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The Nordic Network at the Foreign Affairs Council: The role of regional coalitions within EU decision-making processes

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Abstract

The European Union is widely considered as an increasingly active and relevant actor in the global security architecture (Bretheron & Vogler 2006). But our knowledge on decision-making processes regarding EU's external affairs is considerably limited due to outdated assumptions of state sovereignty. Unlike other dimensions of European integration, the realm of foreign and security policy has traditionally been regarded as purely intergovernmental "high-politics" structure driven by big powers.

However, several qualitative studies suggest the existence of a distinct group of the small Nordic countries that, collectively, "punch above their weight" in EU international crisis management (Strömvik 2006; Jakobsen 2009). But how can we explain the existence of such a group actor in a context of zealously defended state autonomy and sovereignty? And what are ways to grasp collective influence on EU foreign and security policy? Following Hafner-Burton et al. (2009), my paper will argue that by applying a Network Analysis approach we can systematically investigate the existence and effects of informal regional coalitions in the Foreign Affairs Council.

Introduction

The Nordic states of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden have for a long time been regarded as a distinct group in international organisations. At times, they have even been perceived as a collective actor called "The Nordics" (Svennevig 1955; Kalela 1967; Laatikainen 2003).[1] Scholars of Nordic studies have, however, repeatedly struggled with comprehending and measuring the notion of regional alignment in international arenas. In fact, our knowledge about processes of regional coalition building and acting at the intermediary level between national states and international organisations suffers from an astonishing theoretical and conceptual underdevelopment.

This study aims at developing a more adequate understanding of regional group dynamics within the European Union (EU). Despite a few seminal contributions, remarkably little research has been done on the existence and role of regional coalitions within the abundant field of EU studies. This lacking interest is certainly not a result of empirical insignificance. Rather, it seems to be caused by theoretical blinkers (Götz & Haggrén 2008). It is quite telling that the two International Relations (IR) schools of realism and constructivism have motivated a plethora of literature on either the behaviour of nation states in international relations or the role of international organisations for solving global policy problems. And yet, these two discourses remain strangely unconnected at the intermediate level. It thus appears that the issue of regional groups of countries in international arenas constitutes a blind spot rooted in mutual disinterest and disregard for other theoretical models.

Our knowledge about the role of coalition dynamics in decision-making processes in EU's external affairs is especially limited. Unlike other dimensions of European integration, the realm of foreign and security policy has traditionally been regarded as purely intergovernmental high politics driven by big powers. However, several studies have suggested the existence of a distinct Nordic group that together "punches above their weight" in EU crisis management (Strömvik 2006; Jakobsen 2009). But how can we explain the existence of such a group actor in a context of zealously defended state autonomy and sovereignty? And what are ways to grasp collective influence on EU foreign and security policy?

I argue that Network Analysis provides a framework to conceptualise and measure regional coalitions within EU politics. In particular, the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) as the main decision-making institution for the EU foreign and security policy can be understood as a structural network that influences and constraints the member states through formal and informal conditions. However, these relational patterns have varying effects depending on a country's respective position in the network. This structure of asymmetrical relationships

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[1] Although the notion of "Scandinavia" has also been frequently used, strictly speaking this term only refers to Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. Since this study is interested in the role of all five Nordic countries for coalition building and acting in EU politics I will only refer to versions of Nordic states, or shortly Nordics.

constitutes certain power constellations. Peripheral but especially well-connected states may be encouraged to form a coalition trying to collectively influence specific policy outcomes as a networked actor. Network Analysis offers a promising analytical toolkit for systematically measuring these collective dynamics at the FAC. Concepts and methods of Network Analysis can therefore serve to complement traditional insights which, if taken separately, struggle both to discover and explain regional coalitions in EU decision-making processes.

This study sets out with defining the idea of a regional coalition and highlighting its relevance in EU politics. Subsequently, theoretical and empirical contributions derived from conventional studies are discussed and a common analytical framework suggested. The third part introduces Network Analysis and points to qualifications and challenges when the approach is transferred to IR. Against this background, I apply network concepts in the context of regional coalitions within FAC decision-making processes before presenting the main hypotheses. The final part summarises my ideas and outlines a future research agenda as well as potential contributions.

Regional Coalitions in EU Politics

In its most generic meaning, the term coalition refers to „deliberately constructed networks of actors having differing interests or values, priorities and goals, yet showing general or limited common objectives" (Dupont 1996: 47). Numerous qualitative and quantitative studies have suggested that coalition dynamics are omnipresent in EU politics (Jönsson & Strömvik 2005; Börzel 2010). In the Council of the European Union – one of the essential EU decision-makers[2] – coalition building is conceived as typical, even "inevitable" component (Elgström et al. 2001: 114).

