

**Congrès AFSP Strasbourg 2011**

**ST 46 L'européanisation et ses coins d'ombre : vers une normalisation des études européennes ?**

*Beyond Europeanization? Mainstreaming European Studies*

**Party government and European integration: Policy (dis)agreement in the EU-15?**

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Work in progress: please do not cite without the authors' permission

## **Abstract**

It is often assumed that agreements reached among party governments in the EU derives from a shared conviction that common aims can be realised through cooperation and harmonisation of policy-making and. Moreover, politics at the EU level are believed to be conducted under the 'veil' of broad-based consensus. Our aim is to investigate the relationship between consensus and delegation in the EU. Does pre-existing consensus lead to more delegation to the EU institutions or instead does increased delegation of policy-making to EU institutions leads to consensus among party governments? We examine this proposition by using a method for causal modelling to examine panel data concerning party governments' positions in the EU and levels of delegation in nine policy areas. We use Comparative Manifesto Project data relating to elections held between 1951 and 2003 for the 15 older member states.

## ***Introduction***

Party governments have a central role in the EU decision-making system, especially regarding decisions over future EU legislation. Party governments are the actors who participate in negotiations at the Council of Ministers and in European Council meetings. In these forums they negotiate - on behalf of their country and their party- which policies should be transferred from the national level to the supranational level and agree the content of EU policies enacted in primary and secondary legislation. Though these institutions are highly influential in formulating EU legislation, they still remain ‘a black box’ with regard to how party governments collectively reach decisions on how legislative authority is delegated to the EU institutions and the production of EU legislation. In this paper we examine: if increasing delegation to the EU institutions is an expression of consensus of party government policy positions in the EU; and/or whether we can observe consensus among the party governments of the member states due to the policy constraints that derive from increasing delegation to the EU.

To examine these propositions we use data from the Comparative Manifesto Project (Budge et al, 2001; Klingemann et al, 2006) to derive information on party government positions across 9 policy areas in the 15 EU member states from 1951 to 2003. We use expert data on the sharing of delegation between the national and EU levels (Hooghe and Marks, 2001) and on the volume of legislation (Arnold and Nanou, 2011). In an effort to disentangle the direction of the relationship between consensus and delegation we apply a method for causal modelling (Granger causality tests) to panel data concerning party governments’ positions in the EU and levels of delegation. We find that there is no evidence of reciprocal causation between consensus and delegation. Consensus among party governments in a policy area does not lead to increasing delegation but at the same time increased delegation has an effect on reaching consensus across party governments.

## ***Consensus and delegation in the EU***

The object of our study is situated at the crossover of two main bodies of literature: studies on consensus in the EU and studies on the relationship between party governments and European integration. Consensus is often referred to as a political basis of the EU: in line with Lijphart’s work on consociational democracies, the EU would be a consensus democracy (Lijphart, 1999; Magnette, 2003; Magnette and Costa, 2003; Dehousse, 1995). Yet, consensus is left undefined in most of these studies. It is ambiguously referred to as the objective basis of the EU *and* as a desirable political objective. As an objective basis of the EU, it seems to imply that the EU is possible because there is a consensus between member states. As a desirable objective, it seems to imply that the existence of the EU compels governments to reach consensus.

From this body of work, we can distinguish studies that refer more specifically to consensus as a method of decision-making in EU institutions. Some specialists of the Council of the EU analyzed the fact that the Council decides by consensus instead of voting (Haas, 1958: 490; Hayes-Renshaw and Wallace, 1997; 2006; Heisenberg, 2005; Mattila and Lane, 2001; Hagemann, 2007; 2008; Novak, 2010; 2011). These studies have revealed that in about 80% of cases in which an act could legally be adopted by qualified majority voting, no opposition is recorded. Yet, what emerges from these studies is mostly that consensus is an obscure method of decision-making. Furthermore, consensus is also ambiguously referred to as both an objective feature of decision-making and an ideal to reach. Recent research deriving from interviews with Council members (Novak, 2010; 2011) has shown that the high

