

# PSW-PAPERS

Departement Politieke  
en Sociale Wetenschappen  
Universiteit Antwerpen

# -papers

1997 / 3

**Loose and tight policy  
networks in EU decision-  
making**

*Peter Bursens  
Bart Kerremans*



## Colofon

PSW-Papers is een initiatief van het departement Politieke en Sociale Wetenschappen van de Universiteit Antwerpen - UIA. De paperreeks heeft als doel het wetenschappelijk onderzoek dat aan het departement wordt verricht, te valoriseren en aan de buitenwereld kenbaar te maken.

### *Redactie:*

Herman VAN PELT, coördinator  
Peter BURSENS  
Nico CARPENTIER  
Sven DE BRUYN  
Kristof DE LEEMANS

### *Redactieadres:*

PSW-PAPERS  
Universiteitsplein 1  
B-2610 Antwerpen (Wilrijk)  
Fax: + 32 3 820 28 82  
E-mail: [pswpaper@uia.ua.ac.be](mailto:pswpaper@uia.ua.ac.be)

PSW-Papers verschijnt viermaandelijks: maximaal 12 nummers per jaar, in de regel telkens 4 nummers op 3 publicatiemomenten (1 maart, 1 juli en 1 december) waarbij naar een evenwicht wordt gestreefd in bijdragen uit de verschillende afstudeerrichtingen van het departement (Bestuurswetenschappen, Communicatiewetenschap, Internationale Politiek en Sociale Wetenschappen).

Meer informatie over PSW-Papers en het departement Politieke en Sociale Wetenschappen vindt U op de website: <http://psw-www.uia.ac.be/psw/>

Bijkomende exemplaren van dit of andere nummers kunnen aan de hand van het ingesloten formulier worden besteld op bovenstaand adres aan de prijs van 100 BEF (incl. verzending). De betaling gebeurt door het vereiste bedrag over te schrijven op het rekeningnummer 001-1354227-86 met vermelding van 'psw-papers'.

V.U.: Herman VAN PELT

## PSW-Papers...

In zijn 25-jarig bestaan heeft het departement Politieke en Sociale Wetenschappen van de Universiteit Antwerpen (U.I.A.) een uitgebreid palmares van wetenschappelijk onderzoek samengesteld. Aanvankelijk kwamen hoofdzakelijk thema's uit de sociale wetenschappen aan bod. De laatste jaren hebben ook de internationale politiek, de bestuurswetenschappen en de communicatiewetenschappen zich sterk geprofileerd en baanbrekend werk verricht.

De publicatie van deze PSW-Papers bewijst dat het departement de wind in de zeilen heeft. Het initiatief wil de dialoog aanwakkeren met de samenleving, de vakgenoten en de opdrachtgevers, en zodoende de spin-offs van het wetenschappelijk onderzoek in het boeiende domein van de politieke en sociale wetenschappen vergroten. Tegelijkertijd komt in de PSW-Papers het professionalisme tot uiting van een hele ploeg onderzoekers. Zij hebben hun sporen ruimschoots verdiend en worden aangezocht voor nieuwe, veeleisende onderzoeksopdrachten.

Het is betekenisvol dat de PSW-Papers worden gelanceerd op een ogenblik dat veel documenten worden verspreid langs de websites van de onderzoekscentra. Wie op zoek is naar meer gedetailleerde informatie over het lopend onderzoek, kan de website van het departement bezoeken. Maar wie synthese en overzichtelijke resultaten belangrijk vindt, wie van nabij wil kennismaken met een concreet project, ver weg van het geruis van de elektronische informatieoverdracht, of wie de diepte van het onderzoekspotentieel wil peilen, vindt nu ook zijn gading in de PSW-Papers.

Herman Meulemans  
Voorzitter dept. Politieke en Sociale Wetenschappen  
Universiteit Antwerpen  
(U.I.A.)

## PSW-Papers...

Pendant les 25 années de son existence, le département de Sciences Politiques et Sociales de l'Université d'Anvers (U.I.A.) a réalisé un palmarès étendu d'études scientifiques. A l'origine, les sujets traités étaient principalement du domaine des sciences sociales. Les dernières années, la politique internationale, les sciences administratives et les sciences de la communication se sont affirmées et un travail de pionnier a été accompli.

La publication de cette série d'études de sciences politiques et sociales est la preuve que le département est en plein essor. Cette initiative a pour objectif de stimuler le dialogue avec la société, les collègues et les donneurs d'ordre et ainsi d'augmenter l'impact favorable de la recherche scientifique dans le domaine passionnant des sciences politiques et sociales. Cette série est en même temps une manifestation du professionnalisme de toute une équipe de chercheurs. Ceux-ci ont largement fait leurs preuves et sont sollicités pour des missions de recherche exigeantes.

Il est significatif que ces publications soient lancées à un moment où de nombreux documents sont diffusés via les websites des centres de recherche. Pour celui qui est à la recherche d'une information plus détaillée sur une étude en cours, une visite au website du département peut être utile. En revanche, celui qui souhaite avoir une synthèse des études et un aperçu des résultats de celles-ci ou celui qui désire avoir une connaissance plus approfondie d'un projet concret, loin du bruit de fond de la transmission électronique d'information, ou encore celui qui veut sonder la profondeur du potentiel de recherche, trouvera, aujourd'hui encore, ce qu'il lui faut dans cette série de publications de sciences politiques et sociales.

Herman Meulemans  
Président dépt. Sciences Politiques et Sociales  
Universiteit Antwerpen  
(U.I.A.)

## PSW-Papers...

Over the past 25 years the department of Political and Social Sciences of the University of Antwerp (U.I.A.) has had an impressive record of scientific research. Initially focusing mainly on the social sciences, research now includes international relations, administration science and communication science.

The publication of these Political and Social Sciences Papers proves that the department is on the right track. By promoting dialogue with society, colleagues and sponsors, the department wishes to expand spin-offs in the fascinating field of political and social sciences. The Political and Social Sciences Papers also testify to the research teams' professionalism. They have won their spurs and are being petitioned for new, demanding research assignments.