Processes of forming and acting in groups are not restricted to formal voting constellations in which member states try to form a winning coalition for, or a blocking minority against, a specific proposal.[3] Qualitative analyses have demonstrated that coalition processes even take place within lower-level committees with formal unanimity requirement (Elgström et al. 2001; Ruse 2012). The majority of matters which are dealt with at the Foreign Affairs

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[2] The Council of the European Union, or simply the Council, is one of the main decision-making institutions of the EU. In general, it adopts legislative acts, usually on the basis of proposals by the European Commission and often in co-decision with the European Parliament. The Council comprises member states' government representatives, usually the ministers of each member state with responsibility for a given area. Consisting of the foreign ministers, the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC), is responsible for defining and implementing the EU foreign and security policy, based on the broad guidelines set by the heads of state and government within the European Council. As a rule, the FAC is subject to unanimity decision-making.

[3] Although Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) rules formally apply in the majority of legislation, about 80 per cent of all Council decisions are reached through consensus (Heisenberg 2005; Hayes-Renshaw et al. 2006). This demonstrates the relevance for a member state to advocate its interests through coalescing with others.

Council, including the EU foreign and security policy, generally fall under this category. Even when the possibility of a single veto by one member state should technically render coalition behaviour redundant, collective patterns of consultation and cooperation in the Council system are nonetheless observable.

Unlike issue-specific and short-lived kinds of groupings, I understand coalitions as long-term alliances, seeking to uphold cohesive group behaviour across various policy domains. This does not mean that coalition members have the same preference in every policy area or on any proposal. Instead, they are in principle willing to compromise to a certain extent for forming a forward-looking relationship in various issue areas (Klemenčič 2006). They join forces in order to signal collective strength, lend weight to persuasion efforts and boost the group morale. Being oriented towards sustained cross-policy interaction, coalitions therefore generally engage in consultation and regularly pursue collective action.

Compared to opportunistic voting behaviour due to majority constellations or converging preferences, processes of long-term coalition building and acting are not random events. The selection and cooperation with other member states is based on certain considerations. In this regard, geographic affinity is commonly assumed to be one of the main factors. For instance, several qualitative and quantitative studies have pointed towards the existence of a distinct Nordic group within decision-making processes at the Council (Beyer & Dierickx 1998; Elgström et al. 2001; Kaeding & Selck 2005; Selck & Kuipers 2005; Veen 2011).

How exactly territorial proximity is connected to coalition behaviour is however open to debate between different theoretical models. Our knowledge about regional groups has certainly considerably improved since Elgström et al. complained that "the role of coalition building in EU decision making is obscure and the evidence of coalition patterns is mostly anecdotal" (2001: 112). And yet, it is astonishing how many studies about Council decision making casually mention collective patterns without providing stringent conceptualisations and convincing evidence. Neither the existence nor the role of regional coalitions has been subjected to a systematic analysis in light of its obvious importance in this field of EU politics.

This study aims at advancing our understanding of regional coalitions, defined as territorially constituted group of states that generally coordinate and frequently cooperate on broad policy objectives in EU politics. More specifically, I seek to address the following research question: *How do regional coalitions exist in the Foreign Affairs Council and influence decision-making processes within the EU foreign and security policy?*

Conventional Theories on Regional Coalitions

Conventional theories differ in their focus and emphasis of factors that can lead to regional coalitions in the Council system of the EU. Power-based explanations point to the essential motivation of a rational actor to join the group which has the voting weight to adopt, or block, a decision. Another approach of more neoliberal nature highlights the converging ideological positions within a coalition, whereby states with similar policy positions work together. Constructivist perspectives, on the other side, describe regional coalitions as a group of neighbouring countries that share the same norms guiding their action. The following sections will discuss these theories more in detail before suggesting a framework that seeks to integrate, rather than separate their contributions.

Power-based explanations

Power-based explanations stress the importance of power considerations as the principle motivation for coalition behaviour. Originating from the assumption that strategic choice is the driving force for individual and state behaviour, this approach considers collective cooperation as an instrumental power-seeking strategy (Kaeding & Selck 2005; Tallberg & Johansson 2008). Building a coalition is guided by the goal to generate the smallest necessary majority, or the smallest possible blocking minority, in vote-based decision-making processes. States primarily seek partners based on their capacity to help to reach these thresholds.

In this regard, power-based approaches predict consistent coalitions among or with the most powerful actors. This primarily refers to voting strength constellations as well as to resources at the disposable of big states. Powerful actors can offer compensation or concessions on other issues, and yield more leverage regarding negotiations in other policy fields where alternative coalitions can be formed (Klemenčič 2006). Collective action is thus guided by the philosophy of 'most important first' by which paramount rational interests lead smaller states to cluster around powerful states to form coalitions stretching across multiple areas.

