

Martin Binder

National Position Taking in International Negotiations

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Martin Binder (MAPP SUNY)
Mannheim Center for European Social Research
University Mannheim
D-68131 Mannheim
Phone: +49(621)181 2794
Fax: +49(621)181 2067
e-mail: martinbinder@gmx.net

Abstract

The paper overcomes the still common assumption that national governments could be understood as unitary actors in international relations. Therefore a model of national position taking is set up. The model takes especially formal and informal governmental structures into account. Following organization theory approaches, governments are modeled as collective actors, composed of national ministries/departments. These actors have their own preferences and interests in certain policies areas, as well as they have given resources available to obtain their goals. The processes are specified using comparable formal and informal structures. Hypotheses to explain the national bargaining positions are derived. A special focus lies on the factors, which affect the assertiveness of the national ministries. Relying on a unique data base from the intergovernmental conference 1996 of the European Union, the paper tests the hypotheses.

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Introduction

National position taking and signalling in foreign policy is often associated with crisis bargaining, deterrence or military intervention (cf. Fearon 1997 or Signorino and Tahar 2006). Rather seldom the focus is set on position taking in a much more complicated setting: The preparation of national policy positions prior international negotiations. The positions taken here are not just “fight” or “don’t fight”, but *real* policy positions in often complex issues. The focus of the paper is international negotiations and the main question is what happens inside the government beforehand of these negotiations. Setting up a “domestic-political” explanation of a state’s foreign policy choices” (Fearon 1998: 289) the paper overcomes the still common assumption that national governments could be understood as unitary actors in international relations. Especially in the case of international negotiations „an understanding of domestic politics is a precondition for, not a supplement to, the analysis of the strategic interaction among states“ (Moravcsik 1993: 481). Even if governments during the negotiations are often perceived as unitary actors it is still necessary to have a valid model which describes their position as an aggregation of preferences of the national actors.

To better understand these domestic politics a model of national position taking before international negotiations is set up in this article. The model takes especially formal and informal governmental structures into account. In this context the term “core executive” is often used (cf. Peters et al. 2000), but very rarely explicitly defined. The paper should also help to expand the knowledge about general governmental structures and thus give a foundation to fill this gap in later research. Following organization theory approaches, governments are modeled as collective actors, composed of national ministries respective departments¹. These actors have their own preferences and interests in certain policies areas, as well as they have given resources available to obtain their goals (cf. Coleman 1990). The processes are specified in a model using comparable formal and informal structures. Later on hypotheses to explain the national bargaining position are derived. Which feature of

¹ In the following premiers, president’s offices as well as departments are also called ministries.

the model best explains the position? Afterwards the point of view is changed to the individual ministry. It is the ministry which is the acting unit inside the government and thus a second focus lies on the factors, which affect the influence of the ministries in determining the national position. How assertive was a certain ministry and why was it successful?

Relying on a unique data base the paper tests the hypotheses. The task is twofold. First it is necessary to derive comparable governmental structures to describe the collective actor government in more detail. And second, the consequences of these structures have to be laid down.

The aim of the paper is to explain the national bargaining position, which is declared prior to international negotiation in the European Union (EU) and to use this model to better understand the assertiveness of the national ministries during that process. Even if the paper concentrates on position taking inside the European Union, most of the results should be transferable to position taking in general. Recently some authors have tried to explain national position taking prior international negotiations in the context of the European Union. Stoiber 2003 tried to explain the efficiency of exchange models in predicting the national bargaining position prior the intergovernmental conference (IGC) 1996 in Amsterdam. He mainly used the governmental structure as restrictions to exchange. The underlying assumption, that about ten actors engage in exchange over 46 distinct policy issues with around 3-4 policy options seems questionable. Baltz, König and Schneider 2005 focused on the impact of interest groups on the national decision making process in the case of legislative initiative of the European Commission and they have two important contributions also interesting to decision making in general. First, one of there main result is, that the ministry, which is in charged with the formulation of the first proposal is a key actor in the national position taking process and second, the positions of the governmental actors seem to be the key to understand the position taking (cf. Baltz et al. 2005: 306). If these findings would be backed by other research on decision making it would give us some possibility to assess national position taking in the European Union in a much broader sense. König and Hug (2006) depicted their goal as to explain the “formation of positions on the constitution [of the EU]” (ibid: 1). Like Baltz et al. 2005 they also used expert interviews to determine the national position as well as the position of the relevant actors. In the end they identified 110 relevant actors in 25 member states. Thereof 67% were actors inside

the government. Taking into account that the premiers offices and the ministries of foreign affairs were always considered as “relevant actors” by the experts, there were – on average – only 0.92 other governmental actors (e.g. ministries) involved (cf. König and Hug 2006: 7). Is the assessment of the experts right? Are there only so few governmental actor involved in the preparation of national positions prior international negotiation? Using unique data (cf. Thurner et al. 2002) this paper can also help to answer that question.