It is significant that the Political and Social Sciences Papers are being launched at a time when many documents are distributed through research centre websites. The department's website has detailed information on ongoing research. However, persons interested in a clear and concise outline and easy-reference results or an upfront view of a concrete project should consult the Political and Social Sciences Papers. Far removed from the continuous buzz of computers it will provide answers to all those wishing to penetrate the very depths of the department's research.

Herman Meulemans  
Chairman dept. Political and Social Sciences  
Universiteit Antwerpen (U.I.A.)

**Loose and Tight Policy Networks  
in EU Decision-Making**

**Peter Bursens  
Bart Kerremans**

**1 december 1997**

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>.

The European Union can be analysed starting from different research questions and consequently using different theories and tools. A major distinction can be made between scholars who are interested in the result of the integration process and scholars who want to understand the internal politics (Hix, 1994 and 1996). The former are looking for 'the nature of the beast' (Risse-Kappen, 1996) and try to grasp the mechanisms that have been driving the pooling of authorities and sovereignties among the states participating in the integration experiment. These researchers mainly have an international relations background and use integration theory to describe the process and forecast its outcome. The most important cleavage lies between neo-realists and liberal-intergovernmentalists on the one hand, ranging from Hoffmann (1968) to Moravcsik (1991, 1993 and 1995) and neo-functionalists ranging on the other hand, from Haas (1958) to Sandholtz and Zysman (1989) and Tranholm-Mikkelsen (1991). Other scholars get themselves much less involved in the discussion of categorising the European Union and accept the current European political system as it presents itself to them. They regard the European Union as a polity *sui generis* with a (multi-level) system of governance in which policy is made by a wide range of actors, both national and supranational, both private and public. These scholars don't rely entirely on international relations approaches but incorporate concepts and methods from comparative politics as well (cf. Bulmer, 1994; Grande, 1996; Kohler-Koch, 1996; Marks, 1996). This research project follows the latter tradition.

---

<sup>1</sup> This article summarises the results of a research project that was conducted by students in Political Science of the Department of Political and Social Sciences of the University of Antwerp (UIA), under supervision of Peter Bursens (UIA) and Bart Kerremans (UIA/KUL). The students were Nadia Chairi, Koen Lansloot, Nils Neyt, Yves Remy, Carolien Slijper, Dimitri Vaerendonck, Katrien Van den Bergh, Erwin van Goethem en Michel Verbiest.

## 2. Research Question.

Looking at the European policy-making scene, one immediately notices the wide variety of institutional structures and decision-making processes. Firstly, numerous actors are involved in the elaboration of European policy: national and sub-national decision-makers, intergovernmental and supranational institutions, national private actors and European level organised interest groups. Secondly, directives and regulations are developed through many different and often complex decision-making procedures. Our hypothesis is that this heterogeneity both in structure and process leads to the creation of different actor configurations with respect to different policy initiatives. The concept of actor configurations refers to the features of the relations between the actors who are involved in the policy making process. We seek to find out which variables account for the differences in these configurations. In more concrete terms: why does directive A develop into actor configuration X and why does regulation B lead to actor configuration Y? Which factors cause the development of particular policy networks? The preferences and strategies of the private actors? The characteristics of the institutional actors? The decision-making procedures? The features of the policy issues and policy domains? An empirical research design was set up in order to identify the variables with explanatory power. We firstly discuss the selection of policy domains and legislative proposals. Secondly, we deal with the methodology to describe (corporatism / pluralism and policy networks) and explain (small N analysis) the configurations. Finally, the results of the analysis are presented and discussed.

## 3. The Cases.

EU-legislation is much too complex to be examined as a whole. We think that case-study based analysis is a more fruitful approach to study the

decision making processes (cf. Kooiman, 1993; Greenwood and Ronit, 1994; Greenwood, 1994). An optimal analysis can only be achieved through a strategic choice of those cases. Taking into account practical restrictions such as time and funding, we chose to work with nine cases in three different policy fields: social, environmental and agricultural policy.

Official Journal	Name	Abbreviation
	<i>Agricultural Policy</i>	
L 329/18 (30/12/95)	Common Market Organisation Rice	Rice
L 63/1 (21/03/95)	Common Market Organisation Dried Fodder	Fodder
L 148/23 (30/06/95)	Price Setting 1995/96 Fruit and Vegetables	Fruit
L 148/9 (30/06/95)	Price Setting 1995/96 Sugar	Sugar
	<i>Environmental Policy</i>	
L 136/14 (18/07/95)	Noise Emissions Construction Machines	Noise
L 337/83 (24/12/94)	Pollution Emissions Combustion Installations	Emissions
L 365/10 (31/12/94)	Packaging and Packaging Waste	Waste
	<i>Social Policy</i>	
L 335/28 (31/12/95)	Safety and Health Prescriptions Workplace	Health
L 254/64 (30/09/94)	European Works Councils	Councils

**Table 3.1 Overview of policy fields and cases**

These fields were selected because they differ in a sufficient number of variables, such as degree of integration, the involvement of private and public actors, decision-making procedures and policy characteristics. The selection of the nine cases was even more confined by practical concerns. It was important to select those directives and regulations that had already successfully come to an end but that at the same time had not been terminated too long ago: respondents had to be able to speak freely about their role in the process while they also had to remember enough details. Eventually, nine cases were depicted: four from agricultural policy, three from environmental policy and two from social policy.

### 3.1 Agricultural Policy.

Agricultural policy has been part of the integration process from the very beginning. The Treaty of Rome formulated the main objectives which remain still important after 40 years: the European agricultural policy has to guarantee price stability, protect the income of farmers and secure the supply of agricultural products in the Union. The basic principles to achieve these aims were defined in 1958: a single market, community preference and financial solidarity. Agreement on the price support system was reached in 1962 through the establishment of the European Agricultural Guarantee and Guidance Fund (EAGGF). From that moment on, negotiations have started to set up the Common Organisations of the Markets (COM). These take different forms according to the products, but they all share price guarantee for agricultural output, intervention through the buying of surplus production and external protection against lower-priced imports. The prices are subject to a yearly revision. In 1967 the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was finally established. Through the years the CAP has gradually evolved into a deficit situation. Nowadays, the CAP still consumes the major part of the EU budget. Several reforms were proposed but never sufficiently implemented. Eventually, by the late eighties, the member-states reached agreement over a radical reform. Since 1992 the different sectors of agricultural policy have been reformed.