Drawing on these assumptions, several studies have investigated the theoretical power of different hypothetical coalitions in EU decision-making processes. One of the most important insights is that the voting weight of a member state does not necessarily equal its voting power. Voting power also depends on other factors such as the allocation of votes and the threshold of a blocking minority. The Shapley-Shubik index, for example, tries to measure voting power by incorporating the number of times a particular state is important in a coalition, i.e. it helps to turn a losing into a winning coalition. Winkler (1998) found the effect of several coalition structures on their voting power to be significant when analysing the voting patterns in the Council from 1957 until 1995. Similarly, Hosli (1999) evaluates the

voting power of Sweden, Denmark and Finland acting as a group in the Council based on their voting behaviour in 1993.

These quantitative power-based studies of coalitions have been criticised on various grounds. One of the main problems is the implicit presumption of *a priori* defined coalition patterns. Few studies are as open as Winkler who states that "postulating an exogenously given coalition structure is a strong assumption" (1998: 398). Others simply hypothesise that power-based coalitions are built when calculating the respective voting power indexes. Moreover, the inherent thinking that all coalition-building processes are equally likely is in reality questionable. Although recent studies suggest an advancement of voting power indexes (Reynaud et al. 2008), the empirical fact remains that some member states are not able or willing to align with the big powers as frequently as others. Finally, voting patterns within the Council do generally not reflect the reality of informal and consensus-seeking decision-making processes. Data on formal voting decisions are inevitably biased due to the fact that any legislative act which is likely to fail will not even reach the final voting stage and be sent back to working committees (Heisenberg 2005). Although qualitative studies suggest that many decisions are crucially pre-shaped or even already decided before the ministers formally decide, there are no reliable statistics on either the extent or patterns of voting at the lower-level hierarchy (see also Hayes-Renshaw et al. 2006).

Power-based explanations certainly advance our standing regarding the influence of power constellations on coalition behaviour within EU decision-making processes. States may act collectively in order to demonstrate joint support for a proposal or to pool resources which is aimed at improving the relative standing of the group vis-à-vis other actors in negotiations. However, power-based studies also often misconceive voting power, and thus coalition behaviour, as independent of the policy field at hand. Empirical conditions such as issue preference and salience are not adequately incorporated. By contrast, ideology-based explanations take these ideas as their starting point.

Ideology-based explanations

Ideology-based explanations suggest that coalitions are primarily driven by political and societal cleavages. In the Council ideological convergence may be reflected in different policy areas (Tallberg & Johansson 2008; Klemenčič 2006). At the institutional level, the main dichotomy between supranationalist and intergovernmentalist attitudes towards European integration is deemed to play a role. Regarding economic and social policies, the traditional left-right scale in national politics could also be manifested in a European liberal-protectionist dimension. According to this thinking, member states join and act in groups with similar policy positions. Collective behaviour may therefore be repeated across issue areas and likely to be relatively stable, but with the possible shifts over time due to changes of political regimes in the member states.

Several studies have tried to lend support to these assumptions by analysing formal voting patterns. Based on contested proposals and decisions in the Council from 2004 to 2006, Mattila (2009) finds two dimensions in terms of the North vs. South and new vs. old member states cleavages. He claims that these constellations can be explained by the governments' left-right positions and their attitudes towards European integration. Using the same dataset, Hosli et al. further investigate the difference between old and new EU member states and observe "significant differences in voting behaviour" (2011: 1226) regarding the latter's clearly reduced likelihood to vote against the Council majority.

The "Decision-Making in the EU" (DEU) project substantiates these findings by detecting coalition patterns based on how close member states position themselves in relation to each other. Drawing on expert interviews, this research group gathered data on the initial positions of member states on 70 proposals in the Council from 1999 to 2000 to gauge patterns of policy alignments. The most important coalition pattern in the DEU studies is again a North-South cleavage. However, interpretations of this regional pattern differ. Following Thomson et al. (2004), Northern countries prefer liberal solutions to policy issues whereas Southern states vote for regulatory practices. Zimmer et al. (2005), on the other side, argue that this division is mainly due to different preferences between the Northern net-contributors and Southern recipients of the EU budget.

Further insights into ideology-based coalition patterns are offered by the Euromanifesto project. This project coded government policy platforms for EU elections in terms of the positional and salience estimates for various policy domains between 1998 and 2007. Based on the dataset, Veen (2011) finds evidence for two coalition dimensions along the North-South cleavage towards European integration and redistribution of financial subsidies. Still, he sees the explanations for this regional pattern unsatisfactory and urges that "future investigations are needed to elaborate upon the geographic notion of actor positions" (Ibid.: 82).

