Analysis of Agenda Setting in the European Council, 2009–2014

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List of Acronyms

CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
GAERC	General Affairs and External Relations Council
EC	European Community
ECB	European Central Bank
ECCs	European Council Conclusions
EP	European Parliament
EPC	European Political Cooperation
EPP	European People's Party
ESM	European Stability Mechanism
EU	European Union
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
OMC	Open Method of Coordination
SMEs	Small and medium-sized enterprises
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
TEU	Treaty on European Union

Executive Summary

The Treaty of Lisbon made the European Council an EU institution in legal terms, while its tasks remained virtually unchanged. It also introduced the function of a permanent President, a position which was occupied by Herman Van Rompuy for two consecutive terms until December 2014. This study presents an analysis of the European Council's agenda in the five-year period under Herman Van Rompuy's Presidency.

Between December 2009 and November 2014, 35 summits took place, five of which were informal and another five extraordinary. This extensive level of summitry continued a trend which had begun several years earlier, and offered increased opportunities to address sensitive issues and focusing events. It ensured relative stability with respect to the annual output of the European Council as measured via its conclusions.

The most prominent topics on the agenda were macroeconomics, foreign policy, and business and finance. While the first two have always been substantially addressed, the latter is an exception, clearly brought about by the global financial crisis and the need to find solutions to its negative effects on the EU. The crisis also enhanced attention to macroeconomics – a domain which was even more prominent than usual. Meanwhile this had an impact on other areas, either by causing a spill-over in attention (e.g. on employment) or constraining the leeway for attention to other topics, even foreign policy.

In the post-Lisbon period, the European Council took a predominantly reactive approach to foreign affairs. Attention to both general foreign policy matters and specific domains with an external dimension (e.g. defence, civil rights, or immigration) was activated foremost by focusing events. The institution confirmed its inclination to react to conflicts in the neighbourhood (Arab Spring, Ukraine crisis, Syrian Civil War, Israel-Gaza conflict). Among these, the unrest in Ukraine with escalating violence and the Russian annexation of Crimea dominated and made the parties to the conflict the most prominent third countries mentioned in the conclusions over the entire five-year period.

Another key force behind the composition of the agenda relates to 'rolling dossiers', recurring themes or files in progress that feature issues for which political agreement between the Member States has to be reached at European Council level. Such matters belong to different sectors, and in the post-Lisbon period included the Multiannual Financial Framework (with a focus on agriculture and regional policy), political appointments and energy policy. The development of a comprehensive energy policy for the EU began in 2006, and discussions in the recent period were driven by a desire to conclude plans on which work was ongoing (in particular to complete the internal market in energy).

The European Council's pattern of attention follows the punctuated equilibrium model, in which relative stability is interspersed by large and erratic changes. The post-Lisbon agenda is notable for its comparatively more punctuated nature. This was the result of three phenomena. First, some very low-key topics suddenly gained prominence as a result of budgetary negotiations. Second, the preoccupation with finding solutions to the economic and financial crisis in 2010 constrained the space for less urgent topics (like immigration), which reappeared the year after, further boosted by focusing events in the neighbourhood. Last, the overcrowding of the agenda with urgent matters made exclusion of topics more common.

While *de jure* responsible primarily for setting goals and identifying broad interests, the European Council in the post-Lisbon period was also much involved in operational matters, and this was only partially related to the delegation of tasks to other institutions. This is likely to be an effect of the economic and financial crisis as operational language dominated particularly in the micro- and macroeconomic domains. However, attaching an urgency status to strategic priorities could also trigger operational discussions, as attention to energy demonstrates. In the areas of foreign policy, external trade and defence the strategic share of the agenda was larger.

Interactions with the Member States and the EU institutions, in particular the Commission, the Council and the Parliament, were quite common. The European Council received input for its meetings primarily from the Commission, except in foreign policy, where the Council had a leading role. The Commission was also the actor most associated with expectations for future input, except in macroeconomics, where the Member States had an equal stake. Delegation occurred on multiple levels simultaneously, with differences across policy fields. Higher stress was put on the Council in macroeconomics, the Council and the Parliament in business and finance, the Member States in employment and the Commission in energy. The Council was primarily requested to act in foreign policy, although the High Representative and the Commission followed closely.

The first five years after Lisbon were full of crises, which required involvement from the top political level in the EU. This made issue attention more uneven than usual, elevated the economy to the highest priority level, and reduced the space for strategic thinking. Overall, developments in this period emphasised the decisive role of the European Council in many policy areas, governed both intergovernmentally and by the Community method.

Introduction

The European Council brings together the Heads of State or Government of the European Union (EU) Member States, accompanied by the President of the European Commission and, since the Treaty of Lisbon, the President of the European Council. Since 1975 it has conducted regular meetings and discussed the top priorities of the Union, laying down directions for Community action and taking decisions on politically sensitive issues. Because of its high political authority, the European Council has had a substantial impact on the agenda of the EU, mostly via informal channels (Eggermont, 2012; Werts, 2008; Wessels, 2008b).

The Treaty of Lisbon, which entered in force in December 2009, inaugurated a new era for the European Council with respect to its legal presence. It was listed among the official EU institutions for the first time, even if the main functions of the European Council had been enshrined in the treaties much earlier. An important new change that Lisbon introduced was a permanent President in charge of chairing and organising summits, which used to be the task of the rotating Council Presidency. The first holder of the post, Herman Van Rompuy, ended his two consecutive terms in office in December 2014.

The goal of this study is to analyse the agenda of the European Council during the Presidency of Herman Van Rompuy or, in other words, during the first five years after entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. It aims to provide a comprehensive and clear perspective on the meetings between the Heads of State or Government and the issues discussed at summits. Besides an examination of the depth and nature of the discussions, the analysis also offers insights into the logic behind the choice of items and the shifts in attention between topics. The time frame is December 2009 – November 2014, but in order to draw inferences and general conclusions, comparisons are often made with previous periods.

The research is based on a quantitative analysis of the European Council Conclusions (ECCs) complemented by qualitative examinations of particular elements of the agenda that emerge from the results of the quantitative analysis. As the study is intended for a wide audience, technical and methodological aspects are kept to a minimum in the main text and elaborated upon further in Annex I. In addition, Annex II contains a list of the issue and topic categories used to classify attention.

The study consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 discusses in detail the European Council as an EU institution with an emphasis on comparing the post-Lisbon setting to that before December 2009. The sections review the establishment of the European Council, the legal framework around it, the institution's functions, the system of chairmanship, the meetings, and the agenda and policy output. Chapter 2 presents the structure of the agenda. It estimates the number of meetings and classifies their type. It also analyses the size of the ECCs. Chapter 3 offers an extensive investigation of the topics featured on the agenda. It starts by elaborating on the attention to policy domains in the period December 2009 – November 2014 and then moves to a comparison with specific periods and the full course of existence of the European Council. In addition, the chapter evaluates changes in attention and applies the punctuated equilibrium theory to the data, again in a comparative perspective. Chapter 4 concentrates on the external dimension of the agenda. It goes beyond the topic foreign policy in order to understand what

domains come up for discussion owing to external pressures and what exactly motivates the attention they receive. An analysis of the most prominent third countries in the ECCs is also carried out. Chapter 5 studies the European Council's institutional roles and interactions. It classifies the attention into strategic and operational language and analyses differences across policy areas. Furthermore, interactions with other institutions and Member States are discussed both in general terms and with respect to variation across domains. The report ends with a conclusion.

Chapter 1: The European Council before and after the Treaty of Lisbon

I. Establishment

The European Council became operative in 1975 as a top level arena for regular meetings of the Heads of State or Government of the European Community (EC). The Heads of State or Government were accompanied by the President of the Commission and assisted by their Foreign Ministers and another member of the Commission. The institution was born out of 'necessity', to improve the coordination of various matters at European level and take decisions on gridlocked issues as well as Community problems of increasing complexity in a context of growing economic interdependence and desire for a strong political role in the world (von Donat, 1987; Werts, 1992).

The document which can be regarded as the 'birth certificate' of the institution is the Communiqué of the Heads of State or Government from the Paris Summit held on 9-10 December 1974. Summits had occurred irregularly since the beginning of the integration process, but in December 1974 it was decided that meetings at least three times per year were necessary to face successfully both internal and external challenges for the EC. The instigators of this institutionalised summitry were Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and Helmut Schmidt, the French President and the German Chancellor at that time, who aimed to secure a space for free discussions (Werts, 1992; Westlake & Galloway, 2004).

The establishment of the European Council occurred outside the EC Treaty framework. The body was first mentioned in the Single European Act of 1986 with very few provisions. In the Treaty of Lisbon, signed in 2007, the European Council was finally included on the list of EU institutions (Title III: Provisions on the Institutions). The powers of the body were therefore not derived from legal provisions. The authority of the European Council's constitutive members as the top executives in all Member States accounted for the importance of the body in the EC's/EU's institutional framework.

II. Legal Framework

The Treaty of Lisbon stipulates the composition and functions of the European Council. Nowadays the body consists of the Heads of State or Government of the EU Member States together with the President of the European Council and the President of the Commission. The High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy does not belong to the institution but is expected to take part in its work.[1] Decisions are generally taken by consensus, except for situations where the Treaties provide otherwise.[2] When the European Council conducts formal

[1] Treaty of Lisbon (ToL), Title III, Art. 9 B(2) | Treaty on European Union (TEU, Consolidated version), Title III, Art. 15(2).
[2] Treaty of Lisbon (ToL), Title III, Art. 9 B(4) | TEU (Consolidated version), Title III, Art. 15(4).

voting, the Presidents of the European Council and the Commission do not take part in the vote.[3]

Currently, the role of the European Council is to:

> 'provide the Union with the necessary impetus for its development and ... define the general political directions and priorities thereof'[4]
>
> as well as to 'identify the strategic interests and objectives of the Union' related 'to the common foreign and security policy and to other areas of the external action of the Union'[5].

This first element of the role was inserted into the EC legal framework with the Treaty of Maastricht.[6] The formulation was almost the same; only instead of 'directions and priorities' the word 'guidelines' was used. However, the overall perception of the European Council's primary function has existed even longer. In the Solemn Declaration on the European Union, adopted by the European Council at its meeting on 17-19 June 1983 in Stuttgart, a similar role was envisaged. The body was set to provide 'a general political impetus to the construction of Europe', define 'approaches' for furthering it and produce 'general political guidelines', including on European Political Cooperation (EPC), the predecessor of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).[7] Nevertheless, this document had no official legal standing and, therefore, the Treaty of Maastricht can be seen as the first formal statement of the European Council's functions.

The Maastricht Treaty also added a few specific provisions on the institution's role in particular policy areas. These included among others definition of the 'principles' and 'general guidelines for the common foreign and security policy'[8] and the task to 'discuss a conclusion on the broad guidelines of the economic policies of the Member States and of the Community'[9]. The Treaty of Amsterdam extended the legal role of the European Council further, especially as regards defence matters[10] and employment policy[11]. It was expected to discuss defence-related issues and progressively frame a common defence policy. With respect to employment, the European Council was tasked with reviewing the employment situation annually and adopting conclusions to serve as the basis for specific guidelines to the Members States adopted by the other institutions.

An important consideration regarding the tasks of the European Council is that it does not exercise legislative functions. This is clearly stipulated in the Treaty of Lisbon.[12]

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[3] ToL, Part 6, Title I, Section 1a, Art. 201a(1) | Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU, Consolidated version), Title I, Ch. 1, Art. 235(1).
[4] ToL, Title III, Art. 9 B(1) | TEU (Consolidated version), Title III, Art. 15(1).
[5] ToL, Title III, Art. 10 B(1) | TEU (Consolidated version), Title V, Ch. 1, Art. 22(1).
[6] Treaty of Maastricht (ToM), Title I, Art. D | TEU (Consolidated version), Title III, Art. 15.
[7] The list of tasks was even more comprehensive, including in addition deliberation of matters concerning the European Union, initiation of cooperation in new policy areas and expression of common positions on external affairs.
[8] ToM, Title V, Art. J.8(1) | TEU (Consolidated version), Title V, Ch. 2, Art. 26.
[9] ToM, Title VI, Chapter 1, Art. 103(2) | TFEU (Consolidated version), Title VIII, Ch.1, Art. 121.
[10] Treaty of Amsterdam (ToA), Title V, Art. 13 (and Art. 17) | TEU (Consolidated version), Title V, Ch. 2, Art. 26.
[11] ToA, Title VIa, Art. 128 | TFEU (Consolidated version), Title IX, Art. 148.
[12] ToL, Title III, Art. 9 B | TEU (Consolidated version), Title III, Art. 15(1).

III. Role in the EU

1. Arbitration

In EU scholarship the European Council has been labelled as the 'engine' of integration (Johnston, 1994: 145), the 'supreme political authority' of the EU (Westlake & Galloway, 2004: 171), and more recently as 'the nexus of European political governance' (Foret & Rittelmeyer, 2014: 2). It served as a crucial arbiter on deadlocked issues in the early years of its existence (Werts, 1992). Nowadays, this function is less prevalent but sensitive matters are sometimes shifted to this top level and the treaties even allow for this in some areas (Chalmers, Davies, & Monti, 2010).

2. Agenda Setting

Over the years the European Council has been transformed into an informal agenda setter for the Union (Werts, 2008). It is said to be the primary venue for agenda setting in the EU via the 'high politics' route, which often involves a focusing event (Princen & Rhinard, 2006). The European Council has exercised this role by adopting important programmes and strategic documents, such as the Lisbon Agenda in 2000 or the Energy Policy for Europe Action Plan in 2007 (Wessels, 2008b). It has also acted as a successful 'political initiator', not only by drawing up broad guidelines but also by specifying priority projects and making requests for action to other institutions (Eggermont, 2012). For example, the European Council has asked the Commission to do research on different issues and communicate or come up with action on a subject, including legislative proposals. It has also called on the Council to speed up negotiations, or made particular requests to other institutions and actors. Last but not least, it has set up new temporary institutional structures for particular purposes. Examples of the latter are the Committee of the Three Wise Men[13] in 1978 and the Reflection Group 'Horizon 2020–2030' in 2007[14].

3. Constitutional Decision Making

Legal scholars usually refer to the European Council as possessing 'constitution-making powers' (Chalmers et al., 2010). The institution has therefore remained at the core of decision making on the most crucial matters for the Community (Nugent, 2010). One of these matters is key appointments. The European Council nominates the President of the Commission, who is then proposed to the European Parliament (EP) and formally elected by the latter. It officially appoints the whole Commission, after approval by the EP on the basis of a list prepared by the President-elect and adopted by the Council.[15] The European Council also appoints the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy[16] and the Executive Board of the European Central Bank (ECB)[17]. According to the Treaty of Lisbon, the European Council needs to consider the results of the EP elections when coming up with a candidate for the Commission

[13] See http://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/1999/1/1/e886f030-6db8-4158-9d02-43fb8e43b25f/publishable_en.pdf.
[14] The report produced by the Reflection Group is available at: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/librairie/PDF/QC3210249ENC.pdf.
[15] ToL, Title III, Art. 9 D, (7) | TEU (Consolidated version), Title III, Art. 17(7).
[16] Acting by a qualified majority, ToL, Title III, Art. 9 E (1) | TEU (Consolidated version), Title III, Art. 18(1).
[17] Acting by a qualified majority, ToM, Title VI, Art. 109a (2b) | TFEU (Consolidated version) Part 6, Title I, Ch. 1, Sec. 6, Art. 283(2).

