Political factors affecting European Union legislative decision-making speed

Lei, Y.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction and background

Policymakers in the European Union (EU) have been seeking ways to accommodate and resolve disagreement and controversy to make decision-making more efficient and potentially increase the decision-making speed of the legislative process. Since the 1970s, the EU's legislative activity has grown significantly in influence and complexity. Adopted legislative acts have increased substantially because of the EU's growth, and decision-making at the supranational level has increased in significance (Hix, 1999). Stakeholder involvement in EU decision-making has, meanwhile, become a critical component for the EU and especially the European Commission to boost democratic legitimacy (Greenwood, 2007; Kohler-Koch, 2007; Rasmussen & Toshkov, 2013; Schmidt, 2013). The EU decision-making process must measure up to democratic standards. It requires EU decision-makers to closely connect citizens with the EU institutions and develop an efficient and flexible political system (European Commission, 2001). However, reconciling divergent stakeholder opinions is a challenge for EU decision-makers, especially during crises, such as the financial crisis, growing populism, and the refugee crisis. Hence, an adjustment to the European policymaking system is vital. Even so, it seems EU governance has two competing tendencies: a demand for more integration and emphasis on decision-making at the EU level and reducing EU involvement while seeking solutions at national and intergovernmental levels. If the first prevails, and the EU is authorized by member states and EU citizens to do more, it is crucial to consider to what extent the EU can make decisions on complex issues that require immediate action regarding democratic standards.

The influence of crises in the EU regards a necessity to focus on the speed of decision-making because the decision-making speed may somewhat reflect legislative efficiency and the crisis management capabilities of the EU. Therefore, it is essential to determine whether any important factors in the decision-making process on EU legislation could affect its speed. It could help decision-makers determine the specific causes of legislative stagnation and how to avoid them, thereby allowing for a democratically legitimate policy to solve the EU crises. EU decision-making speed (or duration of the legislative process) has been studied since the late 1990s (e.g., Golub, 1999, 2007, 2008; Golub & Steunenberg, 2007; König, 2007, 2008; Schulz & König, 2000; Selck & Steunenberg, 2004; Sloot & Verschuren, 1990). It refers to the time EU decision-makers need for consulting, scrutinizing, deliberating, and bargaining on a legislative proposal before it can be formally enacted into law and implemented at the member-state level (Schulz & König, 2000). Many studies explore how characteristics of the legislative process or the actors who play an immediate role in making legislation affect speed. Given that the factors are closely related to the legislative process, they are called "internal" factors. Next to these factors are factors regarding the broader setting within which legislative decision-making occurs. These factors, such as stakeholder involvement, stem from the social-political environment and may also affect decision-making speed. The study terms them as "external" factors. Notably, they have received less attention in the current literature. Hence, this doctoral dissertation focuses on the external factors, specifically regarding the role of interest group representation and their interaction with internal factors, such as member states preferences.

Decision-making in the EU context is complex. The decision-making procedures seem to change with each revision of the treaty, and legislative proposals also seem to be affected by various stakeholder demands and preferences. The duration of EU decision-making is critical for policy responsiveness, including delivering specific legislation to the public and timely adjustment of proposals to ensure they continue to meet the demands they were intended to address (Rasmussen & Toshkov, 2013). Typically, legislative decision-making studies use the term "speed" interchangeably with "duration" (e.g., Drüner et al., 2018; Golub, 2007). This dissertation follows that practice.[1]

There are two possible indicators of decision-making speed or legislative duration. The first is the number of legislative proposals adopted within 22 months as a percentage of the total number of proposals tabled by the European Commission, following Sloot and Verschuren (1990). The other is the lag between the date of the proposal's presentation by the European Commission and the date of its adoption by the Council of the EU (Schulz & König, 2000). When examining speed or duration, scholars typically use the dates from the Commission's formal initiative to adoption as the primary investigation indicator (i.e., the time lag between initiation and adoption) (Golub, 2007, 2008; König, 2007, 2008).

Existing theories provide two perspectives that help elucidate how political factors could affect EU decision-making speed or legislative duration. Determinants of EU decision-making speed include (1) participation of the European Parliament (EP) (Golub, 2007, 2008; Golub & Steunenberg, 2007; König, 2007; Schulz & König, 2000), (2) the use of specific legislative

[1] The study uses the term "decision-making speed" interchangeably with "legislative duration" in each chapter. Conceptually, decision-making speed is the dynamic reflection of responsiveness. Instead, legislative duration seems to be the most appropriate concept to encompass variations in measuring speed. Following Chalmers, "[l] legislative duration refers to the speed with which proposals become laws and is measured as the time it takes in days between two specific events (i.e., when the Commission makes a proposal and the adoption of that proposal into law)" (Chalmers, 2014: p. 597). This way of measuring duration corresponds to the common approach in the literature (see e.g., Klüver & Sagarzazu, 2013; König, 2007; Schulz & König, 2000). Meanwhile, some scholars use the time lag between a Commission proposal and a Council decision as the primary indicator of the EU's decision-making speed (see Schulz & Konig, 2000).

rules and institutional reform (Golub, 1999, 2007; Golub & Steunenberg, 2007; König, 2007), (3) the choice of legislative instruments (Golub, 2007; Klüver & Sagarzazu, 2013; Schulz & König, 2000; Sloot & Verschuren, 1990), (4) the situation before and after EU enlargement (Best & Settembris, 2008; Golub, 2007; Hertz & Leuffen, 2011; Klüver & Sagarzazu, 2013; König, 2007; Toshkov, 2017), and (5) actor preferences (Golub & Steunenberg, 2007; Golub, 2008; König, 2008; Tsebelis & Garrett, 1996, 2000). The factors mostly refer to characteristics of the decision-making process and can be labeled as "internal."

