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## **Decision-making in the council of the European Union. The role of committees.**

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## **Part III Qualitative analysis**

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## **8 Methodological issues**

In Part III of the book, I describe and compare six case studies of Council decision-making. Like the quantitative analysis, the case studies contribute to answer both the descriptive question of how many and the explanatory question of why certain issues are decided at the committee level. The research design allows for within-sector as well as between-sector comparisons. In each of the next three chapters, I describe two instances of legislative decision-making in a certain Council formation. Chapter 9 deals with the field of Agriculture, Chapter 10 with Environment and Chapter 11 with Economic and Financial Affairs. Every chapter ends with a within-sector comparison of the involvement of different Council levels and a discussion of the relevance of potential explanatory factors. In Chapter 12, I conclude the qualitative analysis with a summary of the results of the within-sector comparisons and an investigation of whether these results also hold up in a comparison across the different Council formations.

Before beginning with the case study descriptions, I discuss some methodological issues in this chapter. First, I outline the added value of case studies to the study of committee decision-making. Then I discuss whether ‘nesting’ a qualitative study within an earlier quantitative study is advisable. In particular, I discuss in how far the empirical results of the quantitative study should factor into the case selection criteria of the qualitative analysis. Based on this discussion, I then present the case selection criteria and introduce the selected decision-making processes. Finally, I describe the methods used to collect the data and discuss the presentation of the results.

### **8.1 The complementarity of quantitative and qualitative research**

The quantitative analysis of committee decision-making relied on whole proposals as the unit of analysis. The analysis only considered whether or not a committee agreed on all provisions contained in a proposal. But even if ministers discuss or reach the final decision on a dossier as a whole, many individual provisions in this dossier will have been decided by committees before. The quantitative analysis did not examine the relative number or the importance of these provisions. The case studies give further insights in this respect. Thus, the consideration of specific provisions within a proposal is the main contribution of the case studies to answer the descriptive question

of how many decisions committees make. In addition, the narrative form of qualitative case descriptions can illustrate how committees reach their decisions. Given the lack of systematic descriptions of committee negotiations in the Council, descriptions of the process through which committees reach agreements are also valuable contributions to the literature on Council decision-making.

However, the case descriptions are also useful for evaluating and developing theory. On the one hand, the plausibility of existing theories can be assessed by investigating the presence of the causal mechanisms posited by these theories. Statistical analyses only examine the co-variation between variables. The detailed analysis of individual cases is helpful for examining whether and how the change in an independent variable causes a change in the dependent variable. At the very least, case studies can be used as plausibility checks for the causal mechanisms suggested by the correlational results found in the statistical analysis. On the other hand, case studies can also positively contribute to theory development. Case studies are often of a rather exploratory nature. Usually, the goal of case study research is to explain the outcome of a case as comprehensively as possible rather than to test a specific theory. Case studies following this outcome-oriented approach are very useful for identifying hitherto neglected explanatory variables or for discovering complex causal structures such as equifinality or conjunctural causation. In this respect, case studies do not only serve as a plausibility check of statistical results, but also aid the development of more appropriate and sophisticated theories.

## **8.2 Advantages and disadvantages of a nested design**

The case selection is based on both theoretical considerations as well as empirical results of previous work. Regarding the empirical results, the selection procedure builds on some of the insights gained from the quantitative study in Chapter 7. No consensus exists in the literature on mixed-method research on how best to combine quantitative and qualitative research. With regard to qualitative follow-up studies of quantitative analyses, Lieberman (2005) distinguishes two possible combinations: if the statistical model fits the data well, the researcher should use case studies to further check the validity of the statistical results; if the model fits the data badly, the researcher should use case studies to improve the model specification. In the first situation, Lieberman (2005: 444) recommends to select cases with widely varying values on the central independent variables but well predicted outcome scores. This

procedure allows for an investigation of the robustness of a particular causal argument across a wide range of values on the independent variables. In the second situation, Lieberman (2005: 445) suggests to select at least one case that is not well predicted by the statistical model. The study of cases with badly predicted outcomes is useful for identifying omitted variables and thus for improving the theoretical specification. Because the goal of these studies is to improve the explanation for the variation in the outcome, Lieberman (2005: 445) also stresses the need to select cases with widely varying values on the dependent variable.

