Article

Allocating political attention in the EU's foreign and security policy: The effect of supranational agenda-setters

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Abstract

Supranational bureaucracies are often promoted as a solution to collective action problems. In the European Union context, investing the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy with new agenda-setting powers was expected to improve the coherence, continuity and efficiency of foreign policy-making. Relying on novel fine-grained and comprehensive data about the content and duration of working party meetings, the study maps and analyses the allocation of political attention to different foreign policy issues between 2001 and 2014. The results show that the empowerment of the High Representative by the Lisbon Treaty had little immediate effect on the Council's foreign policy agenda. However, the study also indicates that this result might be due to a lack of capability and ambition rather than weak institutional prerogatives.

Keywords

Agenda-setting, Council of the European Union, delegation, European External Action Service, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

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Making the EU a more effective foreign policy actor

The establishment of supranational bureaucracies and the delegation of agenda-setting powers to them by states is often seen as a way to overcome collective action problems or reduce transaction costs (Keohane, 1984; Koremenos et al., 2001; Moravcsik, 1993; Pollack, 1997; Stein, 1982; Tallberg, 2002). In the context of the European Union (EU), the Lisbon Treaty's creation of the new post of High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR) in 2009 was justified in these terms (European Convention, 2002). Being both a Vice President of the Commission and the chair of the Foreign Affairs formation in the Council, the HR was supposed to bring more coherence to the EU's foreign policy. In comparison to the pre-existing situation, where the chair of the Foreign Affairs Council changed every six months with the country holding the rotating Presidency, the establishment of the HR was also expected to ensure a more consistent approach to the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). In addition, being an impartial agenda-setter unaffected by national biases should have resulted in more productive policy leadership and a more efficient policy-making process. The overall aim of the drafters of these institutional reform proposals was to make the EU a more effective and coherent foreign policy actor on the world stage (European Convention, 2002: 11).

Yet, despite these high expectations, the actual effects of the establishment of a supranational agenda-setter in the area of EU foreign policy have received little attention in the literature.[1] An exception is Vanhoonacker and Pomorska's (2013) qualitative study, which evaluates the extent to which the first HR, Catherine Ashton, has effectively applied various agenda-setting strategies during the first two-and-a-half years of her term in office. One of these strategies is 'arousing interest', which is related to the concept of political attention that is of primary interest in this article. Vanhoonacker and Pomorska (2013: 1329) find that Ashton clearly set out her foreign policy priorities, but the way this has been followed-up by her and the European External Action Service (EEAS) has been 'unconvincing'. While providing valuable insights, an important point of comparison, and advantages in other respects, qualitative research is necessarily restrictive and selective in empirical scope. Relying on a new quantitative dataset of the number and duration of Council working parties in different areas of foreign affairs, the current study complements Vanhoonacker and Pomorska's (2013) work by providing the first large-scale mapping of the distribution of the Council's political attention in this policy field. By leveraging comparisons over time and across issue areas, the study offers a systematic and comprehensive assessment of the effect of the establishment of the HR and the EEAS on foreign and security policy-making. If the establishment of and the delegation of agenda-setting powers to the HR had the desired consequences, traces of these effects should be visible in the distribution of political attention in the CFSP. The use of process-generated quantitative data to investigate, on a large scale, aspects of the EU's internal foreign policy-formulation process is an innovation in an area of research that has so far overwhelmingly

relied on the insights of practitioners, either through quantitative surveys or qualitative interviews.

Based on theoretical expectations derived from principal–agent theory, the study examines whether and to what extent the introduction of the HR and EEAS by the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 affected the continuity, efficiency and relative emphasis in the allocation of political attention in the CFSP. It complements existing research on the distribution of political attention in other EU institutions, especially the European Commission (Princen, 2009) and the European Council (e.g. Alexandrova and Timmermans, 2013; Alexandrova et al., 2014). While the effect of the rotating Presidency on the overall allocation of political attention in the Council of the EU has been the subject of past research (Häge, 2017), this is the first quantitative study that focuses on the allocation of political attention across sub-topics within a particular policy area. The idea for the creation of the HR and the EEAS was originally developed in the Constitutional Convention in 2002 (European Convention, 2002); and Convention members' rationales for the establishment of the post and its administrative support body mirror principal–agent arguments.[2] Thus, the study results do not only speak to the evaluation of theory but also provide an assessment of the extent to which the institutional designers' initial aspirations have been realised.

The delegation of agenda-setting power to supranational chairs

Functionalist arguments for the establishment and design of supranational bureaucracies play an important role in a number of international relations theories, including Neo-Liberal Institutionalism (Keohane, 1984; Stein, 1982) and Liberal Intergovernmentalism (Moravcsik, 1993).[3] The common element in these approaches is the assumption that states delegate powers to supranational institutions to reduce transaction costs or overcome collective action problems. Thus, states and supranational institutions form a principal–agent relationship. In this view, supranational institutions enable or facilitate mutually beneficial cooperation amongst self-interested governments; and the choice for or against a particular institutional arrangement is guided by the rational anticipation of its consequences. Existing applications of principal–agent theory to the EU provide more specific ideas about the types of problems different institutional arrangement can address (Pollack, 1997; Tallberg, 2002), but applying the general principles of principal–agent theory to the case of the HR requires some further extrapolation based on the specific tasks and objectives of this post.

The EU's foreign policy has long been criticised for a lack of coherence, continuity and ambition as well as its inefficient decision-making processes. The establishment of the HR was geared towards alleviating these problems. As the final report of the European Convention's Working Group on External Action documents (European Convention 2002: 17–22), the establishment of the HR and EEAS was aimed at increasing the coherence and efficiency, between and within institutions as well as at the level of services, of EU foreign policy-making.

The HR's double-hatted position as both a member of the Commission and the chair of the Foreign Affairs Council was supposed to provide more coherence, and the longer term in the position of the chair of the Foreign Affairs Council was supposed to bring more continuity and efficient agenda-management to the political and security aspects of the EU's foreign policy. Proponents of the HR also argued that its establishment would help to 'better define and pursue a more pro-active and effective foreign policy' (European Convention 2002: 19). The goal of providing consistent, efficient and effective policy leadership to the CFSP is of particular relevance for this study, as it concerns the HR's agenda-setting activities within the Council.

