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Poland in the EU Council – First Experiences following the Accession

1. Introduction

The Council of the European Union (formerly known as the Council of Ministers) has been one of the most important decision-making bodies operating in the EU institutional system. Its present composition, methods of making decisions and the scope of competence, have been provided for by the Treaty of Nice, signed on 26 February 2001. As the Treaty was meant to prepare the EU for new membership composition, consisting of 25 Member States (including Poland), its principal aim was to make decision-making processes in the EU more effective – which was in fact essential, considering the number of actors to take part, so largely increased. The Treaty of Nice brought fundamental changes as regards allocation of numbers of votes to individual Member States within decision-making process in the Council and extended the scope of application of qualified majority voting, reducing the number of affairs that have to be resolved by unanimity.[1]

Solutions adopted in Nice failed to satisfy all European decision-makers. Some European politicians, mainly in Germany and France, highlighted the need to pass a new Treaty they described as the Constitution for Europe, intended to consolidate and deepen co-operation among the EU Member States in order to make it more effective. In their opinion, provisions adopted in Nice were insufficient to meet their basic aim of achieving better efficiency of decision-making processes in the European Union composed of as many as 25 Member States (perhaps even more in the future). Romano Prodi, the former President of the Commission, argued as follows: "*All that fifteen States which met in Nice –*

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[1] *Traktat z Nicei. Polski punkt widzenia* (*The Treaty of Nice. Polish point of view*), http://www.msz.gov.pl

each focused on its national interests – could achieve, was an imperfect and insufficient treaty. Most governments were in fact more concerned about ensuring themselves possibilities to block future EU actions that in providing opportunities to attain their common interests".[2] As the result of postulates put forth by the reform-oriented group, the Convent was established and entrusted with the task of developing such a document. Its activities led to preparation of the draft Constitution Treaty for Europe that became the basis for negotiation between governments of Member States about visions of collaboration within the European Union provided for in the draft constitution. This negotiation was concluded on 18 June 2004 with signing of the Treaty establishing the Constitution for Europe, which is to enter into force on 1 November 2009.[3]

2. The character, composition and scope of competences of the EU Council

Character and composition

The Council, unlike the Commission or the European Parliament which are supra-national bodies, has been an institution that was meant to implement the idea of intergovernmental co-operation, thus reflecting confederate nature of the European Union. It is composed of ministers from Member States' governments, each responsible for representing his country's interests. However, what they form, is not a permanent team of the same representatives. Instead, composition of the Council is changed depending on the subject matter of a given meeting. For example, in debates concerning agricultural issues ministers of agriculture take part, while ministers of transport are gathered when a meeting deals with transport-related issues, and so on. General affairs and problems regarding co-ordination of the Council policy are discussed by foreign affairs ministers and on those occasions the Council composition is referred to as the Council for General Affairs.[4] Problems of the Economic and Monetary Union are dealt with the Council composed of ministers of economy and finance (known as ECOFIN). The most frequent to meet (at least once a month) are the Council for General Affairs, ECOFIN and the Council composed of ministers of agriculture, while other compositions meet only several times a year. Thus, we have to deal with the single Council that act in several different configurations. Due to its peculiar nature, it has no regular term of office specified (this depending on political

[2] "Les Echos", 18.01.2001.

[3] Entry of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe into force depends, obviously, on the ratification process in the EU Member States.

[4] *Unia Europejska. Przygotowania Polski do członkostwa* (*The European Union. Poland's preparation for the membership*), eds. E.Kawecka-Wyrzykowska, E.Synowiec, Warsaw 2001, p.79.

situation; each appointment of a new government in a Member State results in a potential replacement of representatives in the Council).

The Council has its seat in Brussels, however, it meets three times a year (April, June, October) in Luxembourg.[5]

Significant in the way the Council operates is an institution known as the Presidency. This means that one Member State after another fills the role of the President for half a year (either from the beginning of January until the end of June or from the beginning of July until the end of December). A minister from a country that holds Presidency, presides meetings of the Council in all its configurations. During the first half of 2005 the EU has been presided by Luxembourg, to be replaced for the second half of the year by the United Kingdom, while in 2006 the function of Presidency will go first to Austria and then to Finland.

