

National Coordination of EU Policy: A Comparative Study of the Twelve “New” Member States

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Abstract

European Union policy-making requires Member States to determine national positions by means of national coordination in order to defend their preferences. This article analyses the coordination systems of the twelve “new” Member States in the middle of 2009 and compares them along the two major lines of divergence in coordination systems: their centralisation and their coordination ambition. In so doing, it ties in with a framework developed by Kassim (2003) and plots the new Member States in a diagram which is compatible with that of Kassim, including thirteen old Member States. A pronounced diversity of coordination systems in the new Member States is found. At the aggregate level, the systems are relatively decentralised. Four countries even combine this with a selective coordination ambition. The article suggests that this can be explained by a lack of resources and proposes avenues for further research.

Keywords

EU policy coordination; Europeanisation; New Member States; Central and Eastern Europe; Executive

PARTICIPATION IN EUROPEAN UNION (EU) DECISION-MAKING CONFRONTS MEMBER States with the challenge to coordinate their national positions in order to ensure effective representation of their interests and efficient EU policy-making. How has this had an impact on the organisation of the executive in the new Member States? Setting up a national coordination system amounts to a re-allocation of resources in the executive.

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Thus, analysing coordination regimes sheds light on the domestic power distribution in the individual states. The coordination of horizontal issues, issue-linkage and prioritisation demand centralisation. Moreover, legitimisation may require an involvement of the political level. However, this has to be reconciled with the need for specific expertise and delegation of tasks in order to avoid an overload of the centre. In addition, the participation in EU decision-making can re-shuffle the domestic horizontal distribution of power between executive, legislative and third-party actors (sub-state level, stakeholders). Empirical information on national coordination systems is a first step towards assessing their attributes and rationales, such as inclusiveness, for choosing one regime over the other. Hence, we require knowledge of the institutions and dynamics of national coordination.

This article presents a first systematic overview of national coordination systems in the twelve “new” Member States which have joined the Union in the 2004/2007 enlargements. It seeks to satisfy two research interests: first, a practical interest in understanding which coordination systems are in operation in the individual states; second, a theoretical and scientific interest in the Europeanisation of the central executives of the new Member States. In other words, this relates to the effect of European integration on domestic institutions. However, institutional reforms in the states may evidently be informed by motivations that are not solely attributable to Europeanisation (Goetz 2000). Research on national coordination of old Member States (Kassim *et al.* 2000, 2001) has revealed divergence of coordination systems along their degree of centralisation and their coordinating ambition. This study is linked to this in scrutinising these two dimensions for the twelve new Member States in order to achieve a plotted figure, classifying the Member States as comprehensive or selective (de-)centralisers. It is argued here that these basic underlying dimensions capturing the differences are empirically and theoretically most relevant. The article draws on a three-staged process of literature and document research, consultation of country experts and interviews with practitioners, intended to reflect the *status quo* of the middle of 2009. Tying in with Kassim’s (2003) framework allows combining his and our classifications, so that a systematic overview of the national coordination systems of 25 Member States emerges. Hence, the article contributes to our cumulative understanding of national coordination and makes it an accessible point of departure for future research that can draw on this classification to inform case selection and in-depth studies.

Studying national coordination in the new Member States from a comparative perspective seems particularly worthwhile since it has, thus far, remained relatively neglected. Therefore, our knowledge is very limited when contrasted with the body of individual country studies (*e.g.* Lequesne 1993), small-*n* (*e.g.* Harmsen 1999; Johansson and Raunio 2010) and large-*n* comparative studies of national coordination in old Member States (Metcalf 1994; Kassim *et al.* 2000, 2001) in both New Public Management and Europeanisation contexts. First, this is due to a bias towards case studies of old Member States and “usual suspects” such as Germany, France, or the United Kingdom. Second, post-enlargement studies of EU decision-making have often focussed on the efficiency and functioning of the EU institutions and processes (Best *et al.* 2008; Dehousse *et al.* 2006). Some studies are concerned with the administrative capacity of coordination systems in the (new) Member States, primarily in the run-up to accession and its immediate aftermath. OECD/Sigma reports assessed administrative readiness of the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs). They highlight the challenges to organising coordination for accession and participation in EU decision-making both in terms of institutions and public administration (OECD 1998a, 1998b). The OEUE project analyses and compares three CEECs and three old Member States. This research has contributed to our understanding of the arrangements in place, the actors involved and the “menu” from which choices have had to be made (Laffan 2003). A study by the World

Bank assesses the administrative performance in EU affairs looking at the role of “policy, people and systems” (World Bank 2006: V). The study takes the form of an evaluation report and makes use of Metcalfe’s (1994) scale described below. It focuses not purely on the coordination of EU affairs in the core executive, but also on management issues, for example concerning the role of e-government, and on sectoral policies, such as programming and absorption of EU Structural Funds. These reports conducted or contracted by international organisations give hands-on policy advice in assessing the administrative capacity of coordination systems. In contrast, this article seeks to analyse and categorise the formal structures and the actual functioning of the coordination systems across twelve new Member States in order to capture the differences in the systems more comprehensively along two dimensions. Therefore, this study seeks to address a lacuna in our understanding of EU multi-level policy-making.

The extant comparative studies of national coordination in the new Member States after enlargement have either been limited by narrowed down foci or their small scale. Fink-Hafner (2007) compares Europeanisation of national coordination in Estonia, Hungary and Slovenia with a particular focus on administrative traditions and party systems. Her work confirms Kassim’s (2003) contention that political and administrative opportunity structures account for the divergence across systems. Dimitrova and Toshkov (2007) provide an instructive overview of coordination councils, officials and locations of main coordination units in all ten CEECs. They focus on change of formal institutions, thus leaving their functioning and inter-institutional dynamics largely aside. They suggest a “politics of institutional choice” approach according to which the relative political benefits of actors account for the choice of individual systems. We seek to contribute to this debate by providing empirical information on the actual functioning and informal procedures of coordination systems. In a recent contribution, Dimitrova and Toshkov (2009) focus on the effects of different coordination systems on compliance with and transposition of EU directives. Thus, they draw on the coordination systems as the independent variable. The authors base their assessment of the coordination strength of the respective systems on the World Bank study mentioned above. They find that a centralised coordination system is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for a high level of compliance, with the degree of politicisation in a given policy area also playing an important role (2009: 12). Panke (2010) focuses on the effects of national coordination systems on quality and timeliness of policy outcomes in small states. In her study on nineteen small Member States, she places special emphasis on the involvement of Permanent Representations, the autonomy of line ministries and inter-ministerial coordination (2010: 773). Thus, the studies do not include all new Member States and do not provide a comprehensive categorisation of different approaches to coordination.

This article leaves the effects of coordination systems on both compliance and policy outcomes aside and instead focuses on a detailed comparison of the internal mechanisms of the coordination systems in the twelve new Member States. In so doing, a classification of the coordination systems in these countries is provided, based on data derived from official documents, personal interviews and secondary literature. This increases our understanding of national coordination systems and provides a basis for future research.

A pronounced diversity of coordination systems in the new Member States is found. At the aggregate level, it seems that the systems are relatively decentralised. Four countries even combine a decentralised approach with a selective coordination ambition. It is suggested here that future research applying historical institutionalism in conjunction with a focus on resources seems promising in order to investigate the divergence of the coordination systems. This article continues with a section dealing with the commonalities and specifics of the new Member States and the CEECs in particular. Subsequently, it presents Kassim’s

typology of coordination systems and analyses, as well as categorises, the coordination systems of the twelve new Member States. The last section concludes the article.

The challenges of national coordination: historical legacies and policy choices

This section seeks to highlight the challenges that the new Member States are facing in their quest for efficient and effective coordination of EU policy. It will first give a short account of the basic coordination challenges in new and old Member States alike. These are common issues involving the domestic organisation of public administration and the “nature of the beast” EU. Second, it discusses several particularities of the administrations of the new Member States, their administrative culture and the political context they are situated in. Thus, it identifies challenges that all Member States have in common, whilst others contrast old and new Member States or cross-cutting subsets of them. Third, this section traces the gradual administrative institutional adjustments of the then candidate countries in the run-up to accession. Fourth, it elaborates on the relationship between administrative efficiency and political effectiveness.

