Union (COREPER\footnote{The acronym for the Committee of Permanent Representatives on the Ambassadors level stems from its French designation, le Comité des Représentants Permanents.} \footnote{See Part III.1 below.}, Ministerial Council meetings, European Council summits, IGCs), associated with varying degrees of public information, interest and expectations and mediatized pressures to produce some sort of result and thus maintain credibility. This responsibility has generated and is perpetuated in decision-making procedures geared to avoid open disagreement: constructive abstention, avoidance of voting in the Council, extensive pre-meeting, behind the scenes consensus/compromise-seeking, and the existence of COREPER itself – never, apart from the infrequent decisions based on mandatory national referenda, is there truly open-result EU decision-making. If integration were merely the cumulative result of a long series of unrelated decisions, one might expect much more confrontational, unbiased decision-making, even within the constraints of path-dependence.

Moreover, as the Council Presidency’s initially managerial role has evolved over time to include representative and leadership functions\footnote{See Part III.1 below.}, its added responsibilities have increased the pressure to deliver a ‘successful’ tenure beyond general expectations of tangible results from Council meetings. Hence, as consecutive incumbents have sought to
justify their efforts to domestic and broader European audiences, a ‘successful’ Presidency has come to be associated with progress in terms of European integration, or at least visible markers in that direction.\textsuperscript{20} The office forces and at the same time allows the incumbent member state to come up with an agenda for its Presidency, making further integration a priority (if temporarily) for that member, no matter what its original preferences.

The way in which this priority is translated into policy depends on the Council’s current agenda\textsuperscript{21}; but given that the incubation period for the vast majority of EU output is rather longer than the six-months tenure of an individual Presidency, the pressure to prioritize integration progress over idiosyncratic national demands is felt by more than just the incumbent, as member states begin to plan ‘their’ Presidencies years ahead of taking office. This introduces the element of competition into the integration momentum, as member states jealously vie and scheme for the biggest events (e.g., an enlargement, or an agreement on an important new policy) and the most important steps in European integration (i.e. the conclusion of an IGC and the signing of a new Treaty) to fall into their tenure. As many of these are subsequently known by their place of origin (e.g. the ‘Maastricht Treaty’, the ‘Copenhagen Criteria’, etc.), they can perpetually signal a Presidency’s and thus a member state’s imprint on the integration process and on the European project as a whole (this symbolism is being undermined, of course, by the decision to hold all future European Council meetings in Brussels).

As a result, rather than presenting an opportunity to pursue exclusively national interests, preparing and holding the Council Presidency makes pursuing integration the prio-

\textsuperscript{20} Presidencies seen as failures, on the other hand, can become a national shame throughout Europe.
\textsuperscript{21} See part III.1 below on the Presidency’s role in the setting of the Council’s agenda.
rity for a member state. More European integration becomes the national interest. This aspect of the integration momentum also means, however, that attempts to fortify the Union by strengthening the Council Presidency through the slowing or abolition of member state rotation and the establishment of a permanent office holder for the ministerial and European Councils, respectively (as provided in the draft Constitutional Treaty\textsuperscript{22}) may actually backfire, because this would eliminate not only the competition mechanism, but alleviate member states of a considerable portion of their individual responsibility for the project of European Union. The key argument here is that the continual forward movement of the integration process has been and is to a considerable extent due to the fact that the unique combination of institutional and ideational pressures adherent to EC/EU policy making has not diminished, but ingeniously harnessed the power of the member states. Tinkering with the set-up in this way is likely to loosen the harness and have them scatter in altogether different directions.

