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Thomas König and Dirk Junge

European Union Politics 2009; 10; 507
DOI: 10.1177/1465116509346780

European Union Politics
DOI: 10.1177/1465116509346780
Volume 10 (4): 507–534

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Thomas König
University of Mannheim, Germany

Dirk Junge
University of Mannheim, Germany

ABSTRACT

Why do member states with veto power usually support policy change proposed by a Commission initiative when their own position is located closer to the status quo? Why do we frequently witness consensus in the Council and rarely observe a rejection of Commission initiatives even after additional veto players, such as new member states or the European Parliament, have increased the constraints on policy change by legislative decision-making in the European Union (EU)? To answer these questions, this study investigates the voting preferences and logrolling opportunities of the member states on 48 Commission proposals. We find that models that derive the voting preferences from each Commission initiative are scarcely able to explain the consensus in the Council. One reason is that the Commission attempts to avoid a divided Council by initiating proposals for which member states favour a policy change in the same direction. When member states still dispute the size of policy change, we show that they can find a solution by mutually benefiting from logrolling across proposals that either belong to the same policy domain or are negotiated during the same period. Hence, intertemporal and domain-specific logrolling can provide a powerful explanation for consensus even in a contested Council.

KEY WORDS

- Council consensus
- European Union
- legislative analysis
- logrolling

Veto players and voting in the Council – the empirical puzzle

Among the striking features of European Union (EU) legislation is the culture of consensus among an increasing number of member states with veto rights and varying interests in European integration and Commission initiatives. This has aroused criticism of analytical approaches to EU legislative decision-making that focus on the voting preferences and power of the member states (e.g. Heisenberg, 2005; Achen, 2006) On closer inspection of their empirical voting behaviour, it remains extremely puzzling that member states almost always support Commission proposals, thereby refraining from exercising their veto power and trying to bring about policy change in the Council. One hypothesis would be that they adhere to a norm of consensus (Lewis, 2003). Even scholars who sympathize with this line of argument on consensus voting behaviour in the Council must nonetheless concede that the same member states constantly make attempts to reform the EU's legislative framework and, in particular, the voting rules in the Council, as they have been doing at the most recent Intergovernmental Conferences (IGCs) in Amsterdam (1997) and Nice (2000) and with the current Lisbon treaty. Why do these member states repeatedly attempt to reform the Council's voting rules when they are always in favour of the Commission's initiatives? Why do they repeatedly refer to the need to improve the EU's obsolete legislative procedures, hence officially requesting an increase in the EU's legitimacy, transparency and capacity to act in legislative decision-making? Apart from these official justifications, the need to reform the Council's legislative rules is also suggested by several politico-economic indicators pointing to a substantial variation in, and a great (and expanding) distance between, the interests of the member states, which increases the danger of a legislative blockage in the Council:

1. The number of member states rose from 12 in the mid-1980s to 15 in 1995, 25 in 2004 and 27 in 2007 (Sutter, 2000; Napel and Widgrén, 2004);
2. The macroeconomic indicators for their national economic and welfare systems reveal increasing structural differences between the member states, mostly owing to enlargement and other 'external shocks' (Baldwin et al., 1997; Sapir, 2004);
3. The variation in the programmatic positions of the political parties in the member states is also increasing, even with respect to the EU's core policy domains, owing to national elections and different public demands (Franklin and Wlezien, 1997; Franchino, 2007).

From an analytical perspective, this higher number of member states with veto power, in combination with this increasing diversity of interests (of a

larger number of member states), would lead us to expect an increase in the likelihood of a No vote in the Council rather than the promotion of consensus across Commission proposals (Romer and Rosenthal, 1978; Tsebelis, 2002; Scharpf, 2006). According to Tsebelis's analytical veto player perspective (2008), member states therefore have good reasons for being concerned about the EU's legislative framework although the aggregated legislative statistics of the EU suggest evidence of a culture of consensus in the Council: the numbers reveal that, over recent decades, the adoption rate of Commission proposals has continuously exceeded 90%. Thus, pending Commission initiatives have been adopted even after treaty revisions that have changed the rules of the legislative procedures. Commission initiatives also found support after several enlargement rounds that have increased the number of member states (Hagemann and de Clerck-Sachsse, 2007; König, 2007). On closer inspection of the voting behaviour of the member states, several authors provide further evidence for this empirical regularity of Council consensus, drawing attention to the Council's statistical voting records according to which only few member states eventually cast No votes if a qualified Council majority guarantees the final adoption of a Commission proposal (Mattila and Lane, 2001; Mattila, 2004; Heisenberg, 2005; Hayes-Renshaw et al., 2006).

Although these statistics suggest evidence of a consensus culture in the Council, it still remains an open question whether member states support Commission initiatives owing to a specific strategy or to a norm among the actors involved that prevents member states from using their veto power. From an analytical perspective, another question that arises is which actor is able to prevent member states from using their veto power in the Council – is it the Commission or are the member states themselves able to resolve their conflicts? Compared with the strong assumption about the decisive impact of norms, which may transform member states' interests, a simple analytical explanation would be that a well-informed Commission avoids proposing initiatives that would lead to a divided Council. In the extreme, if the Commission is able to exclude contested proposals from the agenda, member states have no incentive to make use of their veto power and can always support the Commission's initiatives. Another analytical explanation could be that the member states themselves seek consensus in the Council when their interests in a particular Commission proposal arouse only some disagreement. When several member states are in favour of policy change, they have an incentive to reach a compromise and are perhaps willing to make concessions to those member states in favour of the status quo. Independently of the explanatory power of a particular analytical or normative explanation, we believe that understanding the empirical puzzle of the Council's culture

of consensus and the simultaneous attempt by the member states to reform the voting provisions of the Council by treaty revision requires consideration of their empirical voting preferences.[1] In other words, the empirical question is whether the interests of the member states are already compatible and harmonious when the Commission initiates proposals, or whether there is actually some level of contestation and dispute between the member states, foreshadowing the rejection of a Commission proposal by the Council, which is, however, finally adopted by the member states.