Coordination of EU policy requires a regime that is capable of horizontal and vertical coordination in the national executive (Kassim, Peters and Wright 2000: 6). Divisions between departmental preferences need to be overcome at the domestic political and administrative levels. Reconciliation of the “desirable” and the “feasible” has to be achieved through feedback from the European level (Kassim 2003: 88). Thus, the “coordination chain” (Wright 1996: 149) has to link different levels and domestic actors. At the same time, it has to overcome differences between the domestic and European policy-making arenas by streamlining and adapting national action to the sectoral divisions and the “rhythm” of the EU policy process (Kassim 2003: 102; Goetz 2009; Ekengren 1996, 2002). Hence, the coordination systems of all Member States are functionally equivalent as regards their “output” and the participation in EU policy-making. *Prima facie*, this suggests an adaptive pressure on the administrations to institutionalise similar solutions to the common challenge.

However, the new Member States, especially the CEECs, face a number of particular domestic challenges that impede efficient coordination and effective participation in the policy-making process. This might set them apart from the older Member States. Firstly, the majority of the countries that joined the Union in the 2004 and 2007 enlargements face a relative shortage of resources (Christiansen *et al.* 2008: 248) and expertise relating to EU affairs. Besides financial constraints and limited capacity, the lack of specific skills among civil servants has frequently been emphasised (*e.g.* Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005: 24.). Two important factors in this respect are insufficient knowledge of the formal and informal working mechanisms and rules of EU policy-making, as well as a lack of language skills (Poole 2003: 63; Christiansen *et al.* 2008: 248), the latter being particularly relevant in comitology with its restricted language regime (Alfé *et al.* 2008).

Secondly and closely connected to the first point, the communist past of the CEECs in many ways still influences the public administration in these countries (Dimitrova 2002: 180; Berglund *et al.* 2004: 2). Most problematic in this respect is the continuing politicisation of the bureaucracies, as a result of the inability of the public administrations to function independently after the separation of party and state at the end of the communist era (Dimitrova 2002: 180). Although this problem has been identified predominately for its domestic consequences, it is highly likely that the involvement of party politics in the civil service can have negative effects on the internal coordination of policies towards the EU in those countries. An interesting question in this regard is the extent to which the different versions of communism in the respective countries have influenced the current structures (Berglund *et al.* 2004: 2, Ekiert *et al.* 2004: 14). For

example, Kischelt (2001: 35) claims that the particular type of communist regime influences the degree of clientelism in the present political system of Eastern European countries. This might also explain why some new Member States are more successful than others in effectively coordinating their policy towards the EU. Nevertheless, some degree of clientelism and rent-seeking behaviour of elite groups trying to hinder further reform and peculating public funds are problems common to all CEECs and most transitional societies, as Noutcheva and Bechev have found (2008: 115).

Thirdly, governments and coalitions change frequently in the CEECs. High electoral volatility and less settled party systems are the main reasons for this instability compared with the old Member States (Berglund *et al.* 2004: 46). Tavits (2005: 1) states that high electoral volatility is a strong indicator for cabinet instability, which “[affects] not only the quality of representation but also the quality, stability and predictability of policies”. Moreover, he also argues that high electoral volatility in Eastern Europe is the consequence of inconstant elite behaviour resulting in frequent party schisms. Consequently, the voters are presented with different choices in every election (Tavits 2008: 541). Unstable party systems might be an impediment for an effective internal coordination of EU policy. This becomes particularly evident when scrutinising the changes in the institutions involved in coordination. These have incited Dimitrova and Toshkov (2007: 964) to suggest an actor-centred “politics of institutional choice” according to which changes have been motivated by “relative advantages [...] to the politicians in power”. The problem might remain salient, since electoral volatility is even rising in some countries in the region, most notably in Poland and Romania (Tavits 2005: 284).

Finally, the relative geographical remoteness of capitals of the new Member States from Brussels might be both financially and organisationally challenging. Despite new telecommunication technologies, it is still necessary and important for national experts and officials to be present in person in Brussels. This is of course much more costly and time-consuming for a Cypriot expert from Nicosia than, for example, a Dutch or French official. Even though this does especially apply to the two Mediterranean island nations, Eastern European officials might also be confronted with this problem.

This overview has revealed that the new Member States face a number of organisational and practical problems which complicate the establishment of an effective and coherent system of EU policy coordination, albeit to varying degrees. Tackling these deficits has been high on the agenda of both the candidate countries and the European Commission long before accession (Lippert *et al.* 2001: 991). Unlike in earlier rounds of enlargement, the “administrative capacity” or “bureaucracy criterion” was made one of the central conditions for accession by the Madrid European Council in 1995. Moreover, the details of the reforms were further specified in the course of the accession negotiations (Dimitrova 2002: 178-179). Already before entering the EU, the then candidate countries were thus subject to Europeanisation, as evident from the adaptation to EU conditionality. In most CEECs, civil service laws have moreover been adopted after accession in order to improve the performance of the public administration (Goetz 2004: 272). However, problems with regard to the capabilities of the civil service continue to persist especially in the CEECs.

The reforms required for accession and the actual negotiations resulted in structures and coordination bodies that have partly continued to exist after enlargement, albeit with somewhat different roles. In general, the prospect and, after accession, the requirements of EU membership have been decisive factors in shaping the political institutions of the new Member States. Since accession was largely an “asymmetric process”, the new Member States had little influence in determining its conditions, but had to react and adapt their institutions and practices to the detailed requirements of the EU, which differentiates the 2004/2007 rounds from earlier enlargements (Dimitrova 2002: 172-175;

Goetz 2004: 256). However, the EU did not provide a precise model by which to build the coordination system. This was not possible, taking into account the huge variety among the respective systems of the old Member States (Lippert *et al.* 2001: 980). Nevertheless, dynamics of administrative adjustments during the accession negotiations need to be discussed to establish the common ground of the new Member States. Whilst the pace of progress individually varied, all candidate countries had to undergo the accession process.

The first step towards an institutionalised contact between the EU and the CEECs was taken with the so-called “Europe agreements” in 1991 (Lippert *et al.* 2001: 987). These agreements set up joint bodies consisting of both EU officials and representatives of the candidate countries, most notably the Associated Council at the ministerial level and the Associated Committee consisting of high-ranking civil servants from member, as well as candidate countries (*ibid.*). The participation in these committees made it necessary for the CEECs to determine responsible actors in the ministerial structure who specialised in contact with the EU institutions (Lippert *et al.* 2001: 989). In 1993, the Copenhagen Criteria were agreed upon, which determined the broad requirements concerning economic and societal conditions the candidate countries had to meet (Goetz 2004: 256). Additionally, in 1995, a White Paper was published that further specified the obligations of the CEECs regarding their integration in the Common Market. Requiring coordination and collection of information on various aspects of the political and social situations, its implementation provided an incentive for the states to establish special bodies and joint committees to coordinate all EU-related matters. Closely connected to public administration reform, this was seen as necessary preconditions to guarantee the full implementation of the *acquis communautaire* and thus the success of the accession negotiations with the EU (Lippert *et al.* 2001: 989).

The outcome of the processes was the development of central coordination structures in virtually each of the ten countries in the mid-1990s, shortly before the CEECs formally applied for accession. They consisted of committees at ministerial and junior ministerial level, usually assisted by a coordination body or secretariat. These bodies played a key role during accession and had close contact with the plenipotentiaries of the respective countries in their work (Lippert *et al.* 2001: 989-991). For the majority of candidate states, negotiations started in March 1998 and were completed by April 2003¹ (Goetz 2004: 255). In addition, the coordination bodies were intended to facilitate contact between different EU units or secretariats in the various line ministries (see Lippert *et al.* 2001: 992, Figure 2). In the majority of countries, the coordination bodies were directly subordinated to the Head of Government and situated in the Prime Minister’s (PM) Office or were part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) (Lippert *et al.* 2001: 992). This illustrates a strengthening of the core executive, which is frequently described as a consequence of interaction with the EU (Goetz 2004: 272).