Member states are represented in various Council bodies at different levels of the institution's hierarchical structure. The bulk of the policy formulation work is done at the administrative level of working parties consisting of relatively low-ranking national officials (Häge, 2013). In the area of foreign policy, the working parties report to more senior officials in the Political and Security Committee (PSC), and the PSC in turn reports to ministers in the Foreign Affairs Council. In general, the chair of these bodies, which has traditionally been the government holding the rotating Presidency, plays a major role in managing the policy-making process in the Council (e.g. Häge, 2019; Kleine, 2013a; Tallberg, 2010). As the Council's rules of procedure (Official Journal of the European Union (OJ), 2009) prescribe, the chair is responsible for the programming of Council meetings (Article 2, paragraphs 6 and 7 OJ), the formulation of agendas of individual meetings (Article 3, paragraph 1 OJ), the 'smooth conduct of discussions', and the implementation of the Council's working methods (Article 20 in conjunction with Appendix V OJ). To ensure the 'smooth conduct of discussions', the chair can set the order of the items to be discussed during the meeting, the amount of speaking time allocated to different delegations, and the overall amount of time spent on a particular topic (Article 20 OJ).

Of course, none of these prerogatives are absolute. Any member state or the Commission can request the inclusion of an item on the agenda (Article 3, paragraph 2 OJ), and, as a general principle, any decision by the chair can be overruled by a simple majority of member states. However, even though member states might occasionally challenge a decision by the chair, directing the Council's attention to a particular issue in a sustained manner across all levels of its hierarchy would be difficult if not impossible without the Presidency's support. In fact, a number of empirical studies have shown that the chair is quite effective in using its formal and informal prerogative to shape the agenda of the Council (Bengtsson et al., 2004; Crum, 2007; Dür and Mateo, 2008; Häge, 2017; Kleine, 2013a, 2013b; Smeets and Vennix, 2014; Tallberg, 2004, 2006; Warntjen, 2013; Westlake and Galloway, 2004). That does not mean that the chair's agenda-setting activities do not follow established traditions and precedents, or that the chair is irresponsive to emerging policy problems, but that these structural and external drivers do not fully determine the chair's agenda-setting behaviour. As the Council's Presidency Handbook (Council of the European Union, 2018: 10) acknowledges,

besides the 'maturity of dossiers and the deadlines that apply to them', it is 'the political priorities that the Presidency wishes to set for its semester' that determines the 'priorities set in the choice and handling of dossiers'.

To summarise, the chair organises the Council's timetable, meeting schedule, and meeting agenda. This scheduling power provides the chair with disproportionate control over what issues are being discussed, how often they are being discussed, and how much time is devoted to an issue during a particular meeting (Häge, 2017). The chair also moderates discussions and facilitates decision-making through the identification and tabling of suitable compromise proposals, often on the basis of information gathered through bilateral talks with individual states (Tallberg, 2010). The formal and informal procedural prerogatives granted to the chair do not only allow it to influence the progression of particular proposals by emphasising or de-emphasising the attention devoted to them, but also enable the chair to play a major role in identifying the range of acceptable policy alternatives and in determining the final negotiation outcome.

Tallberg (2010) suggests that states delegate these types of prerogatives to chairs of multilateral negotiation bodies as functional solutions to three forms of bargaining problems: agenda failure, negotiation failure, and representation failure. Given this study's focus on internal Council decision-making rather than negotiations with third parties, only agenda and negotiation failure are of relevance. Agenda failure refers to overcrowded and shifting agendas, which are of particular concern in negotiation situations with multiple actors involved. States grant control over the agenda to the chair to ensure the efficiency of decision-making. Negotiation failure refers to the inadvertent breakdown of bargaining because of a failure of negotiators to identify the underlying zone of agreement. In order to avoid negotiation failure, states task the chair with brokerage responsibilities. They share private information about their preferences with the chair in bilateral 'confessionals' and grant it authority to structure bargaining around a single negotiating text in order 'to cut through the complexity of competing and overlapping proposals' (Tallberg, 2010: 245).

Traditionally, the meetings of all Council bodies were chaired by representatives of the country holding the rotating Presidency. However, the Council's rules of procedure are clear that the duties and prerogatives conferred onto the Presidency 'shall apply to any person chairing one of the Council configurations or, as appropriate, one of its preparatory bodies'. After entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the HR and her representatives from the EEAS have taken over as chairpersons in the area of foreign affairs (with the exception of trade and development). Given the consensus in the literature about the influence of the Presidency on the Council's agenda, it is reasonable to expect that the HR/EEAS will be able to use the powers of the chair at least to the same effect.

Applying the logic of principal–agent theory, the introduction of the HR and EEAS to replace the Council Presidency as chair in the area of the CFSP was not geared towards the fulfilment of new functions, as the functions stayed the same, but towards better fulfilling the existing functions of the chair. To achieve these

objectives, the HR was not only given the task of chairing the Foreign Affairs Council, but her representatives from the EEAS also now chair the meetings of most CFSP preparatory bodies in the Council (see the Online appendix for an overview of preparatory bodies and their type of chairperson).[4] In comparison to the Council Presidency, the HR has three advantages with respect to the prevention of agenda and negotiation failure: the HR has a longer time-horizon, the HR is a more neutral and impartial actor, and, at least under certain conditions, the HR can rely on better policy expertise.

Regarding the longer time-horizon, the relevant provisions in the Lisbon Treaty do not explicitly specify a term limit for the HR. However, the appointment of the HR requires the consent of the President of the Commission (Article 18 Treaty on European Union), whose own term limit is five years. Existing experience also seems to support the presumption of a five-year term in office of the HR, which is considerably longer than the six months term of the country holding the rotating Presidency. Different countries holding the Presidency tend to pursue different policy priorities. Thus, the system of six-monthly rotating chairs has been criticised for a lack of policy continuity. In contrast, the HR's longer time-horizon should allow for a more sustained focus on strategic policy objectives and more policy consistency in the medium- to long term. If longer terms in office of the chair have the desired effects and lead to more policy continuity, over-time volatility in the attention devoted to particular policy issues should be reduced after the Lisbon Treaty has entered into force:

> *H1*: The establishment of supranational chairs will result in less semester-to-semester change in the allocation of political attention.

Supranational chairs are not only expected to ensure more policy consistency over time but also to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of negotiations. Compared to governments who might use the prerogatives of the chair to pursue their own national priorities and policy objectives, supranational chairs are expected to be more neutral and impartial. Neutrality and impartiality make supranational chairs more trustworthy brokers, and states will be more likely to reveal their true preferences and red lines in bilateral talks. Better information about states' preferences will reduce delays and the risk of negotiation failure by allowing supranational chairs to determine the zone of agreement more quickly and reliably. The content of proposals matter, too. Supported by their own administrative apparatus dedicated to providing foreign and security policy advice, supranational chairs should have an informational advantage regarding the consequences of different policy options. This advantage is especially pronounced in comparison to smaller states holding the Presidency, whose national administrations cannot match the resources of the EEAS.