As Rohlfing (2007) demonstrates, the nesting of qualitative studies within quantitative studies generates a serious methodological and logical problem. If the researcher uses case selection criteria that are based on the results of a quantitative study, the researcher implicitly assumes that the results of the quantitative study are correct. However, if the results of the quantitative analysis are known to be correct, there is no need for further investigations through qualitative case studies. If doubts exist about the validity of the results of the quantitative analysis, any selection criteria whose calculation is based on the model estimates is as flawed as the model specification itself. To overcome this problem, Rohlfing (2007) proposes to remove the most severe outlying cases from the estimation sample and to re-estimate the model based on the reduced sample. The results of the reduced sample should then be used to calculate residuals and other post-estimation statistics often employed to select cases for the qualitative studies. Rohlfing's (2007) proposed solution mitigates the impact of outliers on the statistical results and therefore on the diagnostic measures used to select cases. Nevertheless, the model estimates can still be affected by other misspecifications. Rohlfing's (2007) procedure does not remedy other problems generated, for example, by omitted explanatory variables or wrong specifications of the functional forms of relationships between variables. Thus, the fundamental problem remains: case studies are only useful if we do not completely trust the results of a quantitative analysis. But if we do not trust the results of the quantitative analysis completely, these results should also not be used to justify the selection of cases for the qualitative analysis.

Although I relied on the relevant theoretical literature to guide the quantitative analysis in Chapter 7, I still implemented a largely empiricist regression approach. In the statistical model, I assumed a linear additive relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable. While the assumption of a linear additive

relationship of the explanatory variables with the outcome variable has the virtue of simplicity, such a specification is not necessarily the most natural one to expect. Given that only little prior research exists that is directly related to committee decision-making in the Council, I might have omitted important explanatory variables as well. Similarly, the inclusion of variables in the model that are in fact irrelevant for explaining committee decision-making might also have distorted the results. Finally, some of the indicators I employed are probably only imperfect reflections of their underlying concepts.

Of course, none of the model diagnostics indicated the presence of non-linear relationships or other specification problems. I also based the selection of independent variables firmly on the theories presented in the existing literature. Model misspecification and unreliable measures are a potential problem for any type of regression analysis. In this respect, the quantitative study presented in Chapter 7 is not in any way exceptional. Indeed, the quantitative study constitutes an insightful initial analysis of committee decision-making in the Council. However, a reliance of further research on the full set of assumptions made in this analysis is neither needed nor advisable. Thus, instead of selecting cases based on how well or how badly the statistical model predicts the value on the dependent variable, the case selection takes into account only the most robust empirical relationships discovered through the quantitative analysis. In this way, the qualitative study still builds on the results of the quantitative analysis, but only on those results that do not depend on relatively questionable modelling assumptions.

### **8.3 Case selection criteria**

The salience of a proposal proved to be the single most important predictor of whether or not a Council decision was reached at the committee level. Indeed, a simple logistic regression of the Council decision-making level against the salience of an act results in a remarkably high model-fit statistic (i.e. a pseudo R-square of 0.24). This simple model correctly predicts the outcome of three out of four cases (i.e. the count R-square is 0.75)<sup>1</sup>. Most importantly, the negative relationship between salience and committee decision-making is not only strong but also highly robust. The relationship

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<sup>1</sup> These results are based on the following logistic regression estimates (z-values in brackets): 1.79 (0.26) - 0.20 \* Salience (8.88)

is not sensitive to changes in the model specification. The finding is not affected by the inclusion or exclusion of other variables in the model or by some of the most common monotonic transformations of the functional form (i.e. logarithmic and exponential) of the relationship. In short, the negative effect of the salience of an act on the probability of a committee decision is what Achen (2002: 441) calls a “reliable empirical generalisation”.

Slightly simplified, this empirical generalisation states that proposals of low salience are almost certainly decided by a committee, while proposals of high salience are almost certainly decided by ministers. Thus, in order to identify additional factors besides salience that influence the level of decision-making in the Council, we should either select proposals with a medium degree of salience or proposals that contradict this pattern. Proposals with a medium degree of salience are neither so unimportant that anything other than a committee decision would be surprising, nor so politicised that the involvement of ministers is necessarily expected. Proposals of low salience that were decided by ministers and proposals of high salience that were decided by committees yield even more leverage to identify additional explanatory factors affecting the level at which a decision is made in the Council. Therefore, a first criterion for the case selection is to choose cases that exhibited either a medium degree of salience or cases that were decided at an unexpected Council level given their degree of salience.