The ideology-based approach rightly points towards the importance of policy preferences for coalitions in Council decision-making processes. However, although the recurring North-South cleavage highlights the great fault lines between EU member states, it does not explain the activity of forming a regional coalition. Diverging opinions about the reasons for the regional division are rather telling since holding similar preferences on a specific issue does not mean that several states actually act as a group. They may formulate and facilitate their interests individually. In this regard, a detected pattern of geographically clustered groups, based on aggregated and rather static policy positions, could simply be the accumulation of individual nations "who happen to want the same thing" (Naurin & Lindahl 2008: 68). This study is however mainly interested in understanding how regionally bound coalitions may exist and influence politics in the Council. Moreover, ideology-based studies

usually do not focus on how similar preferences of member states develop in the first place. Approaches based on cultural affinity, on the other side, try to shed light on this question.

Culture-based explanations

Culture-based explanations stress the relevance of cultural affinity in coalition building and acting. Similar history, culture and languages are manifested in norms shared between certain states that lead them towards collective behaviour. These joint characteristics are generally associated with geographical proximity (Tallberg & Johansson 2008). Culture-based models do not claim that neighbours always vote homogenously. Rather, territorially bounded states are generally willing to consult prior to making a decision and frequently promote the same agendas based on similar norms. Given that cultural traits are pervasive and relatively constant, regional coalitions should function across policy domains and over a long period of time.

Several studies base their analysis of regional coalitions in EU decision-making processes on *a priori* defined groups and secondary sources. Drawing on reports about the 2003/2004 Intergovernmental Conference, Klemenčič (2006) finds that France and Germany as well as the Benelux states formed relatively cohesive negotiation actors. These groups managed to overcome their differences through a shared interest in acting together in the future. Further, Blavoukos & Pagoulatos (2011) portray a Southern coalition of Spain, Greece and Portugal during the four multi-annual financial frameworks negotiations between 1998 and 2005. While this regional group shared a broad convergence of norms and agendas, it crucially lacked a strategic or coordinative structure rendering it rather ineffective. However, both studies provide somewhat anecdotal evidence and only deal with extraordinary EU negotiations about budget and constitutional issues without accounting for the day-to-day and less formal interaction within the Council structure.

Only a few studies have actually tried to shed light on the coalition behaviour at the sub-ministerial level in the Council. The groundbreaking contribution by Elgström et al. (2001) is based on a 1998 survey among Swedish representatives about contact patterns in different types of working committees. They find "surprisingly fixed" (Ibid.: 126) geographical coalition patterns, particularly among Sweden, Denmark and Finland. The Nordic neighbours consult each other most frequently and across different hierarchy levels. Naurin & Lindahl (2008), on the other side, do not find a distinct Nordic group after having conducted phone interviews with over 260 Council working group representatives from all member states about their cooperation preferences in 2003 and 2006. Instead, they argue for a centre-periphery constellation with four clusters of Northern, Southern, Visegrád and Baltic countries.

These detailed studies have advanced our knowledge about coalition behaviour by illuminating empirically based communication and cooperation patterns behind regional group alignments. Moreover, the focus on the dynamics within the working groups acknowledges the reality of an informal multi-stage and multi-actor Council decision-making system behind the consensus culture during formal voting sessions. However, culture-based explanations often do not differentiate between policy domains, which may partly explain their diverging findings. Collective consultation and cooperation is likely to be dependent on issue preference and salience varying from area to area. Finally, culture-based studies do not conceptualise the influence of regional coalitions in the Council. By only providing evidence for the existence of shared consultation and cooperation patterns, the impact of collective action in pertaining decision-making processes has yet to be assessed systematically.

Streamlining the Approaches

Conventional theories offer different perspectives from which to approach regional coalitions in Council decision-making processes. Power-based explanations highlight the importance of power considerations and constellations for states' strategic choice to join and act within groups. Ideology-based models stress the role of similar policy preferences when states ally with partners to pursue common agendas. Culture-based approaches advocate that interests are embedded within a shared norm environment usually found in regional proximity which leads neighbours to collective behaviour. Moreover, findings from quantitative and qualitative studies at times seem to contradict each other, both within and across theoretical fields. In light of this complexity, how to make sense of regional coalitions in the Council?

I argue that conventional theoretical assumptions about coalition behaviour should be seen as being complementary rather than contradictory. Following Veen, these studies provide in their entirety very helpful insights and evidence – knowledge which "need[s] to be re-ordered, however" (2010: 2). While it might be analytically possible to clearly separate explanatory factors based on power, ideology and culture, I regard this differentiation not only as empirically difficult but also obstructive to a richer theoretical picture of group dynamics. Instead, I suggest to re-organise the presented ideas and findings about regional coalitions in the Council system within the following framework.