From the neo-corporatist perspective (Gorges, 1996; Streeck & Schmitter, 1991), the speed determinants mainly include interest group influence and public interests (Baumgartner et al., 2009; Klüver, 2013; Mahoney, 2008; Rasmussen & Toshkov, 2013). The studies link EU legislative politics with parties and groups within and outside the realm of EU institutions, which may impact decisions. From that angle, the studies provide explanatory factors that affect speed from an "external" perspective. They mainly regard (1) interest group influence and lobbying success (Callanan, 2011; Chalmers, 2011; Klüver, 2012; Mahoney, 2008; Schneider et al., 2007), (2) interest group access and strategies (Bennett, 1997; Beyers et al., 2014; Boräng & Naurin, 2015; Coen, 1997; Eising, 2007; Eising et al., 2015; König et al., 2007; Klüver et al., 2015), (3) density and diversity of the interest group population (Berkhout et al., 2017; Gray & Lowery, 1995, 1996; Toshkov et al., 2013), and (4) and interest group mobilization (Rasmussen et al., 2014). While scholars speculate about the relationship between interest group involvement and the speed of EU decision-making, the EU legislative politics literature lacks studies on the direct impact of stakeholders on decision-making speed.

This study addresses the gap between EU legislative decision-making and interest group politics by conducting an extensive examination of internal and external factors affecting the speed of EU legislative decision-making. The factors are summarized as "political factors," which include external factors (i.e., stakeholder involvement, especially stakeholder opinions) and the interaction between internal (member-state preferences) and external (stakeholder opinions) factors. Bridging this gap is crucial because it advances our understanding of EU legislative politics in various dimensions and contexts, thereby addressing important questions underlying the formation of this political system.

The main research question is as follows: *What political factors affect the speed or duration of EU legislative decision-making?* Overall, EU legislative choice is the product of the interaction between many actors. This dissertation explores what political factors affect EU decision-making speed, specifically to what extent speed is affected by interactions between

EU decision-makers and many actors or stakeholders. The EU decision-makers include the European Commission, the Council, EP, and the member states; they are important actors within the Council. The stakeholders include EU interest groups and other non-state groups. The study employs four sub-questions to answer the main research question.

First, *how do the different stakeholders affect the duration of the EU legislative process?* Chapter 2 addresses this sub-question, arguing that a crucial determinant of the legislative decision-making speed is the intensity of preference conflicts between different stakeholders regarding legislative proposals. This first empirical chapter focuses on the formative stage of decision-making and probes the impact on the decision-making speed of various stakeholders, presenting opinions in public consultations. The intensity of preference conflicts between different stakeholders significantly prolongs the legislative process.

From the findings in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 presents additional analyses to examine in-depth the degree of heterogeneity in member-state preferences, using some of the variables in Chapter 2. It addresses the second research sub-question: *What is the impact of the interaction of stakeholder opinions and member-state preferences on EU decision-making speed?* Chapter 3 establishes a link between the opinions of stakeholders and the preferences of member states to explore the impact of their interactive relationship on the duration of EU decision-making. It focuses on the agenda-setting stage of decision-making and investigates how the negative opinions of stakeholders and heterogeneous preferences of member states interact in shaping the legislative process. The interaction of member states and stakeholders induces a longer duration of legislative decision-making based on the multivariate analysis.

Chapter 4 addresses the third sub-question—*Is there a causal mechanism behind the interaction between member states and stakeholders that affects duration?* —which focuses on the causal mechanism behind the interaction between stakeholder involvement and member-state preferences. It builds on the findings from prior sub-questions and further analyzes the causal relationship linking actors' preferences and lengthy legislative duration. This third empirical chapter addresses the negotiation stage of decision-making, whether there is indeed a causal relationship between the heterogeneous preferences of actors (i.e., member states and stakeholders), and the lengthy decision-making duration. The study employs process tracing to uncover the causal mechanism behind the finding that a longer duration is associated with heterogenous preferences of member states and negative opinions of stakeholders, verifying the findings of Chapters 2 and 3. The combination of the two aspects means that the length of decision-making unavoidably increases.

Chapter 5 addresses the fourth sub-question—*To what extent do EU decision-makers respond to the different opinions of stakeholders when the EU decision-making duration is longer?* —which links decision-making speed to the political responsiveness of EU decision-makers by examining the relationship between the opinions of different stakeholders and the positions of EU decision-makers and member states on specific policy issues. It focuses on the trade-off between more stakeholder involvement, which may decrease the EU democratic deficit, and the slowing decision-making speed, which reduces EU efficiency (in providing an answer to important social problems). Hence, this fourth empirical chapter explores whether EU decision-makers consider actors' opinions and what it means for EU legislation.