To summarise, better information about states' policy preferences, superior policy expertise, and the absence of incentives to pursue policy objectives that advantage some states over others should put supranational chairs in a position

to provide proposals that are less biased, provide more convincing policy solutions, and are more likely to be collectively preferred to the status quo. Such proposals in turn reduce the transaction costs, in terms of time and effort required, of reaching an agreement. The expectation is not that supranational chairs provide a larger number of proposals, but that the proposals provided will be processed more efficiently. All other things equal, the total amount of time required to process the CFSP agenda should decrease as a result:

> *H2*: The establishment of supranational chairs will result in a reduction of the overall amount of political attention required to develop CFSP.

The preceding hypotheses test whether two quite specific principal–agent claims about the collective benefits of a permanent supranational chair over the rotating national Presidency have indeed been realised. However, moving beyond these functionalist arguments, the most basic expectation regarding the agenda-setting power of supranational chairs is that they will pursue policy priorities that are systematically different from those of national governments. Principal–agent theory, and rational institutionalist theories more broadly (e.g. Tsebelis, 2002; Weingast, 2002), assumes that changes in institutional rules make a difference in terms of politics and policy outcomes. A change in the allocation of political attention as a result of the establishment of the HR might happen in the pursuit of collectively better policy outcomes, as functionalist theories would have it, or because supranational chairs overstep their mandate and pursue policy objectives that are not in line with the collective will of member states (Pollack, 1997; Tallberg, 2002). In either case, supranational chairs are expected to pursue different policy objectives because their institutional position induces incentives and role perceptions that differ from those faced by national governments.

> *H3*: The establishment of supranational chairs will result in a systematically different allocation of political attention to policy issues.

Note that the empirical examination of *H3* does not attempt to identify and cannot differentiate between the reasons for why exactly the HR allocates attention differently than national governments presiding over the Council (i.e. whether supranational chairs pursue collectively beneficial or more biased policies than governments). Member states select and appoint the HR, they can overrule any procedural decision of the HR by a simple majority vote, and most policy decisions require their unanimous agreement. In general, member states have ample means at their disposal to monitor, control and reign in the actions of the HR. Thus, the HR is a supranational actor but has little scope to pursue integrationist objectives that go beyond member states' interests. Significant agency losses through biased policies are unlikely to occur. Still, the subsequent analysis cannot determine *empirically* whether any changes in the allocation of attention are the results of bureaucratic drift or collectively beneficial improvements deriving from a more

effective and efficient management of the agenda. Nevertheless, knowing whether or not the establishment of the HR made a difference to the allocation of political attention in the Council is still of value in itself, and if the analysis showed that the change in the type of chair has no effect, then both potential causes would be rejected. Such a result would suggest that any changes in the allocation of political attention came about mainly through external developments, regardless of the type of chair.

Data, measurement, and research design

To measure the distribution of political attention to foreign policy issues, the study relies on data about the duration of meetings of Council working parties active in this area between the start of 2001 and the end of 2014. A detailed description of the data, their collection and coding can be found in Häge (2016). The Online appendix contains a summary.

The approach to measuring political attention employed here deviates in a number of respects from those of existing studies, which largely code the content of agenda documents in line with a common template developed by the Comparative Agendas Project (Baumgartner et al., 2011). Firstly, the approach employed in this study does not only count whether an issue was on the agenda of a meeting, but also how long that meeting dealt with that issue. The length of time an issue was discussed is a more appropriate measure of the political attention it received than a binary indicator of whether or not it formed an item on the agenda. Second, rather than coding the content of documents, this study uses organisational structures as a policy categorisation scheme. In the study of legislative committees, existing research has shown that institutional jurisdictions and the content of policy do not always overlap (e.g. Jones et al., 1993). However, in the case of Council working parties, policy remits are more clearly and narrowly defined, the institutional hurdles for establishing, merging or abolishing working parties are relatively low, and national officials have fewer incentives to encroach on each other's jurisdictions than elected politicians. If an issue straddles their jurisdictions, working parties can hold joint meetings. Indeed, both organisational changes and joint meetings have been common throughout the study period. Thus, the organisational structure of the working party system is more flexible and responsive to changes in the public problem perception than that of legislative committees. Several examples of working party agendas presented in the Online appendix also demonstrate empirically that the names of working parties adequately reflect the content of their discussions. Finally, from a purely practical point of view, agendas for working parties are not available in electronic form until 2004, and these records are likely incomplete for a number of years thereafter. Also, access to the agendas of some foreign affairs working parties remains restricted for diplomatic and security reasons. Thus, even if manually coding the agendas of more than 25,000 foreign affairs working party meetings was practically feasible, the costs of it would far outweigh any possible benefits.[5]

The original source of information for the working party meeting data are calendars maintained by the Council Secretariat. The Council's calendars report the duration of working party meetings in terms of half-days. For the purposes of this study, the working party meeting data were aggregated by semester, so that each row indicates the total number of half-day meetings of a working party during the respective six-month period. Given that the rotating Presidency changes every half a year, the semester seems to be the most appropriate temporal unit for comparative purposes. The original working party meeting data reach back to the beginning of 1995. However, this study focuses on the post-2000 period, mainly because the organisational structures of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) only became fully operational in 2001. Focusing on the period after the year 2000 ensures that the Council's organisational structures in the area of foreign affairs remain largely constant during the study period, which is essential for making valid over-time comparisons. At the lowest level of aggregation, the data-set consists of information about the duration of meetings of 37 foreign affairs Council working parties over 28 semesters, resulting in a total of 1036 observations. Some of the analyses below aggregate the data further by type of CFSP working party or entire policy sub-areas, resulting in smaller sample sizes.

The titles of the working parties are used to classify the content of the Council's agenda. The Online appendix provides a full list of working parties and their categorisation into policy areas and sub-areas. In EU foreign affairs, two broad policy areas can be differentiated: external economic relations, which are largely based on Community competences and managed by the Commission; and the CFSP, which operates through intergovernmental procedures with the Council fulfilling executive functions. Within the area of the CFSP, three types of working parties can be distinguished: regional working parties with a focus on a particular geographical region of the world, horizontal working parties that deal with a particular international issue, and CSDP working parties that deal with the implementation of the defence and security aspects of the CFSP. In the area of economic external relations, working parties concerned with trade can be distinguished from working parties concerned with development policy.