In general, the central structures and coordination bodies remained in place after the CEECs and the two Mediterranean island nations joined the EU. They continue to be important for EU policy coordination, albeit with different competencies and tasks. In this respect, the developments in the new Member States mirror those in countries that joined in earlier rounds of enlargement, such as the United Kingdom or Portugal (Kassim 2000: 23; Magone 2000: 143). However, the degree to which the central coordination body remains actually superior to the corresponding units in the respective line ministries varies significantly from country to country. Whereas in some countries a strengthening of the central coordination bodies could be observed, the line ministries regained power in the post-accession period in other cases.

¹ The negotiations with Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria began in February 2000. However, negotiations with Romania and Bulgaria were not concluded until April 2005 (Noutcheva and Bechev 2008: 124).

Some studies argue that a centralised coordination system will necessarily increase the possibilities for a country to foster its position in the European arena (*e.g.* Metcalfe 1994). Metcalfe has developed a scale measuring effectiveness at the EU level as a function of the efficiency of coordination systems, *i.e.* their centralisation, ranging from (1) independent organisational decision-making to (9) overall governmental strategy (1994: 281). He claims that “poor internal coordination not only compromises national interests; it also adversely affects the performance of the system as a whole” (1994: 276). However, Kassim argues that an important distinction has to be made between administrative efficiency and political effectiveness (2001: 70). Sepos points out that, whereas a centralised coordination system is administratively more efficient in terms of producing one coherent position at the domestic level, this does not necessarily lead to more desirable policy outcomes at the EU level (2005: 186). As a classical example to illustrate this, he cites the coordination systems of the UK and Germany (2005: 173). The former is commonly regarded as administratively very efficient because of its high degree of centralisation, but much less effective in influencing policy outcomes in Brussels (Kassim 2001: 70). The latter is frequently cited as being very effective, but from an administrative point of view rather inefficient, with frequent quarrels between departments (Sepos 2005: 173). Thus, studies on the old Member States suggest that it is not possible to state that an “ideal coordination model” producing the best policy outcomes exists (2005: 187). Other factors, such as the size of a Member State, the position of the Member State on a given issue *vis-à-vis* the Commission and other Member States, as well as the mobilisation of interest groups, are also of prime importance (*ibid.*).

Therefore, it is important to bear in mind that the formal coordination system of a Member State does not necessarily allow judgements concerning the possibility of a country to negotiate successfully in Brussels. New Member States can choose from a variety of coordination systems depending on domestic arrangements and historical legacies, without one being necessarily superior to the other in terms of political effectiveness. However, the particularities mentioned above suggest that certain coordination models might be structurally more suitable for the particular situation of the new Member States than others. These countries have to be effective in influencing policy outcomes with the highest possible degree of efficiency in the absence of ample financial and personal resources (Christiansen *et al.* 2008: 248). Therefore, it might be advisable for new Member States to concentrate their coordination ambition in areas of particular importance to them. In particular, small Member States might not have a strong interest in some policy areas, whereas others might be of particular importance to them (Nugent 2006; Panke 2010).

Research design

This section pursues two objectives in revealing the research design of our study. Firstly, it explains why Kassim’s typology (2003) was chosen, rather than other comparative frameworks, in order to make sense of the differences in coordination systems in the new Member States. Secondly, it highlights the methodology applied for categorising the countries.

Choosing a comparative perspective

Several studies have put national coordination systems in a comparative perspective. The research presented here ties in with a typology developed by Kassim (2003) based on a research project that resulted in two volumes of insightful country reports (Kassim *et al.* 2000, 2001). These studies arguably constitute the most comprehensive and sophisticated analysis of national coordination systems in the EU. The dimensions capturing the

differences, namely centralisation and coordinating ambition, stand apart from other attempts at comparing national coordination as they were conceived of inductively. Other studies have put coordination systems in a comparative perspective by assessing them along *a priori* determined criteria, such as stability (Dimitrova and Toshkov 2007) or centralisation (Metcalf 1994), or have focused on functional criteria such as speed of coordination and quality of positions (Panke 2010). In contrast, Kassim's typology captures the root of differences between coordination systems and is, therefore, theoretically more relevant than measures of efficiency *per se*. If we considered a different – or only one – dimension, the observed differences or similarities might be caused or distorted by the underlying variation in the dimensions that are now scrutinised. Empirically, moreover, a measure of efficiency is only instructive when controlling for the scope of coordination. Therefore, Kassim's basic typology is considered more "genuine", comprehensive, and ambitious for our purpose than other extant or conceivable (single) dimensions capturing the differences between coordination systems.

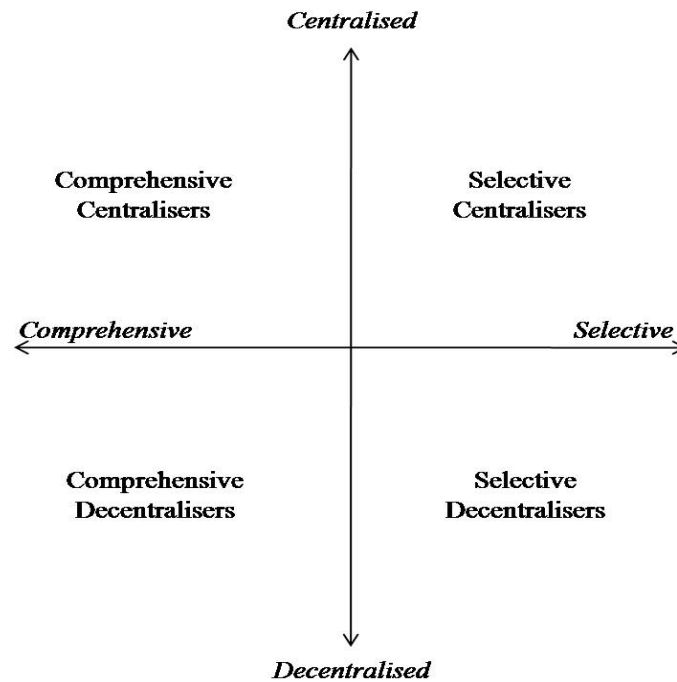
The added value of analysing the new Member States according to this existing typology can be appreciated when considering this article as a piece of cumulative research. Rather than adding yet another set of criteria for comparing a sub-set of coordination systems along an allegedly innovative dimension, it seeks to contribute towards a classification of the coordination systems of all Member States according to a unifying, comprehensive typology. Given the daunting task of capturing the differences of national coordination systems across the whole EU, and given the central importance of understanding the link and the interaction between the national and European layers of governance, cumulative research is imperative. Classifying the coordination systems can, in turn, inform future research and might provide a basis for case selection and in-depth studies.

Kassim's (2003: 91-2) typology classifies the various systems along two dimensions. The first dimension concerns the degree of centralisation of the system. In centralised systems, specialised authoritative institutions at the centre of government are responsible for overall coordination. In particular, in the case of conflicts arising between different ministries or departments, the coordination body comes into action by eventually taking the decision or forcing reconciliation. A further aspect of centralisation is the ambition to "speak with one voice", implying a coherent representation by all national officials. Decentralised systems, by contrast, lack a central coordination body with considerable authority. Whilst bodies facilitating inter-ministerial coordination may exist, the respective individual actors remain relatively independent. In order to establish the degree of centralisation of a coordination system, the strength of the central coordination unit vis-à-vis the individual ministries is decisive. Furthermore, the room for manoeuvre of civil servants, as well as the relation between the capital and the Permanent Representation in Brussels, feeds into the analysis.