Currently, the common wisdom is that strong norms can affect member states' voting behaviour and prevent them from using their veto power even when their interests are not in harmony. Apart from the normative consensus literature, which draws inferences about the strong impact of norms from legislative statistics (e.g. Heisenberg, 2005; Hayes-Renshaw et al., 2006), Thomson et al. (2006) analyse contested Commission proposals in the period from 1999 to 2001 from an empirical-analytical perspective and observe a high error rate of proposal-specific models in their prediction of the outcome location of adopted legislation (Schneider et al., 2006). Their analyses show that these predictions significantly underestimate member states' support for Commission initiatives and too often forecast vetoes and the maintenance of the status quo. Achen (2006) therefore points to the important role of informal norms for Council support of these contested proposals in EU legislative decision-making. Although this research also concludes that the procedural provision of veto power is less important for EU legislative decision-making, Junge and König (2007) draw attention to the empirical specification of voting preferences. This specification may also have an important impact on the models' predictive power regarding legislative outcomes and their prediction error, respectively. On closer inspection of the sources of error, they find that the specification of the policy space – by either (un)weighting the issues of a proposal regarding the actors' saliencies or (un)restricting the number of issues – affects the predictions of these analytical models more than do the correct identification of the voting weights and the legalistic interpretation of the procedures.

Briefly summarized, the empirical literature finds disagreements in the Council, but the proposal-specific study of their solution from an analytical perspective does not provide sufficient insight into the empirical puzzle of consensus in the Council. It therefore remains an open question whether member states follow a general norm or whether they apply a specific strategy for reaching compromise and adopting Commission proposals by consensus in a contested Council – and, if the latter, how this strategy works in practice. More specifically, the question is whether current analytical models can explain Council consensus or whether they have to consider the strong impact of norms for predicting the voting behaviour of the member states.

This study therefore departs from prior work by investigating more closely the voting preferences and strategies of the member states in the Council. For this purpose, we start by calculating the predictive error of proposal-specific models that derive the voting preferences of the member states separately for each initiative before we examine the potential of various kinds of logrolling across Commission proposals to explain Council consensus. Thus, instead of developing and testing a new voting model and comparing the predictive power of rival approaches to the outcome of Commission proposals, we are interested in the empirical voting behaviour of the member states and, more specifically, in logrolling strategies that can explain the culture of consensus in the Council. Our research design also diverges from previous Council studies on contested Commission proposals (e.g. Selck, 2004; Steunenberg and Selck, 2006; Bailer and Schneider, 2006; Thomson and Hosli, 2006) by additionally including data on voting behaviour in the Council that we gathered from the minutes of the final meeting of the Council on each proposal. This allows us to determine the predictive power of proposal-specific analytical models and to distinguish between actors' voting preferences on the one hand and the actual strategies they employ to pursue their interests on the other.

Furthermore, we avoid selecting a particular strategy from the set of all available strategies in order to verify the explanatory power of analytical models. Rather, inspection of the institutional organization of the Council suggests distinguishing between two strategies that member states can apply to reach consensus in the Council. These 'institutional' logrolling strategies may affect their voting preferences, namely by linking (i) domain-specific and (ii) intertemporally contested Commission proposals. In brief, the institutional organization of the Council entails a coordinating presidency and a three-level committee system with a working group level that helps to coordinate contested proposal-specific interests (König and Pöter, 2001; Häge, 2007, 2008), while the Committee of the Permanent Representatives (Coreper) promotes logrolling across the ministerial level within policy domains. Our results finally reveal that these logrolling strategies within and across policy domains can indeed offer a powerful explanation for consensus in a contested Council. This suggests that it is the institutional organization of the Council that promotes logrolling opportunities for the member states and their continuous support of Commission proposals.

Veto power, voting preferences and consensus – why bother?

In the literature on European integration, veto player theory plays a prominent role in understanding the inter-institutional distribution of power

between the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament; whether the institutional provisions are themselves subject to change by means of treaty reforms, i.e. by the treaty of Amsterdam in 1999 (Tsebelis and Garrett, 2001; Slapin, 2006), the Nice treaty in 2003 (Yataganas and Tsebelis, 2005) and the most recent treaty reforms in 2007 (Tsebelis and Proksch, 2007); whether the membership size of the EU expands in 1995, 2004 and 2007 (König and Bräuninger, 2004); whether the legislative procedures include the European Parliament as an additional veto player since 1993 and 1999 (Steunenberg, 1994, 1997; Tsebelis, 1994; Crombez, 1996, 1997, 2000; König and Pöter, 2001; Tsebelis and Garrett, 2000, 2001); or whether the adopted bills are correctly implemented on time (Mastenbroek, 2003; König and Luetgert, 2009). Tsebelis (2002: 248–82) himself devotes a large part of his book *Veto Players: How Political Institutions Work* to the study of EU institutions, and, most recently, Scharpf (2006) renewed his joint decision-making trap approach, shifting it closer towards veto player theory and arguing that both approaches were based on similar theoretical considerations relevant for the analysis of EU decision-making.

In the analytical tradition of studying EU legislative decision-making, the institutional veto players are the Commission, the member states and sometimes the European Parliament – all these players interacting in a legislative procedure, with actors having both the interest and the power to change the status quo. Briefly summarized, analytical models share the assumption that actors have an ideal notion of the eventual legislative outcome and exercise power by voting on behalf of their interest in a proposed outcome (Hotelling, 1929; Enelow and Hinich, 1984; Poole, 2005). In most applications of this perspective, an actor's voting preference is identified by his/her individual distance from a Commission proposal in relation to the status quo: if the distance from the status quo is larger, the actor will vote in support of the proposal; otherwise, he/she will vote against its adoption (Enelow and Hinich, 1984; Tsebelis, 1995, 2002; Poole, 2005).

Inferring voting preferences from an actor's individual distance from a proposal relative to the status quo is, however, not an easy empirical task. Often, a proposal raises more than one controversial issue and thus allows for an eventual trading of interests in a multidimensional policy space. This possibility of trading creates additional opportunities for finding compromise and compensation by increasing the incentives for an actor to vote in support of a proposal (Tollison and Willett, 1979). Furthermore, member states usually attach actor-specific saliencies to those issues of a multidimensional proposal that might ultimately shape their voting preferences. The final votes may also differ in their impact on the outcome prediction whenever the member states have weighted votes under the procedure of qualified majority voting[2] and

whenever the European Parliament performs as an additional veto player in the co-decision procedure. Figure 1 illustrates how these elements determine the voting preferences of the actors as well as the consequences predicted by analytical models for the outcome of the proposal.