First, it is necessary to distinguish between the extensive negotiating phase and the final voting procedure. Contested votes in the Council with winning coalitions or blocking minorities are rare events, even under qualified majority voting rules. The voting behaviour of the ministers can be understood as the public show stage, ideally suited for member states to cater to domestic audiences and political posturing. However, it does not provide any reliable information about group behaviour prior to the casting of votes. It might even misguide the analysis since positions and strategies during the negotiation phase may differ

from the actual voting. When analysing regional coalitions in the Council, the focus should therefore be on group dynamics during the negotiation stage.

Moreover, despite their formal decision-making role in reality it is not the minister themselves who negotiate. Representatives of the member states within the various working groups and committees crucially shape or already vote on decisions. Investigating the lower hierarchy level in the Council system also accounts for the negotiation dynamics of proposals that do not reach the voting stage. In this regard, consultation and cooperation between national officials with regional proximity is likely to be exercised at the influential committee stage if the coalition strives to influence the eventual policy decision in its favour. Instead of remaining at the surface of aggregated voting patterns, it is exactly these dynamics of regional activities in which this study is interested. The analysis of regional coalition patterns and impact should thus assess group dynamics at the Council committee level.

Finally, I maintain that diverging explanations and findings of geographical patterns are at least partly rooted in a too broad research design spanning across policy areas. On the one hand, formal institutional procedures vary from one field to another, including the appliance of majority voting or unanimity rules as well as the working procedures at the committee level. Moreover, incentives for coalition behaviour may not be equal across policy domains because informal conditions for forming and acting within a group are likely to be different. Conventional theories point to factors of perceived power constellations, issue salience and shared cultural norms which all vary from policy area to policy area, influencing states' attitudes towards collective action. Accordingly, regional coalition dynamics should be analysed within only one policy domain.

Power-based, ideology-based and culture-based explanations provide valuable insights into different aspects of the same process of regional collective behaviour. Systematising their ideas suggests that it is theoretically fruitful and empirically compelling to analyse the existence and role of regional coalitions in structural power constellations in culturally embedded interaction at the sub-ministerial level within one policy area (Naurin 2007; Veen 2010).

Network Analysis in IR

The previous part has suggested to integrate conventional ideas of power, ideology and culture into one common framework for understanding regional coalitions in Council decision making. Before I will argue that Network Analysis helps to understand these group dynamics, the following sections introduce this novel approach in the field of IR. A brief overview of main definitions is be followed by an important separation between network-as-structure and network-as-actor perspectives. At the end of this part I highlight remaining challenges when applying Network Analysis in international politics.

Network Analysis in International Relations

Technological changes, economic openness, political interdependence and social connectivity have led to the proliferation of networks. Although hardly a new phenomenon as such, both the cross-border regulation of international affairs and the disintegration of nation states have given the idea of networks new political and academic prominence (Maoz et al. 2005; Hafner-Burton & Montgomery 2006; Kahler 2009; Hafner-Burton et al. 2009). Practitioners advocate for non-bureaucratic networks as a form of international governance which is more effective and adaptable than both states and international organisations. Scholars in turn rejoice in the possibility to finally replace supposedly obsolete views of self-contained actors with a grand open-system perspective that would better reflect modern realities.

Understood in its most basic meaning as any set of interconnected nodes, networks are naturally omnipresent. Nodes can be anything ranging from individuals over groups and organisations to states (Kahler 2009). Links refer to endless forms of idealistic and material connections. Network Analysis comprises a series of conceptual and analytical tools which help to describe and measure a system of these relationships between and among units.

However, the widespread and eager reception of networks in recent IR literature has created a burden for systematic assessments. Many studies have reduced the concept of network to an appealing metaphor rather than a sharp analytical instrument (Hafner-Burton et al. 2009). Importantly, Network Analysis is not a homogenous theory but "rather a framework for analysis based on a set of assumptions and tools that can be applied to an assortment of behaviours" (Hafner-Burton & Montgomery 2010: 6).

Network-as-structure and network-as-actor

Following Kahler (2009), I argue for distinguishing two approaches when applying Network Analysis in international politics: network-as-structures and network-as-actors. The former provides a broad definition of networks and focuses on the effects of structural characteristics on individual behaviour. The second understands networks as a mode of organisation for actors and assesses conditions for achieving collective objectives.

The network-as-structure approach suggests that networks are almost ubiquitous. Any interaction between a set of actors automatically establishes and maintains a system of relationships. Individual attributes are less important because the beliefs and actions of the network members are interdependent. In this regard, relational structures within or specific features of a network itself can influence the behaviour of involved actors. A network-as-structure both constrains and enables certain behaviour (Hafner-Burton et al. 2009). However, actors may possess different positions in a structural network because certain

units may not share a connection or the strength of the ties varies in terms of frequency, duration, intensity and reciprocal quality. This creates a patterned system of relationships that affects the power balance within the network. For instance, central actors with numerous dense relationships can exercise more influence compared to peripheral units. In turn, these asymmetries can result in the success of certain policy agendas. Network Analysis within the network-as-structure approach offers a toolkit for identifying and measuring structural patterns and linking them to potential outcomes (Scott 2000; Knoke & Yang 2008).