The second dimension takes into account the coordination ambition of a country. Some Member States have comprehensive systems that attempt to agree on a position on virtually every EU issue. Stakeholders, such as private interest groups, social partners and sub-state governments are usually involved in formulating the mandate. Moreover, they often proactively intervene at an early stage of the policy cycle. In contrast to such comprehensive ambitions, the scope of selective systems is rather modest. The emphasis lies on particular, salient issues and the government is the principal actor in deciding a position. In addition, the focus is put on the decision-making phase in the Council where national officials defend the position of their country.

In order to systematically depict the differences between the systems of 13 old Member States, Kassim plotted the countries in a figure producing four basic coordination types: comprehensive centralisers, selective centralisers, comprehensive decentralisers, selective decentralisers (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Kassim's (2003) typology of national coordination systems



Source: figure based on Kassim (2003).

The following section presents the methodology applied. The validity of the classification is thereby demonstrated and the research design is made replicable. This might encourage tests of robustness of our classifications and future research on the same or other Member States.

Methodology

This section explains the methodology used here for classifying the coordination systems along the two dimensions of Kassim's framework, in order to bolster the internal validity of the positioning and guarantee the replicability of the research design. First, it explains the factors that are considered in order to locate the coordination systems on the respective dimensions, *i.e.* how to determine the position of a given coordination system. Second, it reveals and justifies the data drawn upon in order to classify the countries. Thereby, it aims to make transparent the process leading to the positioning of the coordination systems. This replicability may encourage others to test the robustness of our findings during the period that is focussed on here, or in longitudinal research designs tracing the changes in the relative positions.

For each of the two dimensions, a series of questions are considered. In order to place Member States on the centralisation dimension, the following three questions guided the analysis. Firstly, is there a formalised organisational entity or a forum for coordination between ministries? If so, does this serve for mutual updating, opinion exchange, or decision-taking? In case of disagreement, is there an arbitration mechanism in place, or is a particular actor authorised to decide? Secondly, how is the relation between the capital and the Permanent Representation structured? Does the Permanent Representation

communicate with the ministries, or is there a central entity interposed between them? Do line ministries send mandates directly, or does this happen through the central body? Thirdly, how much room for manoeuvre do individual civil servants have in formulating mandates and negotiating in Brussels? In aggregating and weighing the answers to these questions, the countries are divided into centralised and decentralised coordination systems.

With regard to differentiating between comprehensive and selective coordination ambition, the research considered three questions, the first of which trumped the others in case of contradiction. Firstly, are coordination and EU-level activity concentrated in few policy areas of particular national interest? Secondly, does coordination take place for issues clearly falling into the realm of one ministry? Thirdly, are stakeholders – private interest groups, social partners, sub-state government – consulted? Drawing on the first question in particular for positioning the country as comprehensive or selective coordinators, the additional two questions are intended to provide a fuller picture of coordinating ambition beyond sectoral differentiation. This is how the classification of the countries in the four categories was reached (see Figure 1). On this basis, the research compared the characteristics of the systems first within and then across the categories to locate the relative positions of the Member States (see below).

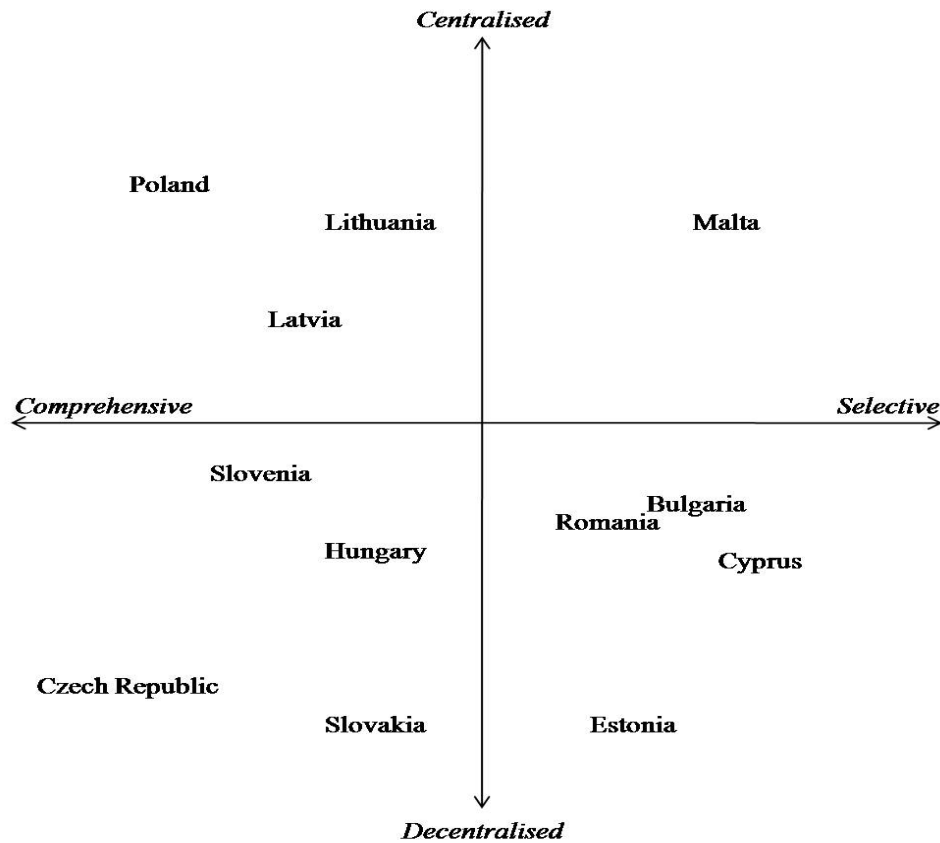
From the questions pursued, it is evident that the categorisation builds upon formal organisational structures and the informal politics of coordination. The research not only investigated whether a central coordinating body existed in a country and whether it was attached to, for instance, the Prime Minister's Office, a Government Office or a line ministry, but went further by looking into the actual practices in the countries. Given the scope of the research project and the expectation that practices vary starkly across sectors, it was decided to avoid particularistic process-tracing of the coordination of individual acts in a particular sector and to opt instead for a more universalistic approach. Thus, the assessment here builds on the analysis of formal organisational structures and informal practices. For this purpose, literature, government documentation and data from interviews with practitioners and country experts were consulted in order to triangulate data.

Obviously, the study is not built on a project as comprehensive as that of Kassim *et al.* (2000, 2001) and remains to be corroborated by future in-depth research. However, having revealed the questions guiding our analysis and the procedure of positioning the countries vis-à-vis each other, the study becomes replicable for others using different data in order to test the robustness of its assessments or focussing on a different timespan in order to trace changes over time.

National coordination in the new Member States

The following section presents empirical findings on the coordination systems in the twelve new Member States in order to categorise them according to their degree of centralisation and coordination ambition. This reflects the situation in the middle of 2009. Mapping the systemic configurations in Figure 2 visualises the stark differences substantiated in the individual country portraits below and reflected upon in the concluding section.

Figure 2: Patterns of national coordination in the new Member States



Source: figure based on authors' own data.

Comprehensive centralisers: Poland, Lithuania, Latvia

The Polish EU policy coordination is highly centralised, but at the same time very complex and frequently changing (Nowak-Far 2005: 12). At the heart of the system is the European Committee of the Council of Ministers (ECCM). This body scrutinises all negotiation positions for the Polish representatives at the ministerial and COREPER levels. Instructions for working group members are given by the respective line ministries. At the request of the ministries, such as in the case of strategic or highly politicised topics, mandates for working group members can also be adopted by the ECCM, which is chaired by the Head of the Office of the Committee on European Integration (UKIE). The UKIE is also the central coordination body that actually sends the mandates to the Permanent Representation, and has to clear all negotiation positions suggested by line ministries beforehand. In addition, UKIE serves as a mediator in case of diverging opinions of two or more involved ministries. If no agreement can be reached in the ECCM, the matter has to be referred to the Committee on European Integration at the ministerial level (KIE), in which the PM has the decisive vote (Nowak-Far 2005: 12). This is a sign of concentration of power in the hands of the core executive (Zubek 2005: 593).