In the next part I will introduce the case study of the Intergovernmental Conference in the European Union 1996. Without loss of generality, I will derive formal and informal measures to describe the governmental organisation. The measures and the whole model are parsimonious to ensure the transferability to other case studies and other empirical data. Later on I will set up the model and afterwards the hypotheses are derived. The paper uses unique data from the intergovernmental conference of the European Union 1996 (cf. Thurner et al. 2002) to test the hypotheses. In the end the result are discussed and further research is outlined.

Intergovernmental conferences as a case of international negotiations

The most known thing about international negotiations, especially about intergovernmental conferences in the European Union, is clearly the meeting of the heads of government (prime ministers and presidents) at a summit in the end. Much less known are the month long processes of negotiation and coordination often going on before such a summit. These processes are in part transgovernmental, i.e. between equivalent ministries of the member states countries and in part intragovernmental, i.e. between the ministries inside one member state. This article focuses on one crucial part of these pre-negotiations: How do the member states figure out their national position(s) in the domestic arena?

In intergovernmental conferences and especially in a broad revision of a treaty of the European Union, topics and issues on the agenda are often complex. Thurner and Linhart (2004a) argued that the complexity and the jurisdictional cross-cutting of policies lead to the assumption, that coordination between different departments

inside the national government is necessary and that it would be unreasonable to assume that a single ministry play the role of a policy dictator. (for a general critique to policy dictator see Dunleavy and Bastow 2001).

Parallel there is an external pressure on the national government to come up with a position. Kassim et al. 2000 point out three reasons why a member state would define and publish a national position prior a international conference. 1. Only an existing and known position can be defended during the international negotiation. 2. There is a growing importance of EU policy making for the national policy arena. And 3. To secure national interest, e. g. in the area of the common agricultural policy. At the same time the coordination has to take place in a certain timeframe, which is normally bounded by the time of the conference itself. So the mechanism of coordination need to be efficient, otherwise the coordination could fail because of pressure of time.

As a case study the paper will take a closer look to the Intergovernmental Conference 1996, which leads to the Amsterdam treaty. The Treaty of Amsterdam was the fulfilment of the Political Union, clarified the issue of rebalancing power inside the European Union and laid down the procedures for the eastern enlargement. Though there are a lot of political concerns how national positions were built prior that conference. Knowing more about the position taking process, helps to better understand these concerns.

The Governmental Structure

To define the governmental structure, graph-theoretical models are applied. In general, the easiest way to define a network/graph is by using nodes to display actors and using edges/arcs to display relationships between these actors. In extension you can link actors to certain events (so-called affiliation or two-mode networks). The aim of this kind of networks is “to model the relationship between actors and events as a whole system” (Wasserman and Faust 1994: 297). Following that this paper tries to model the system government as a two-mode network. The relations are thus defined between actors (ministries) and events (policy issues to be discussed). The possible specification of the relationships is manifold. So a theoretical foundation is absolutely required. (cf. Pappi 1987, Wasserman and Faust 1994). Before that a specification of the policy area under consideration and the

identification of the involved actors are necessary (boundary specification). The focus of the paper is on intergovernmental conferences of the EU and thus the policy area is theoretically defined by the issues discussed at the respective conference. How to operationalize this policy space is discussed in the respective section.

The Actors

In the next step the relevant actors have to be identified. As the paper examines governmental structures the question is which actors inside the government were involved in preparing the national position prior of intergovernmental conferences. Despite there is some evidence that actor outside the government (e.g. interest groups) usually were trying to influence the process of governmental decision making, König and Hug (2006) found in their data to the European Convention, that “in most countries governmental actors dominated the internal coordination process” (ibid p. 5) and government officials are still denoted as the most skilled actors in the process of intergovernmental conferences (cf. Hayes-Renshaw and Wallace 2006, Thurner 2006). Actors inside the government have a “quasi-monopoly of expert information” (Thurner and Linhart 2004: 252) and therefore I will focus on the actors inside the government. Ministries are conceived as corporate actors (i.e. acting unitarily with single peaked preferences). They could be represented by ministers or high governmental officials. One main decision about identifying the relevant actors in practice is whether it is done from outside the system (e.g. expert interviews or document analysis) or from inside the system (e.g. interviews with involved governmental officials). As I will argue later on in more detail, it is necessary to expand the description of governmental structures beyond formal and written procedures. To take the actual structure into account it is necessary to look inside the organization government itself. The processes inside the government are hard to discover from outside, why this paper includes the self assessment of the actors inside. For example: a reliable and valid classification of formal and informal involved actors can be achieved by combining a nominalistic approach (Laumann et al. 1983) and a realistic approach (cf. Thurner et al. 2002: 56).

