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Built on quicksand? A decade of procedural spatial models on EU legislative decision-making

Björn Hörl, Andreas Warntjen and Arndt Wonka¹

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Abstract. This article reviews a central strand of the literature on legislative decision-making in the European Union (EU): procedural spatial models. These models have gained increasing prominence during the last decade of scholarship on the EU and have considerably enhanced our understanding of the EU legislative decision-making process. However, the literature has not been without criticism and has reached a stage of theoretical stagnation. The intention of this article is therefore twofold: First, it reviews the existing procedural spatial literature and critically discusses the lacking specification and justification of some of its assumptions. The manifold assumptions used in different models are based on actors' preferences and the characteristics of the decision-making process, which are often at odds if not diametrically opposed to each other. In a second step, it will therefore be argued that it is necessary to re-evaluate some of the central assumptions of procedural models. In particular, future research needs to study mechanisms of preference formation and decision-making, i.e. aggregation of preferences, within EU legislative bodies.

Keywords: EU legislative decision-making, procedural spatial models, policy preferences

1. Introduction

Throughout the history of European integration member states have introduced and reformed the decision-making procedures of the European Union (EU). Successive changes in the constituting treaties have led to a complex legislative system at the European level. During the last decade researchers have applied procedural spatial models to study the consequences of the changes in the legislative decision-making procedures. Scholars working in this tradition have analysed the relative impact of EU institutions and have made predictions about expected policy outcomes. Although researchers have (← p. 592) applied the same methodology, they have often made incompatible predictions about legislative outcomes. The ambiguity of these studies can be explained through inconsistent interpretations of the legislative decision-making procedures and through differing assumptions, in particular about the preference configurations of the legislative bodies (Dowding 2000: 132-3; König and Pöter 2001; Selck 2004a). The empirical literature evaluating the different predictions is still in its infancy (Steunenberg 2000), which is why it is hard to judge the explanatory power of the rival models. As a result of the diversity in assumptions applied and the difficulties in testing the procedural spatial models, the literature has reached a point of stagnation.

We argue that it is time to re-assess the appropriateness of procedural spatial models for analyzing EU legislative decision-making and critically review the lessons learned from this literature. Procedural spatial models are firmly rooted in the new institutionalist framework of rational choice theory. This framework identifies the interactions between institutions and preferences as the determinants of policy outcomes. So far research on the EU legislative process has focused primarily on institutions, i.e. the procedural power which these assign to the legislative bodies. We claim that we need to shift our attention to the preferences involved, i.e. their formation and aggregation. However, we do not intend to present a new model of the interaction of legislative bodies. Instead, our ambition is to summarize the

insights we have gained, point out ongoing discussions that are of general interest, and highlight features of EU decision-making which are promising topics for future research.

The article proceeds as follows: In the next section (2.) we discuss procedural spatial models of EU decision-making with a special emphasis on their assumptions. In the third section, we elaborate our argument about the need to investigate intra-institutional aspects of EU decision-making to advance our understanding of EU legislative procedures. In the fourth section, we discuss the existing literature on intra-institutional decision-making, highlighting features that are at odds with the simplified accounts of inter-institutional models. Finally, we conclude by suggesting some avenues for future research.

2. Procedural spatial models of inter-institutional decision-making in the EU²

To predict legislative outcomes, the procedural spatial literature relies on two central concepts: veto power and agenda-setting power. An actor who has veto power can block any decision and therefore her preference cannot be discarded. A rational actor will only refrain from using her veto power, if the proposed legislation is closer to her preferences than the policy that would prevail otherwise. Actors have agenda-setting power when it is ‘impossible, difficult, or costly’ for decision makers to modify their proposals (Tsebelis 1994: 131). The power of an agenda-setter therefore crucially depends on the (← p. 593) configuration of the actors’ preferences and particularly the location of the status quo (Romer and Rosenthal 1978).