President post.[18] In 2014, this rule was applied for the first time, and most of the major political groups in the EP nominated a lead candidate, or *Spitzenkandidat* (Hobolt, 2014). Eventually, the post went to Jean-Claude Junker, the nominee of the largest political party in the EP – the European People's Party (EPP). It should be noted that the EPP was also the party to which the relative majority (of more than one third) of the Heads of State or Government belonged at the time of the election.

Another of these 'constitutional' domains is enlargement. The Heads of State or Government collectively draw up the general criteria for EU enlargement, monitor accession negotiations, and have a significant influence on the accession of new Member States, even if formally the decision is taken by the Council.

Furthermore, the European Council has played an extremely important role in treaty reform, especially at the final stages of Intergovernmental Conferences (de Schoutheete & Wallace, 2002; de Schoutheete, 2012; Wallace, 2010). In 2001, it established a Convention on the Future of Europe which was tasked to prepare a draft constitution for the EU.[19] As a result of this all-inclusive process, fewer changes were made to the draft by the European Council at the subsequent IGC than in previous cases (de Schoutheete, 2012). The failed Constitutional Treaty and the later Treaty of Lisbon introduced a simplified treaty revision procedure. This new instrument is primarily in the hands of the European Council (acting by unanimity) with only consultative roles for other EU bodies, under the condition that the decision taken by the Heads of State or Government does not increase EU competences.[20]

4. Foreign Policy

As mentioned above, the European Council defines the EU's interests and goals with respect to the CFSP and other external actions. This key involvement in foreign affairs has been a main area of activity for the body since its establishment. The Paris Summit Communiqué of 1974 already stated that ensuring 'progress' and 'consistency' in the work on EPC was needed alongside the activities of the EC. The Solemn Declaration of 1983 specified that the European Council 'solemnly expresses the common position in questions of external relations'. Acting in an external capacity, the institution therefore represents a 'collective head of state' for the EU (de Schoutheete, 2006: 52). In fact, the European Council has been devoting a lot of attention to international affairs at its meetings, which take up the highest share of its overall agenda (Alexandrova, Carammia, & Timmermans, 2012; Wessels, 2008a).

Focusing events are also particularly relevant for the foreign policy agenda of the European Council.[21] Such events are generally rare, happen unexpectedly, have large scale consequences and involve harmful effects or the possibility of future harms (Birkland, 1997; 1998). Recent research presents some of the selection mechanisms used by the European Council in addressing focusing events. Notably, there is a greater likelihood that the eruption of violent conflict will be addressed than natural disasters. Focusing events are also more likely to be discussed by the Heads of State or Government when they occur in the EU's neighbourhood or involve a high number of casualties (Alexandrova, forthcoming).

[18] ToL, Title III, Art. 9 D, (7) | TEU (Consolidated version), Title III, Art. 17(7).
[19] See http://www.cvce.eu/en/collections/unit-content/-/unit/b9fe3d6d-e79c-495e-856d-9729144d2cbd/f3416b5f-da44-4703-b1f1-5ed2dcf95b97/Resources.
[20] ToL, Title VI, Art. 48 (1) and (3) | TEU (Consolidated version) Title VI, Art. 48 (1) and (3).
[21] Domestic focusing events are also important but their frequency of occurrence is much lower.

5. Policy Coordination

The newly emerging theory of deliberative intergovernmentalism argues that ever since the Treaty of Maastricht the European Council's role of decision maker has been expanding via the incorporation of new areas into European policy making with modes of governance different from formal legislative procedures (Puetter, 2013; 2014). The domains which can be placed in this framework are employment, social policy, economic governance and foreign and security policy, as well as some elements of justice and home affairs. The common trait between these fields is that they are all governed by political instruments mostly in the hands of the European Council and the Council but the resulting policy is more than a purely intergovernmental agreement. In employment, for example, in the context of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), an exchange of best practice takes place with benchmarking, peer review and lessons learning. The result is a sort of 'soft law' which is binding on the Member States to a varying extent but never comes in the form of the classic instruments: directives, regulations and decisions. Governance in these areas can therefore also be labelled as intensive transgovernmentalism, with a key role for the European Council, an active role for the Council and marginalisation or exclusion of other EU bodies (Wallace, 2010).

IV. The System of Chairmanship

European Council meetings used to be organised and chaired by the EU Presidency rotating biannually across the Member States. This special office of the chair has given rise to extensive literature around the question whether holding the EU Presidency provides an institutional advantage for the Member State in charge (see e.g. Bengtsson, Elgström, & Tallberg, 2004; Elgström, 2003; Manners, 2003; Niemann & Mak, 2010; Schout & Vanhoonacker, 2005). A recent analysis based on five countries and 25 different presidencies rejects the institutional advantage hypothesis with respect to the agenda of the European Council on the general level (i.e. not with respect to individual topics, Alexandrova & Timmermans, 2013).[22]

In December 2009, when the Treaty of Lisbon entered into force, the European Council acquired a permanent President. The post was occupied by the Belgian Herman Van Rompuy for two consecutive two-and-a-half-year terms until the end of November 2014. In fact, the European Council decided that the Swedish Presidency should finish its term and chair the last European Council meeting in December 2009. Herman Van Rompuy therefore took office on 1 January 2010 and called an informal meeting the following month. The position of the permanent President was envisaged as a tool for bringing about more stability on the agenda, especially as regards longer-term planning.

Owing to the relatively short period in which the European Council has been chaired by a permanent President, evaluations of this role are rather scarce. In his recently published book Puetter (2014) points out that Herman Van Rompuy was successful in his task as a moderator and sought involvement with other EU bodies. For example, he held regular exchanges with the President of the Commission and the President of the Parliament, maintained contact with other members of the Commission, participated in bi-weekly meetings with the High Representative, and attended some meetings of different Council formations. But Herman Van Rompuy also 'consciously use[d] his prerogative to decide about the agenda' without reducing the importance of coordination across the Member States (Puetter, 2014: 124; see also Dinan, 2013; Kaczyński et al., 2010). He managed to do this by utilising different meeting formats and setting aside time for strategic deliberations.

[22] Particular Member States might indeed have influenced individual topics on some occasions.

V. Meetings

Meetings of the European Council have occurred without interruption since the first formal summit in March 1975. The number varied, as the rules on this subject have always been quite flexible. According to the Treaty of Lisbon,

> '[t]he European Council shall meet twice every six months, convened by its President. ... When the situation so requires, the President shall convene a special meeting of the European Council.'[23]

This rule was formulated slightly differently in the older treaties but the meaning was essentially the same. Ever since the Single European Act, meetings were scheduled to be held at least twice a year, which again made anything beyond this number possible. The only difference made by the Treaty of Lisbon was the shift from a rotating Presidency to a permanent President, who has ever since been in charge of setting the timing of summits and calling additional ones.

The treaties contain no classification of meeting types, although the European Council uses different formats. Besides the regular summits, informal and extraordinary meetings have been organised over the years.[24] Officially no clear definition or fixed categorisation of meeting types exists.[25] Informal meetings were introduced in order to allow for open discussion without the need to produce written statements as in the regular meetings. Extraordinary meetings are called when fresh developments require quick reaction and positioning of the EU. Their purpose is to address a particular event and its consequences and to do so as quickly as possible. Before the Treaty of Lisbon, if decisions had to be taken in accordance with the treaty framework, the European Council could convene in one additional format, Council meeting in the composition of Heads of State or Government.[26] When the European Council became an EU institution within the meaning of the Treaties, this format was abolished.

Each summit lasts two days in total and features a joint photo (de Schoutheete & Wallace, 2002; de Schoutheete, 2012).[27] Informal and extraordinary meetings are more likely to take a single day. At the end of every summit national briefings take place, nowadays following a press conference by the permanent President. The Lisbon Treaty assigned the President the duty of reporting to the EP after each meeting.[28] Previously, starting in 1981, this task was performed by the rotating country Presidency. It was first mentioned in the EU's legal framework in the Treaty of Maastricht.[29] President Van Rompuy is considered to have fulfilled his reporting obligation for almost all regular meetings, with the exception of two occasions and informal summits (Vanden Broucke, Poptcheva, & de Finance, 2015).

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[23] ToL, Title III, Art. 9 B | TEU (Consolidated version), Title III, Art. 15(1).
[24] Some studies contain a third category, namely thematic meetings, but these are not very different from regular summits (de Schoutheete & Wallace, 2002; de Schoutheete, 2012). They are announced as being dedicated to a single theme but other topics are also discussed.
[25] This conclusion was reached on the basis of answers to questions submitted to the General Secretariat of the Council of the EU (response letter received on 31.08.2011).
[26] Such cases were extremely rare. An example was the meeting on 20 June 2004 at which the President of the Commission was nominated in accordance with Article 214(2) of the Nice Treaty.
[27] Even though exceptional longer meetings have occurred, the two-day format has generally been preserved.
[28] ToL, Title III, Art. 9 B(6d) | TEU (Consolidated version), Title III, Art. 15(6d).
[29] The treaty stipulated that the European Council should report (TEU, Title I, Art. D), and the duty was in practice performed by the rotating Presidency.

VI. Agenda and Output

1. In Charge of Agenda Preparation

In the early years there was no formal agenda prepared for European Council meetings because of a desire to allow for flexibility in the exchanges (de Bassompierre, 1988; Johnston, 1994; Werts, 1992). But very soon the Heads of State or Government realised that the importance of their work required structural improvements. At the meeting in June 1977 in London an internal document on the organisation of the meetings was adopted and attached to the conclusions. In it a distinction was made between two types of discussions which occur at summits – informal exchanges of views not aimed at public statements and debates aimed at making decisions, with the element of resolving outstanding issues at lower levels included in the latter category. This distinction allowed for a mix of informality and formality, as little or no agenda preparation was envisaged for the first type of discussion and substantial preparation for the second type.

In fact, the input of the rotating Presidency has also constituted an essential aspect of the preparation of the agenda since the early years (Bonvicini & Regelsberger, 1991; Hayes-Renshaw & Wallace, 2006; Werts, 1992). It was famous for conducting a tour of capitals to canvas the views of the different Member States but this became increasingly hard with each enlargement round, especially the 2004 accession of 10 new countries (Westlake & Galloway, 2004). The General Secretariat of the Council provided administrative and logistical assistance for the preparation of the meetings (Bonvicini & Regelsberger, 1991; Curtin, 2009; Westlake & Galloway, 2004).

The London declaration of 1977 tasked the Ministers of Foreign Affairs with preparatory work. At a meeting in Seville in June 2002 a reform of the conduct of European Council meetings was enacted. The Seville summit conclusions produced a list of 'Rules for the Organisation and the Proceedings of the European Council', according to which preparatory work was entrusted to the General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC). The body was expected to come up with an annotated draft agenda on the basis of a Presidency proposal and offer brief outlines of the issues up for discussion as well as to circulate an outline of the conclusions on the first day of each European Council meeting. This indicated that a large part of the conclusions had been approved before the summit began (de Schoutheete, 2012). After 2002 the role of the GAERC and COREPER became much more important (de Schoutheete, 2012; Westlake & Galloway, 2004). Since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the new permanent President has been assigned the task of preparing the draft agenda, in cooperation with the President of the Commission and the General Affairs Council.[30]

This involvement of other institutional actors does not mean that an external agenda is imposed on the European Council. On the contrary, the Heads of State or Government are the core owners of their own agenda with possibly some influence by the Presidency/President on particular topics or the ordering of the discussion points. Despite this ultimate control over its own agenda, the European Council has limited time during its meetings to address all the points it desires. The initial discussion agenda is not formal in order to allow for flexibility (Bulmer & Wessels, 1987; Johnston, 1994). The final informal agenda is set before the start of the

[30] ToL, Title III, Art. 9 B(6b) | TEU (Consolidated version), Title III, Art. 15(6b).

meeting after careful selection of issues by the Ministers in the GAERC[31] under the guidance of the Presidency. This list might still be modified during the meeting as the Heads of State or Government have the right to raise any issue they consider important. However, the time to voice their opinions and concerns is limited and has been further reduced by the increase in participants following EU enlargements.

2. Meetings Record and Conclusions

The London declaration stated that no record should be kept of the informal exchanges of views, whereas the discussions aimed at agreeing on decisions were to be made public in a 'written record of conclusions'. The latter was to be published on behalf of the Presidency, which used to be the practice until the Treaty of Lisbon, when the term European Council Conclusions came in operation. While technically the conclusions used to be published on behalf of the Presidency, in fact they always represented the collective view of the European Council.

The types of statements made in the ECCs vary extensively. Often 'politically and morally binding' decisions are adopted (Werts, 1992) and common positions are expressed on a variety of matters, in particular foreign affairs. The European Council also monitors the development of a range of dossiers, and in that respect requests the Commission to prepare a proposal or the Council (and the EP) to reach an agreement. In terms of their legal standing, the conclusions are non-binding documents. However, they often contain calls for action to other EU institutions which cannot be ignored because of the inherent power play (Eggermont, 2012; Westlake & Galloway, 2004). Furthermore, the agreements put on paper set the boundaries for action by individual Member States.

The conclusions have additional functions with respect to specific policy areas in which the European Council has a dominant role. For example, they are the documents where major appointments are announced (e.g. President of the Commission). Since 2000 special attention has been dedicated to employment within the framework of the OMC at the spring summits. Economic policy coordination in the context of the European Semester has been dealt with similarly since 2011. The Heads of State or Government also closely monitor matters relevant for enlargement negotiations, a subject which is reflected in the ECCs. Other issues could be added to this list.

The conclusions can be seen as having multiple functions. They are, of course, aimed at producing general strategic directions for the EU but in many cases go deep into the technicalities of policy making. This sometimes reflects a much more active European Council role in policy making than the Treaties stipulate. The ECCs also serve as an instrument for publicising what has been agreed at the closed meetings to citizens. While a certain level of leeway always remains, not least because agreements are often quite general, the promises made at the round table are the message that the Heads of State or Government deliver at home.

[31] With the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon GAERC was spilt in two, the Foreign Affairs Council and the General Affairs Council. The second has been in charge of preparation ever since.

ECCs have been issued after every formal meeting, including extraordinary ones, as well as after some of the informal summits. Occasionally, in particular at extraordinary or informal meetings, the documents are called statements or declarations but for the sake of simplicity they are regarded as conclusions in this study.[32] The only difference is that statements and declarations are much shorter than ordinary ECCs because they usually cover the single issue around which the informal or extraordinary meeting is organised and rarely use the opportunity to add additional items.

[32] Sometimes a document can be issued on behalf of the Heads of State or Government and the President of the Commission rather than the European Council.

Chapter 2. Structure of the Agenda

I. Number and Type of Summits

The first meeting of the European Council after the Treaty of Lisbon entered into force was held on 10-11 December 2009 but the first meeting chaired by Herman Van Rompuy took place in February 2010. After Van Rompuy's two two-and-a-half-year terms ended, on 1 December 2014 the role was transferred to his newly elected successor Donald Tusk. Between December 2009 and November 2014, 35 European Council meetings were held. There were between two and four meetings per half year and at least six annually. Six summits were organised in 2010 and 2013, seven in 2011 and 2012, and eight in 2014. The last meeting in December 2014 was with Donald Tusk as President.

As explained in Chapter 1, according to the EU treaties the European Council is convened twice a year or more often if required. While the numbers above suggest a more frequent meeting schedule than usual, the most recent period is not entirely exceptional, as having four meetings a year had already been the uninterrupted practice since 1995 and seven meetings annually were organised as early as 2003. Nevertheless, after the Lisbon Treaty became effective there was a further increase. Figure 1 presents the total number of meetings per year and their sub-division per six-month period. The latter used to be the planning mode during the era of the rotating Presidency.