The Polish system can generally be described as very ambitious and comprehensive. It aims to represent Poland's interest in every policy field. Naturally, there are some areas that are "traditional" interests of Poland and to which special importance is attributed, most notably cohesion and regional policy, agriculture and the Eastern neighbourhood policy (interview, UKIE, May 2009). However, regional bodies or social partners are not directly involved in the coordination process, even though they contribute in an advisory capacity (Nowak-Far 2005: 17). The *Sejm* and the Senate have to be informed of Poland's participation in the Council (Act on Cooperation 2004: 1). However, in practice the Parliament is weak in controlling and scrutinising national coordination of EU policies, as its recommendations are not binding (Nowak-Far 2005: 17). In general, Poland can be classified as a comprehensive centraliser.

In Lithuania, the main responsibilities lie with two departments located in the Government Office. The first is the Department of EU Policy Analysis and Inter-institutional Coordination, which is tasked with formulating Lithuanian positions and drafting legal acts. The second body, the Department of Coordination and Monitoring of European Law Implementation, focuses on the processes of transposition and implementation of EU law. This coordination unit is also responsible for dispute settlement, if two or more state institutions fail to reach an agreement. By inviting the relevant actors and representatives of the MFA and the European Law Department, an attempt is made to resolve conflicts. Despite the important role of the Government Office, the MFA also plays a key role and works closely together with the EU departments. In particular, it is responsible for the preparation of the COREPER II meetings and the representation of Lithuania in Brussels. For inter-institutional coordination, there are specialised working groups, broadly called "Working Groups on European Union Affairs" consisting of experts from the ministries, other state institutions and agencies, social-economic partners, as well as interest groups. Their tasks are to assist those in charge of EU policies and to coordinate works related to Lithuania's membership of the EU if competences of two or more state institutions and agencies are affected. In case of conflicts arising between two or more departments, they equally function as a problem solver (personal communication, Permanent Representation of Lithuania, June 2009).

With regard to the comprehensiveness of the system, the role of the parliament (the *Seimas*) appears to be significant. Before a mandate is sent to Brussels, it has to pass the *Seimas*, which can formulate an opinion on it and can issue amendments. However, the government is free not to consider these amendments. The computer system LINESIS of the Government Office forms the core of Lithuania's coordination. It ensures the communication and exchange of relevant documents between the institutions that are involved. Furthermore, it makes the system relatively transparent and controllable (personal communication, Permanent Representation of Lithuania, Brussels, June 2009). Lithuania's coordination system can be identified as centralised and comprehensive.

Latvia can equally be classified as a comprehensive centraliser. In 2004, the European Affairs Bureau migrated from the PM to the MFA. Thus, the ministry was charged with the main responsibility for coordination (Dimitrova and Toshkov 2007: 974) and has been given the right to make final changes before instructions are sent to the Permanent Representation (Panke 2010: 777). The European Affairs Bureau fulfils the function of a secretariat for two further institutions: the Council of Senior Officials at the administrative level, which is an important trouble-shooter in case of conflicts, and the European Integration Council at the political level. Rollis (2005: 102) argues that Latvia still faces major challenges in providing an effective coordination system. Much depends on the political actors in office and not so much on professional experts. Furthermore, the administration is still not strong enough. Latvia lacks both financial and human resources to facilitate the effective work of the civil service by increasing the coordination capacities.

Latvia attempts to let stakeholders participate in the process of EU policy-making. Already during the accession process, the country was eager to listen to interest groups. In order to overcome obstacles such as insufficient language skills and lack of knowledge of the working mechanisms of EU institutions, the government offers seminars to the non-governmental sector and publishes relevant documents on its websites. Nevertheless, measures to attain this goal still have to be improved, since only a limited amount of information is made available (Rollis 2005: 106).

Comprehensive decentralisers: Slovenia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia

In the first half of 2008, Slovenia was the first of the new Member State to hold the Council Presidency and thus pass what could be considered a “stress test for national coordination”. The State Secretary-led Government Office for European Affairs (GOEA) is charged with coordination (except for CFSP matters, which remain with the MFA), in which an online “EU portal” plays an important role. In late 2008, the GOEA and the Government Office for Growth were merged as a Minister-led Government Office for Development and European Affairs (GODEA). The GODEA assigns one or several ministries to a dossier and coordination then takes place on-line. A ministerial position on the EU portal can automatically become the national position if there is no objection to the lead ministry by a fixed deadline (interview, GOEA, November 2008). While there are 35 working groups, physical meetings at the GODEA are summoned in case of important horizontal dossiers only, which is the case about once every two weeks. There is a weekly Working Group on EU Affairs at civil servant level chaired by the State Secretary and, recently, a monthly meeting at State Secretary level has been introduced to discuss strategic issues. The GODEA tries to assert itself as a coordinator and supervisor suggesting solutions in case of conflict while sometimes, albeit decreasingly, being perceived as an “intruder” by the line ministries (interview, GODEA, May 2009). Against the odds of a “lack both of co-ordination and teamwork culture” in the administration (Fink-Hafner 2007: 15), the GODEA is judged to be “very well established, stable, and influential” (Dimitrova and Toshkov 2007: 975) and learning from the Presidency experience might further smoothen the coordination process (Kajnič and Svetličič 2008). Given the continued importance of line ministries, Slovenia is still classified as decentralised.

Slovenia has a relatively comprehensive coordinating ambition. Every issue running through the EU portal can be formally considered to have undergone coordination. Nevertheless, there are attempts to prioritise by a regular *Declaration on activities of the Republic of Slovenia in the EU institutions* (Kajnič and Svetličič 2008). Yet, its impact in practice is negligible. However, the Presidency lessons might provide a basis for a move from passiveness to more proactive coordination in at least some policy fields. As regards inclusion of third parties, it has to be noted that the lead ministry or working groups may consult stakeholders, in particular the social partners (interview, GOEA, November 2008). Nevertheless, coordination is understood as a governmental task (interview, GODEA, May 2009). Dossiers falling under the National Assembly’s competence are forwarded and discussed in the Committee on EU or Foreign Affairs in order to confirm mandates before a Council meeting (interview, GOEA, November 2008). Slovenia, therefore, can be classified as a comprehensive decentraliser.

Hungary looks back on a change of its coordination unit from a State Secretariat for Integration and External Relations in the MFA to the Office of European Affairs (OEA) at the PM’s Office, and back to the MFA within few years after its accession. However, the position of a Minister without portfolio responsible for European Affairs has survived the institutional turmoil. There are 48 inter-ministerial working groups under fixed chairmanship, each targeting a specific EU policy field. Based on a proposal prepared by the chairing ministry, they define the negotiating positions. Next to the chair and other

concerned line ministries, representatives of the Permanent Representation, MFA, Justice, Finance and Interior are permanent members. This usually suffices for decision-making, but in case of disagreements the dossiers are passed on to the Inter-ministerial Committee for European Affairs (interview, country expert, May 2009). This is located at the administrative level (Dimitrova and Toshkov 2007), but chaired by the Minister without portfolio. Convening on a weekly basis, the committee prepares COREPER (as far as necessary) and Council meetings. Moreover, it is briefed on recent Council meetings. If disagreement persists, matters are referred to the Conference of State Secretaries and, ultimately, the Cabinet of the Government for European Affairs, again chaired by the Minister without portfolio. The existence of this position means that there is a certain degree of centralisation. Moreover, Fink-Hafner (2007: 19) has highlighted the deep integration of political leadership with a highly politicised civil service, in which one may expect the ministerial cabinets to keep an eye on national coordination.