A prominent assumption regarding the preferences of the legislative actors in EU legislative decision-making is the ‘supranational scenario’ in which political conflict over EU policies is conceptualized along a ‘degree of integration’ dimension. According to this scenario, the member states in the Council are assumed to be the least integrationist actors and the Commission as well as the EP hold strongly pro-integrationist positions. The status quo

reflects the policy position of the least integrationist member state (Garrett and Tsebelis 1996: 280; Tsebelis 2000; Tsebelis and Garrett 2001: 366).

The Treaty on the European Community defines three procedures which account for the vast majority of EC legislative decision-making: the consultation, the cooperation, and the codecision (I+II) procedure.³ The *consultation procedure* consists of one reading, in which the Commission makes a proposal to the Council. The EP is entitled to give its opinion on the Commission proposal, but the Council can disregard it. Thus, the Commission enjoys agenda-setting power and the Council veto power, while the European Parliament has ‘no substantial role’ (Crombez 1996: 205; Tsebelis and Garrett 2000: 13). The Commission can exercise its agenda-setting power by proposing a policy close to or identical with its own preference, if it can make a qualified majority in the Council better off than any policy that could be agreed upon by unanimity (Crombez 1996: 207-13).

The *co-operation procedure* extends the legislative decision-making process by a second reading. Tsebelis (1994) argues that the cooperation procedure gave the EP ‘conditional agenda-setting power’ as it is more difficult for the Council to unanimously reject an EP amendment which was accepted by the Commission than to accept it by qualified majority in the second reading. In order for the EP’s ‘conditional agenda-setting power’ systematically to become effective, a preference configuration must be assumed where the EP and the Commission have similar preferences. Tsebelis’ argument has been criticized on other grounds by Moser (1996; 1997). He notes that the Commission has the sole right of initiative and concludes that it is hence always the agenda-setter (1996: 836-7; Tsebelis 1996). Similarly, Steunenberg contends that ‘the European Parliament may only restrict the set of policies from which the Commission may make its choice’ (1994: 645), thus questioning Tsebelis’ claim of increased EP power.

The *codecision procedure* was introduced with the Maastricht treaty (*codecision I*). It differs from the co-operation procedure in so far as the Council and the EP are forced to convene a Conciliation Committee if the Council does not accept all parliamentary amendments in the second reading. If conciliation fails, the Council is able to reintroduce its common position, possibly with amendments, in a third reading. Tsebelis and Garrett (2000: 23) postulate that the possibility of the Council to reintroduce its common position gives it agenda-setting power. Compared to the co-operation (← p. 594) procedure the EP lost conditional agenda setting power but gained veto power. Assuming the supranational preference scenario, Tsebelis and Garrett argue that this was ‘a bad deal for the Parliament – and for the pro-integration agenda’ (2000: 15). Crombez (1997a; b; 2000b), on the other hand, argues that EU legislative politics takes place on an economic left-right dimension and assumes that the preferences of the Commission and the EP are located within the range of policy positions occupied by the member states (1997a: 101). Using this preference configuration, he concludes that ‘the Parliament has more power under the co-decision procedure than under the cooperation and consultation procedures’ (Crombez 1997a: 112).

The possibility for the Council to reintroduce its common position in a third reading under *codecision I* was abolished with the Amsterdam Treaty. Tsebelis and Garrett (2000: 15; 2001: 372) and Crombez (2000a: 365) agree that the Amsterdam version of the *codecision procedure (codecision II)* represents a ‘truly bicameral’ system consisting of the Council and the EP. The Conciliation Committee drafts the final text which subsequently must be ratified without changes by a qualified majority in the Council and a simple majority in the Parliament. Neither the EP nor the Council delegation enjoys agenda setting power in the Conciliation Committee. Thus, Tsebelis and Garrett (2000: 24-5) argue that we should expect the Council and the EP to agree on a policy which lies halfway between their respective ideal

points. The exact location of the legislative outcome, however, depends also on exogenous factors like the location of the status quo and the relative bargaining power of the Council and the EP (Crombez 2000a: 366; Tsebelis and Garrett 2000: 24-5).