Taking the identified actors into account, the government can be described as a collective actor consisting of involved national ministries, which has to find common policy positions prior an intergovernmental conference. The next step is to define the

attributes, which best describe the relationship between the actors and the tasks they have to solve. In this case the task would be find a common national policy position in a certain issue.

Formal Relations

The paper focus on two formal relations an actor could have to a task. Assuming that in each government there has to be a specialization along policy areas (departmentalization) for efficiency reasons. Following to that, there are informational asymmetries in the system. Some ministry are more skilled and have more knowledge in certain policy area than others (“competence”, cf. Bergman et al.: 109). Further on it is whether possible to design the national coordination process absolutely open (i.e. to include all ministries), because this would make the process inefficient (“capacity”, cf. Bergman et al.: 109). Nor is it possible to design it absolutely closed (i.e. to only include one ministry). The assumption of ministers being policy dictators in their area (Laver and Shepsle 1996: 125) seems not applicable in the field of jurisdictional crosscutting policy issues. Knowing that, the policy coordination between the involved ministries is crucial and the assignment of formal rights in that process is important.

Already Laver and Shepsle (1996: 38) and Baltz et. al. (2005: 283) pointed out, that the actors who are allowed to make the first written proposals are key actors in the national coordination processes. They frame with their preparation most of the later ongoing coordination process and they can achieve special knowledge. Because of that special knowledge advice in the following process is also often sought from these actors and so they still maintain some power in the process.

Furthermore the aspect of official access to and participation in the national coordination processes is theoretically important. “The national policy domain is primarily determined by the network of access to trustworthy information about policy matters.” (Laumann and Knoke 1989: 26) This trustworthy information is a key to exert influence on the national position. The more reliable information an actor can gather, the better she can assess the positions and interests of the other actors in the system and the better she can persuade during the process.

A combination of the two criteria could be a basic formal structure of the organization government. In the national process of position taking at minimum it has to be

specified, who is allowed to make the first proposal and who is allowed to participate in the coordination process.

Informal Relations

Having focused on formulating a national negotiation position and identified two important formal criteria in this process, I include a third and informal criteria for the description of governmental structures. In the most general sense „[i]nformal structures are the coalitions or networks of unofficial relationships which play a continuous role, sometimes positive and sometimes negative, in the transmission of commands, in the collection and communication of information and in the coordination of tasks inside and, at times, beyond the confines of organizations.“ (Breton 1998: 187) To describe and understand the governmental organization in a broader sense, than focusing on constitutions and rules of internal procedure, it is necessary to include this actual and informal structure. In Contradiction to the formal criteria, the question is which actor was indeed important in formulating the national position and not which actor should be important because of some written procedures. Thus the informal relation is characterized by the actual perceived influence of an actor on a specific issue.