rate of general agreement among party governments in the Council is not enough to substantiate consensus among the member state representatives. Actually, the absence of opposition often results from the silence of the minority rather than from substantive agreement with adopted acts. Those party governments with opposing policy positions have incentives to refrain from voicing their disagreement at the different stages of the decision-making process. In the Council, negotiations are repeated on a long-term basis. The shadow of the future discourages opponents from being obstructionist and leads them to soften their disagreement. Moreover, national representatives of the party governments of the EU member states tend to believe that registering a vote against an adopted act would have a negative effect at home. Moreover, national representatives argue that they tend to keep silent when they are defeated because their domestic political opponents could use this negative result against them. The norm of consensus, combined until fairly recently with the fact that there is no public record of EU level negotiations, means that party governments can reduce the political costs associated with a weak negotiating position or one that promotes an unpopular position in their country. As Moravcsik (1993: 515) observes: ‘particularly where domestic interests are weak or divided, EC institutions have been deliberately designed to assist national governments in overcoming domestic opposition’.

Since the mid-1990s, calls for greater transparency of decision making in the EU allowed access to the voting records and minutes of the Council negotiations, this has become a growing field of research providing us with new evidence. Hagemann and Hoyland (2008), Mattila (2004), Mattila and Lane (2001), Aspinwall (2002) and Tallberg and Johansson (2008) have researched whether the outcome of negotiations in the Council or European Council can be explained by ideological considerations related to the left-right dimension of competition. These studies tend to highlight that what structures the preferences of party governments is concerns about the benefits and costs of allocating more policy-making authority to EU institutions but also found some evidence that partisan considerations play an important role. Our study is positioned between this group of studies and a second group of studies focusing on how the party composition of EU member state governments has affected the Council (Manow et al., 2008) or the influence of political parties in EU legislative decision-making (Lindberg et al., 2008; Lord, 2010; Warntjen et al, 2008). With the few exceptions already noted, most existing studies do not offer a clear account of the mechanisms of production of consensus. In particular, the impact of the European integration on policy consensus across party governments has not been examined in depth. Our main research question is: does the EU exist because of a preliminary consensus between member states; or, alternatively, does the existence of EU delegation compel party governments to reach consensus? Existing studies on the direction of the relationship between party governments and European integration tend to focus on the way political parties influence the course of EU integration and rarely examine the influence of European integration on party governments.

In this paper we argue that, although party governments have the institutional capacity to upload their preferred policies at the EU level, once delegation to the EU institutions takes place it can lead to increased consensus among party governments. As Alter (2001: 203) observes: ‘... member states are really only the masters of the treaty during the drafting of legislation’. There are two possibilities regarding this. First, it is possible that what we observe is that party governments and their main political rivals are either already or once the EU policy is in place convinced of the benefits that derive from the liberalization of trade. Second, party governments, even if they disagree with the direction of EU policies in place, are legally-bound to implement such policies (Alter, 2001). Party governments in the member states have the responsibility to change existing national policies to comply with EU

legislation and to avoid taking future decisions that conflict with EU policies (de Búrca and de Witte, 2002: 210). If a party in government or in a government coalition disagrees with the content of an existing directive there is almost nothing it can do to change the content. As Alter argues (2001: 203): ‘In theory, member states always have the option of revising the texts should they be unhappy with the outcome. But in practice, changing existent legislation is difficult to do and often politically unfeasible’. The most an incumbent party that is dissatisfied with an EU decision can do is to try to put in place a policy that compensates those interests adversely affected by the directive, provided this is a feasible action in each case. Delegation to the EU ‘locks in’ policy and reduces member states’ flexibility to adjust individual policies to changing demands and circumstances (Scharpf, 1988). There is some evidence to suggest that the EU acts as a constraint on party competition within the member states, leading to convergence in party positions (Mair, 2000; Hix, 2003; Bernhard, 2004; Dorussen and Nanou, 2006; Nanou and Dorussen, 2010). Elster’s (1983) insight into adaptive preferences can be useful in our evaluation of how EU involvement in policy-making binds party governments in the member states. Elster’s (1983) object is individual preferences but the mechanisms he puts forward can also interpret consensus among party governments in the EU. The starting point of the analysis is the insight that ‘people tend to adjust their aspirations to their possibilities’ (Elster, 1983: 109). Our results show that such adaptation exists among party governments in the EU member states.