The four agricultural cases are illustrations of the two most important policy instruments within the CAP: Common Organisation of Market reform and annual price setting. Both kinds of legislation come about by means of the consultation procedure. Annual Price Setting regulations are always treated as one issue, sometimes even together with market reforms, which enables the Agricultural ministers to give and take by voting so-called package deals.

The Commission (DG VI and the numerous consultative and implementation committees), the European Parliament (mainly the agricultural committee) and the Council of Ministers (the Special Committee on Agriculture and the agricultural working groups) are the most prominent institutional actors, while COPA (the European transsectoral farmers umbrella organisation), the respective sectoral interest groups and BEUC (the European Consumers Association) are the most important private actors.

### 3.2 Environmental Policy.

Environmental Policy is a more recent policy sector on the European level. Although some directives and regulations were already adopted before the Single European Act (SEA) in 1987, it was the SEA that marked the start of a real European environmental policy. Before 1987, policy proposals had to be based on article 235 or on the Internal Market provisions of article 100. The SEA introduced the new articles 130 R, S and T, exclusively dedicated to environmental policy. The EU competency with respect to environmental policy was again extended by the Treaty of Maastricht, mainly through the establishment of the co-decision procedure and the provision that other policy fields should incorporate elements of sustainable development into their proposals. Day to day European environmental politics is steered by the Environmental Action Programmes (EAPs). The first EAP dates from 1972, the fifth, which is being implemented currently, is written in accordance to the philosophy of sustainable development, focusing on subsidiarity and shared responsibility of all involved actors. Nowadays European environmental policy can be based on different treaty provisions which result in different decision-making procedures (co-operation or co-decision) and different voting requirements within the Council (qualified majority or unanimity).

Some directives are only minor adaptations of previous legislation, such as the noise emissions and combustion installation emissions directives, while others are major directives covering new and extensive issues, such as the packaging and packaging waste directive.

Environmental interest groups, such as the European Environmental Bureau, Greenpeace International and WWF, are of course the most active in the environmental policy domain. But also consumers, industry and even trade unions interfere if their interests are at stake. Within the Commission, DG XI plays a major role, within the EP, the environment committee, and within the Council structure, the Coreper and the environmental working groups.

### 3.3 Social Policy.

Although the Treaty of Rome already had some minor provisions with respect to a European social policy, the prevalence of the economic objectives was beyond doubt. For a long time, social measures such as the free movement of employees, have been regarded as tools to eliminate distortions of the internal market (Archer and Butler, 1992). Only in 1974 the Commission adopted the first Social Action Programme. However, its legislative output fell short of expectations. In 1987, the SEA incorporated a new title on social policy, introduced qualified majority with respect to safety and health measures for employees and asked for a renewal of the social dialogue. But again little progress was made. The signing of the Social Charter by eleven member-states in 1989 was of political importance but did not really trigger social initiatives. Finally, the negotiations for the Treaty of Maastricht resulted in a social chapter. However, the United Kingdom refused to approve the negotiated outcome which forced the other member-states to attach the chapter as an agreement in a protocol to the Treaty. This Agreement now allows 14 member-states

to initiate social legislation using the institutions and procedures of the first pillar of the Treaty. Besides the Agreement, the Maastricht Treaty also enables social policy through articles 117-122.

The directive on Safety and Health Prescriptions is an example of Treaty based legislation while the Works Councils directive is based on the Social Agreement. The European Commission's DG V is in charge of the initiation of social policy. Within the European Parliament the committee on social affairs and employment is the forum, while the Coreper and social working groups are the relevant Council actors. Both trade unions and employers have created European level organisations: the ETUC (European Trade Union Confederation) and UNICE (Union of Industrial Employers in Europe). Besides these, numerous sectoral associations monitor legislation and lobby European institutions in Brussels.

### 4. Methodology.

The aim of this article is to identify the factors that can explain why certain types of actor configurations develop as a result of the elaboration of legislative proposals. The number of observations, i.e. the cases from the different policy domains, is nine. The number of possible explanatory variables on the contrary is much higher (cf. *infra*). A research situation in which the number of independent variables exceeds the number of observations does not lend itself for statistical analysis. Two alternative analytical tools can be applied to overcome this problem: qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) and small N analysis. This research therefore uses the so-called small N analysis. This comparative methodology has been especially constructed to work with a data set with a small number of observations and a large number of variables (De Meur and Berg-Schlosser, 1994, 1996a and 1996b; De Meur, 1996). Through comparisons based on the logic of 'Most Different with Same Outcome' (MDSO) and



'Most Similar with Different Outcome' (MSDO), variables are identified that are able to explain the similarities and differences in the data set. The MSDO logic can be translated to our hypothesis as follows: to explain why within a group of legislative initiatives, all those initiatives result in a similar policy network, one has to look for similarities in the features of those initiatives that differ the most. The MSDO logic is formulated as follows: to explain why within a group of legislative initiatives, some initiatives result in a different policy network than other initiatives, one has to look for differences in the features of those initiatives that are the most alike. The small N analysis identifies in the first place the cases that have to be compared with each other and secondly the variables with explanatory power. The analysis is based on a matrix in which the dependent and independent variables are brought together. The construction of the variables is described below.