Measuring political attention in terms of meeting duration has several advantages: first, the duration of meetings devoted to a certain topic measures the amount of attention devoted to the topic more directly than a simple indication of whether the topic was on the agenda or not; second, the amount of meeting time and room resources devoted to a certain topic is under direct control of the chair. If the chair has agenda-setting power, it should be most visible in such an indicator rather than indicators of policy outcomes that heavily depend on the actions of other actors in the collective decision-making process. Of course, the focus on attention during the process rather than policy outcomes also means that this measure does not capture the agenda-setter's influence on the *content* of policy. Such a study would require a different research design, examining the positions of actors and the negotiation outcome on contested issues within individual proposals (e.g. Thomson et al., 2006). At the same time, the allocation of attention is not

inconsequential, as it determines what issues make it on the agenda in the first place (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962), and it also determines the vigour with which a policy solution is being pursued once the issue is on the agenda.

The combined time-series and cross-sectional structure of the data is particularly well-suited for the application of quasi-experimental research designs to examine the potential effect of a change in the type of working party chair on the distribution of the Council's political attention. Before the Lisbon Treaty, all working parties were chaired by the rotating Presidency. Once the Lisbon Treaty provisions were implemented, working parties in the area of CFSP were chaired by an EEAS representative of the HR, but working parties relating to issues in external economic relations (i.e. trade and development) continued to be chaired by the rotating Presidency. Thus, the research design does not only enable before-and-after comparisons, but in some instances also cross-sectional comparisons with a 'control group' in the form of trade and development working parties. This type of comparison allows us to distinguish between the effect of the establishment of supranational chairs and the effects of other time-varying variables affecting all working groups in a similar way. Finally, the long timeframe of the research design permits differentiating short-term changes as a result of the new chair from the simple continuation of pre-existing temporal trends.

Of course, the allocation of political attention in an institution over time is not solely determined by the priorities of the agenda-setter but may be influenced by other developments as well. The foreign policy agenda in particular is often driven by external events and changes in public problem perceptions. Unfortunately, detailed, comprehensive and reliable data on either agenda setting priorities or international developments and crises are not readily available. Such data would need to provide trustworthy information about the agenda-setting priorities and external problem developments for each of the 37 policy areas distinguished in this study. Rather than analysing imperfect measures of these concepts in a multiple regression framework, this study follows a design-based approach to making causal inferences. The research design employed here is akin to an interrupted time-series design, which assumes that, apart from the intervention, all other variables affecting the dependent variable remain constant over time. This assumption is most plausible directly around the time of the intervention. Unless some other independent variable happened to suddenly change its value at the same time as the intervention, we can attribute the change in the time trend of the dependent variable to the intervention.

This means that only an abrupt and statistically significant change in the level or slope of the time-series of political attention around the time of the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 is treated as evidence in favour of an effect of a change in the type of chair. Changes at a later point in time might be delayed effects of the change in the chair, or they might be the result of other developments. The current research design cannot distinguish between these two possibilities. At the same time, focusing on abrupt and statistically significant changes in the slope or level of the time trend around the time of the entry into force of the Lisbon

Treaty allows differentiating between the effect of the establishment of the HR and effects of more incremental and continuous processes like, for example, the increasing politicisation of the EU. It is also unlikely that features of individual proposals, like their complexity or controversy, are responsible for such an abrupt change. These variables would need to have changed value in the same direction simultaneously, across a large number of proposals, exactly at this particular point in time.

The effects of the establishment of the HR on political attention in the CFSP

The following analyses examine the expected effects of changes in the type of chair on the allocation of political attention in the Council. All analyses focus on the time period between the start of 2001 and the end of 2014, resulting in 18 pre-Lisbon and 10 post-Lisbon semesters for the temporal comparisons.[6] Depending on the conceptualisation, measurement, and observed value distribution of the outcome variable, the analyses rely on different types of regression models and measure the outcome variable at different levels of aggregation. Where an inspection of the data indicates non-linear time trends, statistical models that allow for more flexible functional forms are employed. Basing the estimation of time trends on local data also means that observations further removed from the intervention threshold have little effect on the analysis results.

Some analyses also focus on particular sub-samples of the data. The most comprehensive and disaggregated version of the data consist of 1036 observations of the number of working party meetings per semester, but more aggregated or sub-sample analyses reduce this number accordingly. To investigate whether the change in the chair had any effect on the outcome variables, the regression models generally include a time trend, a variable indicating the post-Lisbon Treaty period and an interaction of these two variables. The results of the analyses are presented in the form of scatterplots that show the model's predicted values of the outcome variable, together with 95% confidence intervals, superimposed upon the observed values of the outcome variable. These plots show whether there was an abrupt step change in the outcome variable around the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, a change in the time trend around that date, or both.

### Continuity and efficiency of foreign and security policy-making

To examine the hypothesis that the establishment of chairs with longer terms in office leads to more continuity in the agenda of collective decision-making bodies, the difference in the number of meetings of a working party from one semester to another is considered as an indicator of volatility.[7] More continuity in the agenda of the Council should be reflected in more incremental change in the number of meetings of a particular working party from one semester to another. Figure 1 plots the absolute semester-by-semester difference in the number of meetings for all
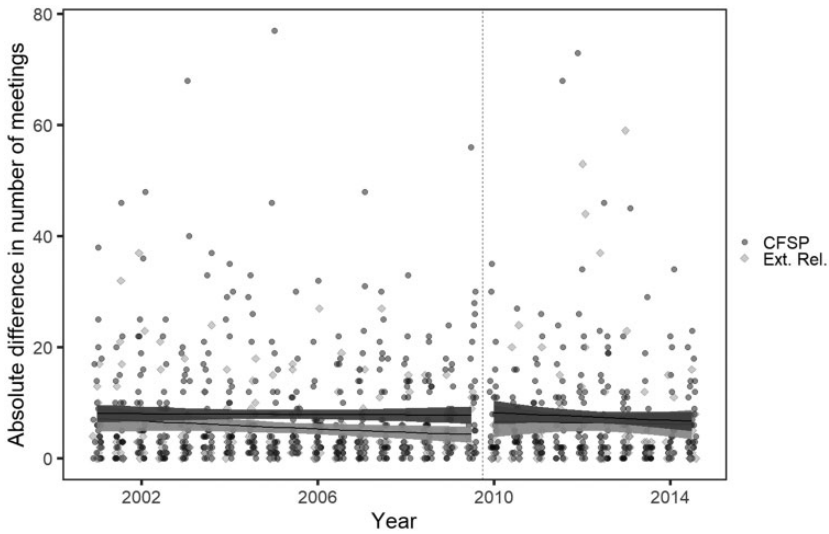
Figure 1. Half-yearly change in the allocation of political attention, 2001–2014.
Note: The data points show absolute differences between subsequent semesters in the number of meetings of working parties in the area of CFSP (dark circles) and External Relations (light diamonds); $N = 1036$. The dashed vertical line divides pre- and post-Lisbon Treaty semesters. Predicted values and confidence intervals derive from a negative binomial regression, where the dependent variable is regressed against a linear time trend interacted with variables indicating policy area (CFSP/Ext. Rel.) and pre-/post-Lisbon Treaty time period: $Difference_i = exp(\alpha + \beta_1 Time + \beta_2 Lisbon + \beta_3 Area + \beta_4 Time \times Area + \beta_5 Time \times Lisbon + \beta_6 Area \times Lisbon + \beta_7 Time \times Lisbon \times Area + \varepsilon_i)$.
CFSP: Common Foreign and Security Policy; Ext. Rel.: External Relations.