Among the different mechanisms that produce a change in preferences, the similarity of preferences observed among party governments in the EU seems to result from the mechanism of pre-commitment – ‘the deliberate shaping of the feasible set for the purpose of excluding certain possible choices’ (Elster 1983: 114). Yet, ‘if one deliberately restricts the feasible set, one also runs the risk that the preferences that initially were the reason for the restriction ultimately come to be shaped by it, in the sense that they would have been different had they not been so restricted’ (Elster 1983: 115). While member states’ pre-commitment is aimed at optimizing their welfare and reaching their common aims, on a long-term basis, pre-commitment might reduce the political choice in such way that parties propose policies that they would not have proposed without the EU pre-commitment.

Our paper aims to build upon these different studies by examining whether party governments across the EU have common policy preferences, so there is pre-existing consensus regardless of the effect of EU legislation in place, or instead whether party governments change their preferences as result of delegation to EU institutions.

### ***Data and method***

To test these competing propositions, this study uses panel data concerning the relationship among party government positions of EU members (ranging from 6 to 15 countries to take into account the expansion in EU membership) across 9 policy areas and the levels of delegation assigned to the EU. It covers the period from 1951 to 2003. Our measures of party government positions derive from the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP), collected by Budge et al. (2001) and Klingemann et al. (2006). The CMP has generated a dataset of policy commitments offered by parties in their manifestos for national elections (which represent their official platforms). This data derives from the systematic hand-coding of individual

statements in official party documents into 56 standard issue categories.<sup>1</sup> Each policy statement in a manifesto is considered to be a coding unit and assigned to one of these issue categories. At the end of coding each document, the CMP estimates the frequency of the policy statement in each issue category, expressed as a percentage of the total number of statements<sup>2</sup>. This process ensures that the data are standardized to avoid distortions derived from the varying lengths of documents. The data generated by the CMP measure the percentage share of coverage that a party dedicates to each particular issue relative to all other issues contained in each manifesto. In order to estimate parties' policy direction and position in each issue area we construct separate issue scales. These are calculated as the net difference between left-wing and right-wing references, or positive and negative references, in a manifesto for each issue. For example, we can calculate the position of a party in the 'Social Policy/Welfare State' issue domain. We assume that a party devotes 10 per cent of its manifesto references to supporting 'welfare state expansion' and 2 per cent to 'welfare state limitation', so the net score is 8 per cent in favour of 'welfare state expansion'. We assume that this score represents an explicit party position located at +8 on the 'Social Policy/Welfare State' policy dimension. Following this, we calculate the average position(s) of the party (in the case of single-party government) or of the parties (in a coalition government) per issue of the first government that comes out of the election. The final step is to calculate the consensus of party government positions across the EU member states. We estimate the variable, *Consensus EU Governments*, as the standard deviation of the (average) positions of party governments of the EU member states for each policy area per year. Higher values of the variable indicate that, on average, party governments in the EU have divergent preferences in a policy area as presented in their party manifestos. We also calculate an alternative variable, *Consensus EU Governments Weighted*, in order to take into account the effects of country size. Delegation to the EU institutions is more likely to take place when there is agreement across the party governments of the larger countries in the EU since these governments are arguably more influential in the European Council or the Council negotiations both with regards to the content of EU policies and the level of delegation. We calculate *Consensus EU Governments Weighted* by weighting party government positions by the percentage of the population of each member state compared to the total EU population and then calculating the standard deviations of the weighted party government positions.

Delegation to the EU institutions is measured through two variables. The first, *Level of Delegation*, is based upon expert evaluations of the degree of EU decision-making authority in issue areas over time. Hooghe and Marks (2001), continuing work initiated by Schmitter (1996), provide information on the level of delegation to the EU institutions for 16 issues. They have assigned scores - ranging from 1 (low) to 5 (high) - to indicate the extent of EU authority across a range of issue areas based on existing and subsequent treaty obligations. The specific time periods correspond to the 'foundation period' (1950 – 1957), the EEC (1957 – 1968), the EC (1968 – 1992), and the EU (1992 – 2000, Maastricht Treaty; 2001 onwards, Amsterdam Treaty). The second delegation variable, *Legislation Output*, measures the total volume of EU legislation produced per year in each policy area. The variable derives from Arnold and Nanou (2011), where they use the public records of the *Official Journal* of the EC/EU in order to calculate the total volume of EU secondary

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<sup>1</sup> A full list of the policy categories together with a detailed description can be found in Budge et al. (2001: Appendix III) and Klingemann et al. (2006: Appendix I).