Another robust empirical result derived from the quantitative analysis concerns the wide variation in committee decision-making across different Council formations. Despite the inclusion of a number of substantially important explanatory variables with the potential to also tap cross-sector variation, significant differences between Council formations remained detectable. Thus, one main dimension of comparison in the case study analysis is cross-sectoral. Given limited resources, the case studies focus on three Council formations: Agriculture, Environment, and Economic and Financial Affairs. I selected these three formations because of the differences in their internal committee structures. In Agriculture, the SCA prepares the meetings of ministers and oversees the work of more than 100 working parties<sup>2</sup>, most of which meet only occasionally. The meetings of Environment ministers are prepared by the deputy permanent representatives in Coreper I. Coreper I in turn supervises the work

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<sup>2</sup> The following figures include subgroups, see Table 2.1.



of the two working parties in the field of Environment. The Working Party on International Environmental Issues deals with all external and the Working Party on the Environment with all internal measures of EU environmental policy. Finally, the permanent representatives in Coreper II prepare the meetings of Economic and Financial Affairs ministers. Coreper II also co-ordinates the work of the eight working parties in this Council formation.

Assuring a large cross-sector variation in the committee structure of Council formations is useful for probing the generalisability of any causal mechanisms identified through the within-sector comparisons. In contrast, the selection of proposals for the within-sector comparison aims at keeping as many proposal characteristics as possible constant within a certain policy sector. At the same time, the selection of cases within sectors should ensure variation on the value of the outcome variable. This procedure resembles Mill's Method of Difference. For each Council formation, I selected two proposals: one that was decided at the committee level and one that was discussed by ministers. Regarding the selection of proposals within Council formations, my goal was to match proposals on the following characteristics: the working party dealing with the proposal, the time at which the Council started negotiating, the legislative procedure, the voting rule, the type of legal instrument, and the status of the proposed legislative act. The status of a legislative act indicates whether the proposal suggests an amendment of existing or the creation of new legislation. In principle, if two cases with different values on the outcome variable differ only in one explanatory factor, then the outcome variable must be causally related to this explanatory factor. Of course, in practise, more than one potential explanatory factor varies across cases, no matter how well the cases are matched on possibly relevant characteristics. Thus, although a careful case selection can rule out many potential explanations, others must be examined through within-case methods such as process tracing and the method of congruence (George & Bennett 2005: 178-9).

In summary, the case selection procedure followed the following guidelines: select proposals as to minimise variation of proposal characteristics within Council formations and select Council formations as to maximise variation in committee structure characteristics. Finally, ensure that the proposals exhibit either a medium degree of salience or an unexpected value on the outcome variable given their degree of salience. Keeping many proposal characteristics within a Council formation

constant makes it easier to identify further explanatory factors. The impact of additional explanatory factors should also be most visible in cases where the degree of salience of a proposal is contrary to expectations given a certain Council decision-making level or where the degree of salience takes a medium value. I present the results of the selection procedure in Table 8.1.

Unfortunately, I could not match all the within-sector cases on all criteria. In particular, I could not identify two Agriculture proposals that were discussed by the same working party, were similar with respect to other characteristics, and exhibited variation on the dependent variable. The lack of similar Agriculture proposals is mainly due to the high specialisation of working parties in this area. Many Agriculture working parties discussed no or only one proposal during the time period considered. In the case where a working party discussed several proposals, the working party was either one of the few Agriculture working parties that reports to Coreper rather than the SCA, the proposals involved trivial dossiers, or the proposals belonged to a single policy package. In the end, I chose two Agriculture dossiers that are similar in all specified characteristics except for the working party dealing with the dossier. Given the level of salience, the Council decision-making level is exactly contrary to expectations. Thus, factors other than salience should have had a major influence on Council decision-making in these cases. Apart from slight differences in the dates of the transmission of the proposal from the Commission to the Council, I was able to match the proposals for the other Council formations on all specified characteristics. In the case of the Economic and Financial Affairs formation, the salience pattern also corresponds to the case selection guidelines. In the case of the Environment formation, the proposal decided by ministers unfortunately exhibits a relatively high degree of salience. This selection is again a result of a trade-off between different criteria. I simply could not identify another pair of proposals in the field of Environment that were so closely matched on all other selection criteria and exhibited the required salience pattern as well.