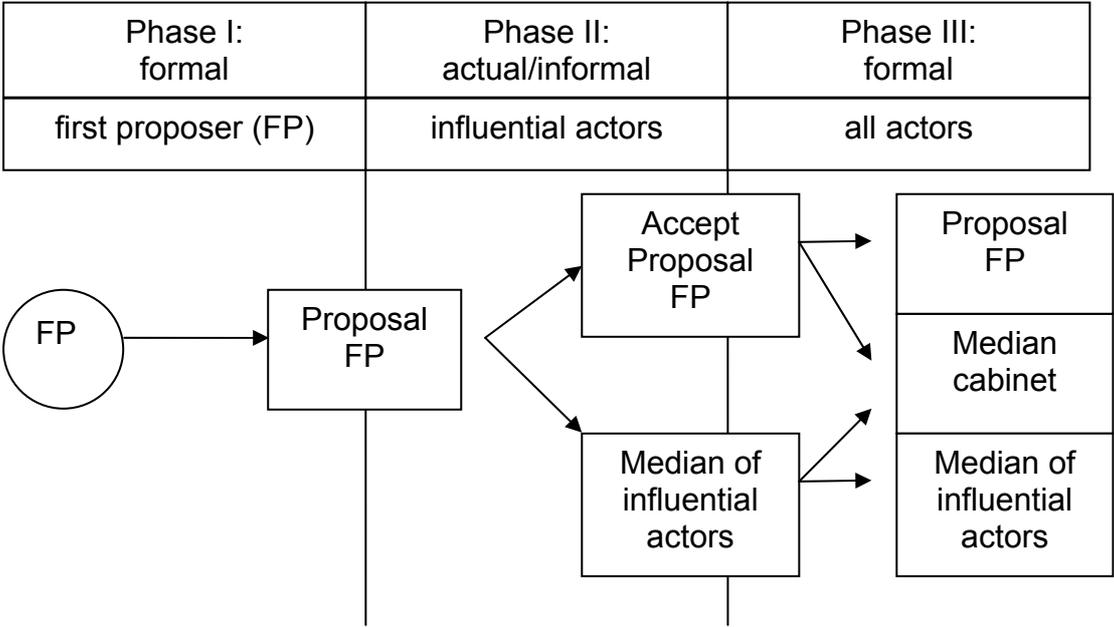
Model of national position taking

Based on the governmental structure developed above and starting from a perspective of sequential choice (Baron and Ferejohn 1989), I will lay down a parsimonious model of governmental decision making in the next section. Some general assumptions have to be made. Each of the identified governmental actors has single peaked and separable preferences over the policy issues and Euclidian Distances are applied. In addition there is a germaneness rule which means that each policy dimension is treated separately and amendments on different subjects are not possible.

It is very time-consuming and inefficient to decide all policy issue in the whole cabinet. We will expect some delegation of tasks to specialized departments for reasons of capacity, competence and collective action problems (cf. Bergman et al.: 109). In a sequential model, the first choice usually made is, which actor is allowed to make the first proposal (“recognition rule” cf. Baron and Ferejohn 1989). Unlike

Baron and Ferejohn, were recognition is randomly, in this model the formal right to make the first proposal is determined by rules of internal procedure of the governments. Afterwards in Phase II an informal and actual coordination takes place, where the influential actors are trying to change the proposal in their favor. Phase II includes a non-formal component into the model and maybe the most elusive to describe. In the section operationalization the paper tries to give some possibilities to clarify this point. In all member states of the European Union the cabinet is in some form responsible for the result of the policy formulation process. Even if there is clearly a different degree of jurisdictional/ministerial autonomy (cf. Laver and Hunt 1992: 125) in the member states of the European Union, Laver and Shepsle (1996) state that “it is the cabinet that symbolizes the apex of political responsibility.” (ibid: 28-29) This political responsibility combined with the jurisdictional crosscutting policy leads to the consequence, that in the case of remaining dissent between the cabinet members, the last decision is vest upon the cabinet itself. It is possible to think of the cabinet position as a threatening point.

Figure 1: Model of national position taking



Looking at the three phases independently from each other we would expect in Phase I the leading ministry to propose its ideal position in the respective issue. In Phase II more than one ministry could be influential and in Phase III the whole cabinet is involved in the process. Thus some kind of a collective choice has to be

made. An easy way of aggregating preferences of actors is the described in the Median-Voter-Theorem of Black (cf. Shepsle and Bonchek 1997: 88). Krehbiel (2006) pointed out, that it is still the “simplest pivot model – Black’s median voter theory – that performs bests in most circumstances”. (ibid.: 239). Assuming that each actor has a unique preferred point in the policy issue and we apply Euclidian Distances there is no majority in the cabinet which could overrule the proposal of the median player by another proposal. In the cabinet and thus in phase III the ministries are treated equally and decisions are made by majority vote. In phase II, decisions are only made by the informal influential ministries. The operationalization follows in the respective section.

Hypotheses on national position formulation and on the ministerial assertiveness

The first four hypotheses focus on the national position itself as dependent variable. Explaining position taking is one goal of the paper. For this reason primarily the national position itself and not the deviation to that position should be the unit of analysis in the first place. First, hypotheses about the interplay of the three phases should be specified and afterwards the focus is raised to the deviation from the national position.

Peters et al. (2000) stated that “the increasing sectorization of policy making weakens collective cabinet action and brings more bilateral contacts between the relevant ministers and the head of the executive.” (Peters et al. 2000: 9) Transfer this claim to the model would mean that the bilateral contacts between ministers are the actual component in phase II and the collective cabinet decision respectively the cabinet decision in phase III. Testing this claim, we would expect the effect of phase II to be higher than the effect of phase III.

Hypothesis A1:

The informal phase (II) has a stronger effect on the national position than the collective cabinet decision (phase III).

Additional to institutional features of the decision making process Baron and Ferejohn 1989 argued that “[t]he member recognized to make a proposal

nevertheless retain some agenda power". Thus holding the phases II and III constant, the first proposal should still explain a significant amount of the variance of the national position, which could not be explained by the former effects.

Hypothesis A2:

Holding the informal phase and the cabinet phase constant, the first proposal still explains a significant amount of the national bargaining position.

