

Can small states influence policy in an EU of 25 members?

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Survey

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1. Introduction

When the European Communities were founded in the 1950s, a considerable effort was made to allow the small Benelux (Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) member states to feel at ease with the larger members (Germany, France and Italy). The institutional structures of the Communities bore the hallmark of a balanced decision-making system between the small and large states. It took account of the small states' fear that their larger partners might try to control the agenda and become dominant within the new institutions. The small states, proportionally,¹ gained a bigger voice within the decision-making system compared to the larger ones. This was enshrined in the Treaties and mainly took the form of each member state's right to veto within the Council of Ministers, equal access to the policy-making structure of the European Commission and a proportionally higher number of representatives from the small states in the European Assembly. In addition, the fact that

1 According to the number of inhabitants, GDP, territorial size and potential military capability.