foreign affairs working parties, distinguishing between CFSP and External Relations working parties. Since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the CFSP working parties have been chaired by the HR, but the External Relations working parties continue to be chaired by the rotating Presidency. Thus, the latter essentially constitute a 'control group'. The outcome variable is a count variable and exhibits an over-dispersed distribution. Thus, a negative binomial regression is used to estimate the predicted values represented by the lines in the plot. The explanatory variables include a three-way interaction of a linear time trend with indicator variables for the type of working party and the post-Lisbon period. All lower-order interactions and basic terms are included in the regression equation as well. Figure 1 shows that the predicted values for the CFSP working parties are essentially stable throughout the pre- and post-Lisbon period. The predicted values for the External Relations working parties are somewhat larger in the post-Lisbon period than in the pre-Lisbon period, but the change is not statistically significant. Thus, Figure 1 and the underlying regression analysis do not support the contention that chairs with a longer time-horizon lead to more continuity in the policy agenda.
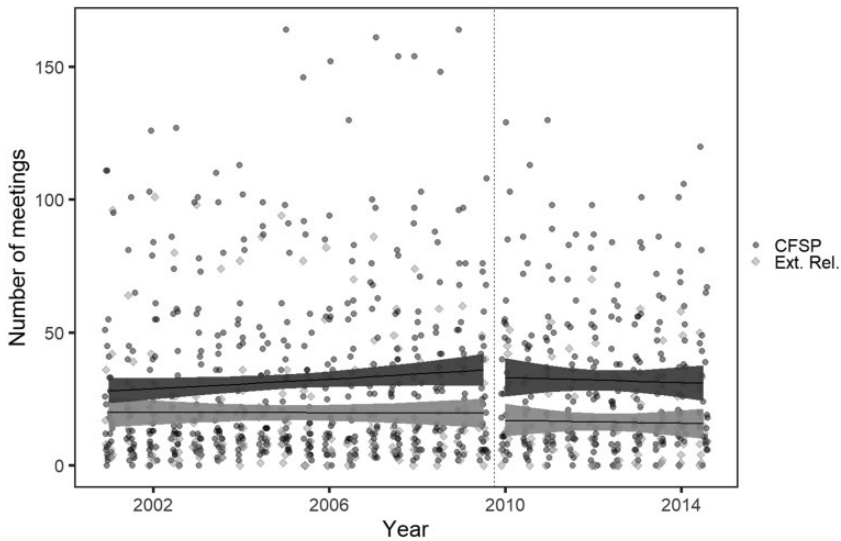
Figure 2. Efficiency in the allocation of political attention, 2001–2014.
Note: The data points show the total number of meetings per semester of working parties in the area of CFSP
(dark circles) and External Relations (light diamonds); $N = 1036$. For further details, see note to Figure 1.
CFSP: Common Foreign and Security Policy; Ext. Rel.: External Relations.

The advantages of supranational chairs in providing high-quality, neutral and
generally acceptable policy proposals should manifest itself in a more efficient use
of valuable meeting time. Figure 2 plots the number of meetings per semester for
all working parties, again distinguishing between CFSP and External Relations
working parties. The outcome variable is an over-dispersed count of the number of
meetings. Thus, the predicted values are based on a negative binomial regression
with the same specification of explanatory variables as in the previous analysis.
The figure indicates a slightly increasing trend in the number of CFSP working
party meetings before the Lisbon Treaty entered into force, which seems to have
been brought to a halt afterwards. However, the pre-Lisbon Treaty slope of the
time trend is only statistically different from zero at the 10% level of significance;
and neither the post-Lisbon intercept nor the slope is statistically different from
their pre-Lisbon counterparts. The plot also shows that the number of meetings in
the area of External Relations are essentially stable throughout the study period.
Thus, the hypothesis that supranational chairs lead to more efficient agenda-
management is also not supported.

The analyses so far have rejected the idea that supranational chairs result in
more policy continuity and efficiency. However, even if the appointment of supra-
national chairs does not constitute an effective response to ensure more continuity
and efficiency in foreign and security policy-making, these chairs might still be in a
position to redirect existing resources to systematically change the allocation of

attention to different policy areas and individual issues, either in the pursuit of the collective good or self-interested objectives. The next two analyses investigate this possibility by examining the over-time allocation of political attention, first to individual horizontal policy issues and geographical areas in the CFSP, and then to different areas at the aggregate level of entire policy sub-fields.

(Re-)allocation of political attention in foreign and security policy-making

Figures 3 and 4 plot the meetings held by a working party as a percentage of the total number of meetings held by all working parties in a particular policy sub-area. Figure 3 examines the temporal change in the relative allocation of political attention to horizontal policy issues, and Figure 4 examines the temporal change in the relative allocation of political attention to different regions of the world.[8] Each panel in these figures shows a time-series of 28 semester observations of the share of meetings held by a specific working party. An effect of the establishment of supranational chairs should manifest itself in the form of a sudden change in the level or direction of the share of meetings around the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the date of which is indicated by the vertical line in the panels. As discussed above, this research design constitutes quite a conservative test. For example, a number of panels in Figure 3 (e.g. Consular Affairs, Conventional Arms Exports, Global Disarmaments and Arms Control, United Nations and Transatlantic) show a significant change in the time trend half-way through the term of the first office holder, but because of their temporal distance from the institutional change, these developments cannot be unequivocally attributed to the introduction of supranational chairs. Given the rather idiosyncratic movements of the time series at this lower level of aggregation, the predicted values plotted in Figure 3 are based on more flexible additive models, which model the share of the meetings as a nonparametric function of time, interacted with a variable differentiating the pre- and post-Lisbon Treaty period.