In Figure 1, all member states C1 to C7 plus the European Parliament and the Commission have ideal points (referring to their position on a policy) in a two-dimensional policy space that allows for trading between their interests. They may also attach different saliencies to the two issues of the proposal, a fact that is expressed by indifference curves with an elliptical form. According to the analytical perspective, member states prefer all proposals P inside these ellipses to the status quo and should therefore vote for their adoption. Hence, all actors are predicted to vote in favour of proposal P1. However, C2 is expected to reject P2 and P3, and the former might be rejected by C1 as well. Furthermore, analytical models can also consider their voting

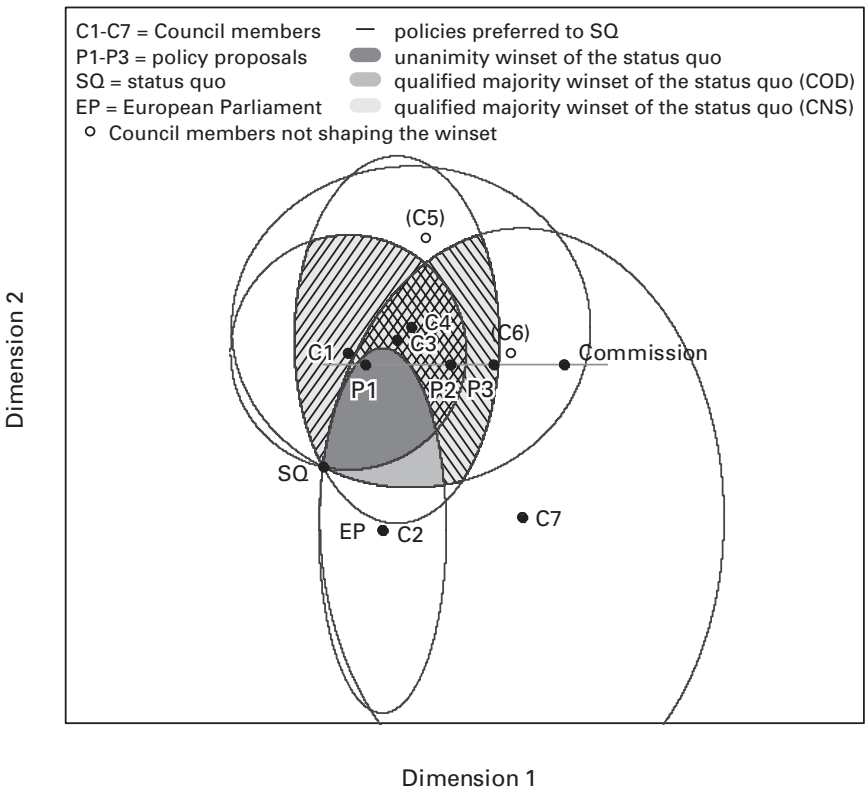

Figure 1 A spatial model of legislative decision-making in the EU: Decisive players in a two-dimensional policy space.

weights and further procedural provisions – such as the qualified majority rule in the Council and/or the veto right of the European Parliament (EP) in the co-decision procedure – in order to predict the final outcome. Hence, the evaluation of an analytical model's predictive power for legislative outcomes and of the voting behaviour of member states depends on the (accurate) specification of their voting preferences. Therefore, the following empirical analysis applies a fully specified model that takes into account the saliencies and the voting weights of the member states on all dimensions of a proposal.

From Figure 1, it also follows that it is difficult to make inferences from outcome predictions about the voting behaviour of the member states. In particular, the distance between an observed and a predicted outcome does not provide sufficient information on the sources of error, i.e. to what extent the voting preference of a single or more actors is wrongly specified and/or whether the error is caused by a wrong identification of agenda-setting, amendment power, etc. Nor can legislative statistics – whether they report the adoption rate of proposals or the voting behaviour of the member states – provide sufficient information on this error rate, because it is impossible to draw inferences about the reasons for consensus without considering the empirical voting preferences of the member states. In order to specify these empirical voting preferences, we need data on the actors' interests in each proposal, which we propose to combine with the information on their observed voting behaviour.

The DEU data: Actors' interests in contested Commission proposals

For the specification of the member states' empirical voting preferences, the DEU (Decision-making in the European Union) study provides quantitative estimates for actors' interests with respect to contested Commission proposals initiated between 1999 and 2001 (Thomson et al., 2006). We propose to combine the DEU data with the voting records of the Council in order to closely examine the voting behaviour of each member state. In the DEU study, key informants first identified the controversial issues raised by each Commission proposal. Second, these experts worked out the policy position initially favoured by each of the 15 member states, the Commission and the EP, and the levels of salience they attached to those 174 issues from 66 Commission proposals, respectively. For the selection of a proposal, each case had to attract some public awareness in the period under study.[3] A second selection criterion was that some controversy had to have arisen during the decision-making process of the proposal.

Both criteria suggest a selection bias of the DEU data towards contested proposals. For a closer assessment of the representativeness of the DEU data for EU legislative decision-making, Table 1 compares the DEU and CELEX (*Communitatis Europeae Lex*) sample distribution with respect to the Council voting rule, the involvement of the EP, policy domains and other characteristics of EU legislative decision-making. In this period, CELEX was the official database for Commission initiatives containing major characteristics of the legislative process.[4]

According to Table 1, most of the DEU cases were decided under the consultation procedure and about 65% by the qualified majority voting (QMV) rule in the Council, the latter applying voting weights of the member states. With respect to the distribution of all Commission proposals from 1984 to 2004, especially for the period of study from 1999 to 2000, we find that the DEU sample approximately reflects the overall distribution of the cases by procedures. Moreover, half of the DEU proposals are regulations, followed by a large number of directives, although the proportion of decisions is lower in the DEU data than in the overall legislation according to CELEX, which is unsurprising because decisions often address technical – and thus non-controversial – issues. Furthermore, the DEU sample pays tribute to the

Table 1 Representativeness of the DEU study

		DEU 1999–2000		*CELEX 1984–2004*		*CELEX 1999–2000*	
	Domain		*%*		*%*		*%*
Procedure	Consultation	40	60.60	8644	78.10	2405	67.30
	Co-decision	26	39.40	1529	13.80	1043	29.21
Voting rule	Unanimity	23	34.80	4341	39.24	1883	52.73
	QMV	43	65.20	6721	60.75	1563	43.77
Type	Decision	7	10.60	2942	25.93	1225	34.30
	Regulation	33	50.00	6393	56.35	1280	35.84
	Directive	26	39.40	2011	17.72	1066	29.85
Domain	Agriculture	14	21.21	2553	22.50	262	7.34
	Internal Market	13	19.69	174	1.53	73	2.04
	Fisheries	7	10.60	865	7.62	105	2.94
	ECOFIN	6	9.09	112	0.99	27	0.76
	JHA	5	7.57	118	1.04	33	0.92
	General	6	9.09	63	0.55	21	0.59
	Others	15	22.72	7177	64.89	3050	85.41
Total		66	100.00	11062	100.00	3571	100.00

dominant role of agriculture, even though legislative activity in the agricultural domain greatly decreased in the second half of the 1990s. Proposals regarding the Internal Market, Economic and Financial Affairs (ECOFIN) and Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) are over-represented in the DEU sample owing to their important political activities, arousing more disagreement among the member states. None of the proposals is still pending, and only one has been rejected.