Laver and Shepsle stated that ministerial discretion give the ministers (here the ministries) the ability to "affect the substance of specific policy proposals" (Laver and Shepsle 1996: 32). However, this discretion is not constant in every state (cf. Laver and Hunt 1992) and so we would expect the effect of the first proposal to be higher in states with high ministerial autonomy.

Hypothesis A3:

The effect of the first proposal should be higher if the amount of ministerial autonomy is higher in the system.

In general it is "not [be] easy for a prime minister to ignore an important and strong minority of ministers who sought to have the matter discussed in full cabinet" (Mackie and Hogwood 1984: 306). The more ministries are interested in the policy issue the more likely some dissent remains and the more likely the ignored ministries press the decision over the issue into the cabinet.

Hypothesis A4:

The more national actors show interest in a policy area, the more likely it is, that the decision is made in the cabinet and the higher the effect of the cabinet median on the national position should be.

Testing these hypotheses, we could throw some light on the impact of the model and gain some knowledge about the position taking process in the national governments.

Beside of the question of the influence of the different phases on the national position, there remains a question open: What is the role of the acting units, i.e.

ministries? Who gains most from the national position - or more specifically, how much does an involved ministry gain from the national position and what are the causes therefore. Assertiveness of an actor is therefore defined as the ability to determine the national position as close as possible to the most preferred position of an actor. Based on a cost-benefit perspective and the fact that resources (information, time, etc.) available are limited, the ministry should invest these resources in the issue areas it is concerned in and not in each issue area equally². For the following hypothesis the dependent variable is the interest-weighted utility of the ministry in each issue.

Keeping in mind, that the model is based on sequential choice theory, we look again at the actors in the several phases. Usually, „asymmetric parliamentary authority in the form of the right to make the first proposal provides gains for those with that right.” (Baron 1995: 87) More specifically in cabinets the ministry who makes the first proposal and that way establishes the frame in which the later discussion takes place is “in a strong position to influence the final outcome” (Burch 1993:107).

Hypothesis B1:

The actor with the right to make the first proposal has a higher utility from the national position, than others.

In a less rigorous manner, the pure access to an issue should provide a ministry an advantage in achieving the best possible position. Access can be understood as the right or possibility to publish a statement to the issue in discussion or to participate formally in the process and thus be included in the flow of information. This access to trustworthy information should help the ministry to better achieve its goal and thus to have a higher gain of the national position.

Hypothesis B2:

The actors with official access to an issue have a larger benefit from the national

² The dependent variable for these hypotheses has to take this fact into account. De Mesquita and Stokman used for example the salience of an issue to model this concern (cf. De Mesquita and Stokman 1994: 79).

position formulated in the end.

The third measure to describe the governmental organization was a informal attribute possibly modelled by self assessment of perceived influence. It remains open, if this perceived influence of an actor also allows this actor to shift the national position towards her ideal policy and thus leads to a higher utility for the actor.

Hypothesis B3:

Actors who were perceived influential in the system were indeed powerful. This leads to a higher gain for the actor from the national position.

As mentioned already, the national position taking prior intergovernmental conferences is a multi-actor, multi-issue system with complex and crosscutting national jurisdiction. Thus the decision making process is distributed between several actors. In case of distributed decision making a project management is often necessary to assure an efficient output of the national policy coordination (cf. Milgrom and Roberts 1992). "The project management had to aggregate information and preferences of political subdivisions" (Turner et al. 2002: 19) and make sure that they are all focusing their efforts on the government's goals. This is time-consuming and often compromise has to be fostered by the project management. So, the project management gains less from the national position than others.

Hypothesis B4:

The temporary appointed project management gains less from the national position, than other ministries.

Ministries have scarce resources, they are bounded by the time of the conference and so they can not gather as much information as they want about the policy issues in discussion. In addition cabinet members "are flooded with information and demands on their attention" (Bergman et al. 179) and they have to figure out the reliability and trustworthiness of the information. We would expect ministry concentrating their action on a couple of issues being more successful in achieving their goal, than ministries, which spread out widely in all issue areas. However, this hypothesis holds only in an issue-by-issue perspective. In the case of summing up the total utility over

all issues it would be necessary to change this hypothesis.

Hypothesis B5:

The fewer issues a ministry is interested in (or vice versa the more a ministry focus on some special issues), the higher will be the gain in the single issue.

Having laid out a series of hypotheses the next section will describe the operationalization, before the hypotheses are tested empirically.