   Overall, the panels of Figures 3 and 4 show very few instances of an immediate and substantive change in the time series around the time of the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. In most instances, the confidence intervals of the immediate pre- and post-Lisbon predicted values overlap considerably, and there is no discernible change in the direction of the time trend at the time of the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. Two exceptions are the horizontal Working Party on Conventional Arms Exports (Figure 3) and the regional Working Party on Africa (Figure 4). In the case of the Conventional Arms Exports issue area, the share of meetings rose to unprecedented levels directly after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, in a relatively clear break with the pre-Lisbon Treaty time trend. In the case of Africa, a steep increasing trend in the share of the meetings devoted to that region of the world in the years preceding the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty was brought to an abrupt halt directly afterwards. Although International Terrorism shows a similar development, the reversal of the rising time trend seems to have set in before the Lisbon Treaty entered into force.
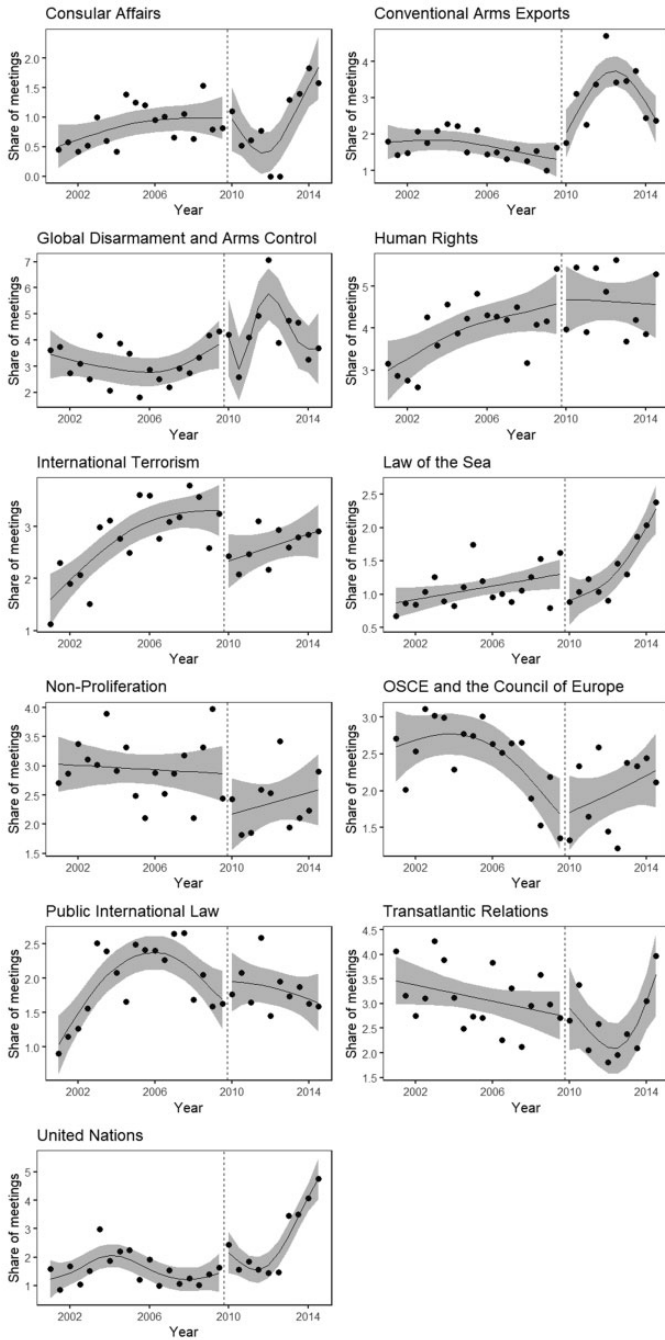
Figure 3. Allocation of political attention to horizontal issues, 2001–2014.
Note: See note to Figure 4.
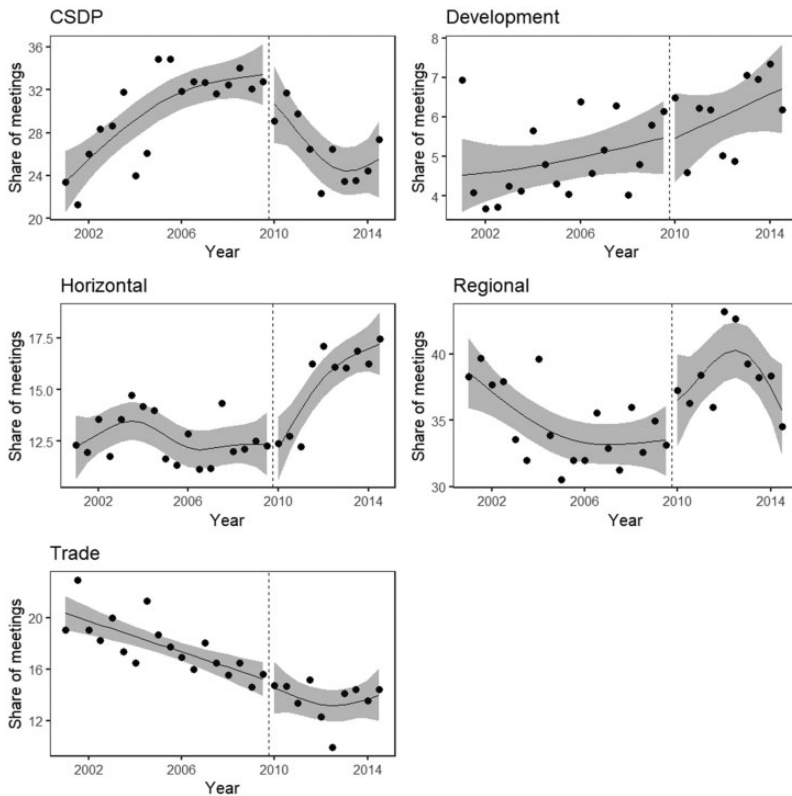OSCE: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.
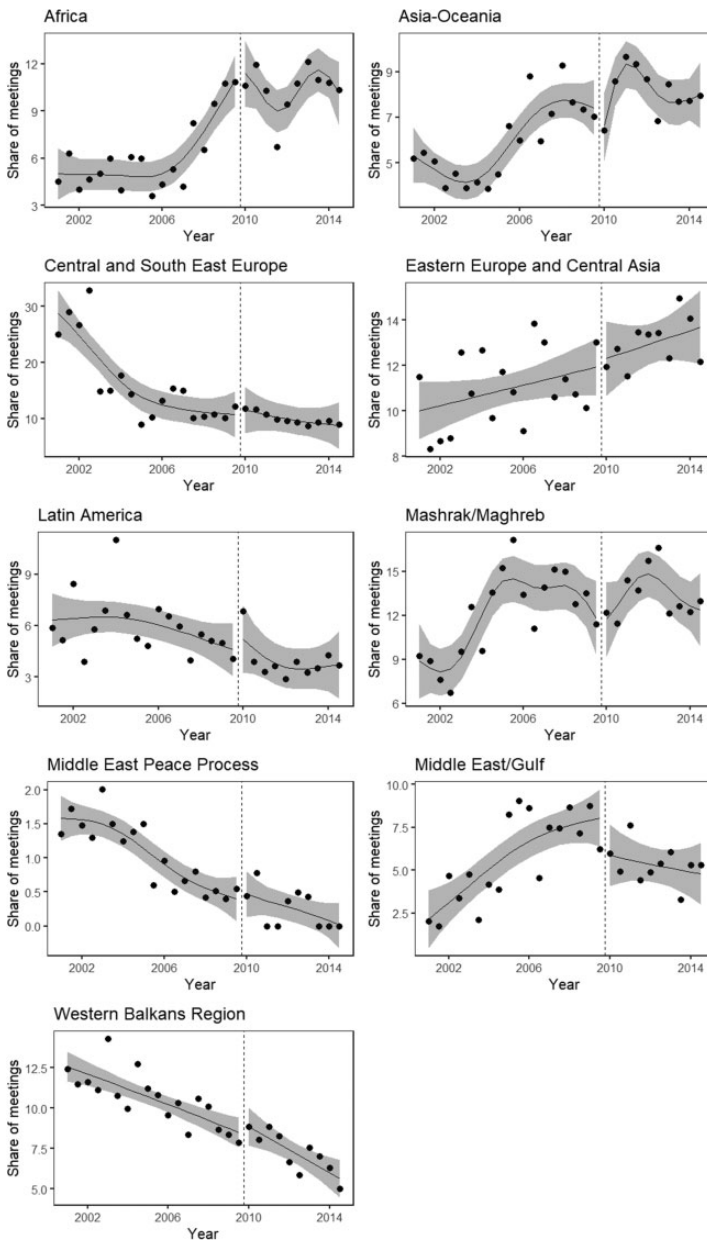
Figure 4. Allocation of political attention to geographical areas, 2001–2014.