<sup>2</sup> A comprehensive description of the coding process is included in Budge et al. (2001: Appendix II) and Klingemann et al. (2006: Appendix II).

legislation produced in a year per policy area and per type of legislation<sup>3</sup>. Information on the descriptive statistics is presented in the methodological appendix.

This study does not to assume a certain causal structure between the consensus of party government preferences in the EU and the level, timing and volume of delegation to EU institutions. To determine the causal structure in our panel data series of party positions and delegation across policy areas we use the Granger causality test (Granger, 1969). Another example of the use of this test is provided by Hellström, (2008) who used it to evaluate the direction of the causal structure between electorates' opinions and national political parties' positions on European integration. This methodology is widely acknowledged as the most popular instrument for evaluating the nature of the causal relationship between two variables (Hood, Kidd, Morris, 2008). The purpose of this test is to check whether a certain variable, called  $x_t$ , causes another variable, called  $y_t$ , considering a linear autoregressive data generating process. This procedure is useful in examining how much of the current value of  $y_t$  can be explained by its past values, and also to show whether lagged values of  $x$  can improve the fit of the model. In this way,  $y_t$  is said to be Granger-caused by  $x_t$  if  $x_t$  helps in the prediction of  $y_t$ , or, equivalently, if the coefficients on the lagged  $x_t$ s are statistically significant. We implement this test in order to investigate whether the causality runs from consensus of party positions to delegation to the EU institutions, or in the other direction, or in both directions. So there are four possible outcomes for causal configuration: (1) unidirectional causality from consensus of party governments' preferences to increasing delegation; (2) unidirectional causality from increasing delegation to convergence of party government preferences; (3) bilateral causality; and (4) independence between party government preferences and delegation.

A preliminary step to implement the Granger causality test is the choice of the number of lags to include. Several possibilities are adopted in the literature: the lag length is often selected by checking the cross-correlogram and correlograms for each series (following the Box-Jenkins method (1976)). Given that we have a panel of 476 observations, the option of investigating the correlogram for each series is not feasible. The choice is based on classical information criteria, such as Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) and the Schwarz' Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC), resulting in one lag for both party government preferences and degree of delegation<sup>4</sup>. Next we test the joint null hypothesis that  $H_0 : \beta_1 = \beta_2 = \dots = \beta_N = 0$  for both equations. If we accept the null hypothesis, delegation is not Granger-caused by consensus of party government preferences and vice versa. The alternative hypothesis is that at least one  $\beta_i$  is different from zero.

## ***Results and discussion***

Before we present our results from the Granger-causality tests we use descriptive statistics to examine the degree of variation in our *Consensus EU Governments* variable across the 9 policy areas included in our dataset (shown in Figure 1). Figure 1 displays bars that stretches

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<sup>3</sup> Information on the construction of variables and the description of policy areas, levels of delegation and volume of legislation is available from the authors' upon request.

<sup>4</sup> The data on delegation to the EU institutions are not ideal for conducting a Granger causality test because observations of this variable tend to remain stable over long periods of time rather than vary per year. However, to our knowledge this is the best available measure of delegation to the EU.

1.96 standard deviations from the mean value which is represented by a line within each box. Smaller values for the *Consensus EU Governments* variable indicate greater consensus among the party governments in a policy area over time.