This dissertation mainly focuses on member-state preferences for legislative proposals and the influence of stakeholder opinions on the speed of EU decision-making. It formulates hypotheses on the influence on the speed of the EU legislative process that member states and stakeholders appear to exert. Ultimately, answering the sub-questions helps resolve the puzzle of this doctoral research project. This study links the legislative proposals, EU political actors, external stakeholders, and legislative duration to investigate what political factors most affect EU decision-making speed. It contributes to the academic literature on decision-making speed by examining the potential impact of member states and stakeholders on decision-making duration, how the heterogeneous preferences of member states and the negative opinions of stakeholders affect the decision-making speed, and how the EU decision-makers respond to these actors' preferences. Answering questions about the interaction between member states and stakeholders is vital for the literature on EU legislative politics and interest group politics. Importantly, this dissertation makes a theoretical contribution by integrating hypotheses in each chapter via the literature on EU legislative politics to develop coherent arguments about the causes of differences in legislative duration.

1.2 What do we know about legislative duration?

1.2.1 Legislative duration in the literature on EU legislative politics

Prior decades have seen discussions between scholars on the EU decision-making process, particularly on the theory, methodology, and data to clarify the determinants of EU legislative outcomes. On decision-making speed, all relevant studies show that the EP's participation slows the decision-making speed (Golub, 2007, 2008; Golub & Steunenberg, 2007; König, 2007; Schulz & König, 2000). The co-decision procedure was extended to more areas in various rounds of treaty revisions. Accordingly, while the Commission and the Council must consider the opinion of the EP, the expansion of the Parliament's legislative powers made it more challenging for EU decision-makers to reach a consensus. The EP's role in co-decision procedures is consultative and for decision-making, which frequently results in considerable delays in passing legislation given Council differences (Chalmers, 2014).

Concerning legislative rules used in the decision-making in the European Council, studies indicate that the EU's decision-making speed is faster under qualified majority voting (QMV) than unanimity under the co-decision procedure (Golub, 1999, 2007; Golub & Steunenberg, 2007; König, 2007). Schulz and König (2000) examine the efficiency of EU decision-making and reveal that various factors, including institutional reform and the voting rules used in the Council of Ministers, affect decision-making speed. Using QMV in the Council instead of unanimity decreases the time lag of the decision-making process (König, 2008; Schulz & König, 2000).

The type of legislative instruments the EU may adopt as binding legislation directives, regulations, and decisions affects legislative duration (Golub, 2007; Schulz & König, 2000). Several studies find that regulations and decisions are less contentious and politically salient than directives and, hence, take less time to pass (Klüver & Sagarzazu, 2013; Sloot & Verschuren, 1990) than directives. Another finding relates to the impact of EU enlargement on decision-making speed. Unfortunately, the findings are contradictory. The more optimistic view is that EU enlargement has little influence on decision-making speed (Best & Settembris, 2008; Golub, 2007; Klüver & Sagarzazu, 2013; Toshkov, 2017); the less optimistic perspective argues that EU enlargement negatively impacts EU decision-making, increases transaction costs, and slows the EU decision-making speed (Hertz & Leuffen, 2011; König, 2007).

The heterogeneous preferences of political actors also affect decision-making speed. Heterogeneous preferences within the Council impede the decision-making process (Golub & Steunenberg, 2007; Golub, 2008). As Tsebelis (1994: p. 132) indicated, "[t]he greater the distance between actors' preferences (ideal points), the harder it is to find consensus on an issue and the slower the legislative process" (also Tsebelis 1995). König (2007) also asserts that the divergence of member-state positions significantly determines the duration of the legislative process. The interaction effects between policy areas and member-state preferences reveal that the magnitude of conflicts significantly slows the pace of legislative decision-making but differs per policy area (König, 2008). Finally, Brandsma and Meijer (2020) examine the complex relationship between transparency and efficiency in multi-actor decision-making processes and conclude that transparency does not affect decision-making speed or efficiency; rather, the duration of a legislative process is solely determined by the political complexity of the issue at hand.

Regarding theories, the spatial model of politics is often used to theorize about decision-making speed (Schulz & König, 2000; Selck & Steunenberg, 2004; Thomson et al., 2012). In this theoretical framework, on making decisions, political actors tend to build "minimum-connected-winning-coalitions" between decision-makers with rather similar preferences on a given policy dimension (Hinich and Munger, 1997; Hix, 2008, p. 49). In a policy space, political actors assumedly have preferences that can be portrayed as ideal positions next to points reflecting policy options. It is assumed that actors favor minimizing the distance between their position (their ideal point) and the adopted policy (Hix, 2008). Further, ideas from club theory, voting power, and transaction costs help explain decision-making speed (Hertz, 2010; Hertz & Leuffen, 2011). These theories furnish a better understanding of EU legislative politics, including what coalitions are possible, why the EP and Council are structured as they are, and who is more dominant under the EU's legislative procedures.