Note: In each panel, the data points show the share (in %) of meetings of CFSP working parties devoted to a particular issue; $N = 28$. The dashed vertical line divides pre- and post-Lisbon Treaty semesters. Predicted values and confidence intervals are based on an additive model, where the dependent variable is regressed against a smooth function of time interacted with an indicator variable for the pre- and post-Lisbon Treaty time period: $Meetings\%_i = \alpha + f(Time) + \beta \times Lisbon + f(Time) \times Lisbon + \varepsilon_i$.

To further investigate the possibility that the establishment of the HR affected the distribution of attention at a higher level of aggregation across entire policy sub-areas, Figure 5 plots working party meetings in policy sub-areas as a share of the total number of meetings in foreign affairs. The predicted values and confidence intervals are based on the same additive model specification as the preceding analysis. The External Relations areas of Development and Trade show a straightforward continuation of pre-Lisbon time trends, but the CFSP areas chaired by the HR indicate a strong redirection of attention from CSDP to horizontal and, to a lesser extent, regional working parties. Furthermore, the examination of the over-time variation in the absolute number of meetings in different policy sub-areas reported in the Online appendix shows that this reallocation of attention is primarily driven by a strong reduction in the number of meetings in the CSDP.

Figure 5. Allocation of political attention to foreign affairs sub-fields over time, 2001–2014.
Note: In each panel, the data points show the share (in %) of meetings of CFSP working parties devoted to a particular policy sub-area; $N = 28$. For further details, see note to Figure 4.
CSDP: Common Security and Defence Policy.

In summary, the analysis of the relative allocation of attention to horizontal issues and geographical areas within CFSP shows few signs of a systematic emphasis or de-emphasis of particular issues after the Lisbon Treaty entered into force. Notable exceptions are the strong initial increase in the share of meetings of the Working Party on Conventional Arms Exports and the levelling-off of the increasing trend in the share of meetings of the Working Party on Africa. In general, over-time changes to the share of attention devoted to different regions of the world are rather continuous and incremental. Fluctuations in the share of attention devoted to horizontal issues are somewhat stronger, but their timing usually does not coincide with the change in the type of chairperson in 2009. At the more aggregated level of policy sub-areas, the analysis shows a relatively clear re-allocation of attention away from CSDP to other CFSP areas, especially those of a horizontal nature. The reduced attention to Africa might be related to this development as well, as the majority of CSDP missions operate in this region of the world. All in all, the analyses give no indication that the establishment of the HR resulted in a more continuous and efficiently processed policy agenda in the CFSP. Few indications also exist that the change in the chair of CFSP Council bodies led to a re-allocation of political attention across horizontal issues or geographical areas. The only sign of a potential impact of the HR can be seen at the level of policy sub-areas, where much less attention has been paid to the CSDP after the HR came into office.

Conclusion

Neo-Liberal Institutionalist and Liberal Intergovernmentalist arguments suggest that states establish international organisations and empower supranational agents to solve collective action problems or reduce transaction costs (Keohane, 1984; Moravcsik, 1993; Stein, 1982). The delegation of authority follows a principal–agent logic, in which rational actors compare different institutional arrangements according to their anticipated consequences and choose the arrangement that promises the most benefits (Pollack, 1997; Tallberg, 2002). In the context of the EU, constitutional debates around the creation of the HR and the EEAS nicely illustrate this logic of institutional choice. EU foreign policy has long been criticised for a lack of coherence, discontinuity, and cumbersome decision-making processes. In the view of its proponents (see European Convention, 2002), the establishment of the HR and its administrative support body, the EEAS, was a step towards overcoming these problems. The goal was to enable the EU to become a more effective actor on the world stage. In terms of agenda-setting in the Council's CFSP, removing the powers of the chair of Council bodies from the rotating Presidency held by national governments and investing them in an impartial supranational actor with a longer time-horizon was expected to result in more continuity and efficiency in foreign and security policy-making. However, the preceding analysis shows little indication that the establishment of the HR fulfilled these expectations. The over-time volatility in the amount of attention

devoted to different policy issues did not significantly decrease, and the overall amount of attention required to process different issues did not subside either.