#### **4.1 Dependent Variable: the Corporatism - Pluralism Spectrum and the Policy Network Approach.**

The dependent variable is the type of configuration of actors that can be found with respect to the policy-making processes. These configurations were conceptualised as policy networks and therefore defined through the structural or relational characteristics of a pair of actors instead of through the attitudinal variables of the individual actors. Based on the literature of policy networks on the one hand (Jordan and Schubert, 1992; Rhodes, 1992; Smith, 1992; Van Waarden, 1992; Windhoff-Heritier, 1993) and on the literature of the corporatism - pluralism spectrum on the other hand (Schmitter, 1979; Lehmbruch and Schmitter, 1982; Wilson, 1983; Cawson, 1986; Williamson, 1989), four main categories were constructed: relations among interest groups, involvement of decision-makers in interest groups, involvement of interest groups in the decision-making process and contacts between decision-makers and interest groups.

These categories all cover several variables. *Relations among interest groups* was subdivided in four variables: monopoly vs. competition, interference or not from decision-makers in the interest groups' sphere, hierarchical relations vs. horizontal relations and the presence or absence of peak organisations. *Involvement of decision-makers in interest groups* in five: recognition, control, creation, support and access. *Involvement of interest groups in the decision-making process* also in five: internal vs. external involvement, formal vs. informal involvement, strict vs. vague separation between private and public sphere, interest groups' participation in institutionalised bodies and interest groups' participation mainly in formal or informal bodies. Finally, *contacts between decision-makers and interest groups* was subdivided in four variables: formal vs. informal contacts, objectives, initiation and reciprocity of the contacts.

In order to conduct the qualitative comparative analysis by means of the so-called small N analysis, the dependent variable must be a dichotomy. The construction of our dichotomy was based upon the policy-network and corporatism - pluralism literature. Both approaches use a spectrum that ranges from loose networks on the one hand to tight networks on the other. With respect to policy networks the far ends are respectively issue networks and policy communities; the other ideal-types are of course respectively pluralism and corporatism. Without exaggerating the similarities, we think that both approaches resemble enough to use them in order to define our dependent variable. Loose networks are thus defined as 'pluralist issue networks' while tight networks are defined as 'corporatist policy communities'.

Table 4.1 gives an overview of the 'tight' scores of the cases on the main categories of variables. This table marks a clear division between the tight and the loose networks. All four cases from agricultural policy plus the Works Councils case from social policy are tight networks while all three

cases from environmental policy plus the Health and Safety case from social policy are loose networks.

	Rice	Fodder	Sugar	Fruit	Noise	Emission	Waste	Health	Councils
D1	1	3	3	3	0	0	1	2	4
D2 EC	3	2	3	2	0	1	0	1	3
D2 CM	2	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1
D3 EC	0	2	2	2	2	1	0	0	4
D3 CM	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
D4 EC	3	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	3
D4 CM	2	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1
Total	12	10	11	10	4	7	2	6	17
Type	Tight	Tight	Tight	Tight	Loose	Loose	Loose	Loose	Tight

D = dimension; EC = European Commission; CM = Council of Ministers

**Table 4.1 Number of 'tight' variables per case**

The concepts of loose and tight networks are of course ideal-types which are never found as such in reality. Cases will never correspond completely to all features of the ideal-type dichotomy, in concreto to the 32 descriptive variables. Table 4.1 only distinguishes between cases that are clearly not loose, thus denominated tight, and cases that are clearly not tight, thus called loose.

#### 4.2 Independent Variables: Procedures, Private Actors, European Institutions, Legislative Proposals and Policies.

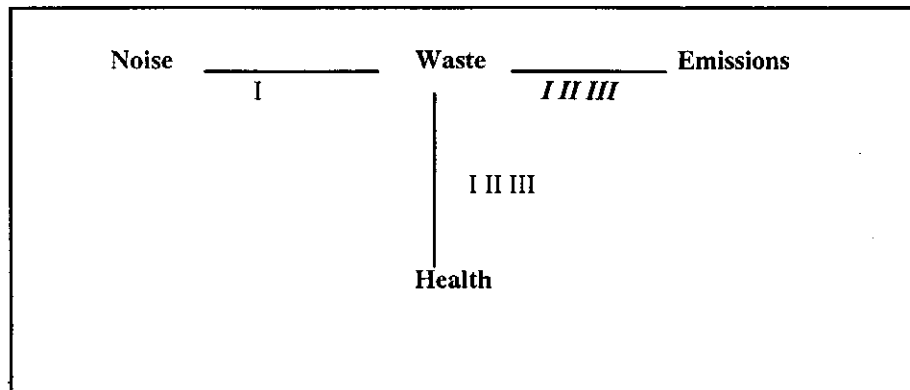
The independent variables of the analytical model were chosen from an empirical point of view, i.e. without preliminary theorising or modelling. This enabled us to make an exhaustive list of variables with potential explanatory power. At the end of the analysis, some theoretical implications of the results will be discussed. Again due to the small N analysis, these variables were also constructed as dichotomies. But while the dependent variable was characterised by structural features, the

independent variables are constructed by attitudinal features. Five main categories could be defined: formal aspects of the decision-making process, characteristics of the interest groups, characteristics of the decision-making institutions, characteristics concerning the content of the legislative initiative and formal aspects of the policy concerned. These main categories could again be divided into several variables. To give a few examples: *formal aspects of the decision-making process* discusses the type of decision-making procedure, initiative of the Commission vs. initiative based on a question of the Council, consultation or not of an advisory body, qualified majority vs. unanimity within the Council; *characteristics of the interest groups* deals with the number of groups, representativeness, social-economic vs. other interests, corporate vs. individual actors; *characteristics of the decision-making institutions* covers the culture of secrecy within the Commission, expertise within the Commission or the European Parliament, economic or post-material tension within the European Parliament; *characteristics concerning the content of the legislative initiative* discusses radical vs. marginal proposed changes, spill-over, causing big or small efforts, technical vs. political initiative; *formal aspects of the policy concerned* deals with distributive vs. regulative policy, directive vs. regulation, old vs. new policy domain, strongly vs. weakly integrated policy domain. In all, 53 independent variables were identified and inserted in a matrix that served as the basis for the qualitative comparative analysis.