Overall, this argument implies that in the long run, the European Union’s (most) “intergovernmental” institutions, generally perceived as the safeguards of national member state interests and prerogatives and as such not as the drivers but rather the brakemen of the integration process, quite contrary to these expectations are biased in favor of furthering European integration. Given the dominant role of the European Council in EU decision making, its bias is decisive, especially when added to the more obvious if less crucial pro-integration motivation of its supranational agent (the Commission), the EP and arguably even the ECJ. The dynamic of European integration, then, is located primarily in the Council, not, as institutionalist reasoning would have it, in the Union’s supranational institutions. Further, the nature of the integration dynamic as hypothesized here

\textsuperscript{22} Cf. Draft Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, CONV 850/03, Articles 21, 23.4.
also means that while it is certainly possible to distinguish major constitutive decisions in the integration process (including the “five treaty-amending sets of agreements” identified by Moravcsik (1998), the Amsterdam and Nice Treaties as well as the European Constitution) from the many small choices made almost every day in the EU, whether by its supranational or ‘intergovernmental’ organs, the evolution of the European Union is as much if not more due to the small decisions, the nitty-gritty details of routinized cooperation as to a “sequence of irregular big bangs” (ibid., 2).

III. Showing the Integration Mechanisms at Work

The Council Presidency: a Supranational Egg in the Intergovernmental Basket?

III.1 The Role of the Presidency in EU Politics and Policy Making

For any member state, taking over the Presidency chair today means “assuming responsibility for the work of the EU Council of Ministers and the European Council” (Elgström 2003, 3), the “foremost site of intergovernmental activism in the EU” (ibid.), especially in the second and third pillars. This has not always been so: like the other elements of EC and subsequently EU policy making, the Presidency has changed considerably from its humble beginnings as the chairmanship of the Council, adding to its managerial duties representative and finally leadership roles. “Cumulatively, collectively, the Presidency has altered almost beyond recognition over the past five decades, not only in terms of competences and tasks but also in terms of demands on resources” (Westlake/Galloway 2004, 325). It has become an office “vital to the good working of the Council” (ibid., 326),
having developed from a purely administrative tool to a highly political player in EU politics, whose weight has been largely underestimated.

The first step in assessing the workings of the integration mechanisms through the Council Presidency is a determination of its nature and functions in the EU context, including the changes both have undergone over time. Table 1 provides an (albeit incomplete) overview of some of the key stages in the evolution of the Presidency.

Today, the EU’s decision-making process in general, and the co-decision procedure in particular, involve three main institutions: the European Parliament, which represents EU citizens and is directly elected by them; the Council of the European Union, which represents the individual member states; and the European Commission, which is tasked with upholding the interests of the Union as a whole. Jointly, these three institutions produce EU policies and laws (directives, regulations and decisions). In principle, the Commission proposes new laws, and Parliament and Council adopt them.

The Council is (still) the EU’s main decision-making body. It has six key responsibilities: the passage of European laws, in many fields jointly with the European Parliament; the coordination of member states’ broad economic policies; the conclusion of the EU’s international agreements; approval of the budget (jointly with the EP); development of the CFSP; and coordination of cooperation between the national courts and police forces in criminal matters. The Council’s work is based, on the one hand, on the member states’ permanent representations in Brussels, whose heads, the members’ permanent representatives or “ambassadors” to the EU, meet weekly in the COREPER to prepare the work of the Council with the assistance of a number of working groups made up of officials from the national administrations.
Table 1 – The Evolution of the Council Presidency over time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal Basis</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Role/Functions/Tasks</th>
<th>Rules/Norms</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treaty of Paris (ECSC), 1952, Article 27</td>
<td>Equal distribution of necessary management burden among members</td>
<td>Rotating chairmanship of ECSC Special Council; temporary primus inter pares; modest responsibilities for convening and chairing Council sessions; protocol duties</td>
<td>Equal rights for all members; 3 months tenure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EEC Treaty, 1957, Articles 146, 147, 203.2; EURATOM Treaty, Article 116</td>
<td>Encouragement of coherence in Council management; representation of the Council</td>
<td>Same as for ECSC</td>
<td>Representation of the Council by member states, not a common representative; Council holds key powers, as opposed to ECSC Special Council; extension of rotating tenure to 6 months</td>
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<tr>
<td>Luxembourg Report, 1970</td>
<td>Equal sharing of the new EPC burdens among the member states; improvement of inter-institutional information</td>
<td>Convening and hosting EPC meetings, providing Secretariat and material organization; yearly report to the EP</td>
<td>6 months rotating tenure for EPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copenhagen Report, 1973</td>
<td>Bridging the formal gap between EPC and EEC, partly through COREU</td>
<td>Coordination of COREU; providing a link between the EPC and the Community frameworks through Council and COREPER</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gymnich Meeting of Foreign Affairs, 1974</td>
<td>Improvement of coordination; unified external representation</td>
<td>Presidency to speak on behalf of the member states in EPC dialogue with friendly states</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Declaration, 1977</td>
<td>Strengthening the Council Presidency</td>
<td>Issuing public summary of European Council conclusions; enhanced responsibility for the advance preparation of the agenda</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>London Report, 1981</td>
<td>Improved discharge of the growing managerial, executive and representational EPC tasks; spreading of responsibility; broadening the EU’s external representation</td>
<td>Working with diplomatic ‘support teams’ drawn from preceding and succeeding Presidencies through new Troika system for EPC</td>
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</table>
Table 1 – The Evolution of the Council Presidency over time, ctd.