Yet, even if the establishment of the HR did not result in the collective benefits hoped for, more fundamental assumptions of principal–agent theory and rational institutionalist thinking more generally suggest that chairs should be able to shape the Council's agenda according to their own priorities, given their powers and resources. Whether chairs are expected to use their position for the collective good or to advance their own self-interest depends on secondary assumptions. No matter what motivates them, the procedural prerogatives of chairs of Council bodies should enable them to lower or increase the amount of attention devoted to different issues and policy areas (Häge, 2017; Tallberg, 2003; Warntjen, 2007). Yet, pre- and post-Lisbon Treaty comparisons show few signs of abrupt changes, either in level or direction, in the relative amount of attention devoted to different horizontal CFSP issues or geographical areas. Significant change is only identifiable at the level of entire policy sub-areas. Here, the analysis shows a strong reduction in the amount of attention devoted to the CSDP.

Encouragingly, these findings are broadly consistent with existing qualitative studies that indicate the limited effectiveness of the HR as an agenda-setter (Helwig and Rüger, 2014; Vanhoonacker and Pomorska, 2013). The finding of a reduction in the amount of attention devoted to the CSDP also reinforces Vanhoonacker and Pomorska's (2013) assessment that crisis management was one of the few areas in which the HR's potential for agenda-setting materialised. Whereas more than 20 civilian and military crisis missions had been launched between 2003 and 2009, no new missions were launched during the first two-and-a-half years of Ashton's terms; and, apparently, Ashton showed very little interest in existing missions and the further development of the operational infrastructure for directing them. As many EU missions take place in Africa, the finding that the steep trend in allocating more attention to this region of the world was suddenly halted once Ashton was appointed in 2009 also fits this pattern. Despite pressures from member states for more engagement, the HR 'has managed to keep a minimal agenda' in the area of CSDP (Vanhoonacker and Pomorska, 2013: 1328).

Even though the reduction in the attention devoted to crisis management is an example of negative agenda control, it indicates the *potential* of the HR to fulfil a more effective agenda-setting role. For practical reasons, this study focused on the time period until the end of 2014, which coincides to a large extent with the term of Catherine Ashton as the first holder of the post before Federica Mogherini was appointed as her successor on 1 November 2014. The establishment of the new post and the EEAS meant that institutional, organisational and operational questions required much of the HR's attention at the beginning of her term (Allen and Smith, 2011). Still, Ashton was frequently criticised for an inept and unassertive enactment of the role (Allen and Smith, 2012; Helwig and Rüger, 2014; Pomorska and Vanhoonacker, 2015; Vanhoonacker and Pomorska, 2013). The current study shows that the establishment of the HR had little *immediate* effect

on the CFSP agenda of the Council after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. Yet, whether subsequent post holders, which can rely on an already experienced administrative support service and might pursue more ambitious objectives, take better advantage of the post's resources and procedural prerogatives will be an interesting question for future research.

The drastically reduced attention devoted to defence and security policy during Ashton's terms in office provides a glimpse of the HR's power to shape the Council's foreign and security policy agenda. Of course, given the unanimity requirement in the Council for foreign and security policy decisions, it might be easier for the HR to keep non-priority issues *off* the agenda than to push her own priorities *on* the agenda. However, the previous HR, Javier Solana, seems to have managed to do just that. Dijkstra (2012) argues that Solana and his officials were instrumental in putting various crisis management missions on the Council's agenda; and they did so with less far-reaching powers and fewer resources available to them pre-Lisbon. In this light, the stark reduction in attention to the CSDP under Ashton might not be due to active efforts to keep crisis management operations off the agenda, but simply a result of not pursuing a similarly ambitious agenda in this area as her predecessor. Either way, the results of this study, interpreted in light of findings of existing qualitative research, reinforce the rational institutionalist mantra that it is the interaction of preferences and institutions that determines policy outcomes (Hinich and Munger, 1997: 17). Rather than insufficient institutional competences, a lack of motivation and a lack of ability to fully utilise these competences are the more likely causes for the absence of an effect of the HR on the EU's foreign policy agenda during the study period. If member states aim to realise the potential of the new institutional arrangements in the CFSP to make the EU a more effective actor on the world stage, they need to select office holders with the ambition to fully exploit the available resources and prerogatives.

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Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. Throughout this article, the term 'supranational' is used in its literal meaning, referring to an entity that has power or authority that transcends national boundaries (see, for example, the entry in the Cambridge Dictionary at https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/supranational). The use of this term does not imply that the HR pursues an independent or even integrationist agenda or the lack of collective control by member states.
2. The Amsterdam Treaty had already introduced the post of 'High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy' in 1999, which was occupied by Javier Solana until 2009. However, this role lacked the scheduling powers of the chair of Council meetings, the capacity for cross-institutional coordination, and the independent administrative resources conferred onto the Lisbon Treaty-version of the HR.
3. Throughout this article, the term 'functionalist' refers to a type of theory that explains a phenomenon by the function it fulfils and should not be confused with (Neo-) Functionalist International Relations theory.
4. To simplify the exposition, the remainder of this discussion does not explicitly differentiate between the HR and her representatives. Of course, in practice, most meetings of Council bodies below the ministerial level are not chaired by the HR herself, but on her behalf by an official from the EEAS.
5. The Online appendix provides a more detailed discussion of these measurement issues.
6. The Treaty of Lisbon entered into force on 1 December 2009. Since the temporal unit of analysis are semesters, the full second semester of 2009 is treated as a pre-Lisbon semester.
7. The outcome variable is measured as the absolute difference in the number of meetings of a working party from one semester to another. Several working parties have a very small number of meetings or no meetings at all in some semesters, which makes the use of percentage changes problematic.
8. These results are replicated in the Online appendix measuring attention in terms of the absolute number of meetings rather than the share of meetings. While an analysis of percentages is conceptually more appropriate for an investigation of the *relative* allocation of attention to different issue areas, over-time variations in percentages are mechanically linked (i.e. by definition, percentages add up to 100%). The issue area(s) that drive changes in the relative allocation of attention are more clearly identifiable when absolute numbers are being considered.

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