On the method used, Hertz and Leuffen (2011) propose event history analysis to probe the duration and estimate a Cox regression model that incorporates time-varying covariates (TVCs) on all directives, regulations, and decisions (see Box-Steffensmeier & Jones, 2004; Golub 2008b). Moreover, survival methodology is the method of choice for scholars studying EU decision-making speed in recent decades. Golub (2007) argues that all previous survival studies on EU decision-making speed suffer from methodological problems that render their findings unreliable and suggests that researchers should use a Cox model with TVCs and non-proportional covariate effects on the data. Indeed, scholars differ on the right methodological approach. Golub (2007) suggests that a log-logistic model is inappropriate for EU decision-making speed. The log-logistic model and the proportional log-odds assumption no longer hold when a model includes TVCs (Collett, 2015; Golub, 2007; Therneau & Grambsch, 2000). König (2008) tests factors by applying parametric and non-parametric event history analysis. König (2007) also estimates a log-logistic regression on all binding legislative acts from 1984 to 1999. Finally, Bailer (2014) used a multivariate ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis and robust standard errors clustered at the issue level. However, Schulz and König (2000) indicate that OLS is inappropriate for analyzing EU decision-making speed because of many right-censored observations. Nevertheless, this study employs OLS regression models in its quantitative analysis while avoiding the mistakes Schulz and König (2000) highlight.

Regarding data and case samples, Krislov et al. (1986) provide descriptive statistics on a sample of 472 EU decisions between 1958 and 1981 and find no increase in the proposal-decision time lag. Sloot and Verschuren (1990) build on the findings to probe the Commission proposals between 1975 and 1986. They find that directives positively affect decision-making speed, while the number of unadopted legislative proposals negatively affects decision-making speed. Selck and Steunenberg (2004) investigate cases from January 1999 to December 2000 using data on 62 legislative proposals adopted under consultation and co-decision procedures. Previous datasets, such as the analysis of König et al. (2006, 2007) on the legislative process, might help resolve some of the most contentious issues.

1.2.2 Legislative duration in the literature on interest group politics

Few interest group politics studies examine how interest groups affect EU decision-making duration. In the most significant contribution to this topic, Rasmussen and Toshkov (2013) probe the effect of interest group involvement on EU decision-making duration. They find that the involvement of interest groups in legislative preparation before the introduction of a formal proposal increases the duration of the legislative process. Toshkov et al. (2013) investigate the relationship between the timing of legislative actions and the activity of organized interests. They show that organized interests neither lead to more nor less delay in the legislative process. Rasmussen et al. (2014) also examine the role of interest groups in EU policymaking. They find that interest groups may play various roles in the legislative process by acting as policy experts, information brokers, and representatives of particularistic or public interests. In their view, interest groups are vital intermediate actors who may directly influence the EU legislative duration and indirectly affect the democracy and legitimacy of the EU governance system.

Scholars posit that involving different interest organizations can delay the EU decision-making process (Rasmussen & Toshkov, 2013) because consulting interest groups does not help resolve conflicts for decision-makers. Rather, it seems to increase the transaction costs of bargaining by requiring decision-makers to spend more time forming a necessary coalition on some compromise (Rasmussen & Toshkov, 2013). In this process, there is a trade-off between democratic legitimacy and efficiency of decision-making; that is, though consultations with interest groups in policy preparation may increase the democratic legitimacy of decision-making, they also yield efficiency losses in the subsequent legislative process (Rasmussen & Toshkov, 2013). Public consultations generally have a detrimental effect on the duration of legislation, as they can lengthen the process by bringing more unanticipated concerns to the table and further separating the positions of decision-makers (Chalmers, 2014). However, Toshkov et al. (2013) note that interest group mobilization has no apparent effect on EU legislative activity. Even so, these studies do not address the actual opinions of interest groups on the legislative proposals, which is an important gap in the existing literature.

The role of interest groups in European politics is the subject of a growing number of studies on lobbying in the EU. Many of these studies analyze the lobbying strategies, lobbying instruments, and interactions of interest groups with various EU decision-makers during the earlier stages of EU decision-making. For instance, Chalmers (2014) argues that an important determinant of the legislative process pace is the administrative burden of public consultation input. The effect of public consultations on the duration of legislation is generally adverse, though this effect is highly dependent on the capacity of decision-makers to speedily process the additional input from the public (Chalmers, 2014). Some studies probe the lobbying strategies of these groups. These strategies often comprise advocating a narrative about a social problem or the proposed policy to address this problem, which varies systematically across interest group types and institutional venues (Klüver et al., 2015). Klüver et al. (2015) further emphasize that lobbying in the decision-making process is affected by institutional factors that vary within the EU political system, such as the institutional fragmentation within the European Commission and the EP. Moreover, Flöthe and Rasmussen (2019) focus on opinion representation to determine how closely interest group preferences align with citizen views. Interest groups also impact the later stages of the policy process, such as transposition and implementation (Bunea & Baumgartner, 2014). That is, high-level interest group diversity in member states may negatively affect the quality of transposition (Kaya, 2018).