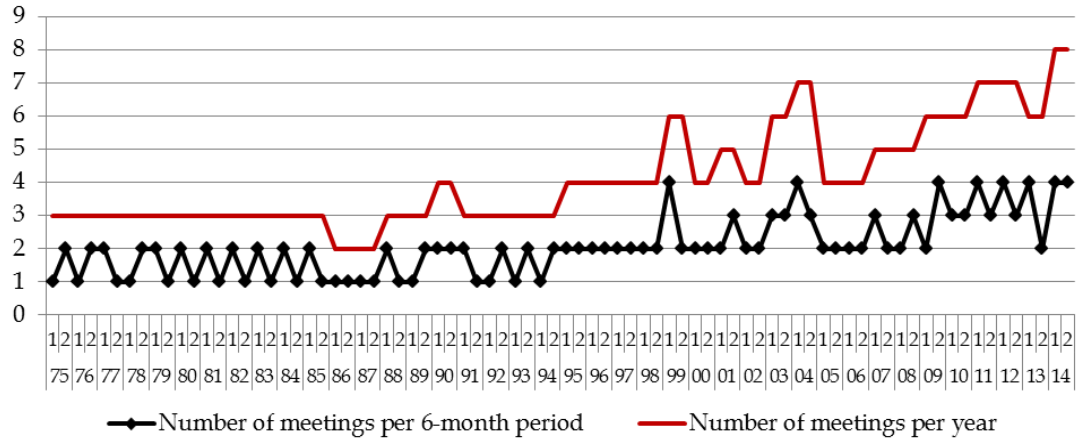

Figure 1. Number of European Council meetings, 1975 – 2014

Overall, there is a trend towards an increase in the number of meetings, which started in the late 1990s. Initially this trend was not continuously upwards, whereas this seems to have been the case after 2006. In February 2015, the calendar for 2015 already showed five scheduled summits, and the eventual total could be even higher.

Developments with respect to the type of meetings have also been taking place. Besides regular summits, informal and extraordinary meetings began to be organised in the late 1980s. Figure 2 displays an overview of the annual frequency of the two event types since their first occurrence. Two of the meetings in 2014 were labelled as special rather than extraordinary. While their contents are to some extent a halfway house between regular and extraordinary summits, the latter seems a more appropriate categorisation.

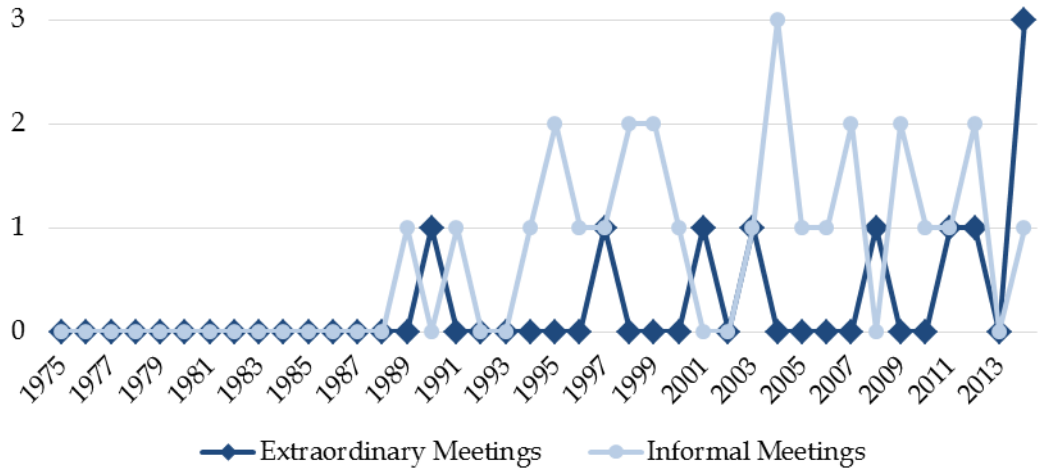

Figure 2. Extraordinary and informal meetings of the European Council, 1975 – 2014

1. Informal Meetings

In the early years of European Council summitry, the number of participants was small and 'fireside chats' were held after dinner. With the increasing involvement of the European Council in policy making and the growing number of Member States these 'fireside chats' became impossible to sustain. Informal meetings therefore started to be organised as 'an attempt to break away from the solemn massive plenary sessions' (Werts, 2008: 74). The format was envisaged as offering a relaxing environment for open exchanges of views without the need to take any binding decisions or produce written conclusions.

The first informal meeting was held in November 1989. The format started to be used regularly in the mid-1990s, and while a short briefing came out in November 1989, no account of the discussions was presented after the following informal meetings. Thereafter the informal summit in October 2000 in Biarritz was the first to open the possibility for issuing declarations or statements, a proceeding which has been used often though not regularly. In the period December 2009 – November 2014, five informal meetings took place and statements were published after four of them. They were not organised at similar points in time within the five years and the reasons behind the use of the format were also different.

The first informal summit was held in February 2010 and produced a statement on the Greek sovereign debt crisis. At this early stage it was still emphasised that the Greek government had not requested financial support. The first and the second Greek bailouts were not featured in ECCs but in the output of the Euro summits. The second informal meeting took place on 26 October 2011. It delivered an agreement regarding the recapitalisation of banks, an issue outstanding from the regular meeting three days earlier. The first informal meeting in 2012, held at the end of January, was dedicated to dealing with the spill-over consequences of the

crisis, in particular assessing ways of using EU funds to tackle unemployment and improve the environment for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The second, in May 2012, was a dinner discussion of growth and jobs that did not result in written conclusions but served to collect input for the regular meeting in June. The last informal summit, in May 2014, was organised two days after the elections for the EP, which coincided with the presidential elections in Ukraine. The meeting was meant to discuss EU institutional appointments in the aftermath of the EP elections[33] but the occasion provided an opportunity to issue a statement on Ukraine.

2. Extraordinary meetings

The first extraordinary summit of the European Council was held in April 1990 to discuss German reunification and the events in Central and Eastern Europe, although the opportunity was used to place other items on the agenda. Extraordinary meetings have not been too common since then, and have been used to address urgent matters, such as for example the 9/11 terrorist attacks. These summits resemble regular meetings in terms of making the EU position public but the main difference is their defining feature – the fact that the Heads of State or Government are called upon at short notice. Moreover, the published conclusions usually focus exclusively on the event that triggered the meeting. Throughout the 40-year period, ten extraordinary meetings took place and five of them were held between December 2009 and November 2014. This is a clear indication that the recent period has been full of emergencies requiring top-level EU reaction.

The first extraordinary meeting after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty was organised on 11 March 2011, 14 days before another regular summit. It was called in response to the turbulent events in North Africa (or the Southern Neighbourhood as the EU prefers to call this region), and in particular the violence used by the government of Libya against its people. The second extraordinary summit, in November 2012, was of quite different nature. It was meant to provide a venue for reaching consensus on the overall ceiling and content of the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). An agreement, however, was not achieved before February the following year. The last three extraordinary meetings were called in 2014. On 6 March, the European Council discussed the situation in Ukraine and the EU's position following the seizure of Crimea by Russian forces. The meetings in July and August were labelled as special. They mainly covered the follow-up to the Ukrainian crisis but discussed other emergencies too, in particular renewed fighting in the Gaza Strip, the rise of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the escalation of fighting in Libya and the Ebola outbreak in Africa. Besides these focusing events, the two summits announced key appointments within the next institutional cycle.

3. Evaluation

The rise in the number of meetings and the increasing reliance on the informal and extraordinary formats in the recent period is largely the result of political developments that required top-level attention in the EU context. The global economic and financial crisis and the urgency of finding solutions seem to have contributed to a high level of summitry.

[33] See the remarks by Herman Van Rompuy after the dinner:
http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/142862.pdf.

Furthermore, sensitive institutional and budgetary questions in relation to cyclical developments (especially expiry of the MFF and EP elections) required more leeway for discussion and consensus building, and time pressure was also a relevant factor here. Last but not least, multiple conflicts in the neighbourhood triggered several extraordinary meetings.

While the need to resolve domestic problems and take a position on external events seems to have kept the frequency of summits high, this intensity is said to have been very much in line with Herman Van Rompuy's own views (Closa, 2012; Kaczyński, 2011).[34] During one of his speeches at the Parliament presenting the outcome of the September 2010 European Council, he stated that 'meetings of the European Council should not be considered as "summits" but as regular -- even routine -- meetings of a Union institution' (4). Furthermore, his chef de cabinet, Frans van Daele, is said to have suggested monthly meetings of the body (Howorth, 2011). Whether the idea of increasing the total number of times the Heads of State or Government met per year was associated with a feeling that the economic crisis would require additional opportunities for discussion is unclear. Notably, not all Member States were fond of meeting more often than necessary.[35] Yet, Herman Van Rompuy is considered to have demonstrated from the very beginning of his term in office that he had both 'the capacity, and the will to bring together the members of the European Council whenever he thought that useful' (Kaczyński et al., 2010: 21).

II. Size of the European Council Conclusions

The length of ECCs has varied substantially over time (Alexandrova, Carammia, Princen, & Timmermans, 2014). This aspect was first regulated at the Seville meeting in 2002. The rules adopted then represented an agreement on shortening the conclusions, with the European Council aiming to keep them 'as concise as possible'. But the vagueness of this wording allowed leeway to extend the text when necessary. The total number of pages between December 2009 and November 2014 varied between 1 and 59, where the maximum value is an outlier since it included an extensive annex on the MFF. Excluding that, the highest number of pages is 35.

One way of classifying the size of the contents is simply to look at page numbers. However, this can be misleading, not least because the formatting of the text on the pages has been altered over the course of 40 years. Even in the most recent period, when the format has remained relatively unchanged, the amount of text on a single page differs both across and within single sets of conclusions. Another option is to focus on counting the number of section titles, which can also allow topics to be categorised (Wessels, 2008a; 2008b). The problem with this approach is again the fact that sections can differ considerably in length. Moreover, the labelling can be misleading when it comes to extracting the topics on the agenda. A more sophisticated method to get around these problems is to divide the full texts into quasi-sentences. These sub-units of a sentence contain a single issue each which makes comparisons across time easy and reliable.

[34] See also Jeroen van der Kris's article in the NRC Handelsblat from 13 February 2010, 'EU-leider wil vaker topoverleg', available at: http://www.nrc.nl/handelsblad/van/2010/februari/13/eu-leider-wil-vaker-topoverleg-11850577 and Joshua Chaffin's article in the Financial Times Brussels Blog from 27 September 2010, 'A Brussels showdown on economic governance', available at http://blogs.ft.com/brusselsblog/2010/09/a-brussels-showdown-on-economic-governance.

[35] See again the news articles by Jeroen van der Kris and Joshua Chaffin.

The same goes for classifying issues on the agenda.[36] The full text of ECCs is therefore divided into quasi-sentences.

Figure 3 offers an overview of the changing size of conclusions measured in total number of quasi-sentences per year. A clear increase in the length of the documents occurred in the early 1990s, with the largest amounts of text produced in 1995 and 1999. Since 2005 a tendency towards slightly shorter text could be seen. However, in 2011 and 2013 the total size of the conclusions again went up. The length of the documents is only partially related to the number of meetings organised annually (Pearson correlation of 0.587[37]). The type of meeting hardly plays a role as the texts coming out of informal and extraordinary summits are quite short.

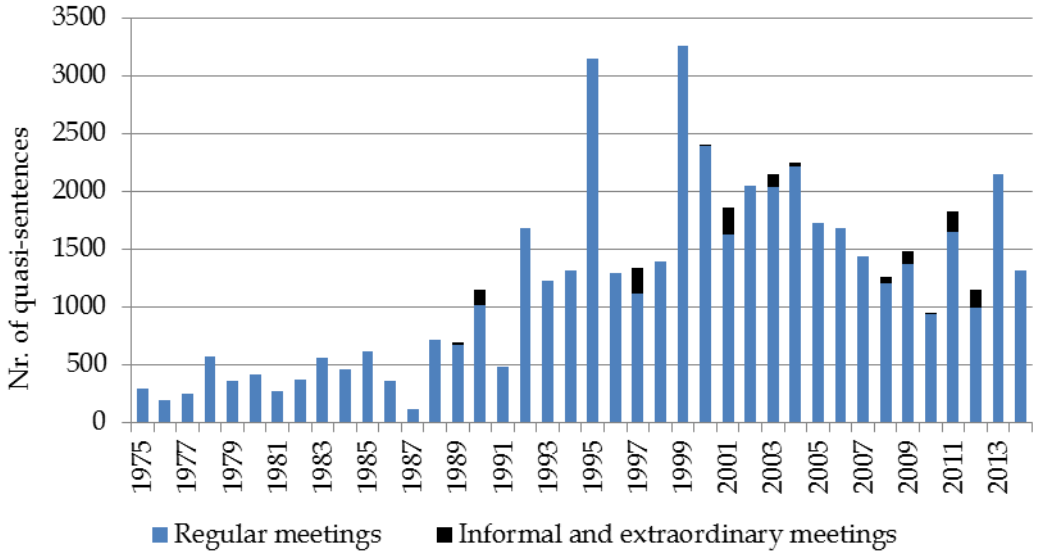

Figure 3. Agenda size per year, 1975 – 2014

[36] Additional information on the approach is available in the Annex I.

[37] The Pearson product-moment correlation is a measure of the strength of the linear dependence of two sets of data or variables. Here the variables are the number of meetings per year and length (in quasi-sentences) of all documents produced in a given year.

In the period 2010 – 2014, the collection of annual ECCs was shortest in 2010 with 936 quasi-sentences and longest in 2013 with 2155 units. The larger size of the agenda in 2011 and 2013, as shown in figure 3, is particularly the result of two meetings – on 25 March 2011 and 8 February 2013. Figure 4 provides a clear overview of the length of texts from individual meetings in the recent period. A relatively stable agenda size of between approximately 100 and 400 quasi-sentences persisted throughout the regular meetings and the two sets of conclusions mentioned above were exceptionally long.

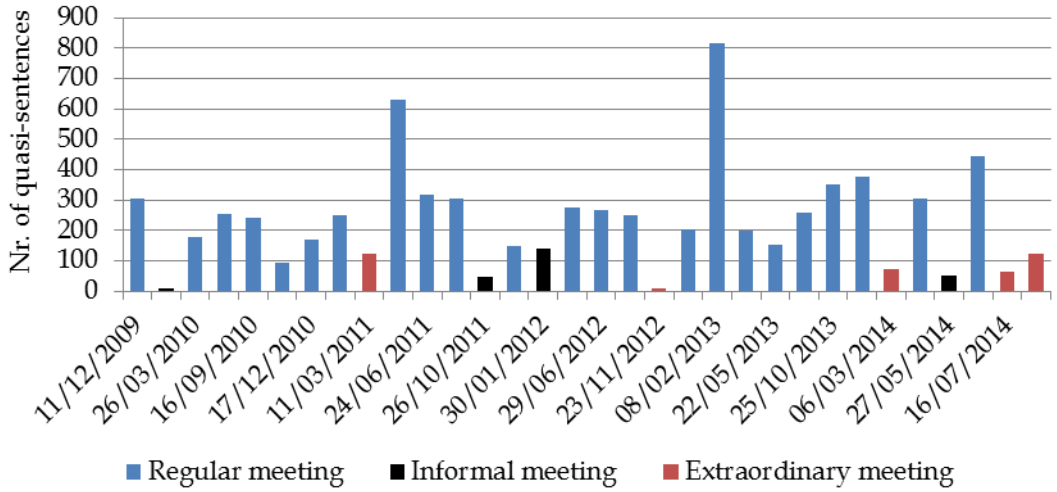

Figure 4. Agenda size per meeting, December 2009 – November 2014

The first case, 25 March 2011, contained several novel aspects: the first review carried out in the framework of the European Semester, the agreement on the Euro Plus Pact and the term sheet for the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), the establishment of which was made possible by a limited treaty change agreed in December 2010. The two remaining issues in these conclusions were reactions to urgent current events – the turmoil in North Africa (regarding which an extraordinary meeting was organised earlier the same month) and the earthquake and tsunami causing a nuclear disaster in Japan. The 8 February 2013 conclusions included an extensive statement on the MFF agreed upon after long negotiations. Thus, increases in the length of the texts adopted by the European Council have been the consequence of a complex of reasons, including additional meetings, new initiatives in response to the economic crisis, and the EU budget.