The role of Committees in Council decision-making

Table 8.1 Characteristics of selected cases

| <i>Selected Council formations</i>  | <i>Agriculture</i>  | <i>Environment</i>   | <i>Economic and Financial Affairs</i>   |
|---|---|--|---|
| Sector characteristics<br>Senior committee<br>Number of working parties   | SCA<br>Large  | Coreper I<br>Small   | Coreper II<br>Medium  |
| <i>Selected proposals</i>   | <i>Geographical Indications Regulation</i> <sup>1</sup><br><i>Leaf Tobacco Regulation</i> <sup>2</sup>              | <i>Ambient Air Directive</i> <sup>3</sup><br><i>Batteries Directive</i> <sup>4</sup>           | <i>Parent-Subsidiary Directive</i> <sup>5</sup><br><i>Mergers Directive</i> <sup>6</sup>                        |
| Outcome variable<br>Decision level<br>Other characteristics<br>Legislative significance<br>Working party<br>Commission transmission date<br>Legislative procedure<br>Voting rule<br>Legal instrument<br>Status of act | Committee<br>medium (14)<br>Geographical Indications<br>Nov. 2001<br>Consultation<br>QMV<br>Regulation<br>Amendment | Committee<br>medium (14)<br>Environment<br>July 2003<br>Co-decision<br>QMV<br>Directive<br>New | Ministers<br>medium (12)<br>Direct Taxation<br>July 2003<br>Consultation<br>Unanimity<br>Directive<br>Amendment |

*Notes:* SCA stands for Special Committee on Agriculture and Coreper for Committee of Permanent Representatives.

<sup>1</sup> Commission (2002): Proposal for a Council Regulation amending Regulation 2081/92/EEC of 14 July 1992 on the protection of geographical indications and designations of origin for agricultural products and foodstuffs. 15 March 2002, COM/2002/139.

<sup>2</sup> Commission (2001) Proposal for a Council Regulation fixing the premiums and guarantee thresholds for leaf tobacco by variety group and Member State for the 2002, 2003 and 2004 harvests and amending Regulation 2075/92/EEC. 21 November 2001, COM/2001/684.

<sup>3</sup> Commission (2003): Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council relating to arsenic, cadmium, mercury, nickel and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons in ambient air. 16 July 2003, COM/2003/423.

<sup>4</sup> Commission (2003): Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on batteries and accumulators and spent batteries and accumulators. 21 November 2003, COM/2003/723.

<sup>5</sup> Commission (2003): Proposal for a Council Directive amending Directive 90/435/EEC on the common system of taxation applicable in the case of parent companies and subsidiaries of different Member States. 29 July 2003, COM/2003/462.

<sup>6</sup> Commission (2003): Proposal for a Council Directive amending Directive 90/434/EEC of 23 July 1990 on the common system of taxation applicable to mergers, divisions, transfers of assets and exchanges of shares concerning companies of different Member States. 17 October 2003, COM/2003/613.

In terms of their content, the two proposals selected in the field of Economic and Financial Affairs, that is the Merger and the Parent-Subsidiary Directive, are most closely related. Both Directives deal with the taxation of cross-border financial transactions of companies within the single European market. The contents of the matched proposals in the other two Council formations are less similar. In the field of Environment, the Ambient Air Directive sets air quality standards and regulates the monitoring of hazardous substances in the air. In contrast, the Batteries Directive lays down provisions for the production, collection, and recycling of different types of batteries. In Agriculture, the Geographical Indications Regulation provides for the registration and protection of geographical names for food products whereas the Leaf Tobacco Regulation determines the amount of subsidies granted for tobacco producers. In general, the exceptions in the matching of case characteristics have to be taken into account when comparing the cases and drawing inferences.

Across sectors, the cases vary considerably in terms of their institutional features. With respect to the voting rule, qualified-majority voting was a possibility in the Agriculture and Environment cases. The unanimity rule applied only in the Economic and Financial Affairs Council formation. Regarding the legislative procedure, the consultation procedure was applicable in the Agriculture and the Economic and Financial Affairs cases, and the co-decision procedure in the Environment cases. Thus, the cases cover all empirically relevant configurations of the voting rule and the legislative procedure. Cases where the co-decision procedure applies together with the unanimity decision-rule in the Council are extremely rare in reality. The type and the status of the legal instruments also vary across sectors. In Agriculture, the legal instruments are Regulations; in the other two sectors, the legal instruments are Directives. The Regulations in Agriculture and the Directives in Economic and Financial Affairs amend existing laws, whereas the Directives in Environment constitute new European legislation. The fact that two sectors always exhibit one characteristic in common allows at least for some level of control in pairwise comparisons of decision-making in different sectors.