On closer inspection of the DEU data, each proposal contains one or more contested issues with estimates of the actors' interests (policy positions and saliencies), including the location of the status quo and legislative outcomes. For each issue, the interviewees were asked to assign the most extreme values on a scale from 0 to 100 to those actors with the most extreme policy positions. They subsequently located the actors with intermediate positions (Thomson et al., 2006). A cross-validation of the data revealed that the DEU estimates are highly reliable as well as independent from the institutional affiliation of the experts (König et al., 2007).[5] More specifically, 21% of all proposals are one-dimensional, 38% are two-dimensional and 41% have higher dimensional policy spaces with between three and six issues. For all cases, the actors have different saliencies and, since 79% of these cases are multidimensional, this should be reflected in the shape of the actors' utility functions by a fully specified analytical model.

Like all empirical studies, the DEU data are limited in that they lack specified values for more than half of the contested 162 issues, i.e. for the status quo and the policy position of at least one actor. In some cases, such missing values can pose a significant problem for the evaluation of analytical theories because the models usually assume complete information on the variables of the game (König et al., 2005). Research on missing values emphasizes the superiority of multiple imputation techniques against listwise deletion, but the question is which imputation method should be applied. In the following, we employ AMELIA, the currently most prominent imputation algorithm, for the imputation of missing actor positions (King et al., 2001). However, if proposals lack values for the status quo, we have to drop them from our analysis because we can hardly assume that the status quo location of one proposal is determined by that of other proposals. Table 2 shows whether this reduction of 18 proposals affects the representative nature of our study.

In spite of the sample reduction to 48 cases, the relative proportion of cases in each subcategory remains approximately unaltered. Furthermore, we deal with a sufficiently large number of cases in most subcategories to estimate the effects for each group and to control for a possible bias in the overall estimation. Combining our data with the voting records of the

Table 2 Procedures and voting rules in the reduced DEU data set

		Number of proposals	*%*	*Number of issues*	*%*
Co-decision	QMV	14	29.17	35	33.02
	Unanimity	5	10.42	12	11.32
Consultation	QMV	18	37.50	42	39.62
	Unanimity	11	22.92	17	16.04
Type	Directive	20	41.67	47	44.34
	Regulation	23	47.92	50	47.17
	Decision	5	10.42	9	8.49
Domain	Agriculture	11	22.92	29	27.36
	Internal Market	11	22.92	28	26.42
	Fisheries	6	12.50	11	10.38
	ECOFIN	5	10.42	8	7.55
	JHA	2	4.17	3	2.83
	Common	2	4.17	4	3.77
	Other	11	22.92	23	21.70
Total		48	100.00	106	100.00

Council, we will determine the actor-specific error rate for predicting the voting behaviour of the member states on each of the 48 Commission proposals. Furthermore, the data will allow us to examine alternative analyses of actors' voting preferences that identify domain-specific and intertemporal logrolling across Commission proposals.

Voting preferences, selection bias and strategies for consensus

Our combination of the DEU data with the voting records of the Council reveals that member states voted against a proposal on only 14 occasions taken from the total sample of 719 votes on the 48 proposals.[6] Note that all 48 proposals were finally adopted, which implies that the No votes did not in effect change the legislative outcome.[7] The few No votes were cast only under qualified majority voting.

In the lower rows of Table 3, we provide a prediction of member states' voting behaviour as determined by a fully specified analytical model that considers the multidimensionality of all proposals as well as the saliencies of the actors involved. Accordingly, some member states prefer the status quo

Table 3 Observed and predicted voting preference by procedure

		Consultation				*Co-decision*					
		QMV	*%*	*Unanimity %*		*QMV*	*%*	*Unanimity %*		*Sum*	
Observation	Support	260	96.3	164	100.0	206	98.0	75	100.0	705	98.0
	Rejection	10	3.7	0	0.0	4	2.0	0	0.0	14	2.0
	Total	270	100.0	164	100.0	210	100.0	75	100.0	719	100.0
Prediction	Support	173	64.1	137	83.0	178	84.8	56	74.6	544	75.5
	Rejection	97	35.9	28	17.0	32	15.2	19	25.4	176	24.5
	Total	270	100.0	165	100.0	210	100.0	75	100.0	720	100.0
Error		95	35.1	28	17.0	28	13.3	19	25.4	170	23.6

and are thus predicted to reject proposals under legislative procedures requiring unanimity. A closer inspection of these results shows that the percentage of rejections is higher for proposals under qualified majority procedures than under the unanimity rule, and we find a slightly higher rejection rate for proposals submitted under the consultation procedure. This – and the different number of proposals under each procedure – suggests that institutional rules matter, and a strong impact by norms is hardly likely to reveal different numbers.

One striking result is that the proposal-specific analytical model correctly predicts more than 75% of the member states' voting behaviour. Compared with roll-call analysis (Mattila and Lane, 2001; Mattila, 2004; Heisenberg, 2005; Hayes-Renshaw et al., 2006), this model indeed has a higher explanatory power when correctly deriving the high adoption rate in the Council in at least 75% of the cases from proposal-specific interests. However, it is a demanding methodological task to explain the remaining cases in which some member states voted for the adoption of a proposal in spite of their favouring the status quo and their power to maintain it. A simple explanation for this limited set of incorrectly predicted cases would be that the preferences of a few member states have been measured inaccurately, but a more complex theoretical approach draws our attention to the countervailing role of the Commission and eventually to a strategy that is applied in the Council by actors in the legislative process who seek to obtain consensus.