Chapter 3. Attention to Policy Topics and Issues

I. The Period December 2009 – November 2014

In the period December 2009 – November 2014, half of the European Council's attention was allocated to three themes: macroeconomics, foreign policy, and business and finance.[38] The first took up a quarter of the considerations in the conclusions, 25.05%. Foreign policy occupied 15.14% of the agenda and issues of business and finance accounted for 10.37%. The next most prominent topics were energy (7.06%), employment (6.58%), governance (5.22%), and defence (5%). Figure 5 presents an overview of the shares of attention dedicated to the range of 21 policy categories used for coding the contents of the ECCs.

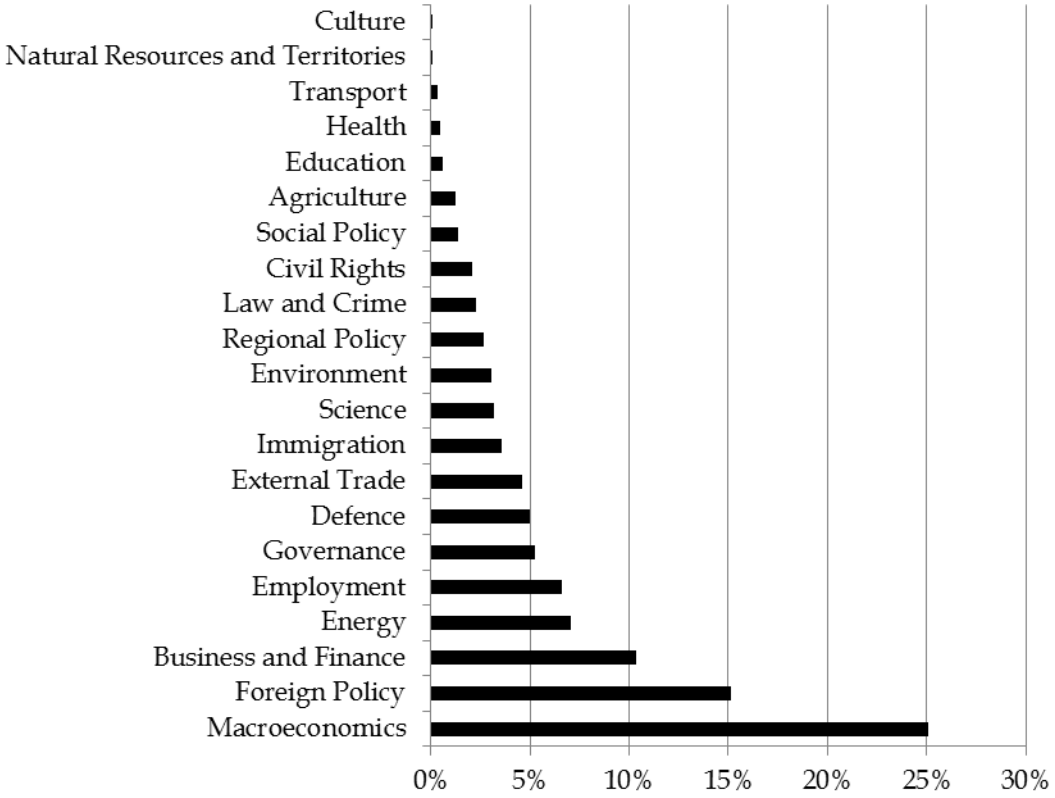

Figure 5. Attention to policy topics in ECCs, December 2009 – November 2014

In the catalogue of 21 domains, the average attention a topic can receive is 4.76%. All 14 remaining thematic fields fell under this threshold. The standard deviation was 5.95%, indicating substantial differences across policy fields. In fact, five topic categories received less than one percent attention (culture, education, health, natural resources and territories, and transport). Most of them are areas in which the EU has very limited competences if any.

[38] The contents of these broad fields are specified in Annex II.

1. Most Prominent Topics

1.1. Macroeconomic Policy

In the macroeconomic domain, almost two thirds of the attention went to general discussions of the economy. These included references to the economic policy guidelines and coordination, National Reform Programmes, growth in the context of the Europe 2020 strategy, recovery and stability of the economy, economic governance and surveillance, etc. The most prominent specific macroeconomic issue category was the budget. It was represented on the agenda in relation to fiscal consolidation and surveillance, and the agreement on a new EU budgetary framework for 2014–2020. Another 15% of the macroeconomic agenda referred to industrial policy, taxation and monetary affairs. Further issues were less prominent. Figure 6A presents an overview of the attention to subtopics within the major category macroeconomics.

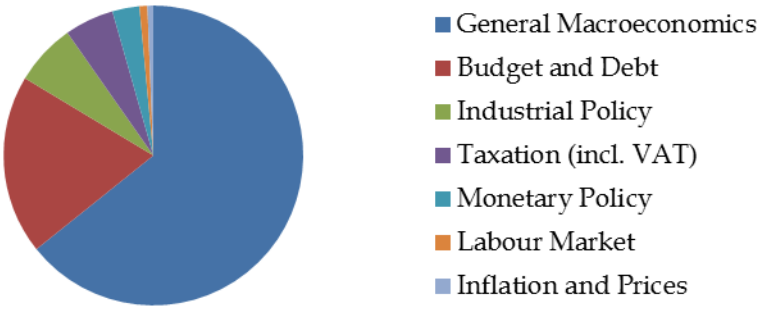

Figure 6A. Attention to macroeconomic issues in ECCs, December 2009 – November 2014

Figure 6B adds a temporal dimension to the attention overview. Throughout the five-year period there were very few meetings at which macroeconomics was low key. Mostly the topic received between approximately 20% and 30% of the attention with lower values since the start of 2014. A few spikes are also notable: in February 2010, December 2010, March 2011, and November 2012. The first and the last cases are somewhat exceptional as they contain only brief statements rather than complete conclusions, focused on the emerging Greek sovereign debt crisis and the MFF respectively. The meeting in December 2010 was also a special case, but for a different reason. It introduced the first simplified treaty revision procedure in order to set up a permanent mechanism for guaranteeing financial stability for the Eurozone. In March 2011, the spike in attention was the result of the establishment of the intergovernmental Euro Plus Pact.

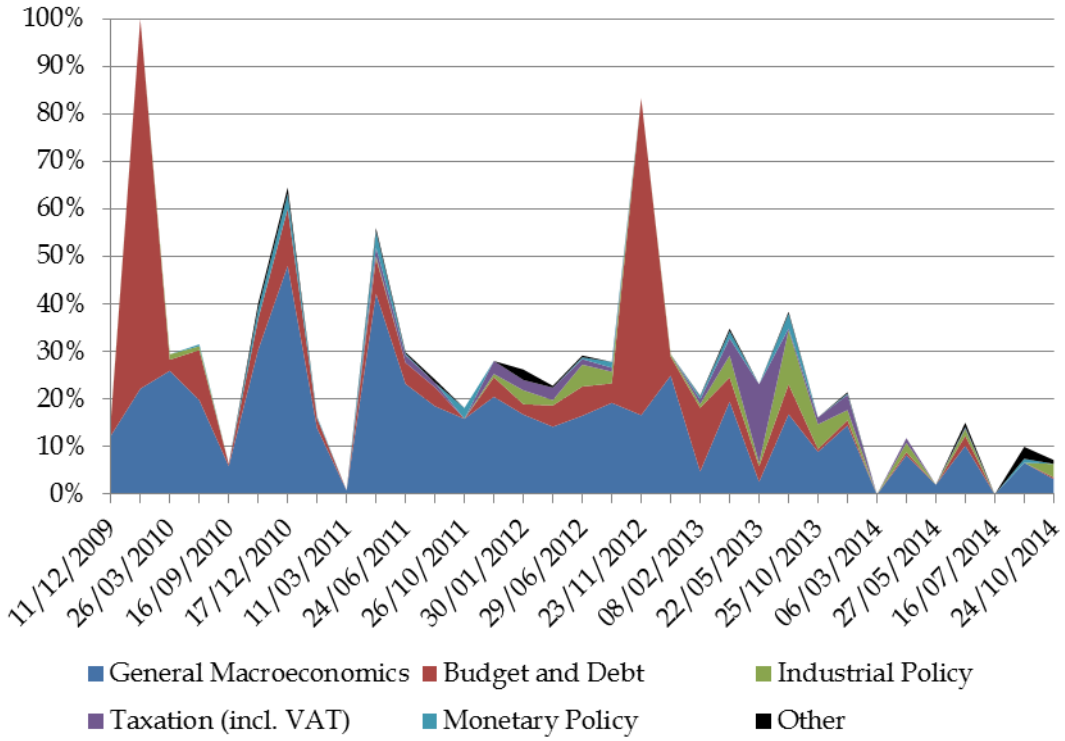

Figure 6B. Temporal pattern of attention to macroeconomic issues in ECCs, December 2009 – November 2014

The post-Lisbon period involved major policy initiatives, as the consequences of the economic and financial crisis required a comprehensive response at EU level. The European Council played an important role in most of these reform efforts, which include but go beyond the points mentioned above.

The year 2010 witnessed major decisions on policy in reaction to the economic and financial crisis, with various macroeconomic instruments or strategic documents aimed at ensuring macroeconomic stability. In March and June, the Europe 2020 strategy was discussed and adopted. While it presented five headline targets in different areas (employment, research, climate, education and social inclusion), the main goals focused on economic growth, convergence and productivity. Later the same year, the European Council reviewed recommendations from the Task Force on Economic Governance, led by Herman Van Rompuy. The final report of the Task Force, presented in October, was endorsed, and the ideas on new rules on budgetary discipline and enhanced economic surveillance mentioned in it were welcomed. The Heads of State or Government agreed on the need to establish 'a permanent crisis mechanism to safeguard the financial stability of the euro area as a whole' (ECCs, 29 October 2010). In December, the ESM was set up for that purpose, an action made possible by a simplified treaty revision procedure (amendment of the TFEU). In March 2011, the terms of the ESM were further elaborated.

The European Semester, which was established in 2010[39], began its first cycle the following year. The European Council has a role in this mechanism at two stages. At the end of each year the Commission publishes an Annual Growth Survey and an Alert Mechanism Report on macroeconomic imbalances. Following discussions in different Council formations and coordination with the Commission, in March the European Council provides EU-level guidance by adopting policy orientations. In June it endorses Country-Specific Recommendations for all Member States after an agreement in the Council but before formal adoption by the latter.[40]

Another reform was the establishment of the Euro Plus Pact by the Heads of State or Government (via the intergovernmental method) in March 2011. Despite the problems in the Eurozone, this instrument managed to attract the support of some countries outside the currency area. The Pact welcomed all Eurozone Member States joined by Bulgaria, Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania (23 EU Member States in total).[41] With its aim of better economic policy coordination, the Euro Plus Pact adds to existing EU-level tools that encompass this goal (such as the Stability and Growth Pact, the European Semester, and the Europe 2020 Strategy).

The anti-crisis measures continued in 2012. In June, the President of the European Council, in close cooperation with the Presidents of the Commission, the Eurogroup and the ECB, presented the report "Towards a Genuine Economic and Monetary Union", which focused on four pillars for the future EMU, namely integrated frameworks on financial, budgetary and economic policy and strengthened democratic legitimacy and accountability. The European Council commented on an interim report in October and December 2012, discussed the topic further in June, October and December 2013 and requested a further development of the plan. In June and October 2012, the Compact for Growth and Jobs was agreed upon and elaborated, outlining comprehensive action at EU and national level with policy instruments in many areas. Its implementation featured on the agenda in December 2013.

The consequences of the crisis and the reform efforts necessitated reflection on the EU's priorities. Consequently, in June 2014, a comprehensive Strategic Agenda for the Union in Times of Change was adopted (annexed to the conclusions). As expected, macroeconomic issues were duly featured and emphasis was laid on the need to bring the Europe 2020 strategy into line with the strategic agenda.

Herman Van Rompuy was faced with economic crisis management from the beginning of his tenure. His knowledge and experience of economic affairs allowed him to play a 'pivotal role' in the shaping of the policy solutions adopted by the European Council (Dinan, 2013). From the start, the President repeatedly emphasised the economy as one of the key challenges for the EU[42], and this was reflected in the structure of his cabinet. Early on, he visited all Member States' capitals in order to discuss his ideas for fostering economic recovery and circulated a paper on the topic before his first European Council meeting in February 2010 (Closa, 2012).

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[39] The Council approved the new economic governance framework in September 2010, and it appeared in the Official Journal of the EU in November the same year.

[40] See http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-11-14_en.htm and http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/european-semester/.

[41] Latvia and Lithuania joined the Eurozone in January 2014 and 2015 respectively. Bulgaria and Denmark's currencies are pegged to the Euro.

[42] See for example his speeches at the "Klausurtagung" of the CSU-Landesgruppe in Wildbad Kreuth, Germany on 7 January 2010 or at the College of Europe in Bruges, Belgium on 25 February 2010.

This paper, entitled 'Seven Steps to Deliver on the European Strategy for Growth and Jobs' was thus presented while the Europe 2020 Strategy was still in preparation. Soon afterwards (in March) he was put in charge of the Task Force on Economic Governance. In 2012, Herman Van Rompuy took the initiative of preparing the report "Towards a Genuine Economic and Monetary Union" in collaboration with the Presidents of the Commission, the Eurogroup and the ECB. However, his pro-active involvement and image as an 'impartial negotiator' (Kroqi, 2013: 10) did not mean that he was dictating the new measures adopted by the European Council. The divergence of views among the Heads of State or Government and the difficulty of facilitating agreements presented a significant obstacle for the President, preventing him from promoting his own vision (Dinan, 2013). In fact, in line with his realistic approach, he focused on fostering consensus rather than imposing his own agenda (Puetter, 2014; 2015).

While this report studies the agenda of the European Council, the co-existence of another closely related institution since October 2008, namely the Euro Summit, needs to be considered. It constitutes a meeting at the level of Heads of State or Government of the Eurozone Member States only, joined by the President of the Commission, and chaired by its own President.[43] Until the end of November 2014 Herman Van Rompuy acted as the President of the Euro Summit.[44] After an initial meeting at the outbreak of the crisis, the Euro Summit was next held in March 2010. Between March 2010 and November 2014 a total of 11 such events took place, with a higher frequency in 2011 and 2012, mostly on the occasion of European Council meetings. The fact that only one summit was organised in 2013 and 2014 suggests that this framework served as an additional venue for crisis management and, with the enactment of a number of solutions, started to become less relevant. This conclusion seems plausible considering also that the Euro Summit is supposed to be held at least twice a year. This was agreed by the Eurozone Heads of State or Government at their meeting in October 2011 and later mentioned in the Rules for the Organisation of the Proceedings of the Euro Summit issued in March 2013. The intergovernmental Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union (commonly referred to as the Fiscal Compact), signed by all Member States except the United Kingdom and the Czech Republic, further restated the agreement (article 12). Thus, the Eurozone Member States seem to not have kept their promise to meet at least twice annually.