Overall, these studies probe the relationship between national governments and national interest groups, as it affects the lobbying strategies of interest groups that are relevant to EU decision-making (Callanan, 2011). However, they do not provide sufficient information on how specific stakeholder opinions link to member-state preferences on legislative proposals at the EU level and how these two types of actors interact in shaping the EU legislative process. Hence, this study focuses on stakeholder opinions on EU legislation and links them to member-state preferences. It investigates interactions between political actors and EU decision-maker responsiveness to better understand the trade-off between the EU democratic deficit and EU efficiency in solving societal problems.

1.3 Research aims and approach

This dissertation aims to ascertain what political factors (i.e., internal and external factors) affect the speed or duration of EU legislative decision-making and the underlying mechanism. The research covers all stages of the EU legislative process, including consultative negotiations among stakeholders, proposal formulation by the European Commission, the interplay of EU decision-makers, and the adoption of legislation. Although the literature provides factors that may affect legislative duration, this dissertation argues that external stakeholders, such as EU interest groups and non-state actors more significantly impact legislative duration than is so far reported. Notably, the opinions of stakeholders will be explored together with the preferences of member states to ascertain whether and how they may interact. Hence, this dissertation furnishes insight into how the determinants affect decision-making speed, employing existing theoretical approaches, various research designs, and quantitative and qualitative methodology.

1.3.1 Theoretical approach

This dissertation establishes a relationship between the decision-making of EU political actors and external stakeholders to connect the literature on EU decision-making with that on interest group politics in the EU. The analysis emphasizes stakeholder preferences or demands for specific content in legislative proposals.

This dissertation develops a theoretical combination of several research approaches on EU legislative politics and interest group politics within an integrated framework. It combines approaches that prioritize how interaction effects between stakeholders and member states are linked regarding the duration of the legislative process. Each connection follows a feasible theoretical logic in which various actors play a role in legislative decision-making. The logic fits nicely into the various research traditions. For instance, the theoretical logic of preference heterogeneity and its consequences for decision-making speed is compatible with spatial models of legislative politics (e.g., Crombez, 2000; Enelow & Hinich, 1984; Hinich & Munger, 1997; Steunenberg, 1997; Tsebelis & Garrett, 2000) and democracy theory (Pateman, 1970) (Chapter 2). The theoretical logic of how stakeholders may interact with member states and the fact that this interaction may delay decision-making can be related to some works on rational choice (e.g., Franchino, 2007; Jupille, 2004; Pollack, 2003; Tsebelis & Garrett, 1996, 2001) (Chapter 3). Insight from studies on how stakeholder involvement impacts legislative duration and the responsiveness and political legitimacy literature (Scharpf, 1997, 1999) can be used (Chapter 4). Establishing a link between decision-makers and stakeholders draws on resource exchange studies (Bouwen, 2002, 2004; Mazey & Richardson, 2006) and resource mobilization theory (Klüver, 2010; McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Rasmussen et al., 2014) (Chapter 5).

There are two important reasons for linking the literature on EU legislative decision-making with interest group politics. First, involving various stakeholders in the legislative process can help increase the input for EU legislative decision-making. Second, both literature streams are somewhat related and share a similar conceptual origin in ideas about forming coalitions to make a dominant or "winning" coalition that shapes public policy. Accordingly, they can be well integrated. Therefore, each chapter discusses the concepts and theoretical underpinnings of the political factors in greater depth.

This study develops its argument as follows. It begins with input legitimacy in Chapter 2, which emphasizes the importance of involving external actors and stakeholders in the EU legislative process. Their input links the opinions of citizens to the discussed policies. Second, Chapter 3 establishes the research framework, focusing on the impact on the EU legislative duration of these actors and their strategic interaction. Third, Chapter 4 applies the concept of throughput legitimacy to unpack the reasons and situations behind the political conflicts and strategic interaction of actors. Finally, Chapter 5 addresses the output legitimacy[2] regarding reaching an agreement on a proposal, which is observed as the manifestation of EU decision-making speed under the impact of these actors. Accordingly, it investigates the responsiveness of EU decision-makers to the stakeholders.

1.3.2 Methodological design

Prior studies of legislative decision-making speed (Golub & Steunenberg, 2007; Golub, 2008; Hertz & Leuffen, 2011; König, 2007) usually focus on individual countries, specific policy issues, and particular kinds of interest groups. This study focuses on EU decision-makers and stakeholders along specific perspectives, which requires a unique methodological design. The four research designs utilized in this dissertation differ from those prominently featured in the literature (i.e., the effect of a policy-specific, country-specific, or single type of stakeholders on decision-making speed).

[2] Scharpf's conception of output legitimacy (Scharpf, 2009) does not apply in this context. Output here refers to the decision outcome that is equal to the adopted legislative acts. Scharpf and other scholars (Schmidt, 2013; Schmidt & Radaelli, 2004) discuss the outcomes of policy implementation that will increase legitimacy because EU citizens benefit from public services and goods.