Hungary pursues a relatively comprehensive coordinating ambition as regards the number of policy fields covered. However, despite the existence of consultative bodies, stakeholder inclusion in the coordination is rather casual and does not trigger substantial input. The parliament, in contrast, is in a powerful position, particularly as regards monitoring. Its European Affairs Committee can start a coordination procedure in the process of which a position is adopted. However, the government under certain circumstances is not bound to it (interview, country expert, May 2009).

The Coordination system of the Czech Republic can be described as relatively decentralised. However, a coordination body exists at the ministerial level (V-EU) and at the level of under-secretaries from all ministries (V-EU at working level). They are assisted by the European Policies Coordination Department (OKE), which also sends the agreed mandates to the Permanent Representation. V-EU at working level serves as a forum for discussion of mandates at the COREPER level. If no agreement can be reached, the matter is referred to the V-EU, which however only meets once a month. It is chaired by the PM and approves positions to be taken in the Council of Ministers. At the working group level, responsibility lies solely with the line ministries, indicating a low degree of centralisation. In addition to the OKE, the Permanent Representation has equally regular and intensive contacts with the line ministries (interview, Permanent Representation of the Czech Republic, June 2009).

The Czech system is highly comprehensive, regarding both the inclusion of stakeholders in the process and the resources attributed to EU coordination. This has been a side effect of the preparation of the 2009 Presidency, which has been a key priority of the Czech Republic in the last years. A specific feature of the Czech system is the high number of different actors involved in the coordination process. Even though they attend the meetings only in an advisory capacity, their involvement is a sign of the comprehensiveness of the Czech system. The Parliament is effectively weak in scrutinising EU policy coordination, even though the Permanent Representation keeps “close contact” with the respective committees in both chambers (*idem*). The Czech Republic can be classified as a comprehensive decentraliser.

The coordination system of Slovakia differs on many points from that of the other new Member States. Most importantly, a special coordination body for EU affairs does not exist. Instead, the MFA plays a key role (interview, Permanent Representation of Slovakia, June 2009). Only the MFA is entitled to send instructions to the Permanent Representation from the COREPER level onwards. At working group level, the experts receive instructions solely from the line ministries, which are decided on by Ministerial Coordination Groups (MCG) chaired by the respective State Secretary. The Committees for EU Affairs I and II within the MFA decide on instructions for COREPER I and II respectively. They consist of experts of each ministry and are chaired by a State Secretary from the MFA. At the ministerial level,

coordination takes place at the Ministerial Council for EU Affairs (MCEUA). However, the latter meets only four times per year, thus indicating a rather weak control from the core. The coordination system of Slovakia was created in its present form in 2004, underwent minor reform in 2007 and again in 2009. The practical application of the theoretical structure seems to be a big problem, and officials have yet to become familiar with the special mechanisms of EU policy-making (interview, Permanent Representation of Slovakia, June 2009).

The Slovak system has to be described as rather comprehensive. Nevertheless, because of limited resources and expertise, the country cannot cover all policy fields equally. Special importance is therefore attributed to the fields of energy and employment, as well as social issues (interview, Permanent Representation of Slovakia, June 2009). A notable characteristic of the Slovak System is the strong role of the Parliament (Denca 2009: 348). The Committee on EU affairs of the National Council of the Slovak Republic has significant powers at all levels. Mandates for working groups, COREPER, and ministers have to be approved by the Committee (interview, Permanent Representation of Slovakia, June 2009). It has the right to intervene at any stage in the process to amend or change mandates. This is a notable exception among the new Member States. The Slovak system can be described as comprehensive, but decentralised.

Selective centralisers: Malta

The most important factor influencing the Maltese EU policy coordination system is the small size of the country. The result is a relatively centralised coordination system. Its main coordination forum is the Inter-Ministerial Committee for EU Affairs (IMC) (Maltese Ministry for Social Policy 2008: 26). It is assisted in its work by the EU Secretariat in the Office of the PM. The Secretariat clears all the proposals and opinions coming from the line ministries for distribution in the IMC. In certain cases, the matter is referred to the Cabinet Committee on EU Affairs (CCEA). The latter consists solely of the PM, the Foreign Affairs Minister and the Finance Minister. The Cabinet Committee clears all position papers before they are adopted by the whole cabinet (Caruana 2007: 270). The EU Secretariat also channels the final positions of the line ministries adopted by the IMC and CCEA and sends them to the Permanent Representation (Office of the Prime Minister of Malta: 2009). However, the line ministries have somewhat more discretion regarding technical issues.

A special feature of the Maltese coordination system is the comparably strong involvement of stakeholders and social partners. They are represented in the Malta-EU Steering and Action Committee (MEUSAC) (Caruana 2007: 272-273). However, MEUSAC can only make recommendations to the CCEA and does not have the power to make binding decisions. The Maltese parliament has to be informed of the position of the Maltese officials in Brussels, but in fact has no power to actually influence the process. In general, it can be said that the Maltese system is selective rather than comprehensive in its ambition. Thus, Malta can be classified as a selective centraliser.

Selective decentralisers: Estonia, Bulgaria, Romania, Cyprus

Estonia is a selective decentraliser. Formerly, the tasks of coordination had been divided between the PM and the MFA. In 2002, the coordination unit, the Office of European Integration, was moved from the MFA to the PM in order to avoid conflicts between the two. Nonetheless, the MFA maintains some responsibility with regard to the coordination of COREPER II. The high degree of decentralisation in Estonia manifests itself in the latitude of the individual ministries, which are able to act relatively independently in formulating their positions and are also responsible for the negotiations (Panke 2010: 777; Fink-Hafner

2007: 817). In addition, the individual ministries are all represented in the Permanent Representation in Brussels and have their own attachés there. Officials working for a ministry directly receive their mandates from there. Furthermore, they are tasked with reporting on the negotiations to the Cabinet (Drechsler *et al.* 2003; Viks 2002). These characteristics make Estonia's coordination system one of the most decentralised among the CEECs.

Estonia's coordinating ambition is marked by a low involvement of other stakeholders. An attempt to rectify this by establishing a consultative committee comprising government and social actors was rather unsuccessful. The role of the parliament also reflects this picture. The Committee on European Affairs is not directly involved in coordination, as positions adopted in the Cabinet do not have to be sent to the Parliament (Viks 2002).

Bulgaria can equally be described as a selective decentraliser. The system was reformed in 2007 by Decree 85/2007 of the Council of Ministers on the organisation and coordination of EU matters. As a consequence of this decree, two central coordination directorates located at the government office (EU affairs coordination directorate at the Council of Ministers) and at the MFA (EU affairs department) were charged with overall coordination. However, the final decision lies with the Council of Ministers, which has to take into account the work of two lower levels: firstly, 31 working/sector groups on which representatives of the ministries sit; secondly, the EU Affairs Council (CEA), which meets weekly in order to discuss and decide on the proposals made by the working groups. It is headed by the Minister for EU Affairs. However, this office does not make the system more centralised, since it is only a political appointment that lacks its own ministry (personal communication, country expert, June 2009).

The degree of involvement of stakeholders in Bulgaria is difficult to define. They are invited to the working groups and, depending on the Foreign Affairs Minister, they can be invited to the CEA. However, it is not formally regulated whether they are only observing the discussions or taking part in the actual decision-making process. Moreover, it is not clear whether the working groups and the CEA have to respect the opinion of the stakeholders in formulating positions. The biggest problem in Bulgaria seems to be the identification of the relevant stakeholders. Bulgaria appears to be selective in its approach by concentrating efforts on several policy domains, such as agriculture, food and nuclear energy. Yet, the country suffers a deficit in its institutional capacity for public policy-making. Priorities are mostly formulated by the political cabinets of the ministers and do not necessarily reflect the public interest. As regards the timing of the involvement in Brussels, Bulgaria can be described as rather reactive, focusing on the decision-making phase in the Council of Ministers (personal communication, country expert, June 2009).