1.2. Foreign Policy

The foreign policy domain is traditionally prominent at European Council meetings, as it reflects one of the core tasks of the institution. This category covers EU relations with third countries and involves discussions of external events, statement of positions and announcement of general actions (e.g. provision of foreign aid). Specific policy areas which are discussed from an international perspective are not part of the category. An example of this is international climate change negotiations, where the EU has a prominent role and the European Council is the arena for reaching a common position for global summits. A wide range of policy topics can be discussed in relation to foreign affairs. Chapter 4 elaborates on the external dimension of the European Council's agenda. This section has therefore been kept brief and presents only a broad overview of the attention given to foreign policy.

[43] The President is elected by the Heads of State or Government of the Eurozone Member States. The ECB President is invited to attend the meetings.
[44] He began to chair the meetings in March 2010.

In the period December 2009 – November 2014, the foreign policy category contained predominantly general discussions, accounting for about two thirds of the attention. Among the more specific issues, foreign aid, international economic development, human rights, and enlargement[45] were prominent. Figure 7A presents the specific shares of attention in this domain.

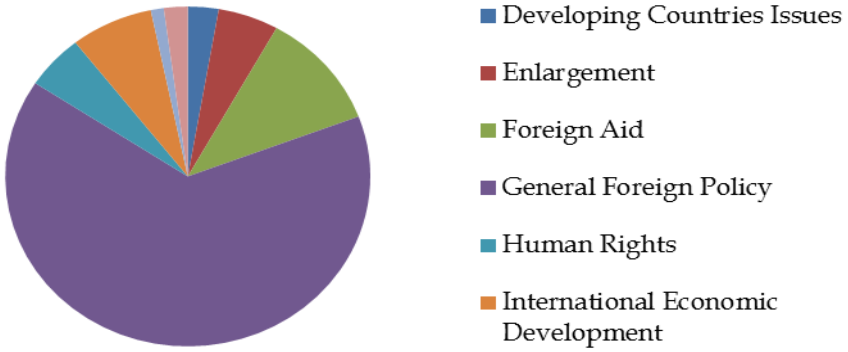


Figure 7A. Attention to foreign policy issues in ECCs, December 2009 – November 2014

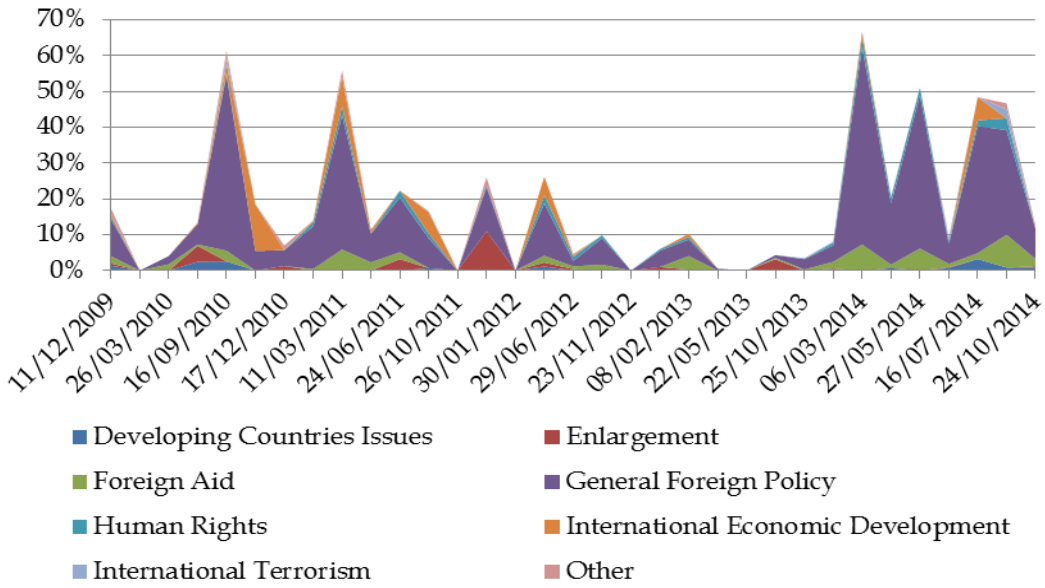


Figure 7B. Temporal pattern of attention to foreign policy in ECCs, December 2009 – November 2014

Figure 7B shows the temporal variation in attention. Foreign policy was present on the agenda at almost all meetings, with extremely high prominence in September 2010, March 2011 and throughout 2014. The first case was a scheduled review of relations with strategic partners, whereas the second offered a reaction to the turmoil in the EU's Southern Neighbourhood. The generally higher attention levels in 2014 were caused by the conflict in Ukraine. Foreign policy was not on the agenda at only five summits.

[45] While it is disputable whether enlargement can be considered a foreign policy topic, it seems to fit best in this major topic category. The matters discussed involve general elements of pre-accession negotiations.

At the start of his term in office, President Van Rompuy signalled foreign policy to be one of the two key points he would focus on in his work, together with **economics (see his speech at the College of Europe on 25 February 2010). His intention was clearly put into practice at the European Council meeting of** September 2010, which was almost exclusively dedicated to relations with strategic partners and attempted to improve the EU's external policy. However, the many crises in the neighbourhood in the subsequent years – the Arab Spring, the Syrian Civil War, and the Ukraine conflict – overshadowed strategic thinking. The focus on strategy was further hampered by the impossibility of speaking with a real single voice due to diverging positions among the EU Heads of State or Government on the appropriate action (Devuyst, 2012; Fabbrini, 2014). While it can be considered that Herman Van Rompuy was not too successful in his drive towards a common strategic approach to foreign policy, he had a much better record with respect to his role as a moderator and facilitator of consensus (Devuyst, 2012; Fabbrini, 2014). Even when a substantial agreement was unattainable, he made an effort to bring the positions as close together as possible. Notably, President Van Rompuy argued that '[a] common foreign policy is not about speaking with a single voice, but about giving the same key messages'[46]. He worked to secure the 'key message' in different contexts and defended the European Council position at international fora.

1.3. Business and Finance

With their 9.5%, matters of business and finance appeared as the third most frequently addressed theme in the ECCs. Remarkably, within this category, general references were not the largest subsection and comprised less than one fifth of the major topic. Regulation of banks, other financial institutions and financial markets was the dominant subject and took up over one third of the attention within the topic. Other prevalent issues were the common market and SMEs. Figure 8A displays the distribution of attention across the subcategories.

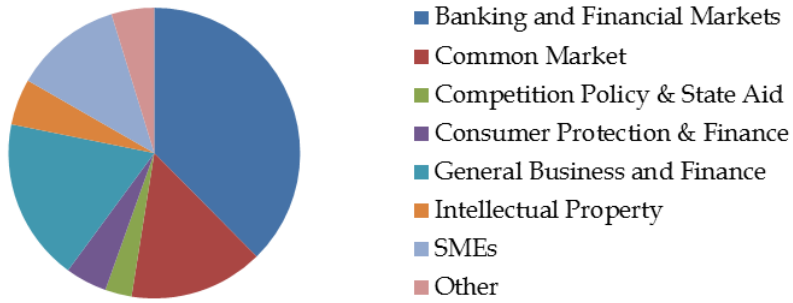


Figure 8A. Attention to business and finance issues in ECCs, December 2009 – November 2014

Figure 8B presents the evolution of attention over time. Business and finance issues were on the agenda in 28 out of the 33 meetings, with higher prominence between the autumn of 2011 and late 2013. The meeting on 26 October 2011 witnessed a major spike in attention, which was the result of an informal summit concluding with a consensus on the so-called 'banking package'. The later was a set of measures for restoring confidence in the banking sector and capital markets.

[46] A statement made in a speech at the Munich Security Conference on 5 February 2011.

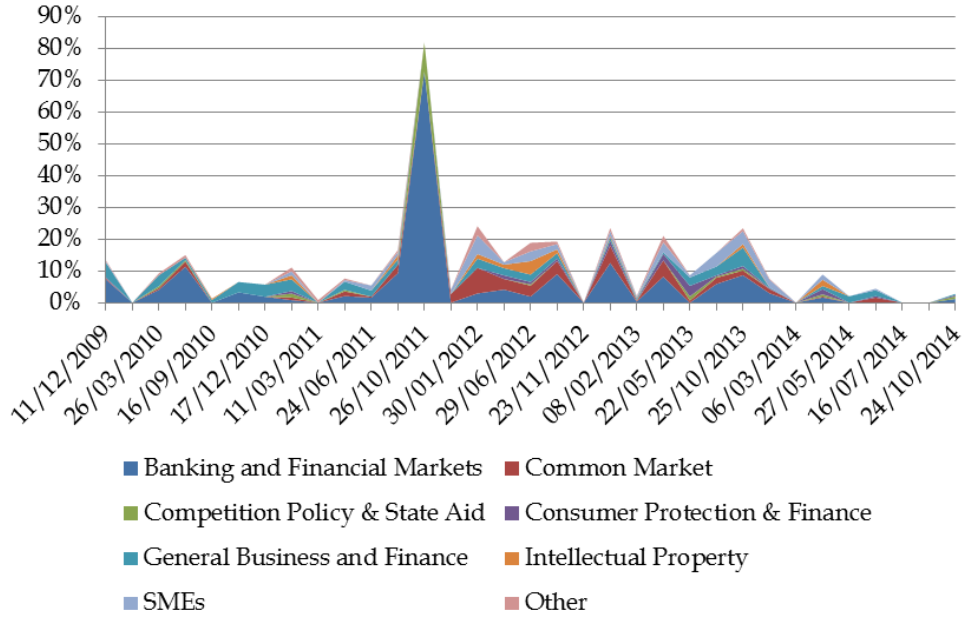


Figure 8B. Temporal pattern of attention to business and finance issues in ECCs, December 2009 – November 2014

Among the specific issues which featured within the business and finance topic, several resulted in more significant initiatives or calls for action. The first occurred in June 2010 when the European Council looked at the regulation of financial services. It discussed existing proposals and called on the institutions to reach a rapid agreement. In addition, a system of levies and taxes on financial institutions to be introduced by the Member States was agreed upon (with the Czech Republic abstaining).

The second major focus was on innovative production and investment. In February 2011, the European Council called for implementation of a strategic and integrated approach to boosting innovation for the benefit of citizens, companies, especially SMEs, and researchers. Here matters of business on the one hand and science and technology on the other were intertwined. Several elements relating to both topics, on which action was desired, were particularly emphasised: completion of the European Research Area, progress towards the digital single market, improvement of the framework conditions for private investment and removing administrative obstacles to the cross-border operation of venture capital. Such issues were further discussed at several summits in 2012 and 2013. In October 2013, the focus was again on the digital economy, innovation and services.

The third key emphasis in the period was on an issue at the heart of EU integration. The need to complete the single market and to 'deliver [its] full potential' were set as goals within the context of attention to growth and jobs in January 2012. This evoked a link to SMEs in terms of deliberations on how to mobilise funding and reduce administrative burdens for them. These issues subsequently reoccurred in almost all meetings that year and the next.[47] In June 2013, the process culminated in the launch of a new 'Investment Plan', which besides helping SMEs was seen as a tool to foster employment. Regulatory fitness (reduction of the regulatory burden) also reappeared on the agenda in June 2014.

[47] March, June, October and December 2012 and March, June, and October 2013.

2. Other Topics

Among the remaining policy themes, four received more than the average attention per topic across the 21 categories. They comprise energy, employment, governance, and defence. Figure 9 displays the trends in attention for the four topics.

While on average energy occupied 7.06% of the overall attention of the European Council in the period analysed, this attention was very much skewed over time. The mean level across the 33 meetings was 7.14% with a standard deviation of 12.56. This is also clearly visible in figure 9, which shows five peaks against a background of rather low interest in this topic. The first peak in February 2011 was a meeting where guidelines for completing the EU's internal energy market by 2014 were presented. In December 2011, following discussion of a Presidency report on the topic, the priority fields in which urgent action was considered necessary were set. In May 2013, further priorities were identified. In March 2014[48], in addition to requests to speed up progress on the priorities for completing the energy market which had already been identified, energy was discussed in the context of climate policy. The European Council called for an EU framework on greenhouse gas emissions, renewables and energy efficiency and set the main terms for it. After some preliminary debates in June 2014, at the October meeting of the same year, the new climate and energy policy framework was finally adopted, together with measures on energy security and interconnections across Europe.

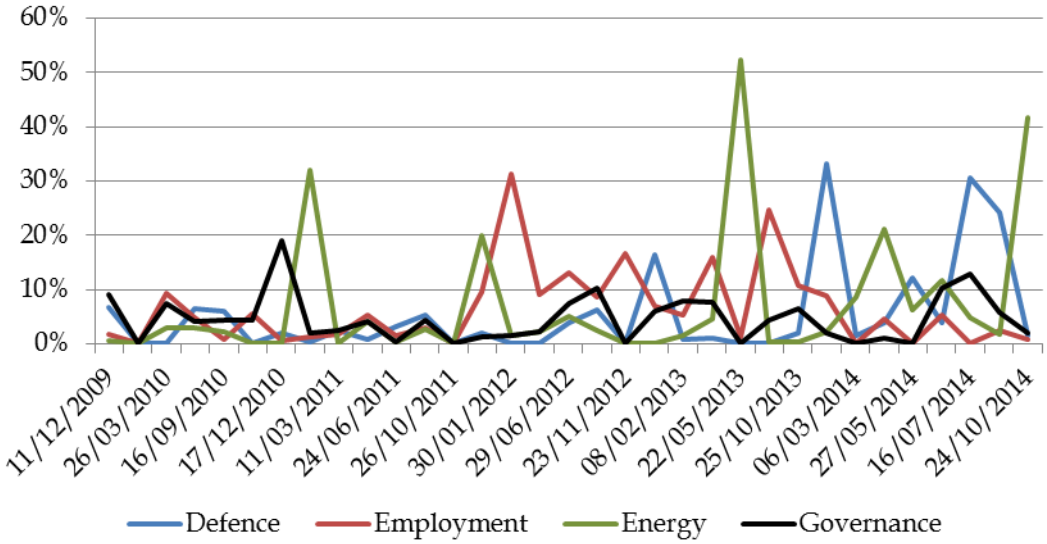


Figure 9. Temporal pattern of attention to the topics defence, employment, energy and governance in ECCs, December 2009 – November 2014

Labour and employment matters were generally briefly discussed in the conclusions until late 2011. This was especially the case outside the spring summits at which reviews of employment policy issues were regularly carried out in the context of the European Semester. On 30 January 2012, the European Council held an informal meeting in an attempt to deal with the consequences of the economic and financial crisis. Besides featuring prominent economic aspects such as macroeconomic policy coordination, SMEs and the completion of the single market, the seven-page statement produced after the meeting added a focus on the need to

[48] The meeting on 21 March.

tackle unemployment, especially among young people. The Compact for Growth and Jobs, agreed upon later the same year, further emphasised commitments in this respect at both Member State and EU level, adding the aspect of facilitating labour mobility across the EU. In February 2013, the European Council established the Youth Employment Initiative as a regional funding instrument (6 000 million EUR for the period 2014–2020).

The topic governance comprises various institutional and political issues. It featured at most meetings (27 out of 33) with attention levels between 1% and 13%, except for December 2010. Because of the limited treaty change – amendment of the TFEU – introduced by the establishment of the ESM, attention increased to 19%. Political appointments were also debated and decided upon, including Herman Van Rompuy's re-election as the President of the European Council (March 2012), the appointment of his successor Donald Tusk and Federica Mogherini as High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (August 2014), Mario Draghi's selection for President of the ECB (June 2011), etc. Another issue within this domain was governmental efficiency, which featured on several occasions in respect of regulatory reform.