Data and Operationalization

The policy space under consideration is derived from the intergovernmental conference (IGC) of the EU 1996. The issues in discussion at the IGC were first structured by the so-called Westendorp reflection group from June 2005 to December 2005. Afterwards the *Service Juridique* of the Council processed the roughly formulated policy issues into European Law compatible options. A current status quo was attached to each issue and 30 confidential notes with the distinct options were sent to the national governments. In that way the agenda for the national governments was more or less exogenously determined and the national government had to coordinate the position taking in the given timeframe.

The data used for the empirical analysis was gathered by an interdisciplinary research group "Institutionalization of International Negotiation Systems". The data collection combined documentary analysis and standardized interviews with top level bureaucrats. The 30 confidential notes constitute the initial policy space. For the questionnaire the notes were split into 9 issue groups containing 46 one dimensional policy issue (cf. Thurner et al. 2002).

To identify the relevant national actors a normative approach was combined with a realistic one. First, all existing governmental actors were identified using the written constitutions and/or rules of internal procedures. Analyzing the documents and using organizational charts of the ministries the authors identified the actors, who were in charge of formulating the first proposal in each issue. They also identified the actors who had official access to the national process, because of shared responsibilities

resulting from overlapping jurisdictions and the actor who was in charge of managing the national coordination.

Each of the member states had at least one representative in Brussels. So it was possible to ask these representatives which of the existing actors were indeed involved in the national coordination process. Involvement was described as the participation in the process in the way that the ministry “present[s] proposals to be included in the position finding in the respective issues under consideration” (Thurner et al. 2002: 282). This is a much broader view than only counting actors with one of the above mentioned formal competencies (first proposal and access). In a second step, also ex-post perceived influential actors³ were counted as involved in the process, even if they were not named by the representative of the national delegation.

Using a standardized questionnaire interviews were conducted with all of the involved actors (N=140). The respondents have been asked about the preferences of their department (i.e. most preferred option in each of the 46 issues) and their relative weighting (salience) of the respective policy issue. Additionally questions about the national and international communication behavior and the perceived influence were conducted.

Most of the variables needed to test the hypotheses are straightforward and thus the operationalization is not further explained. Detailed formal definitions are attached in the appendix. The operationalization of the perceived influence of the actor needs some more attention. In the questionnaire each national actor was able to denote all the national actors (including herself) as influential or not in determining the national position⁴. The data was gathered after the conference (ex-post) and separate for each issue group. To normalize the counts for the different number of national actors involved and the different overall frequency in the member states I use the number of times an actors was denoted as influential in an issue group divided by the number of all appellations in the regarding issue group in each member state. This should be an

³ The standardized questionnaire includes a question about ex-post perception of influence. An actor was included if at least two other actors inside the system indicated her as influential.

⁴ The question for the influence of an actor was: “Would you please indicate those ministries or institutions that stood out as especially/outstanding influential in the process of finding the final negotiation position.” (for all questions see Thurner et al. 2002)

issue-group-specific valid and comparable measure of how influential a national actor was in the governmental system.

Based on that variable it is possible to estimate a weighted median to describe the informal phase II of the model. Here it is important, that each actor affect the median position based on his perceived influence in the system. (For a detailed definition see Thurner and Linhart 2004a: 10).

The interest of an actor in an issue group, is operationalized by the fact if she signals a position in that area. The underlying assumption is that the signalling of a position is common knowledge in the national governmental system, whereby the internal weighting (later used to describe the salience of an issue) is hardly common knowledge. So the number of actors interested in an issue and the number of issues an actor is interested in are the particular sums of this variable.

The first dependent variable is modelled as the national position itself and the second dependent variable is the utility of an actor in an issue weighted by the salience (cf. De Mesquita and Stokman 1994: 79). The variable is modelled as weighted utility function of the ministry and thus dependent not only on the distance between ideal point of the ministry and outcome, but also on the salience of the issue under consideration.

Results

The variables are at least ordinal in the interval $[0;1]$ and as Thurner et al. 2002 argue “compatible with the concept of Euclidean preferences” (ibid: 22). A multiple linear regression could be an appropriate method and gives the possibility to “identify the independent effects of a set of variables on a dependent variable” (Greene 2003: 9). In the model here, we would expect that a larger first proposal leads to a larger national position. In the same manner we would expect effects for the weighted median and the cabinet median. Using a multiple linear regression we can compare the different effects in there significance and effect size. Robust standard errors are used to consider the multiple observations per actor. Other statistical methods (e.g. logit or multilevel regression) lead to similar results and for reasons of parsimony and interpretation I will apply the simplest method.