In the analytical literature, the Council is usually conceived of as a voting platform in which member states cast their votes under closed rule and the Commission initiates proposals in order to promote European integration. From this perspective of a so-called supranational scenario, the crucial question on the role of the Commission is whether it fully knows the voting preferences of the member states, anticipates their voting behaviour and, taking all the available information into consideration, consequently only initiates proposals related to the process of European integration on which the member states generally agree. This preference-related analytical explanation for an integrationist selection of proposals undertaken by the Commission prior to the voting procedures could indeed explain the high adoption rate of initiatives and would let us expect to observe conflict in the Council only when the Commission has imperfect information about the process and incomplete information about the voting preferences of the member states.

Although postulating the availability of complete and perfect information makes the formal analysis more tractable, it is, however, more realistic to assume that the Commission cannot entirely foresee the whole legislative process as well as the voting preferences of the member states since this

process includes several stages and lasts sometimes for more than one year. Moreover, the proposals often contain multiple issues on which a large number of member states hold different positions. Empirically, we observe a large number of controversial cases with some member states located close to or even at the status quo. This configuration clearly rejects the notion that the Commission can perfectly preselect proposals with regard to the voting preferences of the member states. However, this does not mean that the Commission is not trying to identify proposals according to the member states' attitudes on European integration. A closer inspection of the DEU data shows that about 46% (or two-thirds when missing values are excluded) of the member states indeed prefer a policy change towards more European integration, and only about 5.5% clearly reject a move in this direction and favour a change towards less European integration (see Table 4).

According to Table 4, there is a considerable level of contestation between the majority of member states preferring more European integration and a small opposition that either supports the maintenance of the status quo or even opts for less European integration. Particularly under Council unanimity, this configuration implies disagreement between the vast majority of member states favouring more European integration and a smaller number of member states opposed to this change. But if these opposing member states disagree only with a specific proposal and support change towards European integration by other proposals, it is likely that logrolling across proposals can lead to the bundling of a package that is consensually supported by all member states in an otherwise contested Council. In this regard, we will examine which logrolling strategies are actually promoted by the Council.

A closer inspection of the Council's organization reveals that two strategies seem to be promoted by the Council's committee system, which

Table 4 Integration preferences of the EU-15 for the DEU data

	Number of positions	*%*
Preference for more integration (ideal position compared with status quo)	1109	45.6
Preference for less integration (ideal position compared with status quo)	131	5.5
Preference for status quo (ideal position is status quo)	484	19.9
Missing values (status quo or position)	706	29.0
Total	2430	100.0

organizes decision-making on three levels. At the lowest working group level, a so-called 'dossier' contains the contested issues of a Commission proposal. The working groups attempt to coordinate these proposal-specific interests and report to Coreper whether and which controversial issues have been settled. Coreper receives the working group reports on all dossiers and discusses only the unresolved controversial issues. The outcome of its discussion is then again classified into remaining open and settled questions, which are finally sent to the ministerial level according to their portfolios. This is, officially, the last stage of Council decision-making where the ministers meet and attempt to resolve on their own account the 5–10% of remaining controversial issues. According to Tallberg (2004), the Council presidency has brokerage resources owing to privileged information provided by the Council's secretariat. Moreover, the Council controls the process in terms of determining the negotiation pace and the possibility of shifting meetings into restricted sessions and of presenting a presidency's compromise formula.

Following the institutional organization of the Council, we can assert that, whenever the working groups have solved many controversies at the first level, the Coreper stage offers the possibility of exchange across proposals from various domains in a timely restricted fashion, and the portfolio responsibility of ministers finally promotes domain-specific exchanges across proposals within a specific policy field (König and Proksch, 2006). These different logrolling strategies may increase the likelihood of adoption and consensus by providing member states with more opportunities to accommodate their interests when linking proposals. Obviously, the two strategies are not mutually exclusive but complementary explanations for consensus in the Council. This raises the question of which strategy might ultimately be better suited for explaining consensus in the Council.

Logrolling across proposals within a period and within a domain

The empirical identification of logrolling strategies is not a trivial task because minimal benefits from exchange do readily occur and can be sufficient for predicting consensus.[8] In order to control for this trivial effect, we consider two criteria: the transaction costs of logrolling and the institutional opportunities for logrolling strategies. The transaction costs of logrolling basically prevent trades across a larger number of proposals in legislatures. In other words, the smaller the number of linked proposals necessary for achieving consensus, the more convincing is the logrolling argument. Thus, the larger the number of proposals that must be linked for a successful promotion of

beneficial logrolling trades, the less likely is the application of a logrolling strategy by the member states, owing to the higher transaction costs involved in linking these proposals in the Council.

When an institutional characteristic constrains the number of proposals to be linked, the specific features of these proposals will matter much more for the success of a logrolling strategy because actors' preferences must better match to produce consensus. With respect to the Council's institutional organization, we evaluate two kinds of institutional characteristics, In our domain-specific analysis, logrolling is possible only between proposals drawn from the same policy domain. This type of analysis follows the idea that the Council facilitates logrolling within the portfolio responsibility of the ministers. In our second intertemporal analysis, we allow logrolling across all policy domains but with respect to proposals that have been negotiated in the same period. This type of analysis is based on the view that contestation is resolved at the Coreper level in the same period. Hence, we interpret these institutional characteristics of the Council's organization as a promotion of logrolling. However, logrolling can plausibly solve contestation in the Council only when the member states' voting preferences appropriately match within either a specific policy domain or a particular time period. This, too, should make it more difficult for the logrolling argument to succeed in empirical tests.

Although we can use the DEU data to examine these two logrolling strategies, we must acknowledge that we can scarcely presume that only the DEU proposals were an integral part of the logrolling trades for finding Council consensus. Hence, we have to consider the DEU sample as a subsample of all proposals and assume that logrolling takes place only between proposals *of the kind* described by the DEU data. We might thus on occasion predict a *single decision* in an incorrect way, but we should be able to draw correct conclusions about the potential effect of logrolling in the Council *on average*. Note that the DEU sample is biased in favour of contested proposals that produce a higher level of conflict and involve more divergent interests than does the total sample of EU legislative initiatives. This means that we carry out a conservative evaluation of the two logrolling strategies because the available subsample of more contested cases is likely to reduce the probability of consensus in the Council.