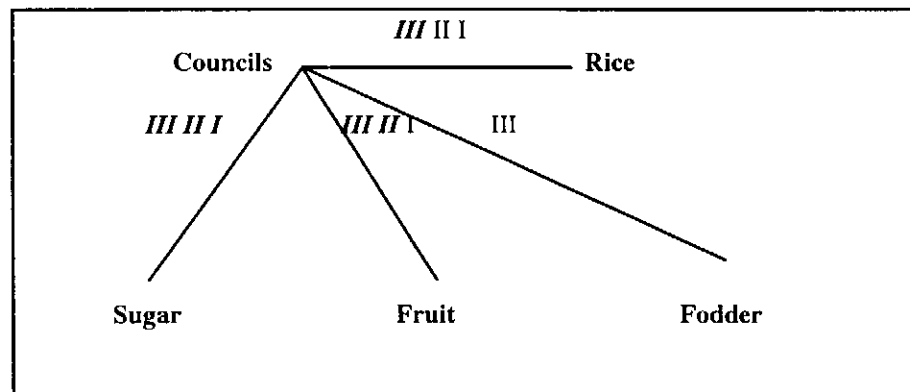
#### 4.3 Analysis.

Following the reasoning of the small N analysis, three different analyses had to be carried out. One among the tight networks, one among the loose networks (both by means of the 'Most Different Same Outcome' logic) and one between the tight vs. the loose networks (by means of the 'Most Similar Different Outcome' logic). These three analyses resulted in three

diagrams which show the pairs of cases that must be compared with each other<sup>2</sup>. The Roman figures in these diagrams indicate the number of categories in which the cases differ from or resemble to each other. Bold italic characters point to a stronger difference or resemblance than normal characters.

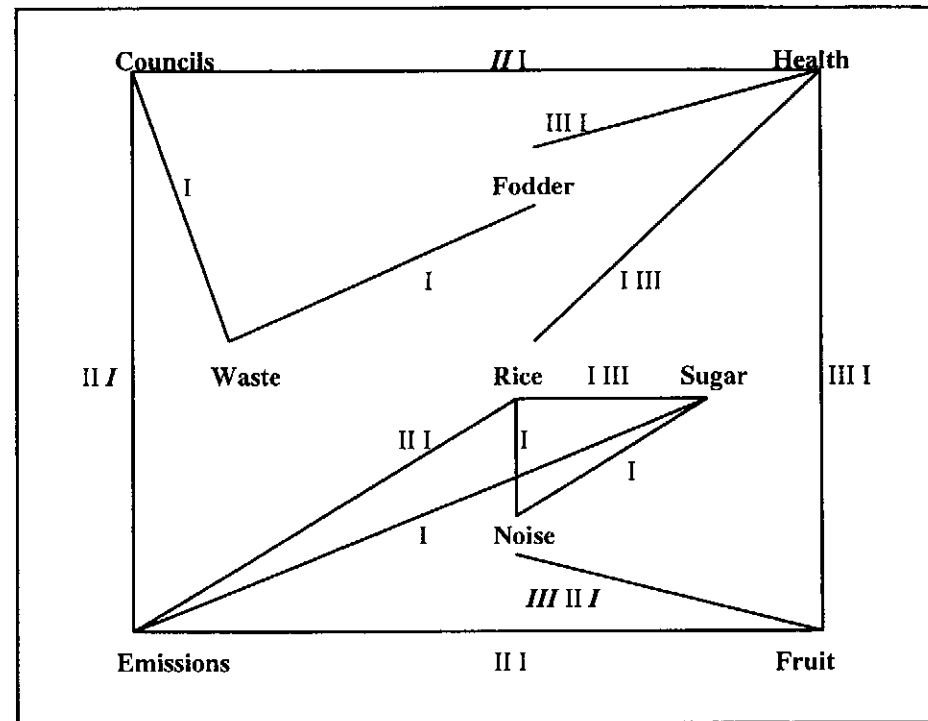


Graph 4.1 Graphical output of MDSO analysis of loose networks



Graph 4.2 Graphical output of MDSO analysis of tight networks

<sup>2</sup> The technical realisation of the the small N analysis is described in detail in Bursens and Kerremans, 1997.



Graph 4.3 Graphical output of MSDO analysis of loose vs. tight Networks

The analysis among the loose networks identified the pairs Waste - Emissions and Waste - Health as being the most similar to each other. With respect to the analysis among the tight networks, the pairs Councils - Sugar and Councils - Fruit were identified as being the most similar. Finally, the analysis confronting the loose and the tight networks showed three pairs to be the least similar to each other: Emissions - Councils, Health - Councils and Fruit - Noise.

The next step in the analysis was the identification of the variables that could be held responsible for the similarities (the two MDSO analyses) respectively differences (the MSDO analysis). This identification resulted in the following tables which show the pairs and the variables. The interpretation of these analytical results is given in the next paragraph.

Pair of cases	Categories	Variables
Waste - Emissions	A	Treaty-based vs. Protocol based Coreper vs. Special Committee Agriculture qualified majority vs. unanimity (Treaty) long period vs. short period
	B	representative actors vs. not representative financially strong actors vs. weak actors geographically spread interest vs. not spread
	C	no secrecy within Commission vs. secrecy no expertise in EP vs. expertise in EP presidency change near vs. not near
Waste - Health	A	use of consultative committee vs. not use Treaty-based vs. Protocol based Coreper vs. Special Committee Agriculture qualified majority vs. unanimity (Treaty) long period vs. short period
	C	no secrecy within Commission vs. secrecy national tension within Council vs. no tension presidency change near vs. not near

**Table 4.2 Identified variables from MDSO analysis of loose networks**

Both pairs generate the dimensions formal aspects of the decision-making process and characteristics of the decision making institutions as potentially explanatory. Looking only at this analysis, the dimension characteristics of the interest groups seems to be important as well.