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stuttgart Solemn Declaration, 1983</td>
<td>Reinforcement of foreign policy; generation of accountability</td>
<td>Further managerial and representational tasks such as giving regular reports on European Council meetings to the EP, including by the President of the European Council; submitting on behalf of the European Council a written annual report on progress toward European Union to the EP; presenting to the EP a program at the beginning and a progress report at the end of tenure; keeping the EP regularly informed of the subjects handled in EPC through the political affairs committee; consult with EP on the appointment of the Commission President</td>
<td>Accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single European Act, 1986</td>
<td>More emphasis on the Presidency’s political and representational roles to manage QMV and internal market program with deadline</td>
<td>Call votes in the Council (exercising political judgment); substantive task: work towards achievement of internal market</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Maastricht Treaty, 1991</td>
<td>Strengthening the EP in the context of European Union through co-decision procedure</td>
<td>Represent Council to EP and Commission in the context of co-decision; identify potential points of disagreement and solutions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amsterdam Treaty, 1997</td>
<td>Refinement and extension of the co-decision procedure</td>
<td>Mediate between Council working party and EP rapporteur</td>
<td>Informal ‘honest broker’ role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helsinki European Council, 1999</td>
<td>Preparation for enlargement, enhancing cooperation between incumbent and incoming Presidencies, enhancing continuity in the Council</td>
<td>Incoming Presidency to support incumbent Presidency in managerial/administrative role; both to ensure a smooth transition</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Seville European Council, 2002; Council Rules of Procedure, currently as of 3-04</td>
<td>Alleviation of Presidency tasks; enhancement of coordination and continuity</td>
<td>Incoming Presidency to chair meetings during tenure of predecessor on next-term issues (e.g. budget); some working parties to be chaired by Council general secretariat; enhanced powers in the conduct of meetings</td>
<td>Referee role departing from the time-consuming democratic process</td>
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On the other hand, the work of the Council is increasingly steered by the Council Presidency, which still rotates every six months. Over time, it has become increasingly politicized, accumulating an ever-expanding plethora of tasks given to it by successive treaties, European Council conclusions, and revisions of the Council’s rules of procedure\(^\text{23}\), but also resulting from the practical requirements of everyday Council business.

In essence, the Presidency fulfills four kinds of tasks\(^\text{24}\), one more managerial, which it shares with the Council Secretariat – the traditional core function of the Presidency, the administration and coordination of the work of the Council and all its subsidiary bodies – and three more political: the shaping of the Council’s (and thereby also in part the Union’s) agenda\(^\text{25}\), the mediation of Council negotiations and deliberations, and the external (international) and internal (vis-à-vis other EU institutions) representation of the Council. In the discharge of these responsibilities, a Presidency may adopt very different strategies and set dissimilar priorities – but its choice in the matter is subject to a range of influences, including a combination of institutional and ideational factors which cumulatively may bias it in favor of further integration.