First, each research design focuses on the opinions of actors about legislative proposals[3] or policy issues of the EU: the EU political actors and external stakeholders and the effects of their interactions on the legislative process in the EU. From the consultations with stakeholders, the study employed data on positions of the European Commission, the EP, and the Council of the EU; member-state preferences on legislative proposals; and information on external stakeholder opinions. It investigates the interplay between EU decision-makers and external stakeholders involved in EU legislative decision-making using quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

Second, the research design focuses on the European rather than the national level. It compares several variables and outcomes. Various possible contextual factors may impact the preferences and opinions of stakeholders. For instance, empirical results that show that political factors slow the decision-making speed warrant a study of the relation between the opinions of different stakeholders and the positions of EU decision-makers. It helps reveal the primary reasons the EU decision-making process is slower under specific circumstances.

The methodological approach adopted in Chapters 2, 3, and 5 differs from the approach adopted in Chapter 4. The primary methodological challenge is ensuring the quantitative and qualitative research data reliability. For instance, Chapters 2 and 3 focus on concrete EU-level cases of legislation and link each legislative proposal to its corresponding consultations for quantitative analysis of the data collected. Chapter 4 unpacks several cases qualitatively by utilizing documents and expert interviews. Chapter 5 combines quantitative and qualitative methods using an existing dataset other than the ones used in previous chapters. The systematic consideration and investigation of specific stakeholder preferences or opinions are unique contributions to the literature. The contributions contextualize the direct or indirect influence of external stakeholders regarding the role of other political actors, such as EU member states, establishing how to explore this relation using quantitative analysis and qualitative methods.

[3] The specific EU legislation includes binding (i.e., directives, regulations, decisions) and non-binding legislations. The study employs the bulk of legislation cases in the quantitative analysis chapter while selecting controversial specific legislative cases in the qualitative analysis chapter. The legislation is selected from the same databases (i.e., the EUR-Lex legislative database and EP's Legislative observatory). Subsequent chapters will provide more information on selecting the proposals.

1.4 Empirical approach

1.4.1 Actor selection

The study focuses on various actors in the legislative process, including actors formally involved in the EU legislative process such as the European, Commission, and Council and those indirectly involved in consultation procedures, such as external stakeholders. First, EU political actors comprise individuals or collective bodies with a role in EU decision-making leading to legislation (Wolfsfeld, 2015). For instance, government ministers and powerful decision-makers are considered important political actors in EU democratic politics. In the EU context, the European Commission, EP, and member states in the Council are considered the main political actors because they usually dominate policymaking in most legislative cases (De Bruycker & Beyers, 2015). The EP has evolved into a significant institution, representing a broader range of interests. However, this study does not highlight its role for several reasons. First, it only acts in half of the legislative decision-making cases in this dissertation. While the European Commission actively organizes consultations, which allows for member-state administration and stakeholders to submit their opinions, Members of the EP (MEPs) have limited staff resources and research funding.

Second, external actors or stakeholders comprise EU interest and non-state groups. EU interest groups aim to affect public policy and achieve the goals of their members or the part of the public they represent via informal and formal political engagements outside the electoral arena (Beyers et al., 2008). They differ from political parties in trying to achieve their goals solely through participation in the decision-making process rather than seeking office through elections (Willems et al., 2020). EU interest groups are typically categorized into four types: business, professional, identity, and institutional groups (e.g., Binderkrantz et al., 2015; Flöthe & Rasmussen, 2019; Flöthe, 2020). Non-state groups include civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (e.g., Albareda, 2018; Börzel, 2010; Macdonald, 2016), often referred to as “pressure participants” (Jordan et al., 2004; Willems et al., 2020). In this study, the distinction between EU interest and non-state groups is that the former can better serve as transmission belts connecting members with decision-makers, as only a few organizations mobilized at the EU-level can structurally serve as transmission belts. However, non-state groups cannot fulfill this transmission belt function, as they typically represent scattered constituencies with different interests and limited political activities (Beyers & De

Bruycker, 2018). Nevertheless, they are crucial to the policy process because they can provide expertise, resources, and public services (Lowery, 2007; Salisbury, 1992; Willems et al., 2020).

EU interest groups are seen as crucial components of political representation in Western democracies (Albareda & Braun, 2019), playing a vital role in communicating their opinions and public interests to EU decision-makers (Coen & Richardson, 2009). Therefore, EU interest groups have a political mission in EU interest politics; the significance of their existence is to strive for interests or advocate the policy opinions of their constituency (Beyers & De Bruycker, 2018). The Commission is the primary channel for EU interest groups to access the EU decision-making process. It does its utmost to launch extensive consultation with the relevant stakeholders during the formulation of legislative proposals. Moreover, EU interest groups can exert extensive influence on their policy preferences by establishing coalitions with other like-minded stakeholders, thus increasing the pressure on decision-makers to meet their demands (Beyers & De Bruycker, 2018). This dissertation uses an inclusive definition of EU interest groups; though they may differ in characteristics, these actors have been mobilized on issues in our sample and have access to the decision-making process. Hence, “stakeholder” refers to interest organizations that responded to open consultation calls, regardless of whether they are EU interest or non-state groups.