Pair of cases	Categories	Variables
Councils - Sugar	A	qualified majority vs. unanimity (Treaty) short period vs. long period
	B	representative actors vs. not representative social-economic actors vs. not social-economic financially strong actors vs. weak actors geographically spread interest vs. not spread
	E	time limit vs. no time limit part of a package deal vs. no part intervening policy vs. regulating policy
Councils - Fruit	A	qualified majority vs. unanimity (Treaty) short period vs. short period
	B	representative actors vs. not representative social-economic actors vs. not social-economic financially strong actors vs. weak actors geographically spread interest vs. not spread
	E	time limit vs. no time limit part of a package deal vs. no part intervening policy vs. regulating policy young vs. old policy domain

**Table 4.3 Identified variables from MDSO analysis of tight networks**

This analysis points again to the first dimension and to the same variables within this dimension. It furthermore adds the dimension formal aspects of the policy to the list. The dimension discussing the characteristics of the interest groups is indeed identified but, after a detailed examination, cannot be treated as having explanatory power (cf. infra)

Pair of cases	Categories	variables
Emissions - Councils	A	consultation vs. co-operation Treaty-based vs. Protocol based short preparation vs. long preparation long period vs. short period
	E	complementary proposal vs. basic proposal no package deal vs. of package deal
Health - Councils	A	Treaty-based vs. Protocol based Commission initiative vs. Council question short preparation vs. long preparation no use of consultative committee vs. no use long period vs. short period
	C	no institutional interest vs. interest Com. no presidency change near vs. change near
	E	complementary proposal vs. basic proposal replacing proposal vs. new proposal no package deal vs. of package deal
Fruit - Noise	A	consultation vs. co-decision Special Committee Agriculture vs. Coreper short period vs. long period
	B	little interest vs. a lot of interest financially strong actors vs. weak actors
	C	institutional interest vs. no interest Com. left right tension Council vs. no tension no materialism tension vs. tension Council
	D	no grave efforts vs. grave efforts
	E	distributive vs. regulative regulation vs. directive package deal vs. no package deal strong integration vs. weak integration

**Table 4.4 Identified variables from MSDO analysis of loose vs. tight networks**

The MSDO analysis shows the formal aspects of the decision making procedure and of the policy as important variables. As will be discussed in the next paragraph, the same variables again pop up: the length of the procedure and the use of package deals.

## 5. Discussion.

### 5.1 Overall Analysis: Length of Procedures and Package Deals.

Two variables pop up in all three analyses: the length of the procedure in the category that discusses the formal aspects of the decision making procedure, and the use of package deals in the category that deals with the formal aspects of the policy concerned.

The length of the procedure seems to be a determinant factor for the type of network. A long procedure, defined as a period lasting more than one year, coincides almost in all cases with a loose network, while a short procedure corresponds always with a tight network. This can be explained by the fact that a short procedure forces interest groups to build intensive contacts and networks. Moreover, decision making institutions who are confronted with a short procedure, are not always able to maintain contacts with a large number of private actors, but, on the contrary are obliged to restrict their consultative contacts to a limited number of actors. Representative peak organisations then become the obvious interlocutors because they are able to provide decision makers with expert information.

The second important explanatory variable is the use of package deals within Council decision making. If the legislative proposal is part of such a deal, a tight network is almost always the case. If on the other hand the Council decides separately on each proposal, a loose network is found. The following argumentation can be developed. The most crucial feature of a package deal is the simultaneous treatment of several, mostly similar, policy proposals within the Council of Ministers. At such occasions, negotiations resemble very much a play of give and take: one member-state gives way with respect to one issue and in turn expects to win with respect to other issues. This negotiation mechanism has far-reaching consequences for the involved interest groups because they cannot be sure that the

governments they have persuaded of their interests will persist in defending their viewpoint until the end of Council deliberations. Confronted with package deals, member-states make calculations, which not necessarily result in policy outcomes in favour of the interest group concerned. This puts off some interest groups and only stimulates the participation of those groups which can be relatively sure that governments will not abandon their viewpoints. The result is a tight policy network with a small number of actors who co-operate very intensively.

No other variables from all three analyses can be considered as explanatory, even though two variables from the category that discusses the formal aspects of the decision making procedure, pop up twice. Firstly, required qualified majority voting within the Council of Ministers. Looking at the data set we can only conclude that this is not of any explanatory use because all cases had to be decided by means of qualified majority anyway. Secondly, the distinction between the involvement of the Committee of Permanent Representatives (all loose networks) vs. the involvement of the Special Agricultural Committee (four out of five tight networks). Since the latter four coincide with the four cases from the agricultural policy domain, it is obvious that we are confronted rather with a distinction between agricultural policy and the other policy domains than with a distinction between tight and loose networks.

It is furthermore striking that variables from the category that discusses the characteristics of the interest groups do not have any explanatory power. Neither the representativeness nor the financial strength of interest groups nor the geographically spread of interests give a univocal result. In some cases they coincide with loose networks, in other cases with tight networks.

## 5.2 Analysis of the Loose Networks: Decision Makers Matter.

With respect to the loose networks, we must focus our attention to the characteristics of decision making institutions. The absence of a culture of secrecy within the Commission during the policy formulation stage is an important feature of the cases that result in a loose network. If the administration is open during the drafting of policy proposals, interest groups are aware of the Commission's ideas in an early phase, which allows them to act very soon. This transparency also gives interest groups the opportunity to communicate their opinions and demands in an informal way. Indeed, a loose network is marked by multiple and informal contacts between private actors and public decision makers. If, on the contrary, the Commission does not want to give any information concerning its proposals until the publication in the Official Journal, less interest groups will be aware of the contents and therefore able to carry out useful lobby activities. Preliminary information is after all an essential prerequisite to succeed in influencing decision makers. The Commission, on the other hand, is not capable of collecting all essential data in order to elaborate realistic proposals and therefore has to rely on some expert information from the sector concerned. This is especially true with respect to price setting in agricultural policy. The Commission receives these data from a small number of privileged interest groups, i.e. the members of a tight policy network.

