



**International Relations  
Multidisciplinary**

**Doctoral School**

**THESES OF Ph.D. DISSERTATION**

**Balint Odor**

**The impacts of the introduction of the double majority in the Council  
of the European Union**

Ph.D. thesis

**Supervisor:**

**Dr. László J. Kiss**

professor

Budapest, 2013

**Faculty of Social Sciences**

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#### **Synopsis**

One of the major innovations of the Lisbon Treaty is the reform of the rules defining the majority vote in the Council of the European Union. 5 years after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, 1 November 2014, the double majority will replace the weighted voting system. This latter has been the rule since the very beginning of the integration process.

According to the new rule for decisions to be passed by qualified majority the support of 55% of the Member States representing 65 % of the overall population of the European Union will be required. The double majority reflects both sources of the EU's legitimacy: the equal treatment of the Member States and the equality of the citizens.

The new system significantly modifies the power distribution among the Member States in the EU's decision-making process.

The dissertation came to the following conclusions:

1. The double majority system strengthens the influence of the big Member States (with at least 60 million population).
2. After a transitional period Spain and Poland will lose the big Member State status which they obtained according to the Nice system.

3. The medium-sized countries' (between 2 and 11 million inhabitants) relative weight is reduced significantly.
4. Member States with less than 1 million population can have increased influence in the Council.
5. Hungary's formal influence will decline in the Council.
6. In the new double majority system, the shift in power distribution among the Member States is mainly due to the fact that the ability of countries with large population to block decisions will be significantly strengthened, while small and medium sized Member States' ability to prevent negative decisions will not be possible by applying the population criteria. This will be a kind of privilege for Member States with large populations. The only way for small and medium sized countries to prevent undesired decisions from being taken is the search for the necessary number of Member States to form an alliance.
7. The decision-making system will become more efficient, it will be easier to adopt a decision as blocking possibilities will be significantly reduced.
8. The institutional equilibrium will be also affected due to the introduction of the double majority and the consequences of the EU crisis management. The role of the Commission will change, new functions will have to be fulfilled by the institution, the European Council and the Council will also play a further increased role in the decision-making process. As a consequence the weight of the European Parliament will decrease even though the larger shift in gaining new competences was done for the Parliament in the Lisbon Treaty.

In recent years efficiently and effectively functioning regional partnerships' weight will decrease in the EU. This is particularly true for the Visegrad Group. The individual influence

of Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia is reduced after the introduction of the double majority. Currently the four Visegrad countries have equal number of weighted votes with that of Germany and France together, the introduction of the double majority will change the situation in a way to grant less influence to the Visegrad group. The reason for that will be that Germany and France will gain increased blocking capacities and the four countries will not be able to form any blocking coalition. Even the new Member States joined in 2004 and 2007 will not be able to block decisions with the new system.

Interregional cooperation between regional partnerships usually composed of small and medium sized Member States (Benelux, Baltic countries, Nordic council, Visegrad countries etc.) can become more relevant.

The introduction of the new voting system will occur in a period when the European Union has been in a deep financial, economic, structural and political crisis. The challenge is to ensure the euro area's and the European Union's long-term sustainability. The EU crisis provides a completely different context to observe the implications of the double majority in the power distribution among the Member States.

The crisis management can result in the emergence of new types of decision-making and coordination schemes within the EU which will set new procedure for the European Union after the crisis period.

The dissertation came to the conclusion that new cooperation scheme will appear with the introduction of the so-called union method. This will be, and in fact already is, different from the community method, which has provided the framework for decisions to be made in the

EU since the beginning of the integration process. The European semester provides the framework for the new method. The method will be applied on political areas where there is no EU competence or where the ability for the EU to act is very limited. The need for such a closer cooperation in the economic and social policy field is becoming stronger and stronger in the light of the difficulties in the EU's crises management.

The study demonstrates the results of different researchers who applied the different power indexes in the Council functioning. The two most commonly used indexes are the Shapley-Shubik index and the normalized Banzhof index. Reference is made to researches of Hosli (1993), Widgren (1994), Peters (1996a,b), Emmanouilidis and Fischer (2003), Chang et al. (2005), Słomczyński and Życzkowski (2006), Baldwin et al., 2001; Felsenthal and Machover (1997) és (2000); Bindseil and Handke (1997), Winkler (1998), Nurmi and Meskanen (1999), Lane and Maeland, 1995, 2000.

The influence of the Member States in the Council is composed of two major elements. One is the widely studied formal power expressed in the different indexes. The second is an informal factor which is hardly measurable. The dissertation analyses the latter element, and draws its conclusion mainly from the practical experiences.

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## **Interviews**

Péter Györkös, ambassador, Hungary's Permanent Representation to the EU

László Sinka, head of department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary

Tibor Stelbaczky, head of department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary, former Martens diplomat in the Hungarian Permanent Representation during Hungarian EU-Presidency (2011)

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