The more common approach to Network Analysis in IR looks at networks as a type of collective action. Networks are not regarded as a pervasive phenomenon of social interaction, but a collectively designed form of organisation. Unlike the structural approach, the networks-as-actor perspective understands patterned interactions as manifestation of individual characteristics. Individual actors come together in light of shared intentions and collectively try to influence certain policy outcomes. The network-as-actor perspective thus analyses collective action on behalf of the members. Studies point to the conditions of scalability and adaptability for explaining the success of networked actors (Kahler 2009).

Network Analysis in IR has hitherto primarily adopted the network-as-actor understanding, often without sound theoretical foundation and rigorous methodological appliance (Hafner-Burton et al. 2009). Both approaches not only need a careful conceptualisation of nodes and links as the constituting elements of a network. The level of analysis must also be taken into account. A network-as-actor itself may be, or transform into, a node in a higher-level network-as-structure. For instance, if central network members possess more influence, peripheral actors may intentionally form a group for enhancing their network position. Indeed, I argue that linking these two approaches can yield great explanatory power for understanding network phenomena in international politics.

Network Analysis for IR

Network Analysis in international politics can offer the best insights when it systematically complements conventional theories and methods. If applied carefully, it serves to contextualise and link existing concepts. However, imprecise definitions and one-sided appliances have so far obstructed the full potential of Network Analysis for the field of IR. The following problems require specific attention.

First, many studies lack a sound definition of networks. They confuse network as a mode of governance with a form of organisation, and vice versa. I argue for distinguishing between understanding networks as a structure on the one side, and networks as actor on the other. Regarding the former, Network Analysis helps to investigate relational effects on individual behaviour. As for the network-as-actor perspective, it serves to assess collective influence on policy outcomes.

Moreover, the recent focus on networks implies an erroneous belief that networks – both as structure or actor – enjoy universal advantages and will therefore replace other forms such as hierarchical state bureaucracies or formal international institutions (Kahler 2009). The prevalence of these "rivals" demonstrate that networks are but one means of governance and organisational form in international politics. They certainly have expanded the options suitable for pursuing international purposes. However, the existence of networks alone does not reveal their effects, let alone demonstrate superiority. It does though points to necessary analyses under which circumstances network structures and networked actors may influence policy processes and outcomes.

Third, network-as-actor approaches have paid too much attention to comparing collective action with other organisational forms, but too little interest in the variation within networked actors. In this regard, scholars have mainly dealt with a few groups of interest, either transnational campaigns or so-called "dark networks" of criminal and terrorist nature (Hafner-Burton et al. 2009: 583). A few EU studies have analysed networks as transgovernmental actor in low-politics field such as agriculture (Henning 2009). Limited attention has, however, been given to policy areas that show supposedly strong intergovernmental characteristics such as foreign and security policy (Mérand et al. 2011). Knowledge about the conditions for success or failure of a networked actor in pursuing collective goals is also underdeveloped.

The spread of networks in international politics is by no means a new development and Network Analysis has been applied to this field for several decades. Only recently, however, structural accounts are fruitfully aligned with traditional theories. Kahler therefore believes that the analysis of networks is "moving from the phase of definition and agreement on their significance to a more rigorous examination of the dimensions of their variation and the effects of that variation on consequential international outcomes" (2009: 19). I welcome this development of theoretical innovation and empirical utility. Keeping in mind the mentioned pitfalls, Network Analysis offers a great toolkit for understanding numerous phenomena in international politics – such as regional coalitions in Council decision making for EU politics.

Network Analysis for the EU foreign and security policy

On the basis of the previous part about its potential for IR in general, I will now argue that Network Analysis offers a particularly promising toolkit for explaining and measuring regional coalitions in the decision-making processes in the Council. The first section conceptualises the Foreign Affairs Council that is responsible for the EU foreign and security policy as a structural network. Subsequently, it will be described how this system of asymmetrical relationships places network members in different positions, introducing the

concepts of subgroups and centrality. The final section presents the main hypotheses regarding the existence and role of regional coalitions in the FAC system.

The FAC as Network Structure

Formally the FAC provides an interaction platform of legally independent member states. According to conventional thinking, countries pursue their foreign and security policy in principle autonomously. In reality, however, the FAC can be understood as a network-as-structure which establishes formal and informal conditions of interaction. Its institutional environment thus constitutes a system of relations that influences the behaviour of member states. Following Lewis (2010), four features of the FAC in particular encourage and discourage certain state actions.