One difficulty with the empirical testing of these models is that most of the crucial concepts used in the theoretical models - such as, for example, actors' preferences, the location of the status quo and the final outcome - are very difficult to measure (Bueno de Mesquita 2004; Steunenberg 2000). This difficulty is reflected in the ambiguous results produced by the still limited empirical literature that has been carried out to test these models. Tsebelis *et al.* (2001), for example, find that the success rate of parliamentary amendments in the Council are the same under the cooperation and codecision procedure when taking into account the preferences of the Commission. The higher absolute rejection rate under cooperation is supposedly due to the Commission's more hostile stance towards the EP's position during the early 1990s. A more detailed study also finds a high percentage of relevant EP amendments which are rejected by the Commission (Kreppel 2002: 797). Yet, conflict between supranational institutions violates the assumptions of the supranational scenario where the EP and the Commission are said to share similar preferences. Tsebelis and his collaborators suggest conflict on the left-right dimension between the EP and the Commission as a possible explanation for the Commission's rejection of EP amendments (2001: 598). Kreppel's analysis also finds that EP amendments are more successful under co-decision than under cooperation (2002b: 809), casting serious doubt on the empirical persuasiveness of Tsebelis' (← p. 595) 'conditional agenda-setter' argument. These results point to a less harmonious relationship between the EP and the Commission than portrayed in the supranational preference scenario.

The supranational preference scenario is also directly addressed by Thomson *et al.* (2004). Relying on expert interview data, they find an empirical pattern in which the Commission and the EP often occupy similar positions. Yet, a more detailed analysis of the regulatory substance leads the authors to the conclusion that ‘the actor alignments do[es] not support the supranational scenario’ (Thomson *et al.* 2004: 252).

While it is useful to conceive treaty bargaining as centring on the question of more or less integration, it can be seriously doubted whether this is a meaningful assumption when it comes to daily decision-making in the EU regulating policies such as the amount of fat allowed in chocolate, or the size of health warnings on cigarette packages. Thus, rather than assuming a stable and uniform preference configuration between EU legislative bodies across all policy fields, future studies should formulate conditional hypotheses about the preferences of Commission, the Council, and the EP. In addition, so far we have very limited knowledge on decision-making, i.e. preference aggregation, within these legislative bodies. Yet, a better understanding of the process of preference formation and aggregation will help us to abandon the so far static and overgeneralized statements about the policy preferences of the Council, the Commission, and the EP. However in order to do so, we need to abandon our conceptualization of EU legislative bodies as unitary actors with fixed preferences across all policy fields. It is these questions to which the following two sections of the paper now turn.

3. Preference formation of legislative actors

In order to arrive at a better understanding of EU legislative politics, we propose to abandon the assumption of a uniform and stable preference distribution for all legislative actors and across all legislative decisions, i.e. irrespective of the regulatory substance of the issue to be decided and the degree of conflict generated by a decision. The decisions taken at the European level are in many respects similar to the ones taken at the national level. Both deal with regulatory issues and European regulations increasingly interfere and replace those member state statutes which regulate socio-economic interactions in and across EU member states (Hix 1994). Owing to the substantive similarity of the regulatory decisions, national parties can transfer their national partisan strategies and

ideological positions to the EU arena. As a consequence, national political parties might structure political behaviour inside the Commission, the European Parliament and the Council – and eventually even across these institutions. Carrying this argument a step further, one could argue that different national parties of the same ideological predisposition coordinate their political behaviour *inside* decision-making bodies and also *across* legislative institutions to advance their respective ideological positions. From this perspective, transnational party coalitions play a major role in the inter-institutional politics of EU legislative decision-making (← p. 596) (Hix 1995; Hix *et al.* 2003; Kreppel 2002a). Members of socialist parties, for example, would propose the same position regardless of their national backgrounds and their respective institutional affiliations. With respect to EU legislative decision-making this would mean that in order to know the policy preferences of the legislative bodies involved we could exclusively rely on the partisan affiliation of their respective legislative actors and how these are aggregated inside the respective legislative bodies.