**III.2 Accessing the Integration Dynamic through the Presidency**

To show the existence and the workings of the hypothesized integration mechanisms, it makes sense to start with the institution where they are hypothesized to be the most strongly and obviously manifest – the Council Presidency.\(^\text{26}\) If they cannot be shown in

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\(^{25}\) Cf. Tallberg 2003.
\(^{26}\) The relative secrecy of especially European Council deliberations which makes it hard to directly observe the Presidency effect (and other manifestations of integration mechanisms) may facilitate member state governments’ deviation from a firm stance on their national interests adopted for the benefit of domestic constituencies, and hence might itself be considered an institutional part of what can amount to
operation there, they are even less likely to be demonstrable elsewhere: in the role of the Presidency, any member state experiences the combined effect of both mechanisms of the integration momentum – escalating commitment and competition – most immediately. Thus, while the ways in which member states approach and execute their Presidencies vary greatly\(^{27}\), their behavior in that role should exhibit certain key similarities that cumulatively reveal a pro-integration bias. In other words, more than just superficially playing the same institutionally-dictated part because they all operate within one and the same decision-making framework, they should direct substantial outcomes in the same, more-integration direction. Naturally, the behavior and choices of any EU member holding the Presidency are affected by numerous factors – the “functions, rules and norms associated with and surrounding the Presidency are … independent variables that may affect EU decision-making and Presidency role performance” (Elgström 2003, 3). The argument here is that among these factors are some that can combine to bias a Presidency in favor of further integration, pushing it towards more pro-integration stances or towards actions that amount to markers in that direction.

In accordance with both an explanatory logic of \textit{expected consequences} and an explanatory \textit{logic of appropriateness}\(^{28}\), the way in which such a pro-integration bias may play out concretely in each case, its actual manifestation in both substance and form of Presidency business, will depend on the exact nature of the role and functions of the Presidency at that point in time (the institutionalized, \textit{built-in} aspects of the integration mechanisms) and on the issues on the agenda, but will also show itself in the way in which a

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\footnotesize
mechanisms sustaining an integration momentum. For research purposes, the increasingly well-documented Council Presidency and the enhanced scrutiny it has begun to receive somewhat make up for the drawbacks of Council Secrecy. \\
\(^{27}\) Cf. Elgström 2003.\\
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given country interprets its mandate and the motivation it brings to it (the ideational aspects of the integration mechanisms).

The characteristics of the Council Presidency (the ‘unit of analysis’) of interest here (the independent variables) therefore include:

- The purpose and tasks prescribed for the office, and the room for interpretation left for the incumbent in this matter.
- The rules and norms governing the Presidency’s discharge of these tasks and the amount of leeway it has in this matter.
- The nature of the issues on the Council’s agenda during a Presidency’s tenure.
- The expectations the Presidency faces from its domestic audience and public opinion more broadly, its fellow Council members, the Council Secretariat, the other EC/EU institutions and possibly beyond.

These variables represent the institutional and ideational factors assumed to be influencing the independent variable of this project, the conduct and overall outcome of a Presidency, which can be observed in terms of the following indicators:

- The incumbent’s goals and priorities for its Presidency.
- The initiatives and proposals of a Presidency-in-office, the positions it takes and the compromises it seeks.
- Other activities undertaken by a Presidency, including but not limited to the scheduling of formal and informal meetings and negotiations on all levels, public and private statements, visits and other contacts within and beyond the Council.
- The ‘output’ of the Presidency: decisions and conclusions reached or avoided, projects initiated or continued, completed, postponed or abandoned.
The anticipated relationship between independent and dependent variables can be specified in an initial set of hypotheses, which will subsequently be tested empirically on the cases listed below:

1 – If and where the purpose and tasks prescribed for the office leave the incumbent room for interpretation, the Presidency will use it to further its goals and priorities.

2 – If and where the expectations the incumbent faces from its domestic audience on the one hand and public opinion more broadly, its fellow Council members, the Council Secretariat, and the other EC/EU institutions on the other hand are contradictory, the Presidency’s initiatives and proposals, the positions it takes and the compromises it seeks will reflect the expectations of the latter.

3 – If the issues on the Council’s agenda during a Presidency’s tenure are divisive, the activities undertaken by the incumbent, including but not limited to the scheduling of formal and informal meetings and negotiations on all levels, public and private statements, visits and other contacts within and beyond the Council will be geared to foster agreement or compromise.