Competence

The most important single competence of the Council **is that of legislation**. Until 1993 (entry into force of the Treaty of Maastricht) the Council was the sole legislative institution in the EU, whilst following that date, in most cases it shares this function with the European Parliament (under a procedure known as co-deciding). However, it still remains the body having the strongest influence upon contents of legal acts (regulations, directives and decisions).

Another important competence of the Council consists in **establishment of other bodies and appointment of their composition**. The Council elects members of the European Commission (however, composition of the latter has to be approved by the European Parliament), it may alter a number of Commissioners, recommends representatives to the Regions Committee, Social and Economic Committee, elects judges of the European Court of Auditors, of the Court of Justice (CJ) and of the Court of First Instance, it may alter numbers of judges and advocates-general of the CJ. Moreover, it is the Council that decides upon remuneration and retirement pay of judges of the European Court of Auditors, of the Court of Justice as well as of members of the Commission.

Another important task the Council deals with is **monitoring** of implementation of the Community norms by Member States and undertakings. This mainly regards the way the Economic and Monetary Union operates, as well as common trade policy. One of the Council's principal activities is a **co-ordination function** as it has been responsible for co-ordinating economic policies of Member States in order to ensure the achievement of single market.[6]

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[5] C.Mik, *Europejskie Prawo Wspólnotowe. Zagadnienia teorii i praktyki* (*European Community Law. Issues of theory and practice*), Warsaw 2000, p.170.

[6] W.Czapliński, *System instytucjonalny UE (The European Union Institutional System)* in: *Prawo Unii Europejskiej. Zagadnienia systemowe (The Law of the European Union. Systemic Issues)*, ed. J.Barcz, Warsaw 2002, p.162.

Last mentioned, but not the least significant Council's prerogative is its function **in international sphere**. The Council (in co-operation with the European Parliament and the Commission) initiates and enters into, on behalf of the Communities, international agreements with other actors of international relations. It also makes decisions necessary for implementation of the common foreign and security policy (CFSP) (while endeavouring to preserve unity, consistence and efficiency of the EU actions).

Decision-making process

The Council of the European Union may make its decisions in three different modes:

- by unanimity,
- by common majority of votes,
- by qualified majority.[7]

Unanimity had been the fundamental principle in decision-making until the entry into force of the Single European Act in 1987. As the acclamation made decision-making process more difficult, clearly hindering the European Communities development, some Member States (Germany in particular) suggested in 1965 to replace it with the principle of making decisions through voting. The principal opponent, reluctant to give up the original principle, was France, afraid of a prospect of being outvoted. In general, the transition to decision-making through voting was equivalent with giving up of the confederate principle and with giving a supra-national status to the Council. In effect, this meant that Member States had to renounce some attributes of their sovereignty – the condition that was out of the question at that time for France ruled by the President Ch.A. de Gaulle. To manifest its protest, France withdrew its officials from all the Community institutions, thus causing an impasse in the functioning of the Communities for half a year. In 1966 a so-called Luxembourg compromise was reached, in which it was agreed that over matters significant for any Member State solutions have to be sought by acclamation. This really meant the victory for France and maintenance of unanimity as the principal mode of decision-making. Later on, enlargement of the number of Member States of the Communities and an eagerness to implement rules of Common Market, finally forced Member States to adopt the principle of making decisions through qualified majority voting, which took place in the Single European Act. However, this form of decision-making, rather than becoming a general rule,

[7] J.Plaňavová-Latanowicz, *Instytucje Wspólnot Europejskich* (*Institutions of the European Communities*) in: *Europejskie Prawo Gospodarcze* (*European Economic Law*), ed. H.Grajewska-Rychlik, Warsaw 2001, p.36.

was introduced gradually in individual areas on the virtue of subsequent Treaties (those of Maastricht, Amsterdam and Nice).

According to the Treaty of Nice, unanimity remains the mode of making decisions in the field of common trade policy in areas of services and intellectual property, functioning of Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund (but only until 2007), fiscal policy, financial aspects of environment protection policy, migration and refuge policy and co-operation of home affairs departments. Moreover, the domain of unanimity includes the CFSP area, conclusion of international agreements (on association, on accession) as well as revision of treaties and adoption of uniform electoral law to the European Parliament.

Common majority has been a mode of the Council decision-making, applied only in procedural or organisational matters (*i.e.* in other-than ones dealing with subject-matters).