Yet, EU member states entertain differing regulatory regimes and the weight of individual economic sectors varies across member states. It is very likely that these politico-economic factors have an impact on political actors' actions in legislative decision-making, thereby preventing the emergence of transnational partisan politics patterns across all policy fields in which the EU takes binding decisions. Thus, actors from countries with low regulatory standards, for example, are expected to oppose attempts by countries with high regulatory standards to harmonize and 'upgrade' regulation in a given policy field on a higher European level because economic actors in these countries would effectively lose competitive advantages in the respective field (Moravesik 1993: 483-96; Scharpf 1999: Ch. 4). Furthermore, member states want to avoid the costs of adapting to a new regulatory regime (Scharpf 1999: 78-83). Thus, for decisions where these factors play a role the political costs of engaging in a transnational party coalition differ for national parties within the same party group. For such decisions we could expect EU legislative politics to centre around national positions instead of transnational party positions.

Finally, institutional self-interest is a potential source of preferences in legislative decision-making (Niskanen 1971). The most common assumption in this respect is that actors in EU legislative bodies are interested in maximizing the budget of the respective legislative body. However, EU institutions do not themselves implement EU decisions and actors within these bodies therefore lack the means of systematically expanding their own budgets. With respect to the Commission, Majone (1996: 61-79) therefore claimed that rather than being a budget maximizer, the Commission should be conceptualized as a competence maximizer. Expanding this argument to all legislative actors, this means that EU legislative decision-making is driven by each institution's effort to maximize its influence on EU politics by expanding its respective competence in a given policy field. Rather than observing the

previously discussed partisan and national patterns of EU legislative politics, we would observe EU decision-making to be structured along institutional lines (Hix 2002a; Rittberger 2000).

The three factors discussed above point to different expectations with regard to the preference configuration of political actors in EU decision-making. To estimate the political space of the EU empirically, scholars have recently started to analyze public and interest group opinions, protest activities, MEP voting behaviour, party manifestos of national and European parties, and expert judgments of party and actors' positions (Hix 1999; Marks and Steenbergen 2004; Marks and Wilson 2000; Pennings 2002; Selck 2004b; Thomson *et al.* 2004). These studies cast (← p. 597) doubts upon the validity of the unidimensional supranational scenario. More theoretical as well as empirical research is needed to delineate more clearly under what circumstances and in which policy fields the policy positions of legislative actors are derived from which combination of the factors discussed above.

4. Intra-institutional decision-making in the EU

The inter-institutional models discussed in part 2 rely on a simplified account of the preference aggregation within legislative bodies. These models conceptualize the Commission and the EP as monolithic bodies represented by their respective median voters. This 'unitary actor' assumption can be either based on the voting requirement - decisions ultimately depend on the vote of a single actor - or directly on the (homogenous) preference configuration. The Council is modelled as a collective actor where the decision-making threshold determines which member state casts the decisive vote and thus represents the collective policy position of the Council. These conceptions of the legislative bodies are based on their *de jure* voting requirement. Other factors like the horizontal and vertical division-of-labour or a *de facto* higher voting threshold might, however, also influence the collective policy position.

Furthermore, decision-making might involve different lines of conflicts and intra-institutional settings in different policy fields. As the positions of the legislative bodies constitute the foundation stones on which a study of the (inter-institutional) legislative process rests they deserve closer scrutiny. In the next sections we therefore review the existing intra-institutional literature with regard to the internal decision-making process and its implication for the collective position taken by the legislative bodies.

4.1. The Commission

Research on decision-making and politics inside the Commission is virtually non-existent. One apparent reason for this lack of research is that information on decision-making inside the Commission is scarce. The procedural literature treats the Commission as a ‘unitary actor’ (Crombez 1996: 203; Tsebelis and Garrett 2000: 15). The ‘unitary actor’ assumption is based on the simple majority rule according to which the Commissioners formally take decisions (Art. 219 TEC). Because the median Commissioner is deemed to cast the pivotal vote in all Commission decisions he or she always determines the Commission’s policy position. Tsebelis and Garrett even go a step further and propose a more pronounced ‘unitary actor’ concept. They assume preference homogeneity among Commissioners. In their view, ‘a series of filters and self-selection mechanisms [among potential Commissioners] enable the Commission to take pro-integrationist positions’ (2000: 16).