National coordination in Cyprus is organised in a decentralised fashion resulting from the "only gradual appreciation of the importance of central coordination in the capital" (Nugent 2006: 60) combined with battles about leadership. The Presidential Palace's Diplomatic Office is limited to informing the President, rather than actively engaging in the coordination between MFA, the Planning Bureau, the Law Office of the Republic and the line ministries with their EU units of two to three officials (Sepos 2008). The MFA is only the "de facto – but not official [i.e. designated] – central coordination authority" (*ibid.*: 52) as it supervises foreign policy in general. Despite centralisation tendencies at the MFA, the Planning Bureau also has specific subjects under its mandate (such as research, for example) (interview, Permanent Representation of Cyprus, July 2009). Moreover, the MFA seems to be a weak coordinator. While Sepos reports that it hosts and chairs coordination meetings (Sepos 2008: 52), the dilute and weak responsibilities provide a breeding ground for decentralised coordination by line ministries and the Permanent Representation. It usually depends on the person or service in charge of a dossier, often at the Permanent Representation, to coordinate with domestic officials and between ministries. The lack of

an institutionalised forum to discuss positions reinforces the weakness of the MFA in coordination and explains why officials do not distinguish the lead voice in the capital when it comes to dealing with EU issues. With the key role of officials in line ministries and the PR in particular comes significant room for manoeuvre (interview, Permanent Representation of Cyprus, July 2009).

As Nugent (2006: 59-65) has pointed out, the lack of resources requires Cyprus to adopt a rather modest, selective coordinating ambition and to “concentrate its attention on issues where it has a specific interest at stake. It does attempt to monitor all general developments and to attend as many meetings as possible, but not at all to the same extent as large states”. These fields include the Cyprus problem, neighbourhood issues, the financial perspective, corporate law and taxation, the services industry and maritime transport. The small size of the country entails a lack of resources reflected in limited participation in working groups and higher workload for individual officials. Yet, this is partly offset by recourse to networks providing a certain degree of informality and flexibility. As regards the position of the executive vis-à-vis parliament and stakeholders, Sepos (2008: 50-51, n. 17) highlights that the House of Representatives has established a Committee for European Affairs, meeting four to five times per presidency, which is supported by a EU directorate of specialists supporting their work. However, influence can be exerted by discussion in the plenary only and is not binding. Stakeholders are consulted by the ministries as deemed necessary on a case-by-case basis. While limited resources complicate early, proactive coordination (Nugent 2006: 66), this may still be sought in some cases (interview, Permanent Representation of Cyprus, July 2009).

Romania provides an example of coexisting administrative and political coordination (Dimitrova and Toshkov 2007: 971). Working groups composed of officials of ministries and agencies assess and discuss positions elaborated by the lead ministry, and thus prepare and subsequently monitor the activity in the Council Working Groups. At this level, the Department for European Affairs (DAE) is only informed, but it becomes more involved as a dossier climbs the hierarchy. Nevertheless, the Permanent Representation and line ministries are in immediate contact unfettered by the DAE. Instructions for Council and COREPER are agreed in the weekly meetings of the Coordination Committee of European Affairs at Secretary of State-level, chaired by the Head of the DAE (co-chaired by MFA). It is here in particular that the DAE acts as an arbitrator in being able to propose, but not impose, solutions. Such issues would be resolved in the ministerial-level Council of European Affairs (meeting monthly or when necessary), which also sets general priorities and is chaired by the PM. The role of the DAE generally consists of providing information, overseeing coordination and checking compatibility of positions. In general, this is reported to function smoothly, with officials granted room for manoeuvre in writing mandates, allowing timely receipt of the instructions in Brussels. The interpretation of these tasks can differ depending on the department’s leadership (interview, country expert, April 2009).

The reported smooth functioning of national coordination has to be considered in the light of a selective coordination ambition. Romania focuses on certain major national priorities, such as agriculture, energy, environment and regional policy. In general, its strategy is rather passive or reactive, “following the crowd” and getting involved, if at all, at later stages. While under the former leadership of the DAE stakeholders have rather been neglected, the introduction of a more systematic inclusion has been planned. Likewise, the Parliamentary Committee on EU affairs is only informed and has thus not enjoyed true direct influence on the positions of the executive in the Council (*ibid.*). Thus, Romania is currently classified as a selective decentraliser.

The diversity of national coordination systems

When taking a step back from the individual country information in order to grasp the broader picture, what is striking is what we do *not* see. First, there is no dominant pattern discernible among the coordination systems set up by the new Member States. All four ideal types are filled. Second, the coordination systems are less centralised than expected. In the analysis presented here, the degree of centralisation denotes the position on the continuum with a unitary, independent coordination unit equipped with decision-making authority at the one end and departmental autonomy at the other. Hence, the relatively decentralised coordination approaches in many of the new Member States reveal that the alleged emergence of powerful core executives should be treated with caution. Even if there are central units attached to the PMs' Offices, those are often weak. The diagnosis of strong core executives may thus result from a tautological definition in parts of the literature. If the "core executive" comprises "all those organisations, structures and roles that serve to integrate the work of governments in relation to Europe" (Laffan 2006: 690), its strengthening through Europeanisation is self-evident and analytically misleading. Instead of a unitary core, we find much fuzzier, complex, *ad hoc* solutions in which officials in line ministries and the Permanent Representation take on a decisive role.

Including the thirteen old Member States in the picture (see figure 3), it becomes clear that there is no dividing line between new and old Member States.² However, the previously blank category of selective decentralisers is filled by four new Member States. Tentatively, the status of Cyprus, Estonia, Romania and Bulgaria can be explained by limited resources demanding a selective approach. The existence of states with decentralised, selective coordination is noteworthy and, in fact, raises questions worth exploring in-depth. Faced with constraints in resources, the adoption of a selective approach may be inevitable. Nevertheless, pairing this with a central coordinator setting the priorities appears more intuitive. In the four countries, in contrast, informal networks seem to contribute to coordination outside formal institutions. This suggests a partial explanation of the coordinating-ambition dimension. Adding to Kassim's (2003) analysis that a centralised, proactive approach often results from Euroscepticism, while more integration-prone countries take a more decentralised approach, the findings here suggest that, in many cases, a selective approach results from limited resources and expertise.

This brings to the fore the question of how to account for the variation across countries. Institutional divergence can be explained by historical institutionalism, in which Hall and Taylor (1996: 939) distinguish between a calculus approach and a cultural approach. The former emphasises strategy and utility maximisation, albeit influenced by and accommodating extant institutions. In the latter, rationality is not bounded by the institutional context only, but routines and norms act as additional "filters for interpretation" (*ibid.*). Kassim, Peters and Wright (2000: 13-18) have argued that political and administrative opportunity structures, as well as national policy styles, have this effect. Accordingly, extant institutions influence reforms, leading to path dependent, divergent institutional outcomes across countries. Dimitrova and Toshkov (2007), in contrast, have rejected this historical institutionalist explanation by pointing to the absence of "institutional lock-in". Instead, they suggest a rational choice-based account of politics of institutional choice accommodating the volatility in coordination systems.