Table 1: Linear Regression (OLS) to explain the national position

	<i>beta</i>	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>Std. Err.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>P>t</i>
First Proposal	0,1903	0,1834	0,0959	1,91	0,057
Median (Influential Actors)	0,4676	0,4577	0,1093	4,19	0,000
Median (All Actors)	-0,1112	-0,1101	0,0811	-1,36	0,175
First Proposal x Ministerial Autonomy	0,0419	0,0387	0,0367	1,05	0,292
Median (All Actors) x Actors interested	0,1646	0,0330	0,0085	3,90	0,000
Constant		0,2278	0,0259	8,81	0,000

N=437, R²=0,4648, robust standard errors

Looking at the regression results we see clearly, that the informal phase of the model explains the national position better than the formal cabinet median phase (hypothesis A1). Keeping the rest of the model constant, the formal cabinet decision does even not explain a significant amount of the dependent variable at all. However the formal variable of the first proposal still explains a significant amount and thus hypothesis A2 can be confirmed. Before looking at the interaction effects we can infer, that the first proposal and the informal coordination among the influential actors explain a significant amount of the variance of the national position.

The effect of the first proposal is not higher in member states where the degree of ministerial autonomy is higher. Hypothesis A3 is rejected and the supposition would be that the first proposal has a systematic effect beyond the national varieties of ministerial autonomy.

The median itself does not significantly explain the national position. However, in interaction with the number of actors interested in the issue, there is a strong significant effect in the model (hypothesis A4). So the more actors are interested in an issue, the more likely the issue is dissolved in the whole cabinet. The effect of the interaction with the cabinet median should have – and indeed has – a positive coefficient.

Changing the point of view to the specific actor in the system table 2 shows the results of the regression analysis. Again a linear regression model is applied as there were no advances or changes in effects using more sophisticated models.

Table 2: Linear Regression (OLS) to explain the actor utility of the national position

	<i>beta</i>	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>Std. Err.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>P>t</i>
First Proposer	0,2539	0,0450	0,0052	8,70	0,000
Access	0,1786	0,0299	0,0035	8,52	0,000
Perceived Influence	0,1532	0,0738	0,0120	6,13	0,000
Project Management	-0,0491	-0,0088	0,0034	-2,57	0,010
Number of Issues Actor is interested in	-0,5883	-0,0037	0,0003	-14,43	0,000
Constant		0,1127	0,0057	19,66	0,000

N=1854, R²=0,3259, robust standard errors

The results show that the actor formulating the first proposal has thereof a significant gain in his utility (hypothesis B1). From this viewpoint the national position is again highly influenced from the ministry offering the first proposal. Even if the institutionalized process afterwards could change the position, there is significant evidence that the first proposer sets up the stage for the following process. Having official access to the process (hypothesis B2) and thus to trustworthy information leads also to an increase in utility for the respective actor. However the coefficient shows that the effect of the access is noticeable smaller than the effect first proposal. Taking another perspective could show us that denied access to the process presumably leads to a smaller assertiveness in position taking. Most jurisdictional responsibilities are fixed through by-laws and constitutions and thus quiet stable. However, there are some changes in jurisdiction and competencies over time and the analysis shows, that these changes would clearly affect the assertiveness of the ministry.

The perceived influence (hypothesis B3) has a high positive effect on the assertiveness of an actor. So actors who were perceived influential were also truly influential. This is not trivial, but gives some indices that the data measurement of influence inside the system is valid and reliable. The effect is also the strongest effect in the model. Combining these results with the effect of the informal phase in table 1, modelling governmental structures based on that informal and actual data would make sense for future research.

To hold the assignment of being the manager of the national coordination process (hypothesis B4) results in a loss for the ministry. This would confirm the expectation that project managers are more concerned about figuring out a national position at all, than about accomplishing their own goal. There could be some future rewards for the managers or some rewards at another level, which is not covered by the model. Maybe the national project managers could use their knowledge to obtain their goals

on the international level.

Last, scarce resources (hypothesis B5) do matter. The involved ministries, which focus on a few (special) issues, have a higher gain (in these issues) as ministries with a wide spread interest area. It seemed to be possible to keep track of a handful issues in the national process, to gather information about these issue and about the positions of the other involved actors. But increasing the number of issues to about 30-40 at a time leads to a decreasing utility, as the ministry loses the ability to keep track of the process. However as mentioned above, this decrease in the utility is based on the single issue and not on the overall utility.

Conclusion

The paper developed a broad applicable model of national position taking prior international conferences. Based on very fundamental measures of governmental structures some insights could be extracted in this empirically often under researched field. Overall this paper expands the view of national governments as collective and not unitary actors in international relations. The unique empirical data showed that the processes before international negotiations are complex and multiple national actors are involved. In detail it could be showed that the first proposal and the informal phase have the largest impact on the national position during the preparation of the positions. The cabinet's position has only an effect in the case where many ministries are interested in the policy issue.