(Figure 1 about here)

The mean values indicate that there is greater consensus in the areas of military expenditure, regional policy, trade policy and industrial relations. There is less consensus on average over time in the areas of competition policy and social policy. The length of the bars and the range of the maximum and minimum values indicate that over time there is variation in the degree of consensus among party governments in the EU in the majority of policy areas, with the exception of trade policy. The most pronounced variations in the degree of consensus over time are found in competition policy, economic policy, social policy and industrial relations. These are amongst the most ideologically-contested policy areas and the high degree of variation in consensus over time reflects this. Next, we examine if the party governments in the EU - as participants in the Council and the European Council - decide to delegate policy-making authority in those policy areas where there is more consensus or if the consensus we observe in certain policy areas can be partly attributed to delegation to the EU institutions.

We want to examine if there is a Granger causality relationship between delegation to the EU and the consensus of party government policy preferences. Thus, we regress the increase in delegation to the EU institutions on delegation for the previous year and on the same lagged value of the standard deviation of party government positions variable for each policy area and vice versa. We investigate whether delegation Granger-causes consensus of party government positions and/or consensus in party government positions Granger-causes the decision to delegate more policy-making authority to the EU. Table 1 presents the main results from the Granger causality tests for pooled linear estimators. Our two alternative measures of delegation are the dependent variables in columns 1-4 and consensus of party government preferences are the dependent variables in columns 5-8 (unweighted and weighted measures).

(Table 1 about here)

Irrespective of the measure of delegation, the results presented columns 1-4 indicate that the one year lags of the consensus of party government positions (unweighted and weighted variables) do not have an effect on delegation. This indicates that, surprisingly, delegation to the EU institutions measured either as the level of delegation based on the expert study or as the volume of legislation produced in the EU does not take place when parties in government across member states have similar policy preferences. The decision to delegate policy-making authority to the EU is not simply a function of the similarity of preferences but this takes place independently of this. This contrasts with findings in the literature regarding pre-existing consensus leading to delegation. The results reported in columns 5-8 provide a different picture. In columns 5-6 an increase in the *Level of Delegation* to the EU institutions the previous year has an effect on the variable *Consensus EU Governments Weighted* ( $p \leq .05$ ) but not on the variable *Consensus EU Governments*. This indicates that the more Europeanised policies become, the more consensus we observe amongst party governments on those policies. However, the increase in the level of delegation seems to influence in varying ways way the preferences of party governments in the larger and smaller member states.

The results presented in columns 7-8, where we employ our alternative measure of delegation - *Volume of Legislation*, show a different pattern. An increase of the volume of

secondary legislation produced in the previous year is associated with an increase in consensus among party governments. The results are only statistically significant for the variable *Consensus EU Governments* ( $p \leq .05$ ) and not for the weighted measure. The results in columns 6-7 provide some indication that delegation to the EU has an effect on consensus among the party governments. We find no evidence to support the alternative proposition. These results alone cannot substantiate causality. To check for the presence of causality in either direction, we need to first implement the standard Granger Causality test. This test involves testing the joint significance of the lagged values of the independent variable. Thus, the null hypothesis is  $H_0: \beta_1 = \dots = \beta_N = 0$ . The results for the F test are reported at the end of Table 1 and show that we can only reject the null hypothesis that the coefficients for the lagged values of *Delegation*, *Level of Delegation* and *Volume of Legislation* are equal to zero, for the model results reported in columns 6-7. The F test suggests that past values of *Delegation* explain *Consensus* among party governments since the latter is Granger caused by the former.

To be confident about our findings we need to perform this test using appropriate estimators for panel data since, by using the pooled OLS estimator, we are neglecting the heterogeneity across different individuals (i.e. the issues) in the panel. The Granger causality test is meant for time-series data, though Granger (2003) stresses the importance of extending the causality test to panel data. We follow other examples which extend the Granger causality test to panel data (Hurlin and Venet, 2001; Lu, Chen and Wang, 2006; Hood, Kidd, and Morris, 2008; Nicolini and Paccagnini, 2011). We use the random effect estimator<sup>5</sup> since we want to capture the effects of variation of delegation across the different policy areas. The results from the random effects estimator confirm the findings from the pooled OLS estimations. Further analysis needs to be carried out to examine whether our results are robust when controlling for other factors that could also contribute to consensus among party governments in the EU, such as the effects of globalisation on public policy and the ‘end of ideology’ debate.