However, instead of assuming the Commissioners self-(s)election along the lines of the US congress literature (Shepsle and Weingast 1987), we should direct our attention to the effects which the EU member state governments’ selection (← **p. 598**) and nomination of Commissioners has on the Commission’s policy preferences (Crombez 1997b; Hug 2003). Member state governments face strong incentives to influence the Commission’s actions in legislative decision-making because of the successively growing interference of the regulatory powers of

the EU in domestic politics. One way to influence the Commission's actions is the selection and nomination of Commissioners. Member states government can be expected to choose Commissioners whose policy preferences are similar to theirs and whose reliability can be assessed from their prior performance in political posts. Indeed, most notably with the enactment of the Single European Act, these attributes can be observed empirically among Commissioners (Wonka 2004). The Amsterdam Treaty gave the EP the formal power to approve the member states' candidate for Commission President and the college of Commissioners as a whole. However, the EP does not have the power to nominate any candidates itself. Furthermore, as the appointment of the current Barroso Commission demonstrated, it ultimately has to accept the candidates presented by the member states. Thus, the latter are still firmly in the driver's seat when it comes to determining the Commissioners', and hence the Commission's, policy preferences.

How should we conceive of preference formation inside the Commission, if, as a result of the appointment process, the Commissioners hold divergent preferences and we are not a priori convinced by the application of the median voter concept? Case study research on EU policy-making (Cram 1994; 1997) as well as the descriptive literature on the Commission's institutional make-up (Cini 1996; Nugent 2001) challenges the assumption of the Commission being a 'unitary actor'. An alternative conceptualization of the Commission is the 'ministerial government' or 'portfolio' model proposed by Laver and Shepsle (1996: 13; 1994: 8). According to this model each minister – i.e., each Commissioner – is quasi-independent in determining the policies in his jurisdiction. Their independence results from the Commissioners' workload, which does not allow them extensive scrutiny of the development of legislative proposals in other departments. In addition, the technical nature of legislative proposals and the fact that each Commissioner can only draw on the specialized bureaucratic expertise of their respective departments should regularly prevent Commissioners from being

able to ‘poke their nose’ in their colleague’s jurisdictions (Laver and Shepsle 1996: 30-33). Thus, the Commission’s collective policy position in legislative decision-making equals the policy position of the Commissioner responsible for drafting the proposal. Commissioners might therefore introduce legislation which especially favours their country or they might ride their party’s ideological hobby horse. They might also increase their Directorate General’s budget to enhance the power, prestige, and joys of their job. Since we lack research on Commission’s internal decision-making, we are so far not able to test the plausibility of either of these considerations – and therefore do not have the means to make more reasoned judgements about the policy positions which the Commission brings into the legislative game.

(← p. 599)

4.2. The European Parliament

Traditionally, procedural spatial models have displayed the EP as a ‘unitary actor’ characterized by its median voter due to the simple majority voting requirement. The second reading of the cooperation and the codecision procedure, however, require the EP to vote with an absolute majority of all its members (Corbett *et al.* 2000: 185-232). Due to the high rate of absenteeism in the EP, the support of about 70% of the MEPs present in the plenary is needed to take decisions (Crombez and Hix 2003: 319). Thus, for many important decisions in the EP it is not the median voter but rather the pivotal voter under qualified majority which forms the EP policy position. This prediction still omits that the EP is not only composed of individual MEPs but also of important subgroups, such as transnational party groups, national party delegations, and committees. The influence of these subgroups needs to be considered if one is to scrutinize the formation of the policy position of the EP.

