

4. Relationships with the Commission

The small member states have always demanded that the Commission act as a mediator between their interests and those of the large states. Small states have for a long time been seen as defenders of the role of the Commission in the Union. This is manifested in the emphasis that they put on the continuing role of the Commission in treaty reform. They often find it easier to get their ideas accepted within the Commission's committees than in the Council, where they face a heavier challenge from other member states.²⁴ However, small states do not get anything for free from the Commission. They, like their bigger partners, have to convince the Commission before it can support their stand.

In order to succeed in influencing EU decision-making, small states need to be able to secure the support of the Commission in the initial stages of negotiation. As a result, small states try to get their ideas accepted in the early stages of policy-making within the Commission. They use the smallness of their administrations to develop *a routine working process* with the Commission in order to get the Commission on their side. A few officials, often just one or two, in a small state are in direct contact with Commission officials for each EU policy sector. Often, there is only one rapporteur for the Commission's proposals. This small number of staff both in the small state and in the Commission simplifies contact. These officials are likely to know each other and it is often easier for the rapporteur to understand the problems which a small state faces because of its narrower interests. Moreover, it is particularly relevant for the Commission to develop a good relationship with officials from the small states since they tend to be involved at all levels of EU affairs. These national officials can make an important contribution to the drafting of proposals within the Commission. They often respond more swiftly to new developments in negotiations and make decisions autonomously. The flexibility and informality of small administrations facilitates mutual understanding between the officials of the small states and those of the Commission. Thus, *a routine working process* between each of the small states and the Commission is created, whereby the small states increase their chances of getting their views incorporated in

24 Thorhallsson, 2000. *ibid.*