#### **8.4 Data sources and collection**

Information on the different cases was drawn from three different sources: primary documents of the EU institutions, particularly of the Council, interviews with public officials who participated in the negotiations in the Council and contemporary

newspaper reports. In a first step, the relevant primary documents were examined. The Council's new transparency rules allow the public access to a wide variety of documents related to the Council's decision-making process. These documents include the legislative proposal of the Commission, agendas and progress reports of working parties and senior committees, Presidency compromise proposals, I/A-item and A-item notes, agendas and minutes of ministerial meetings as well as press releases summarising the outcomes of ministerial meetings. In some instances, room documents of varying content, which are distributed before or during meetings to aid the discussion, are also available. If possible, I downloaded the Council documents directly from the Council's public register of documents website<sup>1</sup>. If the register did not contain a document known to exist because it was mentioned in another document or the register denied access to a document, I obtained the documents through a formal request for access to Council documents<sup>2</sup>.

The examination of these documents allowed a relatively detailed reconstruction of the process as well as the content of Council discussions. Many of the Council documents contained cross-references to earlier or accompanying documents. The documents also referred to specific meetings with specified dates. The meeting agendas of Council bodies in turn mentioned the documents on which discussions were supposed to be based during the meeting. These cross-references made double-checking the completeness of the document record for a certain case possible. In instances where documents turned out to be missing, I filed a new request for access to these documents with the Council secretariat. Unless a document concerned a legal opinion, the Council Secretariat granted all these requests. Through the cross-references among documents, I could reconstruct the formal aspects of the negotiation process in considerable detail with a high degree of confidence in the accuracy and the completeness of the description.

The reports of working parties and senior committees were particularly useful for examining the content of the negotiations. These reports mention the issues

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<sup>1</sup> The Council's register of documents can be accessed online at:

<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/showPage.asp?id=254&lang=en&mode=g> (consulted on 28 June 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Requests for access to Council documents can be made online at:

<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/showPage.asp?id=306&lang=en&mode=g> (consulted on 28 June 2007).

contested during a meeting and usually also note the positions and demands of dissenting delegations. I could trace the progress of discussions by comparing the content of the reports over time. In order to trace the developments on individual issues, I manually coded all documents with the aid of qualitative content analysis software. This procedure allowed the identification of contested issues, the timing at which an issue was first raised, the nature of the disagreement, the time and the Council level at which an issue was resolved as well as the final decision-making outcome in terms of policy substance.

Thus, the analysis of Council documents forms the backbone for the case narratives I present in the following chapters. Although these documents present a wealth of information about the negotiation process in the Council, they also have some shortcomings. Firstly, the documents often lack information on developments happening before and between formal meetings. Secondly, in line with the Council's guidelines for producing documents<sup>3</sup>, the reports also focus on those issues on which agreement is still outstanding after a meeting rather than on how committee members resolved issues during a meeting. Thirdly, the documents do not always state the reasons for objections by delegations<sup>4</sup>. Fourthly, Council documents neglect much of the history of the proposal and the context of the decision-making process. Finally, some of the issues are technically complex and insufficiently explained in the documents.

For these reasons, I complemented the data from the document analysis with information gained from expert interviews and newspaper reports. The expert interviews were semi-structured in that they aimed at answering a similar core set of open questions for each case. However, I also used the interviews to supplement the information gained from the primary documents. I used them to fill gaps in the document trail and to ask for clarifications of technically complex matters. In general, the interviews mainly served the purpose of exploration and information-gathering. My goal was to interview representatives of the most central actors in the decision-making process. Beyers and Dierickx (1998: 299) found that the Commission, the

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<sup>3</sup> Council (2003): Guide for producing documents for the Council and its preparatory bodies. N. d., SN 1430/03 Rev. 1.

<sup>4</sup> The lack of reasons in a report is at least sometimes due to the fact that delegations simply did not give any reasons for their positions (Interview F).

Council Secretariat and the Presidency are the most central actors in the communication networks of working parties. Thus, I contacted representatives of these institutions who were involved in the Council negotiation process in the selected cases. If the proposal was decided through the co-decision procedure, I also approached a member of the EP delegation representing the Parliament's position in negotiations with the Council. This selection procedure resulted in 20 potential interview partners.

Unfortunately, I could not interview all of these experts. The selected decision-making processes all date back several years. Many potential interview partners had changed their job positions within Brussels or moved back to national administrations. Some of the organisational structures within the EU institutions had also changed in the meantime. As a result, I could not determine the current location and contact details of one of the selected interview partners. In addition, resource constraints restricted the possibilities to interview former EU officials in their home countries. I could not interview five of the seven experts who were not working in Brussels anymore. Four experts explicitly refused an interview. One of the experts who declined an interview mentioned confidentiality concerns, the others referred to their heavy workload. However, in other instances, not only one but several representatives of the same institution agreed to an interview. Overall, I conducted 14 interviews in May and June 2007, eleven in Brussels and another three in different EU countries. Four of the interview partners were able to provide information on two of the selected cases. In Table 8.2, I list the interview partners for each case.