First, compared to other Council configurations, the FAC is especially insulated from the public. Its remit is often dominated by sensitive topics and classified information. This in-camera setting facilitates dense mutual relationships because it provides the opportunity to speak candidly and exchange perspectives. Deliberations behind closed doors promote thick trust. Unlike the posturing to domestic audiences at the public front stage, internal common rules of interaction also discipline national interests. Moreover, negotiations are usually held under a long shadow of the future since cooperation in reaction to constantly changing developments in other countries or regions requires permanent deliberations (Warntjen 2010). In light of this, member states are generally discouraged to pursue short-term gains at the expensive of strategic partners and long-time objectives.

Next, the FAC has a wide scope of issue coverage. Its broad agenda allows cooperation dynamics with more issue-linkage and package-deal possibilities. The perspective of the member states is widened to recognise external conditionality and dependency beyond circumscribed national thinking. Higher issue scope establishes shared group standards of arguments and behaviours that may be expected and accepted, or socially sanctioned. The implicitly felt responsibility to "make things work" drives member states to find common solutions to complex challenges (Heisenberg 2005).

Third, the interaction intensity of the FAC is very high. While the ministers meet in general only once a month, national officials are in constant contact and negotiations. Based on this intense interaction, they are socialised into and embedded within a specific EU environment. Shared habits of cooperation based on personal relations are developed and maintained. Frequent meetings at the working group level create common frames of reference and work procedures (Hayes-Renshaw et al. 2006). High interaction intensity promotes a sense of collegiality that helps to facilitate collective behaviour through aligning national interests.

Finally, the FAC is pervaded by a normative density. Especially at the lower-level hierarchy, it is deeply rooted in a distinctive culture of collective decision-making (Heisenberg 2005). This

refers to a wide repertoire of shared values and norms which streamline deliberations between officials formally representing national interests. Moreover, rules of the game for common interaction are adaptable and change in light of new circumstances. Normative density is naturally promoted by the other three factors and, in turn, reinforces them as well. In combination, they all help to establish and maintain the FAC as a network structure that influences the behaviour of the member states.

Positions within the Network Structure

Conceptualising the FAC as a structural network suggests that the interaction between the formally equal member states is embedded in asymmetry and even hierarchy. In practice, a member state does not share the very same relations with every other country. The ties between actors can have varying strengths, depending on the substance of interaction in terms of scope, intensity, frequency and duration. They can also be asymmetrical, i.e. stronger in one direction than the other, and display positive or negative relationships, for example friendship and rivalry. The FAC structure is therefore likely to provide an unequal distribution of connections between the member states. As a result, member states have different positions in the network. In order to analyse the established structure Network Analysis offers two important concepts, namely subgroups and centrality.

Existence of subgroups

The distribution of ties may divide a network into distinct subgroups. Also called cliques, these subgroups refer to three or more network members "among whom there are relatively strong, direct, intense, frequent, or positive ties" (Wassermann & Faust 1994: 249). Based on ideas derived from social psychology and sociology, Network Analysis generally describes two mechanisms through which these subgroups may develop.

From a relational perspective subgroups are based on the cohesion between certain units in terms of the connecting ties. Relational Cohesion can be quantified through several properties. Wassermann & Faust (1994: 249-251) suggest four general structural features which can group a certain set of actors together. First, mutuality of ties requires all pairs of subgroup members to be adjacent. Next, closeness of reachability describes nodes that reach each other, although they may not necessarily be bordering. Third, frequency of ties among members is based on the total number of connections between subgroup nodes. Finally, the frequency of subgroup ties is measured relatively to the rest of the network.

An individual approach explains a subgroup by looking at the attributes of the network members that encourage or discourage close relationships. These so-called affiliation networks are rooted in traditional sociological studies about individual membership in groups (Hafner-Burton et al. 2009). They suggest that actors are brought together through

belonging to the same social circle based on shared individual characteristics. Joint affiliation increases the likelihood that strong ties will then be built between the members. Similarly, given that actors or groups of actors are members of several social circles, a connection is established between the two circles. The overlap in circle memberships facilitates the development of strong ties between the members. In other words, affiliation subgroups are characterised by circles of same actors and actors of shared circles.

Network centrality as source of power

The asymmetrical distribution of connections between network members constitutes varying degrees of centrality and periphery. Based on sociological studies, Network Analysis suggests that actors in the centre of a network have more social capital than peripheral members. Higher social capital in turn can be used to influence the interaction within the entire network.