In this study, we aimed to provide a better understanding of the notion of consensus within the EU. While previous research has focused on consensus in different EU institutions, we examined consensus among party governments in the member states. Our results contribute to two field of inquiry. First, by showing that consensus is generated by delegation, we shed light on the mechanisms involved in the production of consensus. Consensus is not an objective basis of the EU which allows member states to delegate their competencies and therefore deepen European integration; on the contrary, consensus results from the delegation of competencies that bind EU member states. Further analysis should be carried out in order to understand the motivations of delegation despite a lack of consensus. Consensus is not based on general agreement that can be reached thanks to the sharing of common values but results from the European integration process. Secondly, while consensus is usually considered as a desirable goal for the EU, our study questions this normative assumption. If one considers that democracy implies the existence of institutional structures that allow for political debate (Manin, 2010), the mechanism of consensus which emerges from delegation puts into question the quality of democratic debate within the EU.

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<sup>5</sup> In this case we do not need to implement the modification of the Granger test introduced by Hurlin and Venet (2001). We implement the Hausman test (1978) to verify if the random effect estimator is preferable to the fixed effect estimator. The results of the Hausman test indicate that the random effect estimator is appropriate (results of the test are available upon request).

## Appendix: Figures and tables

Figure 1

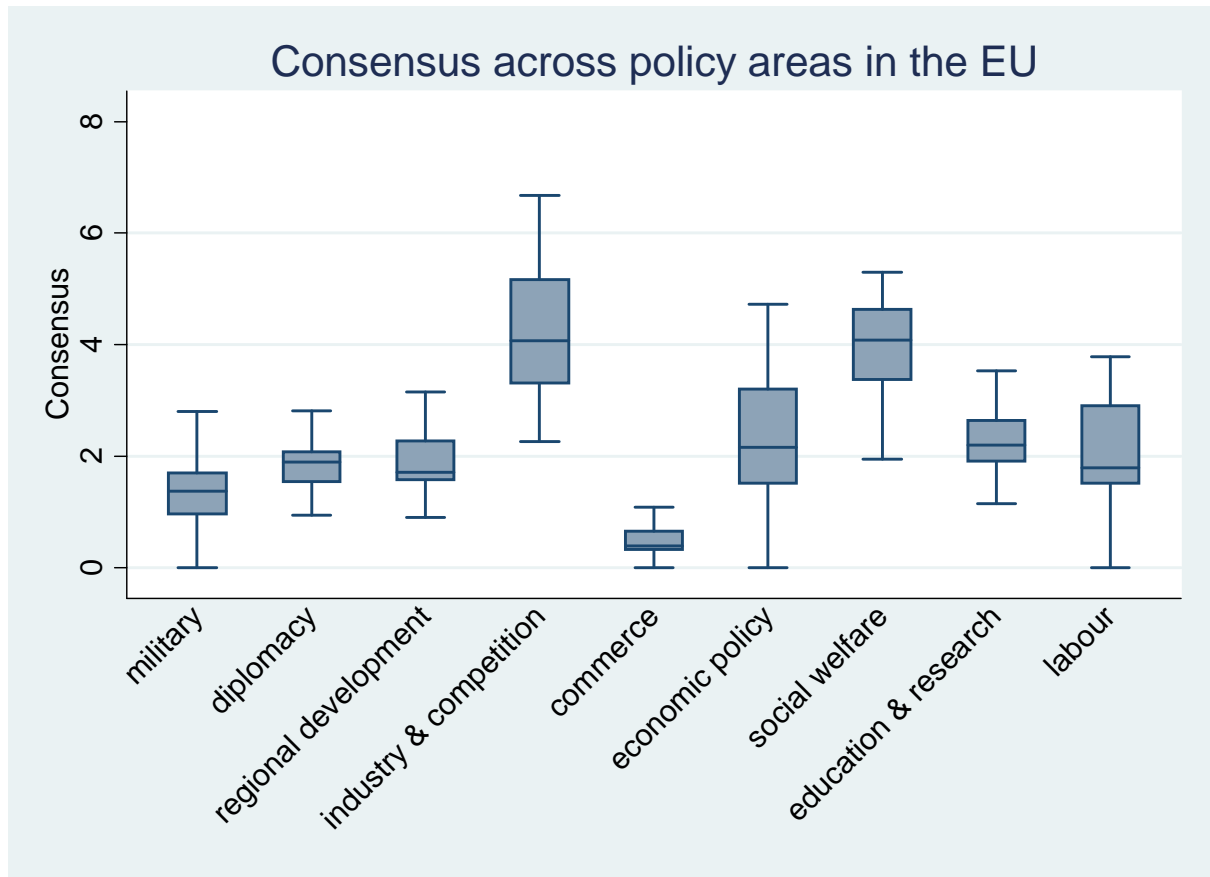


Table 1 Consensus and delegation in the EU (1951-2003) Pooled OLS

	<i>Delegation</i>				<i>Consensus</i>			
	(1) <i>Level (t)</i>	(2) <i>Level (t)</i>	(3) <i>Legislation (t)</i>	(4) <i>Legislation (t)</i>	(5) <i>Governments (t)</i>	(6) <i>Governments Weighted (t)</i>	(7) <i>Governments (t)</i>	(8) <i>Governments Weighted (t)</i>
<i>Level (t-1)</i>	0.992*** (0.012)	0.992*** (0.012)			-0.058 (0.041)	<b>-2.235**</b> (0.877)		
<i>Legislation (t-1)</i>			0.996*** (0.015)	0.993*** (0.015)			<b>-0.0003**</b> (0.000)	-0.006 (0.004)