Defence gained 5% of the overall attention of the European Council, with increasing levels towards the second half of the period and especially over the last year. In December 2012, a desire to increase the effectiveness, visibility and impact of the CFSP was demonstrated, in particular via the agreement to develop further EU capabilities, strengthen the defence industry and design a comprehensive approach to prevent conflicts and manage crises. Detailed discussions on EU defence policy with a focus on the aforementioned aspects continued in December 2013. The attention in 2014 was driven by external conflicts, especially the crisis in Ukraine.

The remaining topics can be grouped in four clusters according to their patterns of attention. The first consists of a single topic – foreign trade – which was almost always discussed in a range of up to 12%. It thus shows a stable continuous mid-level presence, similar to governance. The second cluster contains topics that were generally low key but had between one and four peaks in attention. This group includes civil rights[49], environment[50], immigration[51], law and crime[52], and science and technology[53]. The third category is formed of domains which received almost no attention with the exception of one or more peaks. It consists of agriculture[54], health[55], and regional policy[56]. The last cluster contains topics with very low (up to 3% or exceptionally 5%) or no attention at all throughout the whole period. These are culture, education, natural resources and territories, social policy and transport.

[49] Peaks in March 2011 (first meeting, 14%) and May 2014 (10%).
[50] Peaks in December 2009 (10%), March 2010 (18%), October 2010 (17%) and October 2014 (15%).
[51] Peaks in March (first meeting, 14%) & June 2011 (27%) & June 2014 (11%).
[52] Peaks in December 2009 (9%), May 2013 (8%) and May and June 2014 (12% and 14%).
[53] Peaks in February 2011 (13%) & October 2013 (23%).
[54] Peak in February 2013 (10%).
[55] Peak in October 2014 (9%).
[56] Peak in February 2013 (22%).

II. The Period December 2009 – November 2014 in Comparative Perspective

This section provides a comparative analysis of the levels of attention to topics in the ECCs. In order to have a single temporal reference point, all conclusions are aggregated annually. The last meeting of 2009 has therefore been merged with the rest of the year 2009. While this changes the starting point of the core period analysed in this study, it makes it easier to distinguish similar time frames. Moreover, it can be argued that this first meeting represented a transitional format. Although Herman Van Rompuy was officially President, he did not take on his full responsibilities until January 2010. The rotating Presidency chaired the last summit in December 2009, as mentioned earlier. It should be noted that the last meeting in December 2014 is not included in the analysis.

1. Most Prominent Topics

1.1. Macroeconomics

Macroeconomics has always been an important topic on the agenda of the European Council, with a total attention of 14% throughout the 40 years of existence of the body, as presented in figure 10. Dividing this period into five-year terms demonstrates that attention was unevenly distributed. The most recent quinquennium witnessed the second highest prioritisation of macroeconomics after the second half of the 1970s. This is not surprising, as both were periods of economic malaise and underperformance. The recession which started in 1973 had worrying effects for the European economy, with stagnating growth, high inflation and rising unemployment. The economic and financial crisis which spread to Europe in 2009 was a multi-dimensional and more pervasive event, with bank insolvencies, rising budget deficits and sovereign debt in some Eurozone countries, plummeting growth and increasing unemployment. While the recession of the 1970s had less dramatic consequences than the more recent crisis, at the time it represented a severe shock for the European economy, which had to be addressed at the highest level. In point of fact, the economic downturn was one of the reasons behind the 1974 decision to start holding regular meetings of the Heads of State or Government (Werts, 1992). In the present circumstances again '[o]nly the national chief executives had the authority to confront the crisis, however halting their actual response' (Dinan, 2013: 1258). The observation that the level of attention in the late 1970s is higher than in the early 2010s should not be overemphasised. The European Council had to deal with a much more limited scope of issues in the first period, as research on the diversity of its agenda has shown (Alexandrova et al., 2012).

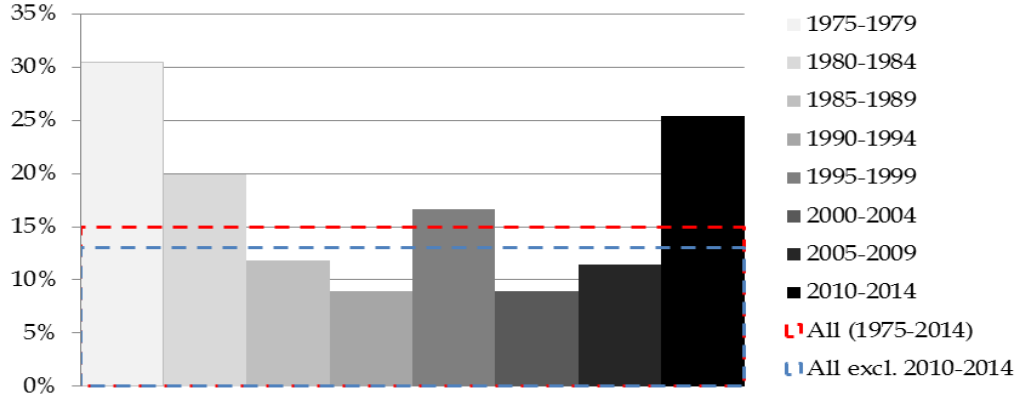


Figure 10. Attention to macroeconomics across five-year periods in ECCs, 1975-2014

1.2. Foreign Policy

Apart from the first years of the European Council (1975–1979), foreign policy has always occupied the largest share of the agenda.[57] This is not surprising given the crucial role of the body in EPC until the Treaty of Maastricht and then the CFSP (see e.g. Mourlon-Druol, 2014; Peterson, Byrne, & Helwig, 2012). In the last five years foreign policy has been topic number two in the ranking, but at 15% the level of attention was lower than in all preceding quinquenniums and thus also lower compared with the total attention over the 40 years. Notably, as figure 11 shows, if the period 2010–2014 is excluded, attention goes up from 22% to 24%. The level of prominence is somewhat similar to the time windows 1975–1979 and 1985–1989. Hence, this is not an indication of an entirely new type of agenda which has not been seen before. Moreover, since 1990 there has been a decline in the prioritisation of this topic. But attention in the last quinquennium is particularly low, which might be largely accounted for by the rise in economic domains, as explained in the previous section and the next. The view that the economic crisis prevented broader discussions on foreign policy has already emerged in the CFSP literature (Klein & Wessels, 2013) and is shared by insiders (an EU official quoted in Puetter, 2014).

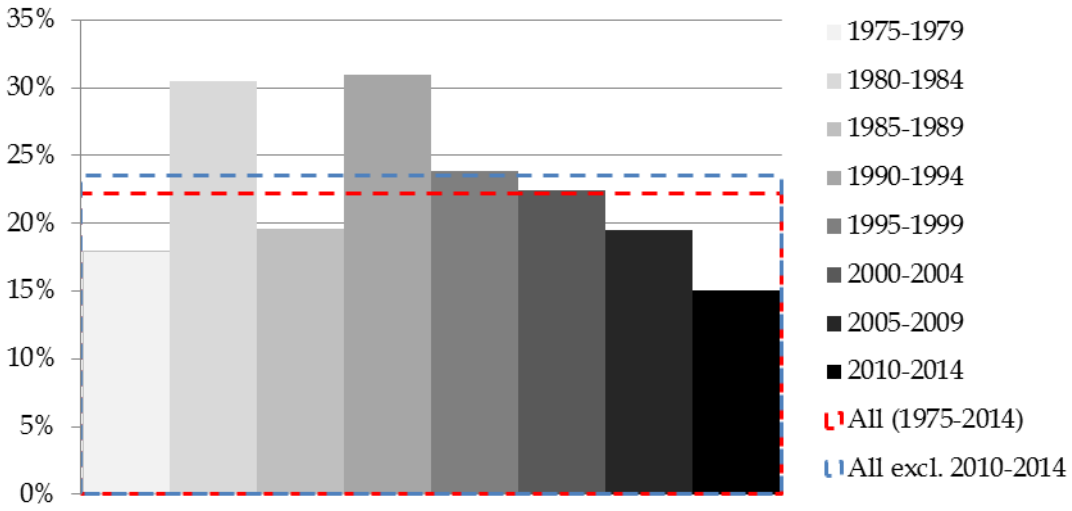


Figure 11. Attention to foreign policy across five-year periods in ECCs, 1975-2014

Under the Treaty of Lisbon, it was no longer regular practice for Foreign Affairs Ministers to be present at summits. After December 2009 they were expected to accompany their Head of State or Government only 'when the agenda so requires'[58] in order to reduce the number of participants in the meeting room. In the post-Lisbon period, the only summit which Foreign Affairs Ministers attended was in September 2010, when Herman Van Rompuy suggested their presence because of the focus on strategic relations with third countries. However, they were not invited in the following years, despite all the violence in the EU's backyard. Devuyst (2012: 345) points out that in this way the Heads of State or Government might have been cut off 'from a certain expertise on international questions'. While this is unlikely to be the only explanation of the drop in attention to foreign policy compared to previous periods, it might have contributed to the pattern. Potentially, with their presence at the meetings before the Treaty of

[57] The ranking and total share of attention to all 21 policy domains is available in Annex III.
[58] ToL, Title III, Art. 9 B(3) | Treaty on European Union (TEU, Consolidated version), Title III, Art. 15(3).

Lisbon Foreign Affairs Ministers might have had an opportunity to further stress this topic, but such a suggestion needs to be substantiated further.

1.3. Business and Finance

Matters of business and finance are not traditionally among the top three themes on the agenda. The third counterpart of foreign policy and macroeconomics is usually governance (Alexandrova et al., 2012; 2014), which in the period 2010–2014 comes sixth in the ranking order. The topic business and finance often follows closely among the upper-mid-range topics. It was on fourth place in the prominence ordering in 1985–1989 and 2005–2009, came fifth in 2000–2004, sixth in 1990–1994 and in some periods was located lower. In the total figure for the 40 years it occupies the fifth place, with 6.87%. The attention received in the most recent quinquennium is therefore higher than usual for a domain which has always been of upper-range yet not top importance (see figure 12). Compared to the previous two five-year periods in which business and finance matters were also given above average coverage in the ECCs, the higher level in 2010–2014 can be attributed mostly to regulation of financial institutions and markets and also to a small extent to the promotion of a favourable environment for SMEs/entrepreneurship. Overall, the enhanced prominence is a reaction to the economic and financial crisis.

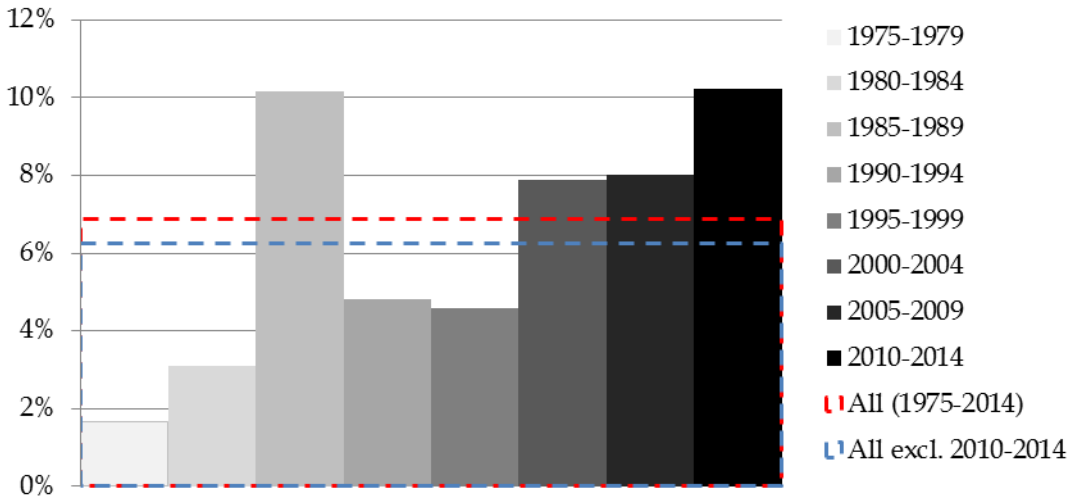


Figure 12. Attention to business and finance across five-year periods in ECCs, 1975-2014

2. Other Topics

Energy, a domain ranked fourth in the last decade, has had a different attention pattern over the years. It gained prominence in the early years of the European Council, scoring fourth and receiving 9.94% attention, and remained low key thereafter (2.89% in 1980–1984 and up to 2% in the following terms). The high salience in the late 1970s was due to the international oil crises, especially the 1979 crisis, which had a significant impact on the European market. The relative neglect of this topic ceased in 2006, when discussion on the draft Energy Policy for Europe was launched. During 2006–2007, debates focused on three key elements: reducing consumption, security of supply, and sustainable and competitive use. The energy agenda was given additional impetus at that time by the EU's attempts to present itself as a leader on climate change action, which still continue. In 2011, the European Council recognised the need to work faster towards completing the internal energy market and set a deadline at the end of 2014. With the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, security of supply gained additional urgency.[59]

With its 6.79% attention employment, the fifth topic in the ranking order for 2010–2014, is slightly above the total for the whole 40-year period (5.75%). Its position and share of the agenda have fluctuated somewhat over the years. Employment has continuously been located in the upper mid-range of attention (between 3.34% in 1990–1994 and 8.08% in 1995–1999) and scored between fourth and tenth place in the ranking. Many of the broad references have been linked with economic growth. The launch of the OMC on employment with the crucial role of the European Council as a coordinator of the process does not seem to have resulted in a gradual increase of the attention devoted to this topic in the conclusions.

Governance is another topic worth describing in detail because of its distinct performance. As stated above, it is usually one of the top three themes on the agenda. It was ranked slightly lower in 1985–1989 (fifth) and 2000–2004 (fourth) but these rankings were compensated by a substantial attention level (9.98% and 8.49% respectively), quite similar to the topics with immediate upper rank. The 5.07% received in the last quinquennium is therefore a remarkably low share for this domain. There is no straightforward explanation for this development. A possible reason for the reduced share of the agenda is the fact that the new Treaty of Lisbon which had been planned for a long time and then renegotiated had just entered into force. Moreover, the need to negotiate a simplified treaty change in 2010 might have been a further reason for the European Council to reduce governance discussions to a minimum in the rest of the period.

As a generally mid-range topic, the position of defence in the last five years is not surprising. The level of attention (4.93%) is only slightly lower than in the preceding period (5.98%) and presents further attempts to consolidate defence policy at EU level. However, in the late 1990s and early 2000s attention was higher, indicating what seems to be an overall downward trend in prominence. It should be noted that this topic is also dependent on external events, as conflicts give rise to EU civil and military missions, which might feed into the general debate on the topic. Its temporal fluctuations are therefore extremely hard to predict.

[59] For a detailed analysis of the energy agenda of the European Council until end 2012 see Alexandrova and Timmermans (2015).

III. Attention Shifts and Policy Punctuations

1. Overall Pattern

Studies of policy agendas demonstrate that political institutions do not adjust their attention to issues incrementally. On the contrary, incoming information signals are processed disproportionately, which leads to a pattern in which relative stability in attention is interspersed by large and erratic change. Baumgartner and Jones (1993; Jones & Baumgartner, 2005) call this pattern punctuated equilibrium. The utility of their model has been demonstrated for various political bodies in many countries (see e.g. Baumgartner et al., 2009; Breunig, 2006; Mortensen et al., 2011).

The reasons why punctuated equilibrium may be observed in attention change are rooted in the bonded rationality of policy makers and fostered by institutional friction. The first element implies that attention is scarce, as policy makers have only limited time and resources to address different matters. Institutional friction comes in various forms, such as for example decision-making rules, and adds additional constraints to topic selection and prioritisation. The result of all of this are periods with continuous attempts to stick to the status quo interspersed with 'punctuations' or large shifts. The latter can occur both in terms of ignoring previously prioritised issues and embracing issues which were previously seen as low key.