Qualified majority has been a mode of decision-making originally intended to render co-operation among Member States more effective. The period from 1 May 2004, that is since the European Union has been enlarged by adoption of ten new Member States, until 31 October 2004 (the date when agreements, concerning the Council, adopted in the Treaty of Nice entered into force), was known as transitional one. Allocation of votes during that period is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Numbers of votes had by the EU Member States in the Council in the period between 01.05.2004 and 31.10.2004

Member State	Number of votes	Member State	Number of votes
Germany	10	Austria	4
France	10	Slovakia	3
Italy	10	Denmark	3
United Kingdom	10	Finland	3
Spain	8	Lithuania	3
Poland	8	Ireland	3
Netherlands	5	Latvia	3
Greece	5	Slovenia	3
Czech Republic	5	Estonia	3
Belgium	5	Cyprus	2
Hungary	5	Luxembourg	2
Portugal	5	Malta	2
Sweden	4	Total EU	124

Source: The Author's own summary on the basis of: IGC:2000: *Weighting of votes in the Council,* Presidency Working Document, CONFER 4796/00.

At that time **qualified majority** was **88 votes**, while **blocking minority was 37**. Poland had 8 votes at that time.[8]

Since 1 November 2004 provisions of the Treaty of Nice have applied, with the above-mentioned votes allocation, presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Member States' population and numbers of votes as provided for in the Treaty of Nice

Member State	Population (million)	Population (%)	Number of votes	% of all votes
Germany	81,590	18.2	29	9.03
France	58,260	13.0	29	9.03
Italy	57,980	12.9	29	9.03
United Kingdom	57,190	12.8	29	9.03
Spain	39,620	8.9	27	8.41
Poland	38,390	8.6	27	8.41
Netherlands	15,500	3.5	13	4.00
Greece	10,450	2.3	12	3.73
Czech Republic	10,300	2.3	12	3.73
Belgium	10,110	2.3	12	3.73
Hungary	10,110	2.3	12	3.73
Portugal	9,820	2.2	12	3.73
Sweden	8,780	1.9	10	3.11
Austria	7,970	1.8	10	3.11
Slovakia	5,350	1.2	7	2.18
Denmark	5,180	1.2	7	2.18
Finland	5,110	1.2	7	2.18
Lithuania	3,700	0,8	7	2.18
Ireland	3,550	0.7	7	2.18
Latvia	2,560	0.6	4	1.24
Slovenia	1,950	0.4	4	1.24
Estonia	1,530	0.3	4	1.24
Cyprus	0,742	0.2	4	1.24
Luxembourg	0,406	0.1	4	1.24
Malta	0,350	0.1	3	0.94
Total EU	446,148	100	321	100

Source: R.Trzaskowski, *Dynamika reformy systemu podejmowania decyzji w Unii Europejskiej* (*Dynamics of decision-making system reform in the European Union*), Warsaw 2005, p.221.

[8] IGC:2000: *Weighting of votes in the Council,* Presidency Working Document, CONFER 4796/00.

The total number of votes allocated to present 25 Member States is 321. **Qualified majority**, necessary to pass an act adopted upon a motion from the Commission, **is 232** votes given by majority of Member States. However, in order to pass an act coming from a source other than the Commission, majority of no less than 232 votes, given by at least two-thirds of Member States, is required. Moreover, any member of the Council may request verification, whether Member States that constitute qualified majority over a given matter, have represented 62% of the EU total population. Unless it occurs that this condition is met, the legal act in question may not be adopted.

The Treaty of Nice, in expectance of accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the European Union in the future, allocated 14 and 10 votes, respectively, to these countries. After their accession the total number of votes will be 345 and the threshold of qualified majority will be raised, accordingly, to 258. This will also increase the number of votes necessary to form blocking minority to 91 votes, while the remaining conditions are not going to change.[9]

The Treaty of Nice extended the procedure of qualified majority voting to the following areas: election of the President and members of the European Commission, appointment of the High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, election of judges of the Court of Auditors, of members of the Committee of the Regions and to the Social and Economic Committee, decisions in selected aspects of co-operation in the area of jurisdiction, freedom of movement and settlement of citizens on territories of the EU Member States, promotion of economic co-operation with third countries, supporting social and economic cohesion (the field of regional policy to be added after 2007) and supporting the EU industry competitiveness.[10]

3. Poland in the EU Council

While becoming the EU Member State on 1 May 2004, Poland acquired a very strong position in the Council. Considering our economic and demographic potential, we have received more votes in that forum than expected in prudent forecasts. Twenty-seven votes Poland has been allocated is just two shy of powerful Germany or France, the United Kingdom and Italy, the latter three being second to Germany in demographic and economic terms, but much stronger than Poland in either respect. Poland's strong position stems from our country having been referred to Spain, which endeavoured to acquire voting

[9] K.Michałowska-Gorywoda, *Podejmowanie decyzji w Unii Europejskiej* (*Decision-making in the European Union*), Warsaw 2002, p.125 ff.