Roll call studies find that the main conflict dimension in the EP is the traditional left-right dimension of politics, which is dominated by the transnational party groups. These party groups display high levels of voting cohesion. Cohesion amongst MEPs from the same

member states is considerably lower (Hix *et al.* 2004). Thus, ideology seems to be more important in explaining MEP voting behaviour than nationality which gives the transnational party groups a dominant role in the EP. The party groups are, however, composed of national party delegations. If the preferences of the transnational party group and the national party delegation diverge, the policy position of the national party delegation is more powerful in explaining the voting behaviour of MEPs (Hix 2002b: 696). This impression is confirmed by Faas (2003: 854) who found the national party delegations in the EP to be the subgroup with the highest level of voting cohesion. Studies of the EP committee system do also question the picture of homogeneous and disciplined transnational party groups. Several committees have been found to be preference outliers with regard to policy-specific preferences and deviate in their voting behaviour from the party line (Bowler and Farrell 1995: 234; McElroy 2003; Whitaker 2003: 6). However, so far the actual influence of national party delegations and committees on the EP internal coalition formation and decision-making process is unknown.

Regarding the coalition patterns in the EP, the two biggest party groups, the European Peoples Party (EPP) and the Party of European Socialists (PES), frequently form a grand-coalition. On average the EPP and the PES voted together approximately in 70 % of all registered roll calls between 1979 and 2001 (Hix *et al.* 2003: 318). Analyzing the grand-coalition pattern voting pattern Hix and his collaborators find empirical support for the argument that the EPP and the PES collude on institutional and integration issues, internal procedural issues, under the absolute majority requirement, and on external trade issues. This confirms that the EPP and PES have similar preferences on European integration and that the absolute majority voting (← p. 600) requirement combined with high rate of absenteeism forces them to vote together (Hix *et al.* 2003: 326-27). Increased competition between the EPP and the PES on the other hand was found on socio-economic and agricultural issues, voting on amendments, and when there is a

high level of attendance (Hix *et al.* 2003: 326-27; Kreppel 2002a: 168-71; Kreppel and Tsebelis 1999: 358-60).

Thus, regarding decision-making inside the EP, coalition patterns seem to be structured mainly along a left-right ideological dimension and dominated by the two main party groups. The coalition patterns differ according the voting requirement, level of attendance, and the policy field at hand. However, due to the methodological problems of roll call data analysis these results should be considered provisional (Carrubba and Gabel 1999; 2004). If future research is able to verify these coalition patterns and is able to determine influence of other subgroups, such as committees and national party delegations, these results could be used to portray a more accurate picture of the EP's policy position(s) in the inter-institutional decision-making process.

4.3. The Council

The Council of Ministers as a legislative actor is characterized by the use of a complex voting system, a horizontal and vertical division of labour and the coordinating office of the Council Presidency. Unless the Council has to decide by unanimity according to the treaty base a qualified majority is necessary in most cases. The inter-institutional literature takes only the voting rule into account. The member states' preferences are commonly depicted on a 'degree of integration' dimension or a left-right dimension. No distinctions are made between policy fields (unless they are based on the voting rule that has to be applied). Thus, it is assumed that the same policy positions are occupied by the member states in all policy fields and across all sectoral Council formations.

Franchino and Rahming (2003) address the horizontal division of labour in the Council. They point out that the horizontal Council formations lack the ability to rein in particularistic

interests of sectoral Council formations (see also Steunenberg 2003: 4-6). Thus, the decisions reached in sectoral Councils might be 'biased' towards sectoral interests. In fact, Franchino and Rahming present evidence that the ministers in the Fisheries Council deviated in their decisions from the preferences of their governments as a whole.

Besides the sectoral Council formations, the member state holding the Council Presidency might have an influence not envisaged by inter-institutional models. Again, this would lead to collective decisions which do not necessarily represent the position of the member state casting the otherwise decisive vote. Tallberg (2003) points to the Presidency's ability of introducing new issues, emphasizing or de-emphasizing proposals or even barring topics from collective consideration.