Recent research has shown that the punctuated equilibrium model of attention change applies to the information processing style of the European Council (Alexandrova et al., 2012; 2014). Attention to a range of topics decreases and increases in frequency and size far in excess of the incremental prediction. This pattern is the easiest to observe in a plotted graph of frequency distribution of annual attention change (estimated via the percentage-percentage method), as presented in figure 13. Further details of the approach to measuring agenda change is available in the methodological annex.

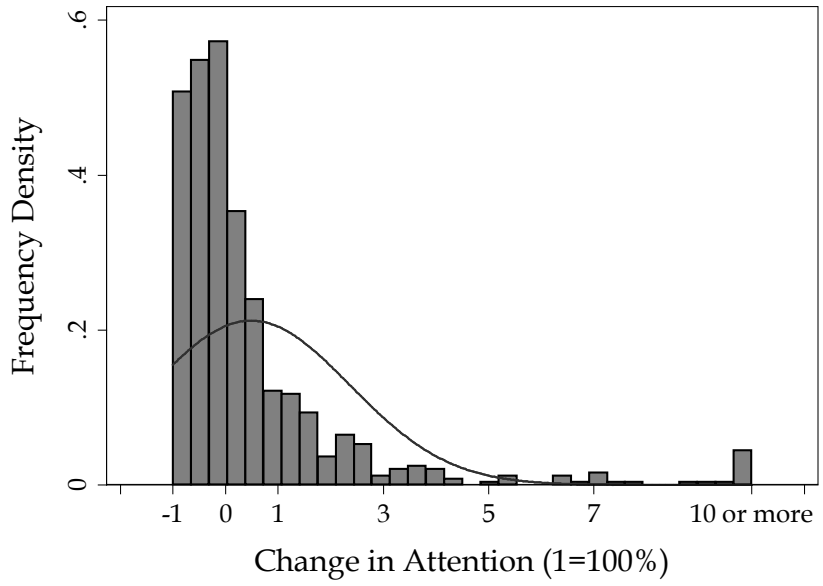


Figure 13. Distribution of attention percentage change from 1975 to 2014

2. The Period 2009 – 2014 in Comparison

Taking an extract of the data in order to configure the attention change pattern for the period 2009–2014 reveals that even for this limited time frame of 5 years a punctuated equilibrium model is clearly visible. Figure 14 displays the result. There is a high frequency of mid-range and extreme negative shifts, a lower level of moderate positive change than predicted by the incremental model and some level of extreme positive change.

The statistical measure which best describes the degree of punctuation of the agenda or the 'peakedness' of the distribution of attention change is kurtosis. L-kurtosis is more robust to extreme values and particularly better suited for making inferences from smaller samples (Breunig & Jones, 2011; Hosking, 1990). A normal distribution has an L-kurtosis of 0.123, whereas a leptokurtic distribution (predicted by the punctuated equilibrium model) has a higher value. Table 1 presents these and some additional statistics for the term 2009–2014, the four preceding quinquenniums and the whole 40-year period.

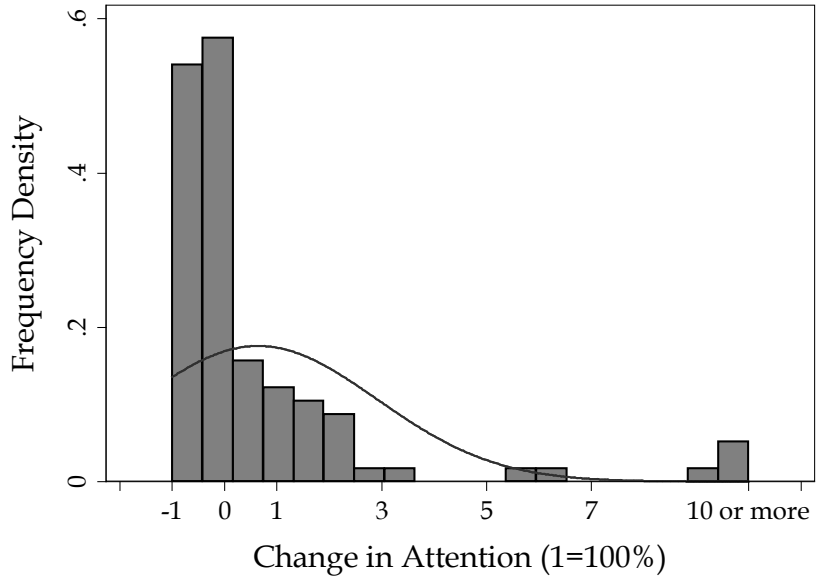


Figure 14. Distribution of attention percentage change from 2009 to 2014

	Change from 2009 to 2014	Change from 2004 to 2009	Change from 1999 to 2004	Change from 1994 to 1999	Change from 1989 to 1994	Change from 1975 to 2014
Minimum	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1
Median	-0.067	-0.031	-0.138	-0.04	-0.025	-0.083
Mean	1.186	0.356	0.479	0.222	0.31	0.633
Maximum	40.201	15.177	20.938	8.756	6.438	40.201
Standard deviation	5.455	1.73	2.43	1.187	1.198	3.033
L-kurtosis (L4)	0.573	0.383	0.431	0.273	0.211	0.431
Observations	99	100	105	99	95	716

Note: Change in attention, 1=100%

Table 1. Statistics on agenda change

The L-kurtosis for attention change between 1975 and 2014 is 0.431, which clearly indicates a leptokurtic distribution (as already seen in figure 13). For the most recent five years the score is quite high, 0.573, demonstrating that switching between topics was quite common.[60] Compared to the four previous quinquenniums, the period 2009–2014 seems to have been subject to more intense high-level change of the topics on the agenda from one year to another.[61] Notably, the L-kurtosis value is exceptionally high. This pattern can also be observed in the simpler statistics. The minimum change of -1, which indicates a decrease by 100%, signifies that in all periods topics discussed in one year have been ignored in the next one. The maximum change of 40.201 in 2009–2014 indicates that the maximum increase in attention in these five years was by 4020.1%. In the preceding quinquenniums this maximum was much lower, except in 1999–2004. A similar message emerges from the median, mean and standard deviations for the different periods.

3. Attention Punctuations since the Lisbon Treaty

In short, the period 2009–2014 constitutes a time frame during which intensive shifts in attention occurred from one year to the next. This level of attention change is higher than the norm for the European Council, making the period exceptionally punctuated. The outstanding score is not caused by any single factor.

The largest positive punctuations in attention come from different policy fields and can be explained in different ways. There are six cases of attention increase of over 500% observed in the domains agriculture, civil rights, environment, health, immigration and regional policy. While some of them were caused by unexpected focusing events occurring outside the EU, others reflected multiannual programming which could easily be predicted. The six cases are in particular:

- Agriculture, 2013 (4020%): From 0.09% in 2012 attention increased to 3.70% in 2013. The reason was the adoption of the new MFF in February, where agriculture traditionally has a special place as one of the key areas of EU spending. The topic does not generally feature much on the European Council's agenda (1.92% of the attention share in the 40-year period), especially after the CAP disputes in the 1980s.An attention share of 3.70% is therefore high for agriculture.
- Regional policy, 2013 (921%): From 0.81% in 2012 attention increased to 8.25% in 2013. The pattern here is the same as for agriculture. Regional funds are rarely discussed by the top EU body (a total of 1.59% between 1975 and 2014) but MFF negotiations generated substantial attention for this topic.
- Civil rights, 2011 (3278%): From 0.11% in 2010 the share of the agenda dedicated to this theme went up to 3.7% in 2011. The drivers behind this were the Arab Spring in the Southern Neighbourhood and to a lesser extent the conflict in Syria. However, it should be

[60] As the difference between the number of observations in the two periods (5 and 40 years) is quite large, direct comparisons of the L-kurtosis values might not be an accurate basis for making inferences.
[61] The number of observations in the sub-samples is relatively similar, making comparisons possible. The differences are due to the varying number of cases where a change from 0 to another value occurred or attention was continuously non-existent.

noted that attention in 2010 was exceptionally low, since this topic receives on average 3.08% of the agenda (across the 40-year period).

- Immigration, 2011 (648%): From 0.88% in 2010 attention climbed to 6.55% in 2011. Similarly to the civil rights domain, the effect can be attributed to the Arab Spring. Yet, while the attention level in 2011 is clearly above the 40-year period annual average (2.65%), immigration has been relatively prominent on the agenda since 2003. Thus, again similarly to the civil rights domain, the increase follows a substantial drop in attention.
- Health, 2014 (1092%): From 0.19% in 2010 attention rose to 2.26% in 2011. For a topic which annually on average receives 0.7%, it can be argued that health matters became prominent. This was the result of the Ebola epidemic in Africa – a focusing event posing an indirect threat for the EU.

Compared to executives in nation states, the European Council has more leeway to drop topics completely from its agenda even if they have previously been considered important (Alexandrova et al., 2012). In the period 2009–2014, six such cases of theme exclusion occurred. The topics sacrificed were domains of low prominence: culture (twice), health, and natural resources and territories (twice). While until the early 1990s quite a high number of topics which had been discussed in the preceding year were ignored, between 1992 and 2009 it dropped to zero or a single topic annually. The most recent quinquennium therefore represents a reverse trend, signifying a further increase in agenda instability.

Chapter 4. External Dimension of the Agenda

The European Council has a special role in coordinating and setting the direction in EU foreign affairs. In today's extremely interconnected world, the domain foreign affairs is not confined to diplomatic relations and trade with third countries. Many specific policy themes, such as immigration or environment, have an external dimension. Policy on the global level is interlinked with domestic decision making, and the EU offers an opportunity for the Member States to have a stronger say when a common EU position can be reached. This chapter elaborates on the types of topics which the European Council discussed within the external dimension of its agenda and the countries which were mostly in its focus.

I. Thematic Spectrum of the External Dimension

As chapter two revealed, 15.14% of the agenda in the period December 2009 – November 2014 was dedicated to foreign policy. However, the foreign affairs share of the agenda is even larger. Many of the policy areas discussed by the Heads of State or Government exhibit an external dimension. For example, while part of the conclusions could be classified under the topic of civil rights, in fact the rights of populations outside EU borders could be discussed. Adding these external references in various policy fields to the foreign policy domain increases the foreign affairs share of the agenda to 26.45%. Figure 15 displays the largest substantial topics within the external dimension (excluding foreign policy) ordered according to their contribution to the dimension. Most prominent is defence, followed by civil rights, environment, energy, immigration, and others.

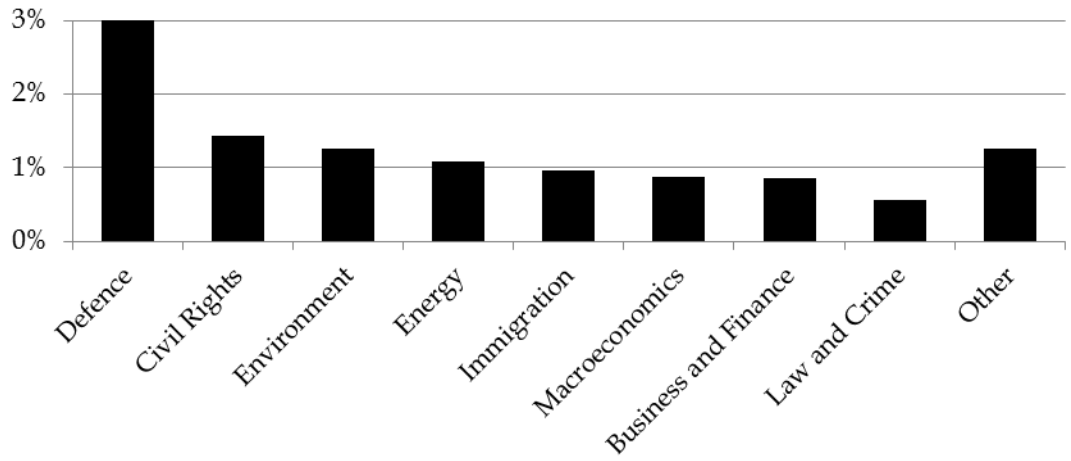


Figure 15. Topics within the external dimension of the agenda (excluding foreign policy)

Matters of war and peace matters discussed in relation to countries beyond EU borders take up 3% of the whole agenda. In fact this is more than the internal defence deliberations, which amount to 2%. The external defence agenda was determined by multiple conflicts abroad, most notably in Ukraine, North Africa during the Arab Spring and Syria. While the 3% share is certainly a significant number, it is lower than the average attention to defence within foreign affairs for the 40-year period (4.61%). Over the last five years, attention to external war-related issues was higher in 2014 than in the preceding years. This demonstrates the strategic importance of the Ukraine conflict.

With respect to civil rights, the situation is similar. The protection of rights often comes up in discussion of violent conflicts. The European Council focused on rights within the foreign affairs domain mostly with respect to Ukraine and North Africa, in particular Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, as well as to a lesser extent regarding Syria and Mali. With a total proportion of 1.44% for such matters, the share is similar to the whole period since 1975 (1.86%).

The environment is a topic that is often discussed from a broad international perspective rather than attached to a specific third country. In fact, it is not environment as a whole but the subtopic of climate change that is the subject of such discussions. Considering the EU's desire to be a global leader in action on climate, it is quite normal to find this issue on the agenda of the European Council. The Heads of State or Government used this arena in order to agree on a common position before the start of international climate negotiations, such as the Copenhagen Conference in December 2009 or the conference in Cancun a year later.

The importance of energy, and especially energy security, in EU foreign affairs has increasingly been recognised by the European Council. In February 2011, it invited the High Representative 'to take fully account of the energy security dimension in her work'. While references are sometimes made to international cooperation or relations to the neighbourhood, the essence of this matter is the EU position vis-à-vis Russia as the main supplier of natural gas and crude oil to the EU.[62] The conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which erupted in early 2014, further emphasised the importance of this topic.

Immigration has been part of the external agenda, primarily in the context of the revolutions in the Southern Neighbourhood. The idea of developing mobility partnerships with countries in this region gained urgency as an increasing number of immigrants and asylum seekers drowned in the Mediterranean trying to reach Europe on overcrowded and ill-equipped boats.

Macroeconomic and business and finance issues in the external dimension of the agenda were triggered by the economic and financial crisis, which required solutions beyond EU borders. The Heads of State or Government therefore emphasised the need to coordinate measures globally. The G20 forum was seen as important in this regard and the role of the International Monetary Fund was highlighted.

II. Third Countries on the Agenda

The external dimension of the agenda can be analysed further from the perspective of direct references to third countries and regions. Table 2 provides an overview of the ten most prominent third countries in the ECCs for the period December 2009 – November 2014.[63] It shows the total number of quasi-sentences referring to each country[64], as well as the relative

[62] See Eurostat data on energy imports:
http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Energy_production_and_imports.
[63] A list of all counties mentioned in the conclusions is available in Annex IV.
[64] For more details on the calculation see Annex I.

size of this number as a share of the whole agenda and only the external dimension of the agenda[65].
There is clearly a leader in the ranking. Discussions linked to Ukraine account for 3.64% of the text in the conclusions and almost 12% of the external agenda of the European Council. Considering that only 21 of the 273 quasi-sentences are from the period before the start of 2014, the conflict at the EU's Eastern border clearly caused a reshuffling of the agenda.