Because of the low number of interviews related to some of the decision-making cases, I do not mention the institutional affiliation of respondents to ensure their anonymity. Overall, five interview partners represented the Commission in negotiations in Council committees, five other interview partners were part of the Presidency delegations chairing the meetings of these committees, one interview partner was part of an EP delegation and three interview partners were affiliated with the Council's General Secretariat. Table 8.2 shows that the number of interviews per case varies quite considerably. I was able to conduct at least one interview for each case. The reliance on only one interview for the cases in Agriculture is somewhat unfortunate. However, the more comprehensive press coverage of policy-making in this policy area compensates to a large extent for any lack of information gained from interviews. In contrast to the other policy areas considered, news reports about

Council negotiations in the field of Agriculture contain quite detailed accounts of the state of play of negotiations and the different views of Member States even when the dossier is still under discussion at committee level.

Table 8.2 List of case study interviews

| <i>Case and interviewee</i>         | <i>Interview date</i>     |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Geographical Indications Regulation |                           |
| Interview A                         | Brussels, 14 May 2007     |
| Leaf Tobacco Regulation             |                           |
| Interview B                         | Brussels, 15 June 2007    |
| Ambient Air Directive               |                           |
| Interview C                         | Brussels, 18 June 2007    |
| Interview D                         | Member State, 8 June 2007 |
| Batteries Directive                 |                           |
| Interview E                         | Brussels, 18 June 2007    |
| Interview F                         | Brussels, 15 May 2007     |
| Interview G                         | Brussels, 14 May 2007     |
| Interview H                         | Member State, 1 June 2007 |
| Mergers Directive                   |                           |
| Interview J                         | Brussels, 13 June 2007    |
| Interview K                         | Brussels, 13 June 2007    |
| Interview L                         | Brussels, 21 June 2007    |
| Interview M                         | Brussels, 21 June 2007    |
| Interview N                         | Brussels, 13 June 2007    |
| Interview O                         | Member State, 4 June 2007 |
| Parent-Subsidiary Directive         |                           |
| Interview J                         | Brussels, 13 June 2007    |
| Interview K                         | Brussels, 13 June 2007    |
| Interview L                         | Brussels, 21 June 2007    |
| Interview M                         | Brussels, 21 June 2007    |

In general, I used newspaper reports as a third source of information for the case studies to complement the information gained from the primary documents and the expert interviews. The newspaper reports were particularly valuable for obtaining some insights into the broader context of the decision-making process at the time. I used the Factiva database as source for the news reports. The Factiva database<sup>5</sup> provides access to the full-text of more than 10,000 sources, including key newswires and many internationally renowned newspapers. The database also covers the major news providers specialised on EU politics, such as Agence Europe, European Voice and Europolitics. For each of the decision-making cases, I performed an English-language search in the database. I chose the search terms as to maximise the comprehensiveness of the search results rather than their precision. I restricted the

<sup>5</sup> Accessed via the library subscription of Leiden University, a description of the database can be found at: <http://www.factiva.com> (consulted on 29 June 2007).



time coverage to the period starting a month before the transmission of the Commission proposal and ending a month after the Council decision. In a second step, I manually screened the articles produced by the search for their relevance.

I used the information gained from primary documents, interviews and newspaper reports to reconstruct in detail the negotiation process in the six Council decision-making cases. I structured the qualitative analysis in three chapters according to policy area. In each chapter, I begin by briefly describing the background and history of EU policy-making in the policy area and by outlining the organisational structure of the Council formation. Subsequently, I present the negotiation process on each of the two dossiers in the policy area. In line with the exploratory character of the study, I describe each negotiation process in a chronological manner. The chronological approach results in comprehensive narratives that form the base for the comparative analyses. Only such relatively detailed narratives provide the reader with the necessary data to judge the validity of the inferences drawn from the case studies. At the end of each policy chapter, I discuss the applicability of potential explanatory factors through a within-sector comparison. The within-sector comparisons allow only for limited examinations of factors that are constant within sectors. Thus, the qualitative analysis concludes with a chapter containing an inter-sectoral comparison of Council decision-making. In this chapter, I pay special attention to factors that vary only across Council formations.