Finally, we take into account that member states do not always cooperate completely and trade votes entirely by logrolling, but that some degree of defection can still be consistent with rational behaviour because it still outperforms complete defection. Theoretically, when the member states are aware of the benefits from trade and thus apply logrolling strategies in the Council, the resulting logrolling patterns of trade imply that member

states support proposals that they would otherwise reject. On the other hand, a member state with a voting preference for the status quo asserts that logrolling trades have not been sufficiently agreed upon and that issues have not been sufficiently linked. Hence, whenever a logrolling strategy is applied, the level of consensus observed should be expected to correspond to the logrolling potential in the relevant policy domain or period. For example, we should observe a higher rate of consensus in policy domains that entail a high potential for mutually beneficial logrolling trades, this likelihood being based on the characteristics of the proposals in these domains (and a comparatively low rate of consensus in domains where this potential is low).

For our empirical evaluation, we begin by assessing the logrolling potential for the various domains and time periods by linking each proposal with up to nine other proposals that have been negotiated within the same policy domain or time period. If logrolling is a plausible explanation for consensus in the Council, this should be achieved by a very limited number of proposals taking into consideration transaction costs. We furthermore assume that proposals are more likely to be linked the more typical they are and the more often similar proposals therefore occur in our sample. We can thus gather a set of linked proposals by randomly drawing combinations from the respective subsamples of the DEU data, a method guaranteeing that each proposal in the subsample has the same chance of being selected and even of being chosen more than once for any combination of proposals.

Basing our analysis on the combinations of different proposals, we are able to predict the voting behaviour of the member states by referring to their voting preferences – by applying our empirical knowledge on their ideal position, their saliencies, their relative distance from the legislative status quo and on every proposal they have linked in the multidimensional policy space. For each size of the logroll, we take 1000 different decision-making situations into account, which have been chosen from the DEU data set by the random procedure described above. This will thus provide an account of the average rate of consensus across actors and decision-making situations.

In order to show the effect of each logrolling strategy, we evaluate whether and to what extent logrolling benefits that result from the combination of a limited number of proposals (maximum 10) can explain consensus in the Council and whether the different logrolling potentials in the various policy domains and time periods correspond to the level of consensus actually observed. We then compare our results with linkages made in completely arbitrarily assigned decision-making situations where the interests of the member states and the locations of the outcome and status quo have been drawn from a uniform preference distribution. This approach allows us to control for variation in the scope of consensus that might artificially be

produced by a higher dimensionality of the aggregated policy space. In order adequately to assess the voting preferences of the member states, we need to ask whether their interests and outcomes have been aligned not in a random but a systematic way.

Figures 2 and 3 provide information about the effect of both logrolling strategies across different policy domains and time periods and about how the strategies may affect member states' voting behaviour in the Council. The *x*-axis lists the number of linked proposals and the *y*-axis presents the average level of consensus across 1000 decision-making situations in which up to 10 proposals were linked respectively. The level of consensus in this analytical model is an indicator of how easy it is to achieve consensus by means of the application of a logrolling strategy and also reflects the ways in which the member states can profit from logrolling in the different settings.

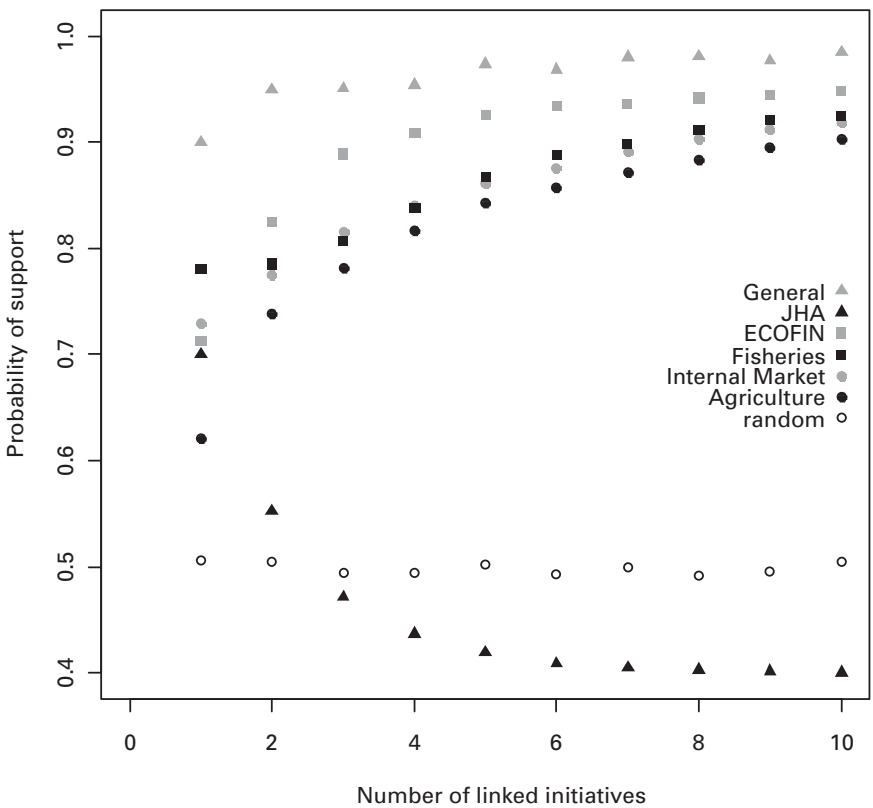

Figure 2 Logrolling across decisions in the same policy domain: Mean level of support in empirical versus random decision-making situations.

According to Figure 2, the predicted level of consensus rapidly increases when we presume that member states link a small number of proposals from the same policy domain. This logrolling strategy mainly increases the average rate of consensus in the General and ECOFIN domains, followed by Fisheries, Internal Market and Agriculture. Table 5 presents the predicted level of consensus for each policy domain and compares it with the voting pattern actually observed in these areas. To simplify the complex statistics, we ranked all policy domains according to the scope of consensus, both predicted and observed. With respect to the observed voting behaviour, we also give evidence for the number of rejections and the total number of decisions in each domain, and the ranking of the predicted consensus has been based on the whole curvature of consensus rates from Figure 2.