1.4.2 Choice of methods

This dissertation employs quantitative and qualitative approaches to test hypotheses developed in the empirical chapters (i.e., Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5). Regarding these empirical analyses, a distinction can be made between independent and dependent variable-centered methods and confirmatory and exploratory research (Gerring, 2001).

The study design employs the independent and dependent variable-centered approaches. Independent variable-centered research regards the effects of a particular explanatory variable specified by theory (Hedström & Swedberg, 1996). That is, it seeks to address this question: What are the impacts of independent variables? (Gerring, 2001). For instance, Chapters 2 and 3 examine the impact on the EU legislative duration of stakeholders and their interaction with member states. However, a study focused on the dependent variable explores the explanation or causes of the researcher’s chosen empirical scenario. Dependent variable-centered studies address this question: What causes the outcome? For instance, Chapter 4 investigates how the heterogeneous preferences of actors cause a lengthy EU legislative duration.

The research design literature distinguishes between exploratory and confirmatory research, starting with and zooming in on the empirics or theoretical expectations, respectively (Heck, 1998). While there are many theoretical claims about what can explain EU decision-making speed and several tests of the claims, the empirical data available is not fully researched. If research on EU decision-making speed is limited to analyzing internal institutional factor hypotheses, key explanatory factors may be overlooked. Hence, a combination of exploratory and confirmatory methods is suitable. As this study shows, applying such techniques means the subject of research relies on prior theoretical expectations and empirical evidence. The methods chosen generally are independent (Chapters 2 and 3) and dependent (Chapter 4) variable-centered while incorporating elements of confirmatory (Chapters 2, 3, and 5) and exploratory (Chapter 4) research. The objective is to examine the impact of member states and stakeholders on EU decision-making, why the outcomes occur, and, more importantly, how other EU decision-makers respond in the dynamic process during such outcomes.

A quantitative study is also highly beneficial for illuminating the validity of existing theories for legislative decision-making speed. However, its limitation includes its reliance on covariance analysis to uncover correlations and its strictly deductive approach that may overlook some empirical material (Blatter & Blume, 2008; George & Bennett, 2005). Thus, to address the limitations, the study conducts case studies, employing robust findings as a case selection criterion for the qualitative research, given the tentative nature of the quantitative analysis results. Unlike most quantitative analyses, case studies can incorporate deductive and inductive features easily. The qualitative analysis scrutinizes the potential explanatory factors investigated in the quantitative analysis (see Berkhout, 2010 for a similar approach). Case studies are particularly useful for assessing the validity of causal mechanisms and enhancing the clarity of theoretical considerations (George & Bennett, 2005). They also help uncover other explanatory elements not previously identified. Finally, case studies are advantageous for understanding whether and how several explanatory elements interact to produce a particular result. Indeed, combining quantitative and qualitative research yields more reliable conclusions than those focusing on one type of investigation (Bennett, 2004).

1.4.3 Data sources and case selection

This dissertation requires quantitative and qualitative data. It employs three datasets based on newly collected materials combined with previously collected data. The first dataset includes information on public consultations regarding stakeholder opinions on specific legislative proposals. The study employed the original dataset from Rasmussen, Carroll, and Lowery (2014), based on 4,501 contributions in 142 online consultations conducted from December 2001 to April 2010. It then collected and added new data on consultations conducted between 2010 and 2018 from the EUR-Lex legislative database and EP's Legislative Observatory. Chapter 2 employs this set, which is further extended with information about member-state positions in the Council on 100 specific legislative proposals across the whole EU in Chapter 3. Based on theoretical considerations and empirical results from Chapters 2 and 3, the qualitative dataset used in Chapter 4 includes specific evidence and references of selected cases from EU official documents, authoritative media reports, and semi-structured interviews of experts and EU officials.

The third dataset selects the policy space and policy position score of each EU decision-maker from the Decision-Making in EU (DEU-III) and Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) Positions datasets used in Chapter 5. The study combines this information with data from the first dataset used for Chapters 2 and 3. The combination yielded a new dataset with more information and a different number of cases, as detailed in Chapter 5. Accordingly, the four empirical chapters employ distinct datasets.

1.5 Overview of the dissertation

The main elements of the research question structure this dissertation. Table 1.1 summarizes the sub-questions addressed in each chapter and the concise structure regarding the different stages of the legislative decision-making processes. It establishes a solid theoretical foundation for researching the political factors affecting the speed of EU legislative decision-making by developing theoretical expectations. The key elements in the empirical chapters mainly include (1) identifying the responsibilities of different political actors in EU decision-making and highlighting stakeholder opinions and preferences of member states as critical components of the legislative process; (2) explaining the mechanism of the impact on EU decision-making speed and emphasizing the decision outcomes in the legislative politics of the EU as the product of strategic interaction between actors; and (3) building a theoretical framework to understand EU decision-making speed, interest representation, and political responsiveness, thus laying the groundwork for the four subsequent chapters.