Network Analysis generally distinguishes three different centrality positions with different forms and degrees of power (Hafner-Burton & Montgomery 2010). Degree centrality of a member is the total sum of its ties with other members. Given that resources in a network are relayed through ties, an actor with a large number of relations has greater access to other units and their resources. Betweenness centrality refers to the number of shortest paths in the network that are connected by a particular member. Put differently, an actor at this position links other nodes that do not have a connection between them. It can thus function as a broker or influence the flow of incoming and outgoing resources from one actor to the other. Closeness centrality describes the length of the path between a member and every other member. Being positioned in the proximity to all the others enables an actor to receive and disseminate resources more efficiently.[4]

Access, brokerage and efficiency are understood as significant sources of power in Network Analysis. This challenges conventional understandings of power in international relations because it is based on the member's position in a network, instead of its individual features. Power is thus not solely or even primarily based on material capabilities. Network Analysis also discusses the fungibility of network power, meaning whether or not this social capital can enhance or compensate for other forms of power (Hafner-Burton et al. 2009). Studies suggest that small states may indeed increase their power leverage through their network

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[4] Note that these indices do not pay sufficient attention to the varying importance of nodes (degree centrality) and ties (closeness and betweenness centrality). Network Analysis therefore offers even more complex measures such as eigenvector centrality (accounts not only for the number of links but also the centrality of connected nodes), information centrality (calculates not only to the distance between nodes but also the strength of ties based on the probability of transmission through all possible paths) and flow betweenness (describes the strength of all ties between nodes by measuring the proportion of total resource flows controlled by a single node) (Hafner-Burton et al. 2009: 564-565).

position, although network power may also serve to intensify and even cement existing big-power asymmetries in international politics.

Regional coalitions as networked actor

The network-as-structure approach helps to understand the FAC as a structured system of asymmetrical relations. Although the FAC's formal set-up suggests a non-hierarchical interaction platform of legally independent member states, it may be permeated with opaque power constellations. Different positions in the structural network enable and constrain the member states to varying degrees. On the other side, the network-as-actor approach suggests that the network members can be aware of their position and do not take the relational structure as externally determined. Different positions in the network may lead the actors to exploit their social power if in the centre, or strive to change their relatively peripheral structural position. In particular, incentives for especially well-connected actors to form and act through a subgroup in order to influence network interactions and outcomes in their favour should be increased.

Taking the two strands together, I hypothesise that an informal regional coalition in the FAC can be conceptualised as a network-as-actor which

(1) is rooted in asymmetrical social interaction patterns of the FAC understood as network-as-structure;

(2) and tries to capitalise on its collectively enhanced position for influencing the EU foreign and security policy.

Conclusion and Future Research Agenda

Network Analysis can synergise conventional concepts on regional coalitions in decision-making processes within the Council of the EU. From power-based explanations it incorporates the idea of connecting power constellations for network dynamics. The significance of shared group preferences within a specific policy domain is derived from ideology-based perspectives. A culture-based understanding is accounted for through frequent communication and consultation patterns between state representatives with similar societal characteristics at the pre-negotiation committee level. Based on these ideas, I have argued that a regional coalition is a particularly well-connected group of member states which exists because of the structural relations in the Foreign Affairs Council where it through its collectively enhanced position as networked actor strives to influence the EU foreign and security policy.

In the future I seek to apply a Network Analysis approach to regional coalitions within the civilian dimension of the EU foreign and security policy. In this regard, the reported Nordic coalition in the field of the EU crisis management should serve to test the presented hypotheses. All five Nordic countries have frequently and jointly participated in civilian EU missions, although Norway and Iceland are not even EU member states. Their joint influence in civilian crisis management has also been regularly highlighted without giving systematic evidence beyond anecdotal accounts. I will aim at testing this claim by making use of the conceptual and methodological richness of Network Analysis.

In order to investigate the existence and influence of regional cooperation patterns in the working group system of the FAC system, I seek to contact and interview relevant decision-making units in the Nordic countries and Brussels responsible for EU's crisis management. With the help of a standardised questionnaire respondents will be asked with whom they have regularly consulted and frequently cooperated in the recent past. Based on these data, a set of social ties between national officials will be generated in which regional cooperation patterns understood as network subgroups can be identified. Their influence in decision-making processes regarding the EU civilian foreign and security policy can then be analysed through established network measures of centrality.

Applying a Network Analysis approach to the FAC yields two important contributions. Investigating the existence and role of regional coalitions will improve our understanding about the actual politics in the Council. Knowledge on the decision-making processes in regard to the EU foreign and security policy is limited because informal group dynamics for influencing specific policy outcomes have so far been largely ignored. On a more theoretical level, applying Network Analysis to IR in general and EU studies in particular will further refine its theoretical rigour and empirical utility. The hitherto rather limited research focus on transnational networks can be broadened to include relevant transgovernmental forms in high-level politics such as foreign and security policy. Moreover, I believe that the differentiation of network-as-structure and network-as-actor will further improve its applicability in international politics. Investigating the *modus operandi* of structural systems and networked actors within EU decision-making processes may deliver on the "great promises" (Hafner-Burton et al. 2009: 586) of Network Analysis for the field of IR.

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