Table 5 reveals that the logrolling model correctly predicts the highest levels of consensus in the General and ECOFIN domains. A more modest level is indicated in the table for the policy domain of Justice and Home Affairs. The latter would have been expected to exhibit the lowest level of consensus but the actual voting patterns show evidence of consensus. A possible explanation for the incorrect expectation is that only two proposals in this policy domain were under consideration, and a small number of proposals cannot be linked in a mutually beneficial way. Here, the comparison with the simulated decision-making situations established by means of random distribution suggests that the likelihood of individual support for Commission proposals does not automatically increase with the number of combined proposals.

Theoretically, the combination of several proposals usually increases the likelihood of support by the member states, and the total number of possible solutions in the policy space increases as well. In this regard, the likelihood of incidentally finding a proposal that fosters the support of the member states

Table 5 Observed and predicted level of consensus by policy domain (rank order)

	Observed level of consensus		*Predicted level of consensus (rank order)*
	Rank order	*Rejections*	
ECOFIN	1	0/75	2
General	2	0/30	1
Justice and Home Affairs	3	0/29	6
Agriculture	4	2/165	5
Fisheries	6	3/90	3
Internal Market	7	6/165	4

does not increase in the simulation but remains approximately constant. We interpret this result as that the member states take the distribution of interests in other proposals into account. Whereas the configuration of the voting preferences and outcomes follows the systematic pattern described by the analytical model, the combination of random decision-making situations does not work in the same way and produce the same effect. Figure 3 shows the expected average rate of both predicted and observed consensus when logrolling takes place across proposals that have been negotiated in the same period.

Again, the likelihood of Council consensus rapidly increases with the number of linked proposals. Moreover, we can observe that the logrolling effect does not depend on the number of different proposals in each period in the data set. With the combination of only a few proposals, the likelihood

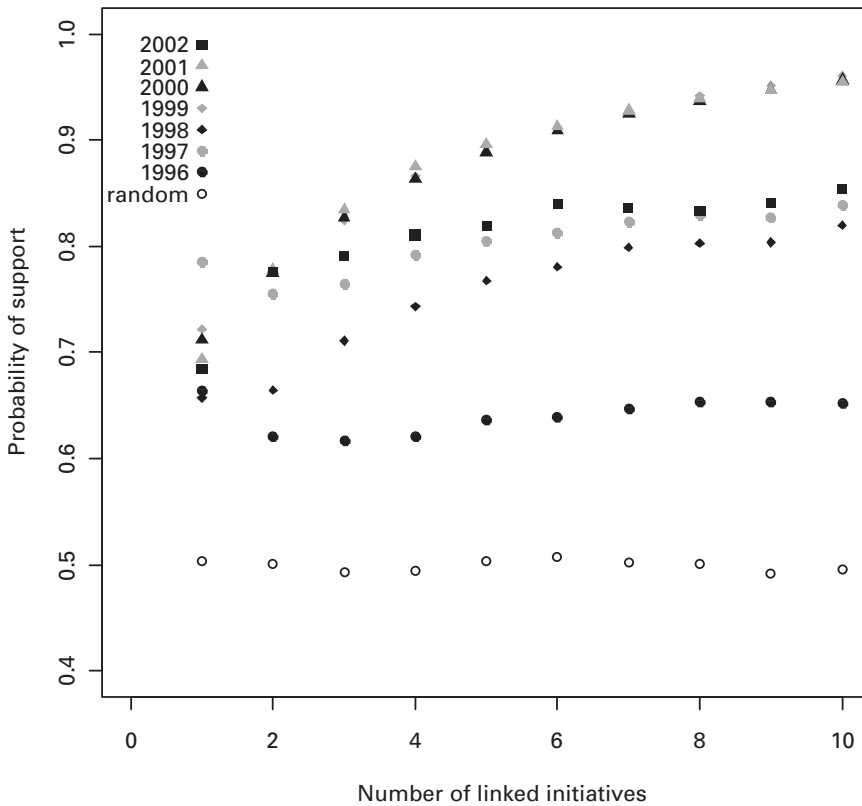

Figure 3 Logrolling across decisions simultaneously on the agenda: Mean level of support in empirical versus random decision-making situations.

of consensus approaches the maximum of 10. The simulation clearly shows that logrolling between proposals that were negotiated between 1999 and 2001 was able to achieve Council consensus most easily, followed by logrolling in 2002, 1997, 1998 and 1996. Table 6 illustrates the level of Council consensus per year. With regard to the voting behaviour of the member states, we also report the number of rejections and the total number of proposals in each period, and the ranking of the predictions is again based on the whole curvature of Council consensus in Figure 3, for which no single value can be calculated.

According to Table 6, logrolling across proposals in periods that were predicted to entail the highest, second-highest and third-highest logrolling potentials led to the second-, third- and fifth-highest levels of Council consensus. The highest level of Council consensus occurs for proposals negotiated in 2002, but there is only one proposal that fulfils this criterion and has been adopted by the member states. Finally, the order for the years 1998, 1997 and 1996 is confirmed with the fourth-, sixth- and seventh-lowest level of consensus in the Council.

We note for the interpretation of these results that they cannot be produced by combinations of randomly drawn decision-making situations. This suggests a systematic selection of proposals that takes into account the patterns of interests in other decision-making situations as approximated by our sampling procedure. Hence, our results should provide a particularly robust explanation for consensus in the Council because it relies on particularly contested legislative initiatives and preferences from the DEU project, which limits the potential for mutually beneficial logrolling by design.

Table 6 Observed and predicted level of consensus by time on agenda (rank order)

	Observed level of consensus		*Predicted level of consensus (rank order)*
	Rank order	*Rejections*	
2002	1	0/15	4
2000	2	10/509	1
1999	3	10/449	2
1998	4	5/150	6
2001	5	10/225	3
1997	6	5/90	5
1996	7	5/60	7

Discussion

This study aimed at investigating why member states with veto power usually support policy change proposed by Commission initiatives even in cases where they have different interests and are located closer to the status quo. This culture of consensus has been observed by statistical analyses of the adoption rate of Commission proposals and the voting records of the member states, which reveal consensus in the Council even after additional veto players, such as new member states or the European Parliament, have joined EU legislative decision-making. This observation stands in contrast to the attempts to reform the EU's legislative framework launched by those member states complaining about the voting rules of the Council. To solve this empirical puzzle of making reform attempts and voting consensually in the Council, we have investigated the voting preferences of the member states with respect to 48 Commission proposals.