Table 1.1 Summary of the dissertation per different stages of the legislative process

Different Decision-making stage	**Formative stage of decision-making**	**Agenda-setting stage of decision-making**	**Negotiation stage of decision-making**	**Decision outcomes stage**
Chapters	**Chapter 2**	**Chapter 3**	**Chapter 4**	**Chapter 5**
Research sub-question	How do the different stakeholders affect the duration of the EU legislative process?	What is the impact of the interaction of stakeholder opinions and member-state preferences on EU decision-making speed?	Is there a causal mechanism behind the interaction between member states and stakeholders that affects duration?	To what extent do EU decision-makers respond to the different stakeholder opinions when the EU decision-making duration is longer?
Focus	External actors: specific opinions of EU interest groups, non-state groups, and preference heterogeneity of stakeholders	Interaction between negative opinions of stakeholders and member states preferences	Causal mechanism (transmission belts of interest groups; transaction costs of member states)	Responsiveness of legislators, specific policy issues, and reverse causality
Channel	Consultation exercise: public consultation, public hearing, and advisory	Stakeholder-specific opinions and member states preferences in the Council meeting agenda	Media coverage, legislation documentary, and semi-structured interview	Legislators' position in the DEU database and document analysis
Dependent variables	Legislative duration	Legislative duration	The lengthy decision-making process	Output score of policy position or preference congruence
Independent variables	Specific opinions of stakeholders on legislative proposals, positive opinions, neutral opinions, and negative opinions	Heterogeneous or homogeneous preferences of member states	Negative opinions of stakeholders and heterogeneous preferences of member states	EU interest and non-state group opposition and salience of policy issue
Theory	Spatial theory and participation and democracy theory	Rational choice theory	Input and throughput legitimacy	Resource exchange and resource mobilization theories
Method	Quantitative: Multivariate analysis (Negative binomial regression)	Quantitative: Multivariate analysis (Negative binomial regression and OLS regression)	Qualitative: Case study and process-tracing approach	Quantitative: Multivariate analysis (OLS regression and Logistic regression)

Chapter 2 examines the impact on the legislative decision-making speed of various stakeholder opinions in public consultations. The study hypothesizes the intensity of preference conflicts between different stakeholders on legislative proposals as a crucial factor affecting decision-making speed. The empirical results show that more intense divisions in stakeholder opinions are associated with a longer legislative process. They also confirm that more divisions within the EU interest groups are linked with a significantly longer-lasting legislative process than the divisions within non-state groups.

Chapter 3 provides an additional analysis of most of the variables as in Chapter 2 to examine in-depth the role of heterogeneity in member-state preferences for decision-making speed. It investigates the interaction effect between stakeholder opinions and member-state preferences. This study establishes a link between the preferences of member states and the opinions of stakeholders on legislative proposals. It also analyses how the interaction of both types of actors influences the duration of EU legislative decision-making. The results show that the interaction effect between heterogeneous member-state preferences and stakeholders with negative opinions prolongs decision-making duration. Interestingly, the interaction of heterogeneous preferences of these actors and longer EU decision-making duration correlate.

Building on Chapters 2 and 3, **Chapter 4** further explores additional evidence for a causal link between the heterogeneous position-taking of the actors and lengthy EU decision-making. This consideration seeks to reveal the causal mechanism behind the finding of lower EU decision-making speed. Hence, Chapter 4 uses in-depth process tracing of heterogeneous member-state preferences and specific stakeholder opinions. The qualitative evidence shows that the more different the opinions of political actors, particularly negative opinions, the longer the duration. The data confirm a causal relationship between the heterogeneous preferences of stakeholders and member states and the lengthy legislative decision-making.

Chapter 5 takes the empirical findings of the preceding chapters as a precondition and examines how EU decision-makers resolve conflicts and respond to the different demands and preferences of stakeholders. It addresses the extent to which decision-makers (the European Commission, EP, and Council) respond to different stakeholder opinions. That is, it studies policy responsiveness by focusing on the relationship between the opinions of stakeholders and the positions of EU decision-makers and analyses whether they could yield more political responsiveness in the EU. The findings show that EU decision-makers mirror EU interest group preferences, which support the responsiveness in the legislative process.

In summary, Chapters 2, 3, and 4 are process-oriented, whereas Chapter 5 is outcome-oriented. The dependent variable of Chapters 2 and 3 is the EU legislative duration, and the independent variables are stakeholder heterogeneous preferences, member-state preferences, and stakeholder opinions. The dependent variables of Chapter 5 include the output scores of decision-making (e.g., legislation); the explanatory variables include EU interest or non-state group opposition and salience of policy issues. Chapters 2 and 3 study how external factors affect the results during the legislative process. Chapter 4 confirms the cause-effect causal relationship (i.e., preference of political actors and longer decision-making duration). Chapter

5 checks whether major EU decision-makers consider the wishes of specific stakeholders in the legislative process.

Chapter 6 summarizes and furnishes some theoretical reflections on the results of each chapter, together with a thorough discussion of the societal implications of the findings. After reflecting on the challenges of this dissertation and outlining avenues for future research, the dissertation concludes with its main contribution to the scholarly literature.