4 – If and where the incumbent’s prior preferences do not align with what would otherwise be a basis for compromise or agreement in the Council, the Presidency is likely to drop or adjust its own position in order to reach a Council decision.

5 – If the issues on the Council’s agenda during a Presidency’s tenure are highly salient to its domestic audience, and if the expectations it faces on this issue from its peers in the Council (and other EU institutions) differ from those of its domestic audience, the Council Presidency is likely to seek to postpone a decision on this issue.
6 – When a country assumes the Presidency, the rules and norms governing its discharge of its tasks, as well as the expectations it faces from general public opinion, its fellow Council members, the Council Secretariat, and other EC/EU institutions will cause it to frame the ‘output’ of its Presidency, especially decisions and conclusions reached as well as projects initiated, continued or completed, as progress in terms of European integration.

III.4 Preparing to Test Hypotheses: on Case Selection

I will be testing my hypotheses on a sub-group of all possible cases – all Presidencies held by EU member states so far – in order to exclude insofar as possible the distorting effects of an antecedent extraneous variable: a country-level pro-EU bias or a pro-EU national government. More specifically, in selecting exclusively Presidencies held by euro-skeptic members as my cases, I not only control for the general national attitude of member states vis-à-vis the EU in order to focus on what might be termed the ‘Presidency effects’, but I stack the deck against my argument: the euroskeptic members are the least suspect of having an innate national pro-integration bias which may exaggerate (or play down) the Presidency effects.

Furthermore, with the UK and Denmark, I have selected two countries which share certain additional similarities, but differ in other distinct ways. Both have entered the EU in the same year – 1973 – at the same point of the Union’s development, and hence have the same length of experience inside the EU and completed the same number of Presidencies – six each. In this way, I am controlling for any new-vs.-old member-state effects that may alter the Presidency effect. The British and Danish Presidencies, moreover, are

interspersed across different stages of the integration process, which makes it possible to observe the Presidency effects – and their changes – across different time periods. What is more, their Presidencies follow very closely upon one another in four instances – the late 1970s, early 80s, late 80s and early 90s – allowing for paired comparisons, specifically with regard to continuity issues. Finally, both the UK and Denmark are ‘northern’ EU members, which helps minimize regional effects 30, although it will not be possible to exclude those completely, as this is where the differences between the UK and Denmark come to bear: not only does Denmark have closer ties to the Baltic region and thus an intrinsic interest in the EU’s eastern enlargement, but the UK is a large, powerful EU member with strategic interests in Gibraltar, the larger Mediterranean and beyond, while Denmark is smaller, with less international weight and more limited strategic concerns. This difference may allow me to glean some first indications of what, if any, impact the size of the occupant may have on the Presidency effect 31. Other obvious differences related to the nature of their domestic political systems, their governments’ receptiveness to public opinion, their demographic and economic weight will also be analyzed with respect to their influence on Presidency effect. Table 2 provides an overview of the 12 cases that will form the empirical foundation of this project.

30 Cf. ibid.
31 Cf. ibid.
Table 2 – Cases, Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Council President/Permanent Representative</th>
<th>Council Secretary General</th>
<th>Meetings</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>1. 1. – 30. 6. 1978</td>
<td>Anker Jorgensen/Gunnar Riberholdt</td>
<td>Nicolas Hommel (Lux)</td>
<td>European Council Meeting, <strong>Copenhagen</strong>, 7./8. 4. 1978</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>1. 1. – 30. 6. 1993</td>
<td>Poul Nyrup Rasmussen/Gunnar Riberholdt</td>
<td>Niels Ersbøll (Dk)</td>
<td>European Council Meeting, <strong>Copenhagen</strong>, 21./22. 6. 1993</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>1. 1. – 30. 6. 1998</td>
<td>Tony Blair/Sir Stephen Wall</td>
<td>Jürgen Trumpf (Ger)</td>
<td>European Council Meeting, <strong>Cardiff</strong>, 15./16. 6. 1998</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: none of the meetings listed were informal, without conclusions. Sources: Westlake/Galloway 2004; Edwards/Wallace 1977; Council*
IV. Literature