<i>Governments (t-1)</i>	0.0009 (0.007)		0.226 (2.041)		0.821*** (0.024)		0.813*** (0.025)	
<i>Governments Weighted (t-1)</i>		0.00006 (0.000)		-0.059 (0.075)		0.894*** (0.019)		0.892*** (0.020)
<i>Constant</i>	0.048* (0.028)	0.047* (0.026)	6.452 (5.956)	9.824** (4.835)	0.559*** (0.097)	8.881*** (1.936)	0.513*** (0.072)	5.763*** (1.255)
F -test <i>Level (t-1)=0</i> (p> F)					2.03 (0.155)		<b>6.49</b> <b>(0.011)</b>	
F -test <i>Legislation (t-1)=0</i> (p> F)						<b>4.15</b> <b>(0.042)</b>		2.59 (0.108)
F -test <i>Governments(t-1)=0</i> (p> F)	0.02 (0.894)		0.01 (0.911)					
F -test <i>Governments Weighted (t-1)=0</i> (p> F)		0.06 (0.813)		0.62 (0.431)				
Observations	477	477	477	477	477	477	477	477
R-squared	0.93	0.93	0.90	0.90	0.70	0.82	0.70	0.82

Standard errors in parentheses; \*significant at 10%; \*\* significant at 5% level; \*\*\* significant at 1% level.

## Methodological appendix

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the variables used in our estimations.

*Table 2. Summary Statistics (1951-2003)*

<i>Variable</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Dev.</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
<i>Level of Delegation</i>	477	1.740042	.883753	1	5
<i>Volume of Legislation</i>	477	104.7757	206.2692	0	972
<i>Governments</i>	477	2.384564	1.410523	.24532	6.996789
<i>Governments Weighted</i>	477	43.82354	39.19091	1.0479	223.1396

Before undertaking any detailed econometric analysis, it is necessary to investigate the stationarity of the variables considered. In table 3 we present the Im-Pesaran-Shin (2003) Unit Root Test, which does not assume a common autoregressive parameter across all panels. Therefore, the null hypothesis is that all panels contain a unit root, while the alternative is that some panels are stationary. For each variable, the null hypothesis is rejected at any level of significance, showing that all series are stationary. This preliminary condition is satisfied and we can thus implement the Granger test.

*Table 3. Im-Pesaran-Shin unit root test*

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Statistics</i>	<i>P value</i>
<i>Level of Delegation</i>	-11.2033	(0.000)***
<i>Volume of Legislation</i>	-4.3782	0.06 *
<i>Governments</i>	-27.4909	(0.000)***
<i>Governments Weighted</i>	-18.285	(0.000)***

Notes: \*\* significant at 5% level; \*\*\* significant at 1% level.

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