[10] *The Treaty of Nice*…, op.cit.

power comparable to that enjoyed by the largest Member States and to find its place among the EU's strongest group.

In effect of such an allocation of votes, Poland became a very important country, needed to form majority coalitions and, even more importantly, to form groups of countries blocking disadvantageous decisions voted according to qualified majority procedure.

An apt question that should be asked is whether the sheer number of votes allocated to Member States is really so important, and are coalitions in fact formed in the forum of the Council, or are Member States rather keen on reaching agreement by consensus, avoiding official voting? In short: how does decision-making process in the Council really look like after 1 May 2004? Has Poland actually taken part in coalitions?

History of decision-making practice in the forum of the Council teaches that, even in the areas in which decisions should be made by qualified majority voting, Member States always seem to prefer to find an unanimous solution. This way, qualified majority voting is left as a last resort, while real basis for making decisions is in negotiation and attempts to reach a consensus. Member States are well aware of the fact that voting is, in fact, about imposing a given decision upon minority of those countries which do not agree with contents of a legal act put forth. This may cause conflicts and stir an impulse for revenge at any subsequent opportunity. Voting may be seen as a sort of a zero-sum game, where certain countries win while others lose. Negotiation, on the other hand, means that everybody has to give up a bit of his original position for the sake of common decisions to be agreed and made.

The practice so far makes it quite clear that only a minor percentage of decisions, which should have been made by qualified majority voting, were actually resolved through that procedure. This has been as evident as to make one wonder, whether the qualified majority procedure is needed at all. However, the fact that it is used so rarely, in exceptional cases, doesn't mean it is redundant. In reality, quite the opposite is true: it seems to be a vital element of the game, as Member States, being aware that it is possible to pass or to block any decision through voting, are, if "subconsciously", highly motivated to find consensus-based solutions at any cost. And even when qualified majority voting takes place anyway, coalition-forming actors usually rely upon the principle of loyalty as they lend their support expecting in reward other parties' support in future voting of legal acts. That's why the possession, by any country, of as many votes as possible, is strategically important. And this explains why the position enjoyed by Poland with its 27 votes in the Council, is very important.

Another clever question is how do Member States negotiate, how does debate on contents of legal acts really look like?

As mentioned above, members of the Council meet rather rarely (after all, ministers have to deal with their everyday duties in their home countries), however they are supported in their tasks by the Permanent Representatives Committee (COREPER).

COREPER (having its seat in Brussels) has been composed of ambassadors of Member States, who make themselves acquainted with draft legal acts proposed and carry the burden of their preparation in order to release their respective ministers from excessive responsibilities. Poland is represented in this body by ambassador Marek Grela and his deputy, Mrs. Ewa Synowiec.[11] COREPER usually works 2-3 days a week. Additionally, it has been supported by working groups (working daily) formed by experts from Member States. It is in fact them – experts from working groups, knowing their countries' interests and situation – who are real authors of contents of legal acts prepared. Most decisions are made at the level of working groups and included in the so-called agenda A. Remaining ones, over which no compromised was reached, form the agenda B, which is submitted for negotiation at a higher level, *i.e*. to COREPER ambassadors. It is at that level that principal debate takes place and some issues move from the Agenda B to A. Only a small percentage of pivotal proposed draft acts included in agenda B is sent up to the superior decision-making level, that is to ministers whose task it is to make decisions on final contents of legal acts.[12]

However, it happens sometimes, even as regards controversial matters included in the agenda B, that ministers see an opportunity to find a consensus anyway and instead of submitting a given issue to voting, send it back to the level of COREPER to have it negotiated anew. This was the case, for example, when agreement was sought over a proposal for a directive on collection of fees on trucks (TIR) using certain types of transport infrastructure (13.10.2004) or for a regulation on harmonisation of technical rules and administrative procedures in the field of civil aviation (13.10.2004).