So far there is only little empirical evidence with regard to decision-making in the Council. Studies on the preferences of member states identify a north-south (← p. 601) cleavage (Mattila and Lane 2001: 44-45; Thomson *et al.* 2004: 249-256). This might reflect a conflict between rich and poor countries or regulatory competition. Interestingly, Thomson *et al.* (2004: 251) report that the preference configuration is stable across policy fields. An analysis of roll call votes shows that the voting behaviour of a country depends on its position on the left-right and degree of integration dimensions. The results with regard to impact of a member state being either net recipient or net contributor of EU funds are inconclusive (Mattila 2004: 43). Frequently decisions are taken unanimously even when the treaty allows for qualified majority voting (Mattila and Lane 2001).

Research on actual decision-making in the Council is still in its infancy. Besides a left-right and 'degree of integration' dimension, empirical studies on positions taken in the Council point to a north-south cleavage. The horizontal division of labour and the office of the

Council Presidency might render the assumptions of inter-institutional models with regard to the Council's collective position invalid. Further research is necessary to establish the effects of these intra-institutional features on the positions taken by the Council vis-à-vis the other legislative bodies.

5. Conclusion: Towards a new research agenda

Procedural spatial models on decision-making in the EU have produced valuable insights into the potential impact of the institutional setting for policy outcomes. The theoretical development of the literature has, however, reached a point of stagnation. We attribute this stagnation to the strong assumption of a single preference configuration across all policy fields and the simplistic 'unitary actor' assumption. Other authors have criticized additional assumptions, such as the 'one-shot game' assumption (i.e., the sole focus on the issue at hand) or the assumption on the level of information shared by the actors (Bueno de Mesquita 2004; Rittberger 2000).

In order to overcome this stagnation, we argue further that future research should study the preference formation and aggregation inside the Commission, the Council, and the EP. Different factors, such as partisan, national, and institutional self-interest, influence the formation of the policy preferences of these legislative actors. The preference configuration used in the models should be based on an assessment of the substance of the decisions to be analysed (Thomson *et al.* 2004). The assumption that actors within the legislative bodies all share the same policy preferences is theoretically implausible and has been empirically called into question. Our review of the burgeoning intra-institutional literature for the Commission, the EP and the Council discussed the different approaches used to explain preference aggregation inside these bodies. Yet, so far our knowledge about these processes is too limited to discriminate between any of these approaches. Further analysis of intra-institutional

decision-making will tell us how the diverse preferences are (← p. 602) aggregated inside these bodies and, as a consequence, which preference the respective body pursues in inter-institutional decision-making.

The policy preferences and motivations of legislative actors are studied by a wide community of EU scholars working in different fields (e.g., interest groups, European parties, European integration). A joint debate taking advantage of different methodological and theoretical approaches should yield insights for our future research which will help us to advance our understanding of EU legislative decision-making.

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Björn Hörnl, Ph.D. candidate, Department of Government, Uppsala University

Andreas Warntjen, Ph.D. candidate, Department of Government, London School of Economics and Political

Science

Arndt Wonka, Ph.D. candidate, Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES), Universität Mannheim

Address for correspondence: Björn Hörnl, Department of Government, Uppsala University, Box 514, SE-75120 Uppsala, Sweden. Tel: +46-18-471-318, Fax: +46-18-471-3308. Email: Bjorn.Horl@statsvet.uu.se; Andreas Warntjen, Department of Government, London School of Economics and Political Science, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE, UK. email: A.K.Warntjen@lse.ac.uk; Arndt Wonka, University of  Mannheim, Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES), D-68131 Mannheim, Germany. email: Arndt.Wonka@mzes.uni-mannheim.de

Notes:

1 The ordering of the authors name does not represent the individual input which went into the article.² For alternative accounts see Dowding (2000), Selck (2004), and Hix (2005, Ch. 3). An introduction to spatial models is provided by Hinich and Munger (1997).

3 For an overview of how these different rules apply to the various policy fields in which the EU is competent, see Hix (2005, Appendix).