The absence or presence of expertise within the European Parliament is another variable that can be decisive in the construction of a policy network. Indeed, if the Members of the European Parliament don't have enough expertise themselves in order to treat proposals in an adequate way, they have to look for it elsewhere. Considering that one of the most fruitful ways to lobby consists of providing expert information, contacts with interest groups become an obvious strategy. If the Parliament has enough information at its disposal, for instance with respect to a technically less

complex proposal, it has to rely less on the input of private actors and becomes less open to contacts, which impedes interest groups' access. One of the features of a tight network is indeed a low frequency of contacts between the players in the field.

An imminent presidency change can also be considered as an important variable but is less outspoken because of a less clear differentiation between loose and tight networks. We can only think of a minor stimulus, i.e. the expectation of interest groups that an issue will be concluded in due course which forces interest groups to enhance their lobby activities and turn more to unofficial, informal contacts, hence establishing a loose network. A polarisation between two or more member-states within the Council of Ministers doesn't lend itself to a univocal interpretation either. The only correlation we see is the use of informal channels to set member-states against each other when they are already in dispute.

### **5.3 Analysis of the Tight Networks: the Policy Domain Matters.**

The category that discusses the formal aspects of the policy becomes relevant when discussing analysis of the tight networks. Firstly, a time limit on the conclusion of a proposal, as can be the case with respect to price setting in agricultural policy, can restrict the opportunities for interest groups to establish contacts with decision makers. This equally limits the number of interlocutors for the decision making institutions. Both features lead to a rather tight network. Secondly, the age of a policy field can play a role. Young policy domains are normally characterised by less established concertation and consultation bodies and more by informal channels. Agricultural policy, for instance has got a long tradition during which consultative committees have been set up and semi-institutionalised relations have been established. Younger policy domains, such as

environmental and social policy, simply have not yet been able to construct these.

### **5.4 Analysis of the Loose vs. the Tight Networks: the Legislative Proposal Matters.**

Again the categories covering the characteristics of the decision making institutions and formal aspects of the policy pop up as having explanatory power, although much less striking. Variables such as the institutional interest of the Commission and basic proposal vs. complementary proposal differentiate rather vaguely. Weak vs. strong integration of the policy is slightly more important since a strong integration can correspond with institutionalised mechanisms - hence tight networks - and weak integration with rather informal mechanisms - hence loose networks.

Finally, the category discussing characteristics concerning the content of the legislative initiative seems to have some explanatory power as well. More specifically, it concerns the variable on the degree of efforts that can be caused by a legislation. Serious efforts coincide with a loose network, while less serious efforts correlate with tight networks. This seems obvious: if a legislative proposal results in a situation in which interest groups have to make serious efforts to comply with the prescribed norms, more interest groups will try to influence the decision in their own favour, using very intensively a large number of channels and strategies. These are all features of a loose network. The cases from environmental policy in general and the Packaging and Packaging Waste directive in particular can serve as excellent examples.

## 6. Conclusion: Do Institutions Matter?

The identification of the variables with explanatory power is not only interesting from an empirical point of view, but is also revealing with respect to political theory. The most remarkable result is that the characteristics of the interest groups themselves are no determinants for the type of policy network. On the contrary, characteristics of decision makers and formal aspects of the decision making procedure and of the policy domain seem to be much more decisive. Based on our empirical data, it would be going too far to say that the preferences of private actors don't matter at all, but the analysis does show that private actors' actions and strategies, and thus the policy networks they build, are highly restricted by the institutional setting they are operating in.

These findings suggest that a new-institutionalist approach of European governance is promising to explain what is really going on. The notion that 'institutions make politics' is not new within political science but it has taken a few years for scholars of European policy-making to follow the new-institutionalist research agenda. Only in the last few years, the European governance setting is being analysed in the tradition that has been started by March and Olsen (1984 and 1989), Steinmo, Thelen and Longstreth (1993) and others. Both the European integration process (Pierson, 1996) and the EU governance system (Bulmer, 1994; Kerremans, 1996; Pollack, 1996; Aspinwall, 1997; Shechter, 1997) are now being examined from a new-institutionalist perspective. These authors all stress different aspects but share a core belief in the determinant role of institutions, defined as legal arrangements, procedures, norms, conventions, organisational forms and routines, in the understanding of European governance.

The results of our analysis seem to confirm the importance of these institutions in two ways. Firstly, the developed policy network which is the

result of the strategies of the participating actors, is largely determined by institutional constraints such as various aspects of the decision making procedure and the policy domain. Variables such as the length of the procedure and the use of package deals are the main examples. These aspects are in their turn products of the 'hard' and 'soft' institutional setting of the European Union, i.e. they are caused by the provisions of the treaties and legislation on the one hand and by the administrative culture and routines of institutional actors on the other hand. Secondly, private actors' strategies are influenced by the institutional actors themselves. The culture of secrecy and the presence of expertise within the institutions shape the choices interest groups make with respect to their participation in the policy making process. The characteristics of those decision making institutions are again products of other new-institutionalist factors. The Commission lacks sufficient expertise because of its small size, which is in its turn caused by its internal organisation and budget constraints. The culture of secrecy is a good example of a 'soft' implicit institutional variable. To sum up, our conclusions suggest that further research from a new-institutionalist point of view is likely to be promising with respect to the study of European governance.



## References

Archer, C. and Butler, F., (1992) *The European Community: Structure and Process*, London: Pinter.

Aspinwall, M., (1997) *Planes, Trains and Automobiles: Governance of Transport Policy in the European Union* Mannheim: Conference on Transformation of Governance in the European Union, 24-26 January 1997, Mannheim University.

Bulmer, S., (1994) 'The Governance of the European Union: A New Institutional Approach' in *Journal of Public Policy*, 13, 4: 351-380.

Bursens, P., Kerremans, B., et alii (1997) *In de wandelgangen van de Berlaymont. Beleidsnetwerken in de Europese Unie*, Rapport Leeronderzoek, Antwerpen: Departement Politieke en Sociale Wetenschappen, Universitaire Instelling Antwerpen.

Cawson, A., (1986) *Corporatism and Political Theory*, London: Basil Blackwell.

De Meur, G., Berg-Schlosser, D., (1994) 'Comparing Political Systems: Establishing Similarities and Dissimilarities' in *European Journal of Political Research*, 26, 2: 193-219.