Despite treaty-based regulations, providing that no official voting may take place either at the level of working groups or at that of COREPER, in fact ministers allow, albeit unofficially, for voting at the latter level, while in working groups simulations of voting are held over key matters, in order to reflect coalitions forming and attempts to exert an influence upon experts from opponent countries using promises in most cases, but sometimes threats as well.

As one observes decision-making process in the Council in the period following 1 May 2004, *i.e*. with Poland's participation, one has to admit not many decisions were made during that period over issues important from the

[11] http://europa.eu.int/idea/bin/dispent.pl

[12] K.Michałowska-Gorywoda, op.cit.

point of view of Member States' interests. Contents of legal acts was mainly adopted at the level of working groups through negotiation and compromise. To give an example, the following legal acts were adopted without voting during the early months following the EU enlargement:[13]

1. Proposal for a Council Decision Establishing the European Refugee Fund for the period 2005-2010, (30.06.2004).
2. Draft Council Decision establishing the Visa Information System (VIS), (30.06.2004).
3. Council Regulation amending Regulation (EC) No 1255/96 temporarily suspending the autonomous Common Customs Tariff duties on certain industrial, agricultural and fishery products, (09.07.2004).
4. Proposal for a Council Decision establishing a Social Protection Committee an repealing Decision 2000/436/EC, (14.07.2004).
5. Proposal for a Council Directive implementing the principle of equal treatment between women and men in the access to and supply of goods and services, (14.07.2004).
6. Proposal for Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the addition of vitamins and minerals and of certain other substances to foods, (14.07.2004).
7. Proposal for a Council Regulation amending Regulation 9EEC) No 1365/75 on the creation of the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, (14.07.2004).
8. Proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation, (14.07.2004).
9. Council Directive amending Directive 90/434/EEC of 23 July 1990 on common system taxation applicable to mergers, divisions, transfers of assets and exchanges of shares concerning companies of different Member States, (8.03.2005).
10. Council Regulation amending Regulation (EC) No 88/98 as regards the extension of the trawling ban to Polish waters, (8.03.2005).

There were, nevertheless, some decisions made in the period after 1 May 2004 using qualified majority voting procedure, mainly regarding some aspects of agreeing customs procedures and common external tariffs on goods imported from third countries. It occurred that in this area Member States' interests were particularly divergent, an example being a package of legal acts on modification

[13] A list of legal acts prepared on the basis on the Council (EU) web page: http://ue.eu.int/cms3_applications (subtitle: Summary of Council Acts - 2004, 2005).

of the bound duties on import of rice from India and Pakistan to the European Union. Over that matter coalitions formed and finally the acts were adopted by qualified majority (Germany, Belgium, Ireland, Cyprus, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Netherlands, Austria, Slovenia and Finland) with opposition from Denmark, Sweden and the United Kingdom believing that regulations should take agreements with other rice importers, such as the USA and Thailand, into account. As decision was made over that issue, Poland was in the abstaining group of countries, together with the Czech Republic, Lithuania and Slovakia.[14]

Another noteworthy situation happened during preparation of contents of the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on conditions for access to the gas transmission networks, when Poland was the only Member State to oppose, so it was unable to block decision that was made by qualified majority (25 November 2004).

However, it was during negotiation of an extremely controversial "nuclear package" that we had to deal with the most peculiar example revealing the importance of Poland in the context of formation of coalitions in the forum of the Council.[15] The package in question consisted of two draft directives: one proving for fundamental obligations and main principles as regards the safety of nuclear installations, another one dealing with burnt nuclear waste management. Work on the package started in 2003, but were completed only in April 2005. A problem that arose during negotiation was whether the directives (legal acts which are binding for the Member States and imply their duty to transpose them to national legislations) were really needed, or should international conventions to which all the Member States were signatories, suffice. Opponents of the directives, including Germany, United Kingdom, Sweden, Finland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Lithuania and Denmark, argued about their potential negative impact upon nuclear safety of Member States. Proponents of both directives, namely France, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Belgium, Luxembourg, Italy, Austria and Latvia, believed that the EU required uniform principles as regards safety of nuclear installations and radioactive waste management and that international conventions failed to ensure such uniformity. Malta, Cyprus, Estonia, Ireland and Slovenia remained undecided, while Poland and Netherlands declared both solutions were satisfactory to them.[16]

[14] http://ue.eu.int/cms3_applications (subtitle: Summary of Council Acts - 2004, 2005).