Our analysis has revealed that proposal-specific models cannot sufficiently and adequately explain consensus in the Council. However, the limitations of these analytical models have drawn our attention to the countervailing role of the Commission and the committee system of the Council in the legislative process, since they both have the power and the institutional means to promote strategies that may explain Council consensus: while the Commission can preselect legislative proposals and then only initiate legislation if a sufficient level of Council support can be expected, the Council promotes logrolling by trading votes across a limited number of initiatives to facilitate support.

A closer inspection of the data on the 48 Commission proposals indicates that the Commission indeed preselects proposals according to the configuration of interests of the member states. For the 48 proposals, most of the member states prefer policy change that is favourable to further European integration and only a few of them prefer the status quo or a change towards less European integration. Although preselection may to some extent explain the high adoption rate of Commission proposals, several proposals still remain contested with some actors preferring the status quo or even opposing a more drastic policy change towards more European integration, a configuration that should lead to a rejection of the proposal under the procedure of unanimity. According to this proposal-specific analytical view, these actors have both the incentives and the actual possibility to maintain the status quo by their veto power, but, the voting records of the Council reveal that they ultimately support the policy change proposed by the Commission in the Council.

In order to explain this Council consensus, our analysis has drawn attention to another and more specific explanation based on logrolling strategies in the Council. On closer inspection of the Council's institutional

organization, logrolling opportunities across proposals within either a policy domain or a common period of time point to the potential of this analytical explanation. If many member states strongly favour the adoption of Commission proposals, they have a sufficient incentive to find solutions for their desired policy change and thus offer concessions and possibilities of compromise to the few member states that have a good reason to vote against the adoption of a particular proposal. The crucial question, however, has been whether the Council can promote these logrolling opportunities in an efficient way. In our view, the Council's use of a logrolling strategy is more likely to occur when it is possible to reach consensus by linking only a few proposals, because linking a larger number would increase the transaction costs and diminish the benefits from mutual exchange.

Therefore, our empirical investigation has focused on the assessment of the preconditions for logrolling and we have observed that these conditions are met in the Council in the following ways. First, consensus can easily be achieved by means of logrolling because vote trades produce the required benefits very rapidly. Second, the preference configurations within policy domains and across time periods are sufficiently diverse to allow for such beneficial deals. This suggests that logrolling is a plausible and powerful explanation of consensus in the Council. We can thus believe that rational member states exploit these logrolling opportunities in the Council to increase their overall benefits. However, although we have demonstrated that the conditions for such logrolling strategies are actually met in the Council, we do not attempt to develop a complete theoretical model that can predict member states' decisions with respect to each single initiative. Rather, our analysis is limited to the potential of these strategies and offers only a promising starting point for future attempts to model decision-making in the EU in a more accurate manner.

Apart from their relevance for decision-making and consensus in the Council, our findings may also have important implications for the study of the EU and the application of analytical models in the future because they challenge the currently dominant proposal-specific concept of actors' preferences. The first generation of analytical models focused almost exclusively on the interpretation of the power-distributional effects of institutions for the adoption of a single Commission proposal, whereas a second generation may draw attention to the accurate specification of the preference component in decision-making, thus allowing for a reinterpretation of the theory's decision-making argument. In this respect, our analysis suggests that member states have established an effective committee system that might even help them to avoid a legislative blockage after treaty changes and enlargements have increased the risk of legislative gridlock. However, our findings also reveal that a limited number of proposals is necessary for finding compromise and

consensus. This suggests that member states have good reasons to complain about the actual legislative framework of the EU while supporting Commission initiatives when logrolling across Commission proposals can provide mutual benefits.

Notes

The data set for the empirical analysis in this article can be found at http://eup.sagepub.com/supplemental.

1 By voting preferences, we mean the relative distance between the status quo and an actor's ideal position and between the proposed change and his/her ideal position. This preference is measured by the actor's position in multi-dimensional policy spaces weighted by his/her relative saliency across dimensions. If the difference between the two distances is negative, the actor is predicted to vote in favour of the status quo; otherwise, he/she supports the proposed change.

2 In the period under study, 62 out of 87 total votes are needed for the adoption of a Commission proposal under the qualified majority rule in the Council. The Treaty of Amsterdam provided Germany, Italy, France and the United Kingdom with 10 votes, Spain with 8 votes, Austria, Belgium, Greece, the Netherlands, Portugal and Sweden with 4 votes and Denmark, Ireland and Finland with 3 votes, while Luxembourg has only 2 votes.

3 To guarantee some public awareness and controversy, proposals have been selected for the study only if they had been mentioned in the Agence Europe, a news service for European Union affairs, and revealed at least a minimum level of conflict in the interviews (Thomson et al., 2006).

4 In a recent study, König et al. (2006) checked the reliability of CELEX data using PreLex – another EU legislative database PreLex – and found that more than 90% of all cases correspond across these different sources of information, even though PreLex documents the legislative process whereas CELEX contains legislative events.

5 Comparing the DEU with data on seven cases negotiated in the conciliation committee, they find a surprisingly high similarity regarding the point locations of the EP, the Commission, the status quo, the outcome and the Council pivot. Even though most experts were rapporteurs, whereas the DEU experts came primarily from the Council, and even though these experts were asked at different points in time, the point location of 15 positions is the same (deviation of 0–5 on a scale ranging from 0 to 100), 13 positions are very close (deviation of 6–25), 4 positions are not comparable owing to missing values and only 3 measures indicate a large deviation (50, 50 and 70). Closer inspection of these three deviating cases reveals that two of them list a slight Council qualified majority position and the minority position is again almost identical with the Council estimate. This suggests that the Council may have introduced the minority position in the bargaining of the conciliation process (König et al., 2007).

6 Note that voting predictions are not affected by voting weights (in contrast to outcome predictions); we therefore do not distinguish between predictions with and without voting weights with respect to voting predictions in the table.
7 In EU legislation, under QMV abstention is de facto a vote against a proposal, whereas under the unanimity rule it supports adoption.
8 This particularly applies in the framework of deterministic models.

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About the authors

Thomas König is Professor of Political Science II at the University of Mannheim, PO Box 103462, D-68131 Mannheim, Germany.
Fax: +49 621 181 2072
E-mail: koenig@uni-mannheim.de

Dirk Junge is a PhD candidate in political science, University of Mannheim, PO Box 103462, D-68131 Mannheim, Germany.
Fax: +49 621 181 2072
E-mail: djunge@mail.uni-mannheim.de