De Meur, G., Berg-Schlosser, D., (1996a) 'Conditions of Authoritarianism, Fascism and Democracy in Inter-War Europe: Systematic Matching and Contracting of Cases for Small N Analysis' in *Comparative Political Studies*, 29, 4: 423-468.

De Meur, G., (1996) 'La comparaison des systèmes politiques: recherche des similarités et différences' in *Revue Internationale de Politique Comparée*, 3, 2: 405-437.

De Meur, G., Berg-Schlosser, D., Ragin Ch., (1996b) 'Political Methodology: Qualitative Methods' in Goodin, R.E., Klingemann, H.-D. (ed.) *A New Handbook of Political Science*, Oxford: Oxford UP.

Grande, E., (1996) 'The State and Interest Groups in a Framework of Multi-Level Decision Making: the Case of the European Union' in *Journal of European Public Policy*, 3, 3: 318-338.

Greenwood, J. and Ronit, K., (1994) 'Interest Groups in the European Community: Newly Emerging Dynamics and Forms' in *West European Politics*, 17, 1: 31-52.

Greenwood, J., (1994) *Representing Interests in the European Union: The Contribution of Case Study Methods*, Berlin: IPSA, 21-25 August 1994.

Haas, E.B., (1958) *The Uniting of Europe: Political, Economic and Social Forces*, Stanford: Stanford UP.

Hix, S., (1994) 'The Study of the European Community: The Challenge to Comparative Politics' in *West European Politics*, 17, 1: 1-30.

Hix, S., (1996) 'CP, IR and the EU! A Rejoinder to Hurrell and Menon' in *West European Politics*, 19, 2: 802-804.

Hoffmann, S., (1968) 'Obstinate or Obsolete? The Fate of the Nation-State and the Case of Western Europe' in *Daedalus*, 95: 862-915.

Jordan, G. and Schubert, K., (1992) 'A Preliminary Ordering of Policy Network Labels' in *European Journal of Political Research*, 21, 1-2: 7-27.

Kerremans, B., (1996) 'Do Institutions Matter?' in *Governance*, 9, 2: 217-240.

Kohler-Koch, B., (1996) 'Catching up with Change: The Transformation of Governance in European Union' in *Journal of European Public Policy*, 3, 3: 359-380.

Kooiman, J., (ed.) (1993) *Modern Governance: New Government - Society Interactions*, London: Sage.

Lehmbruch, G. and Schmitter, Ph., (ed.) (1982) *Patterns of Corporatist Policy Making*, London: Sage.

March, J. and Olsen, J.P., (1984) 'The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political Life' in *American Political Science Review*, 78, 2: 734-748.

March, J. and Olsen, J.P., (1989) *Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics*, New York: Free Press.

Marks, G., (1996) 'An Actor Centred Approach to Multi-Level Governance' in *Journal of Regional and Federal Studies*, 6, 2: 20-38.

Moravcsik, A., (1991) 'Negotiating the Single European Act: National Interests and Conventional Statecraft in the European Community' in *International Organization*, 45, 1: 19-56.

Moravcsik, A., (1993) 'Preferences and Power in the European Community: A Liberal Intergovernmentalist Approach' in *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 31, 4: 473-524.

Moravcsik, A., (1995) 'Liberal Intergovernmentalism and Integration: a Rejoinder' in *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 33, 4: 611-628.

Pierson, P., (1996) 'The Path to European Integration: a Historical Institutional Analysis' in *Comparative Political Studies*, 29, 2: 123-163.

Pollack, M.A., (1996) 'The New Institutionalism and EC Governance: The Promise and Limits of Institutional Analysis' in *Governance*, 9, 4: 429-458.

Rhodes, R.A.W., Marsh, D., (ed.) (1992) *Policy Networks in British Government*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Risse-Kappen, T., (1996) 'Exploring the Nature of the Beast: International Relations Theory and Comparative Policy Analysis Meet the European Union' in *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 34, 1: 53-80.

Sandholtz, W. and Zysman, J., (1989) 'Recasting the European Bargain' in *World Politics*, 41, 1: 95-128.

Schmitter, P., (1979) 'Still the Century of Corporatism?' in Schmitter, P. and Lehmbruch, G. (ed.) *Trends Towards Corporatist Intermediation*, London: Sage.

Shechter, Y., (1997) *Interests, Strategies and Institutions: The Pharmaceutical Sector in the European Community*, Bern: ECPR Joint Sessions, 27 February - 4 March 1997.

Smith, M.J., (1992) *Pressure, Power and Policy*, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Steinmo, S., Thelen, K., Longstreth, F., (ed.) (1993) *Structuring Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tranholm-Mikkelsen, J., (1991) 'Neo-functionalism: Obstinate or Obsolete? A Reappraisal in the Light of the New Dynamism of the EC' in *Millenium: Journal of International Studies*, 20, 1: 1-22.

Van Waarden, F., (1992) 'Dimensions and Types of Policy Networks' in *European Journal of Political Research*, 21, 1-2: 29-52.

Williamson, P.J., (1989) *Corporatism in Perspective: An Introductory Guide to Corporatist Theory*, London: Sage.

Wilson, F.L., (1983) 'French Interest Group Politics: Pluralist or Neo-Corporatist' in *American Political Science Review*, 77, 4: 895-910.

Windhoff-Heritier, A., (1993) 'Policy Network Analysis: A Too! for Comparative Political Research' in Keman, H. (ed.) *Comparative Politics*, Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit University Press.



# PSW-Papers Bestelformulier

Naam: .....

Adres: .....

.....

.....

### Stuur mij aub de volgende PSW-Papers:

No	Auteur	Titel
.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....

Gelieve dit formulier terug te sturen naar:  
 Redactiesecretariaat Psw-papers,  
 Departement Politieke en Sociale Wetenschappen, UIA,  
 Universiteitsplein 1, B-2610 Wilrijk, België  
 Fax: ++ 32 (0)3 820 28 82 Email: pswpaper@uia.ua.ac.be