[15] Information regarding negotiation on "the nuclear package" come from internal materials presenting Poland's position in the forum of working groups (in the Author's possession).

[16] There have been no nuclear power plants in the territory of Poland, however, our neighbouring countries have such plants and involve in activities in the scope of nuclear technologies. Poland is also a signatory of international conventions in this respect, therefore both solutions are deemed advantageous from our country's point of view.

Poland, aware of having become a decisive factor in that situation as far the strongest of the undecided parties, presented its demands to the coalition led by Germany (or, to be precise, just to Germany), expecting their support in other key issues which were much more important from Polish interests' point of view. Our country has also faced energy-related problems, however, in different areas so Poland decided to support "German" coalition, hoping for support from Berlin in such matters as: construction of another line of the Yamal gas pipeline from Russia to Europe, through the territory of Poland; Poland's endeavours to have maintenance of public aid to Polish coal mining approved and to have anti-dumping measures to control import of coal from Russia to the EU undertaken; and, finally, raising the rate of liberalisation of German labour market for Poles. Germany, in reward for the support obtained from Warsaw during the voting of the "nuclear package", promised to consider similar support to be given in the future to Poland over the above-mentioned issues.

As this example, relating to one of few situations since the time the EU was enlarged in 2004, reveals, sometimes voting in the forum of the Council indeed does take place. The same example also throws light upon mechanisms of coalition emergence, of lending support by irresolute countries in order to win a similar privilege in reward in the future, at another opportunity when decisions will be made through qualified majority voting. Finally, this illustrates how skilfully Poland attempted to take advantage of the situation to take care of its interests. It is also symptomatic that it negotiated with Germany – the wealthiest and largest of the EU Member States, this way giving hints who is the leader of processes taking place in Europe in its eyes.

While evaluating this example one should ask a question, whether qualified majority voting is perhaps going to happen more often in the enlarged European Union after all. If so, this suggests that the EU will tend towards implementation of supra-national idea and, at the same time, that in doing so it may ensure better efficiency of decision-making and stimulate dynamics of its further growth. It is this consideration that underpins endeavours of proponents of the EU institutional reform provided for in the Constitution Treaty which makes it more difficult to form blocking minority coalitions and extends the scope of areas in which decisions are going to be made through qualified majority.

4. Conclusion

The institutional reform provided for in the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe has been an undeniable milestone in the process of integration taking place in the European Union. It should be considered that its contents was negotiated by representatives of 25 countries representing, in many

instances, various and divergent national interests, afraid of losing their national identities and scrutinized by their national public opinion.

There may be no doubt that the European Union gravitates towards federation-based solutions. Smooth operation of an organism composed of so many countries can hardly be imagined unless supra-national solutions are applied to some extent. However, the draft Constitution leaves a number of issues unsolved and open, to be agreed by the European Council during its subsequent summits. Nevertheless, what is most important in the Treaty, is the adoption of the rule of voting by qualified majority in the Council of Ministers (at present the Council of the European Union) as well as of the procedure of co-deciding by the Council and the European Parliament over adoption of the EU legal acts.

Considering the future further enlargement of the European Union by adoption of Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia, with so many Member States it seems quite certain that decision-making using majority procedure will become more and more an arena for formation of blocks and coalitions emerging depending on what is required for satisfaction of individual countries' interests. While taking part in such coalitions, Member States will certainly follow their own reasons of state, taking care of welfare and safety of their own citizens and promotion of their interests stemming from historical experience, condition of their economies or their geopolitical situation. Coalitions may be formed by small countries (which are more numerous) in order to counterbalance the advantage of their large partners; coalitions may group wealthier countries against poorer ones (for instance when budgetary matters will be at stake), *etc*. Most likely, however, is formation of long-lasting coalitions grouped around strong centres – regional powers which have their zones of influence in different parts of the continent. Sure enough, these countries will have to collaborate, basing on the mechanism of balance of power we have known quite well from the history of Europe, counteracting any hegemonic ambitions. Collaboration of such block will probably assume a form of a historic "concert" of powers, its principal objective being satisfaction of interests of the EU Member States, endeavouring above all other things and in spite of divergences or divisions, to ensure peace, safety and welfare in Europe.