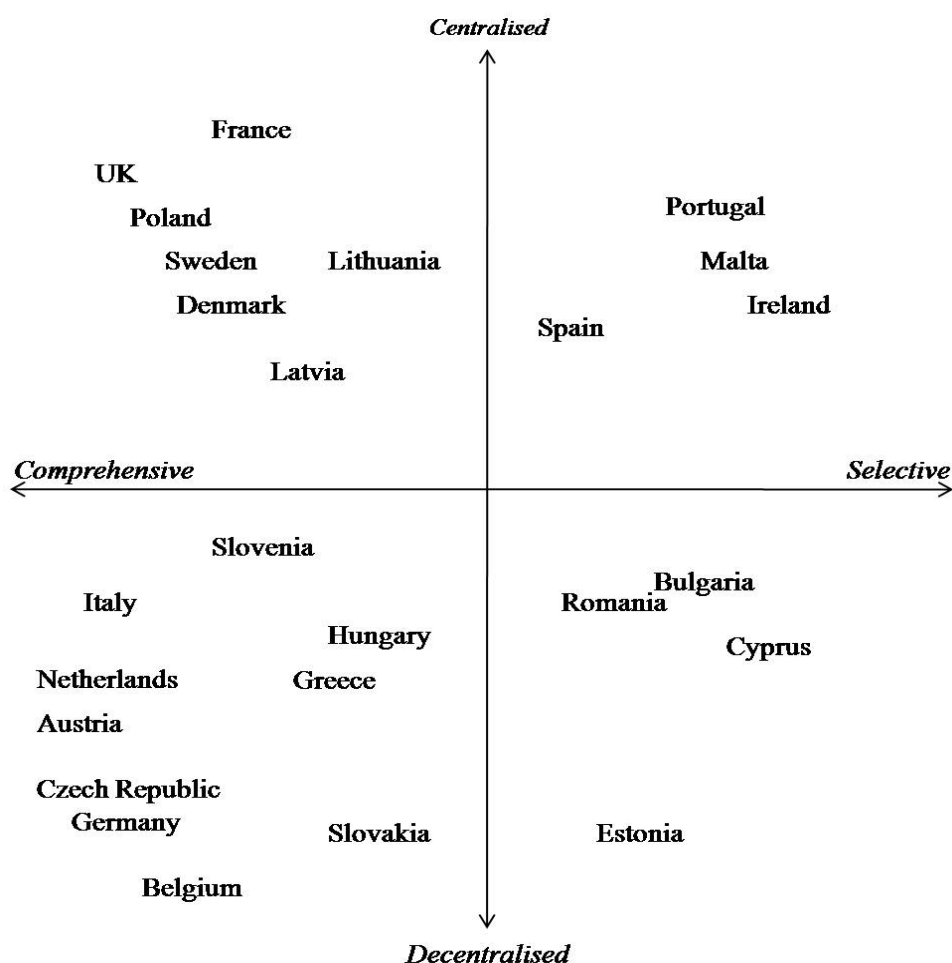
While the debate is beyond the scope of this article, the findings here can provide some impetus in suggesting reasons for the observed heterogeneity. The diversity that is found

² The coordination systems in the old Member States may have been subject to changes since Kassim's analysis in 2003. Borrás and Peters (2009: 4) for instance suggest that national coordination systems have generally been subject to centralisation. The combined figure should therefore be read with cautiousness.

can be considered grist to mill of those who have criticised the tendency of lumping together the CEECs as an allegedly unitary post-communist group. It is suggested here that this account might be too simplistic (cf. the differentiated presentation in section II). However, if one was to retain the assumption of the common communist heritage as a predominant characteristic determining administrative culture and traditions to the present day, the diversity would disconfirm historical institutionalist accounts pointing to path dependence and institutional stickiness. Likewise, given that the countries joined the Union within a period of two years only, it seems that the functional requirements of taking part in EU business and the roughly parallel process of preparing for accession under constant progress evaluation by the EU do not go a long way in explaining the coordination arrangements. Other factors seem to be more pertinent in shaping the coordination systems.

Factors determining coordination systems largely seem to overlap between old and new Member States, which points towards more generic aspects determining the coordination systems in place. This suggests that, in order to explain the development of coordination systems, future research should investigate more explicitly why and in which way political and administrative opportunity structures influence the development of coordination systems. It should refrain from over-emphasising the communist legacy of the countries and instead focus on issues such as party systems, logistical considerations arising from geographical locations, and administrative culture, which do not *a priori* inherently discriminate between old and new Member States. One explanation suggested for the adoption of selective, decentralised approaches is the lack of resources or the lack of willingness to invest them. As the development of the coordination systems was not traced through time, a comprehensive longitudinal analysis (see Dimitrova and Toshkov 2007) of the institutional development of the coordination systems after the “critical juncture” of accession remains to be undertaken. Thus, future research will have to explicitly engage with the fact that the communist heritage seems either to be (a) too differentiated or (b) too weak to exhibit a long-term impact towards convergence and to examine which aspects actually determine the coordination system adopted.

Some stimuli for the debate can thus be derived. First, decisions on the reform of coordination systems do not amount to “free choice”. Instead, politicians are restrained by the resources at their disposal. Second, in order to refute a historical institutionalist argument, institutional change has to be sustainable. The case of Hungary seems to provide an example of a reversal of institutional change after it proved out-of-step with national administrative requirements. Third, while institutional change at the “critical juncture” of accession should not be too surprising, the findings here reveal that the working groups dealing with the chapters during the accession negotiations have often lived on. This might contribute to explaining the relatively decentralised coordination systems and the pronounced division of tasks. Thus, the findings suggest that a historical institutionalist theorisation of the Europeanisation of the executives, allowing for resources as an intervening variable, might provide a promising avenue for further research.

Figure 3: Patterns of national coordination in 25 Member States

Source: the figure is based on the authors' own data and on Kassim (2003: 93-94), with the position of France being adapted according to the in-text description.

Conclusion

This article has sought to provide a systematic comparison of national coordination systems in the twelve new Member States in the middle of 2009. Drawing on Kassim (2003), the research presented here has classified the countries in a typology of comprehensive or selective (de-)centralisers. They were then mapped (Figure 2), combining the findings of this article with those of Kassim in a single figure and thereby putting the coordination systems of 25 member states in comparative perspective (Figure 3). The only exceptions are Luxemburg and Finland (however, for these countries, see Panke 2010; Johansson and Raunio 2010).

The research reveals great variety among the new countries, thus confirming earlier smaller-scale studies (Dimitrova and Toshkov 2007; Fink-Hafner 2007) across the population of new Member States. When putting this into perspective by adding 13 old Member States to the map, it becomes evident that four new Member States fall under

selective decentralisers, a category not filled before. In total, five Member States are classified as selective coordinators, three of which belong to the smallest EU Member States and two of which are the recent newcomers Romania and Bulgaria. Other states have found technological solutions to address the problem. Slovenia, for instance, uses an online “EU portal” for coordination and thereby seems to avoid costly meetings, while ensuring the distribution of information. The findings therefore suggest that the attributes and rationales of coordination systems cannot be analysed without taking into account the limits to the resources at the disposal of the executive, such as money, time, appropriate language skills, expertise and personnel.

Furthermore, the empirical data suggests that the coordination systems are less centralised than expected. Only one third of the countries are classified as centralised coordinators. This can be explained as a corollary of the accession negotiations, in which usually multiple working groups were in charge of the individual, technical chapters. These working groups consisting of officials from the line ministries have accumulated expertise and persisted contributing in a meaningful way to the coordination of EU policy. Depending on the definition of “core executive”, this suggests that: if understood as the PM and his office, the strengthening of the core executive may be weaker than expected; if understood as all actors involved in EU policy coordination, its strengthening amounts to a tautological observation. In practice, this denotes that, unless there are open inter-departmental conflicts resulting in resolution at the political level, administrative actors seem to bear the brunt of responsibility. Combined with the *de facto* weak role of parliaments, with the notable exception of Slovakia, it seems worthwhile to scrutinise the legitimisation of decisions in future research by testing the regimes from a more normative angle regarding their accountability structures.

Based on this analysis of EU policy coordination, it is suggested that in-depth research is necessary in order to reveal causal links of pre-existing political and administrative opportunity structures and national policy styles (Kassim 2003) with differences in coordination systems in the new Member States. In particular, the diversity revealed across old and new Member States speaks to the fact that this analysis should refrain from the thus far often overstated homogeneity or “otherness” of the CEECs. Different institutional arrangements and practices should be explained by general variables applicable throughout the EU. By analysing and categorising the coordination systems, this article intends to provide a starting point for such studies. In particular, it has revealed the methodology guiding the analysis so that future research can test these categorisations, trace the developments in the Member States or complement the findings. As for explaining variation, explicitly including resources in explanatory frameworks seems to contribute to explaining the variation, even though this comes at the price of some vagueness. Hence, the analysis suggests that national coordination systems in the new Member States remain an interesting laboratory for Europeanisation studies.

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