Widening the perspective towards the acting ministries, the paper showed that the formal rights of making the first proposal and having official access to the coordination leads to a utility gain for the respective ministries. It could also be shown that concentrating efforts on few issues gives the actor an advantage in assessing its goals, whereas the assignment of managing the national coordination is not beneficial and even leads to losses. At all the advantage of the model is not its detailedness, but rather the comparative point of view regarding national position taking in the context of international conferences.

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Appendix

Formal Definitions:

The system is defined by governments $i = 1, \dots, 15$, subunits (ministries) $j = 1, \dots, n_i$, where the number of units n_i is dependent on the government. There are $k = 1, \dots, 46$ issues structured in issue groups $h = 1, \dots, 9$. Each policy issue is measured in the unit interval $[0, 1]$.

The most preferred position of an actor $r_{i,j}$ in issue k is denoted as $\Theta_{i,j,k}$ and the issue salience (weighting) of the actor $r_{i,j}$ in issue k is denoted as $s_{i,j,k}$. The national position is $\lambda_{i,k}$.

The perceived influence of actor $r_{i,j}$ in issue group h is defined as:

$$\rho_{i,\hat{j},h} = \frac{\sum_{j=1}^{n_i} \pi_{i,j,h}(\hat{j})}{\sum_{\hat{j}=1}^{n_i} \sum_{j=1}^{n_i} \pi_{i,j,h}(\hat{j})}$$

where $\pi_{i,j,h}(\hat{j}) = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if actor } j \text{ denotes actor } \hat{j} \text{ as influential in government } i \text{ and issue group } h \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$

$$\rho_{i,j,h} \in [0,1] \text{ and } \sum_{j=1}^{n_i} \rho_{i,j,h} = 1$$

The number of actors interested in an issue and the number of issues a actor is interested in are defined as:

$$\text{actors interested}_{i,k} = \sum_{j=1}^{n_i} \text{interest}_{i,j,k}$$

$$\text{issues interested}_{i,j} = \sum_{k=1}^{46} \text{interest}_{i,j,k}$$

where $\text{interest}_{i,j,k} = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } \Theta_{i,j,k} \text{ exists} \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$

The weighted governmental median is defined as

$$\text{Median(Influential Actors)}_{i,k} = \theta_{i,\hat{j},k} \mid \sum_{\substack{j=1 \\ \theta_{i,j,k} < \theta_{i,\hat{j},k}}}^{n_i} p_{i,j,k} > 0,5 \quad \text{and} \quad \sum_{\substack{j=1 \\ \theta_{i,j,k} < \theta_{i,\hat{j},k}}}^{n_i} p_{i,j,k} > 0,5$$

and the unweighted median as

$$\text{Median(All Actors)}_{i,k} = \theta_{i,\hat{j},k} \mid \sum_{\substack{j=1 \\ \theta_{i,j,k} < \theta_{i,\hat{j},k}}}^{n_i} q_{i,j,k} > 0,5 \quad \text{and} \quad \sum_{\substack{j=1 \\ \theta_{i,j,k} < \theta_{i,\hat{j},k}}}^{n_i} q_{i,j,k} > 0,5$$

where $q = \frac{1}{n_i}$

Definitions of variables

Variable		Range
Dependent Variable		
National Position	$\lambda_{i,k}$	[0,1]
Independent Variables:		
First Proposal	$\Theta_{i,j,k}$ where Actor _{i,j} has the power to prepare the first proposal in issue k	[0,1]
Median (Influential Actors) ⁵	Median (Influential Actors) _{i, k}	[0,1]
Median (All Actors)	Median (All Actors) _{i, k}	[0,1]
First Proposal x Ministerial Autonomy	First Proposal x high ministerial autonomy ⁶	[0,1]
Median (All Actors) x Actors interested	Median (All Actors) _{i, k} x actors interested _{i, k}	
Dependent Variable		
Interest-weighted utility of a ministry in an issue	$(1 - \Theta_{i,j,k} - \lambda_{i,k}) \times s_{i,j,k}$	[0,1]
Independent Variables:		
First Proposer	1 if Actor _{i,j} is the first proposer and 0 otherwise	{0,1}
Access	1 if Actor _{i,j} has official access to the system and 0 otherwise	{0,1}
Perceived Influence	$p_{i,j,h}$	[0,1]
Project Management	1 if Actor _{i,j} has to manage the project and 0 otherwise	{0,1}
Number of Issues Actors is interested in	issues interested _{i, j}	[0,46]

⁵ For calculating weighted medians see also Thurner and Linhart 2004a: 10.

⁶ High ministerial autonomy is based on Laver and Hunt (1992).