The prominence of Russia is also largely related to the conflict. The pattern of attention to it is similar, as 123 of the 153 quasi-sentences are from 2014. While Russia has always been an extremely prominent third country in the discussions of the European Council, the last year certainly signifies a peak.[66]

Country	Quasi-sentences	Proportion of the whole agenda	Proportion of external agenda
Ukraine	273	3.64%	11.70%
Russia	153	2.04%	6.56%
Syria	134	1.79%	5.74%
Iran	99	1.32%	4.24%
Libya	97	1.29%	4.16%
USA	57	0.76%	2.44%
Palestine	53	0.71%	2.27%
Israel	51	0.68%	2.19%
Egypt	43	0.57%	1.84%
Afghanistan	36	0.48%	1.54%

Table 2. Most prominent third countries on the agenda

The Syrian Civil War began in early 2011 and has continued ever since. Various factors may have contributed to the decision to discuss this problem at the European Council level. The conflict, which became a humanitarian disaster, is located not too far from EU territory and therefore led to refugee flows towards the Member States. However, the lower number of references in 2014 signifies that the new emergency taking place much closer to the EU geographically reduced the space for other conflicts. This does not mean that the Syrian Civil War was ignored in the EU system. On the contrary, the Foreign Affairs Council continued to discuss the matter but it was not prioritised at the top level, i.e. in the European Council.

Concerns over Iran's nuclear programme were discussed until late 2012. Attempts by the EU to persuade Iran by diplomatic means to comply with international standards and cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency did not meet with success. This led to a more deterrent approach, with sanctions against individuals linked to the nuclear programme and an embargo on Iranian oil from July 2012. After these harsh measures were enacted (i.e. during the last two years) Iran did not appear on the European Council's agenda.

[65] The external dimension of the agenda here comprises foreign affairs, as discussed in section I of this chapter, in addition to external trade.
[66] The only exception is 1999, when the number of quasi-sentences reached 342, but this happened in a period when the European Council used to produce much longer conclusions.

Among the countries in table 3 are Libya and Egypt, two of the states where popular uprisings led to the fall of totalitarian governments. The Arab Spring revolutions in the whole region occupied considerable attention at the top EU level. A total of 210 references were made to North Africa. This number accounts for 2.8% of the whole agenda and 9% of its external dimension. While attention was high in 2011, it declined the following year when the violence seemed to be coming to an end. In 2013, the European Council proposed the development of an extensive partnership with the countries in the region. After delegation of tasks to the other institutions, the region was no longer within the scope of the European Council's discussions.

Israel and Palestine often feature on the agenda because the never-ending conflict in the Middle East continuously supplies new insurgencies. The fact that these two countries are among the top ten for the most recent period is therefore hardly surprising.

The USA is a strategic partner of the EU in many respects. Most notably, it is an important member of NATO, to which most EU Member States belong, and often participates together with the EU in multilateral coalitions on world problems. In addition to such matters, the last five years brought up two other issues. The first, negotiations on a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, was only briefly discussed in the European Council in order to signal the importance of reaching agreement. The second issue was a more complex matter. USA intelligence services appeared to have eavesdropped on EU leaders and after information about this scandal reached the news media a statement at the Heads of State or Government level was deemed necessary.

In sum, many of the third countries that were frequently referred to by the European Council were places of violence and instability in the immediate or more distant neighbourhood. Both traditional and newly erupting insurgencies found their place on the agenda, the latter drawing much more attention from EU leaders. Externally driven events with high harm potential, such as Iran's nuclear programme and the US illegitimate intelligence gathering, also triggered major attention.

Chapter 5. Institutional Roles and Interactions

I. European Council Roles

As mentioned earlier, the treaties designate the European Council as the EU body responsible for political guidelines and directions. However, the freedom to select topics for discussion suggests that EU summits might go beyond long-term strategic planning and touch upon technical details of policy making. In fact, the European Council has been accused of focusing too much on details, which undermines its efficiency (Cloos, 2008). On the other hand, reaching consensus on sensitive issues might often be possible only when all the core elements are settled.

1. General Pattern

The literature on public management and organisational science distinguishes between strategic and operational planning and decision making (see e.g. Ackoff, 1974; Bryson, 1988; Poister & Streib, 1999). The main differences involve time horizon, scope, and degree of detail. Strategic plans/decisions cover several years, affect a wide range of activities and frame goals in general and simplistic terms. Operational plans/decisions are intended to materialise faster (mostly within a year), have a more limited scope and feature considerable detail. Generally, the European Council should be expected to spend more attention on the first category and only rarely focus on the second but so far this has not been systematically studied with empirical data. This section offers the first attempt to classify the nature of statements in terms of these two roles: providing overall directions and setting goals vs. specifying policy actions and instruments. It should be noted that the distinction between strategic and operational language refers to policy solutions, and therefore part of the text in the ECCs cannot be placed in either category. Summaries of the conclusions, which are nowadays often included at the beginning of the texts, are also left unclassified.

Figure 16 presents an overview of the distribution of the agenda (measured in quasi-sentences) across the two categories for the period 2010–2014. It appears that the portion of the text that can be classified as operational (46%) is somewhat higher than the strategic statements (40%). This is to some extent attributable to interactions with other EU institutions. When the European Council reviews existing actions and dossiers produced by them or requires further action on its strategic deliberations, this mostly relates to operational activities. However, a substantial amount of the conclusions (31%) include details of policy making that stem from the European Council directly. Thus, in the last five years the EU's top body, which is not supposed to exercise legislative functions, appears to have discussed specific policy details that go beyond setting the overall political agenda much more often than might have been expected.

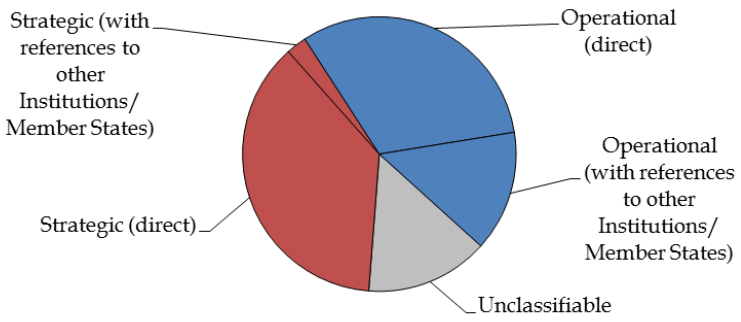


Figure 16. Strategic versus operational language

2. Variability across Policy Areas

The roles which the European Council assumed varied across policy areas. Figure 17 shows the shares that policy domains took up in the strategic and operational parts of the agenda.[67] Several patterns are worthy of note. One of them concerns foreign policy, which is more often discussed from a strategic perspective. This is in line with the task of the European Council to identify core interests and objectives on CFSP. Both the planning of cooperation with third countries and reactions to external events are more frequently approached by strategic positions. Specific decisions on EU actions and their further elaboration are less prominent. Much the same can be said of the situation for defence, a topic very much linked to foreign policy, and civil rights, which at least in the last quinquennium were mostly within the external dimension of the agenda (as explained in Chapter 4). Interestingly, the different crises in third countries featured on the European Council's agenda have not transformed its institutional role.

The approach to economic affairs is quite different. Both macroeconomic and business and finance matters were on the agenda in more operational terms. The pattern is particularly striking for the latter category, which (as shown in Chapter 2) received much more attention in the last five years compared to previous periods. It seems that the economic and financial crisis acted as a trigger for more direct involvement in policy making by the European Council. The urgency of swift reaction required concrete measures rather than general frameworks for development. However, strategic language was also necessary. On the one hand, this was an instrument to position and defend the choices made. On the other hand, agreement on general strategic directions was a stepping stone toward operational decisions.

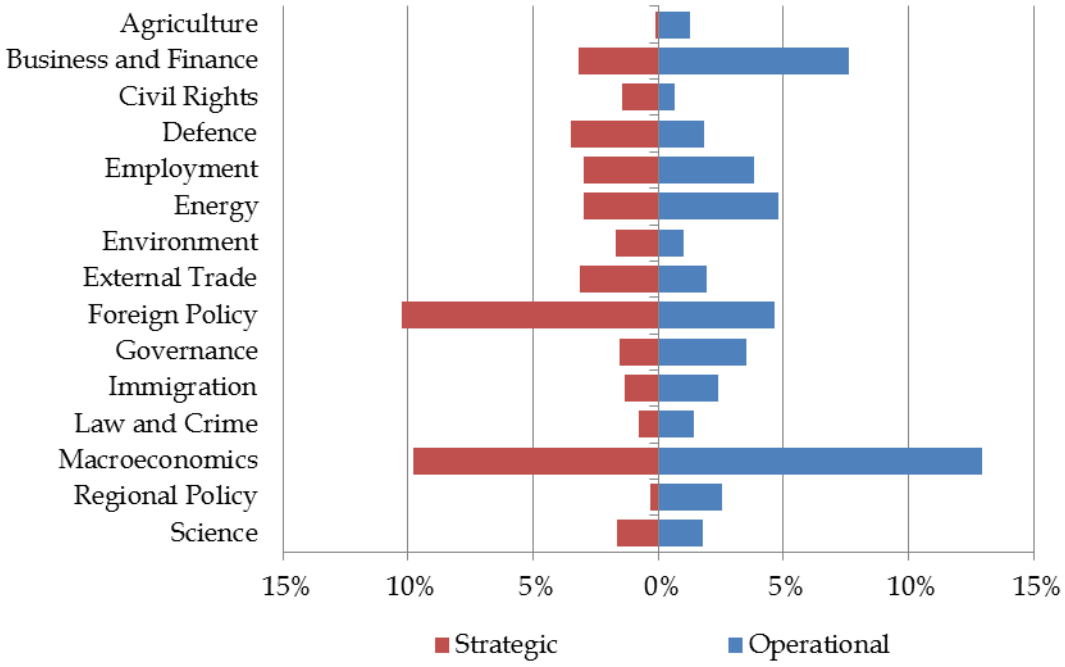


Figure 17. Strategic versus operational language across policy areas

[67] The total for the two classifiers (strategic and operational) together equals 100%, excluding non-classifiable statements. Topics which received less than 1% attention in each category (culture, education, health, natural resources and territories, social policy and transport) are left out of the graph as making inferences would not be reasonable.

Several policy areas demonstrate a relatively equal distribution of attention across strategic and operational elements. A noteworthy example here is employment, one of the new areas of EU policy governed by soft instruments (see Ashiagbor, 2005; Puetter, 2014). Every spring, the European Council evaluates the economic situation in the Union and adopts conclusions which serve as a basis for the Council to specify employment guidelines that in turn are considered by the Member States in designing their domestic policies.[68] In July, the European Council endorses the final country-specific recommendations reviewed by the Council on the basis of a Commission proposal. It appears that the close interlinking of the European Council with other EU institutions in the area of employment has offered opportunities for it to have more substantial policy input in addition to the strategic directions. This logic can also be applied to the macroeconomic area, which also falls within the framework of the European Semester. However, the substantially higher share of operational discussions in macroeconomics highlights that the economic and financial crisis has had an independent effect.

Stronger focus on functional details is notable in a few sectors where the explanation for the phenomenon is rather straightforward. One such case is governance. This topic comprises issues like top appointments and treaty change which are not about strategic plans, and represent substantial policy decisions. Thus, traditionally the European Council can be expected to use more operational language in this area. Other examples are agriculture and regional policy. As discussed in the previous chapters, these two domains are rarely within the topic catalogue of the European Council and attention to them was caused by the need to agree on a new budgetary framework. The MFF was added in a lengthy annex to the conclusions and naturally covered a range of technical details in agriculture and regional policy. Hence, operational language in these two domains is not common for the European Council but can be easily invoked once in a few years in the context of budgetary planning.

Energy is a further example where operational policy has outweighed strategic goal setting. However, in this domain the European Council cannot be expected to focus on detail, which would signal an extension of its functions. Operational language on energy was associated with three subjects. The two more dominant of them were large frameworks – the aim to complete the internal market in energy by 2014 and the climate and energy policy framework drawn up in March, June and October 2014 with a number of specific measures related to energy efficiency, interconnections and security. In both cases the broad strategic outlines of development drawn up by the EU's top agenda setter were complemented by announcements of concrete action or calls for such action. The third element contributing to the operational perspective was externally driven. The nuclear disaster in Japan in 2011 prompted a decision to carry out stress tests on nuclear power plants in the EU. In short, in the period 2010–2014 energy is an example of a policy area where broad strategic planning can be extended to a large number of operational measures and activities, and the European Council has the ability to make this possible.

[68] Since 2010, the coordination of employment policies has been integrated in the European Semester.

II. Interactions with other EU Institutions and the Member States

The European Council communicates with the other EU institutions and the Member States via its conclusions. Existing research shows that the body is a process type institution in terms of the way it handles information (Alexandrova et al., 2012). This means that it both receives information signals from the EU machinery and produces further output which serves as an input for this machinery. As Herman Van Rompuy put it in his first annual evaluation of the European Council meetings under his chairmanship, a summit is 'both the end of a process and the start of new beginnings' (General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union, 2011: 5).

1. General Level of Interaction

In the last quinquennium, 16% of quasi-sentences contained a reference to EU institutions or the Member States. These references can be of three kinds. First, the European Council can review or comment on action undertaken by another institution, such as a report from the Commission or a decision by the Council. Second, it can state that an action will take place. For example, it can take note of the fact that the Commission is planning to come up with a proposal or that the Member States are ready to take certain measures. Third, it can call on the other institutional actors to carry out an action, such as invite the High Representative to undertake research on an issue and report back. Such calls can also be aimed at speeding up action which is about to take place, like reaching an agreement between the Council and the EP on a pending legislative proposal.

Table 3 presents the total numbers of interinstitutional references across these three types. Calls for action were made twice as often as reviews of existing activities, and the number of references to planned future actions lay in between. The breakdown of values on an annual basis demonstrates that all three categories were continuously present in the same order with differences in the exact number of statements. Considering that the data for 2014 does not contain the latest conclusions from December, the numbers there are quite likely to be higher. The year 2010 therefore stands out as a case with a comparatively low level of institutional interaction. This does not seem to be a function of the size of the text in the ECCs. The low number might be potentially related to the fact that in 2010 a new institutional cycle started for the Commission, with the second Barroso-led College taking office in February. As the European Council interacts quite intensely with the Commission, this logic seems plausible but further research over a longer period is necessary in order to confirm the proposition.

	Institutional Action References				
Year	None	Review of existing action/ document	Expression/ confirmation of (planned) action	Call for action or for speeding up action	All
2010	836	30	41	39	946
2011	1500	70	66	187	1823
2012	849	68	106	122	1145
2013	1823	79	105	148	2155
2014	1171	37	22	82	1312
All	**6179**	**284**	**340**	**578**	**7381**

Table 3. Types of references to actions by other institutions or Member States

2. Interaction Intensity across Institutional Partners and Policy Areas

The three types of institutional action references have been linked to a range of actors. Figure 18 presents the institutions mentioned by the European Council in each of the categories, ordered from the most prominent in the three types of references altogether (bottom) to the least prominent (top). The European Commission is the leader in institutional interaction (541 references), followed by the Council (398), the Member States (245), the EP (154), and the High Representative (56). Remarkably, with respect to all of these actors demands for action dominate.

The Commission is, not surprisingly, the focus of European Council requests. As the European Council does not have its own bureaucracy, calls for further research on a prominent topic are made to it. The Commission President, who participates in all summits, acts as a strong link between the two bodies. He is therefore sometimes individually addressed by the Heads of State or Government (32 references). But the Commission can also offer various documents for consideration at European Council level, in an attempt to secure support for its actions (Eggermont, 2012). The recent period clearly demonstrates that this occurs in practice. Further evidence for the intensive interaction between the two bodies is the high level of cases in the middle, where future action is announced. These cases can comprise both follow-up to previous calls by the European Council or Commission own initiatives communicated to the EU's top body.

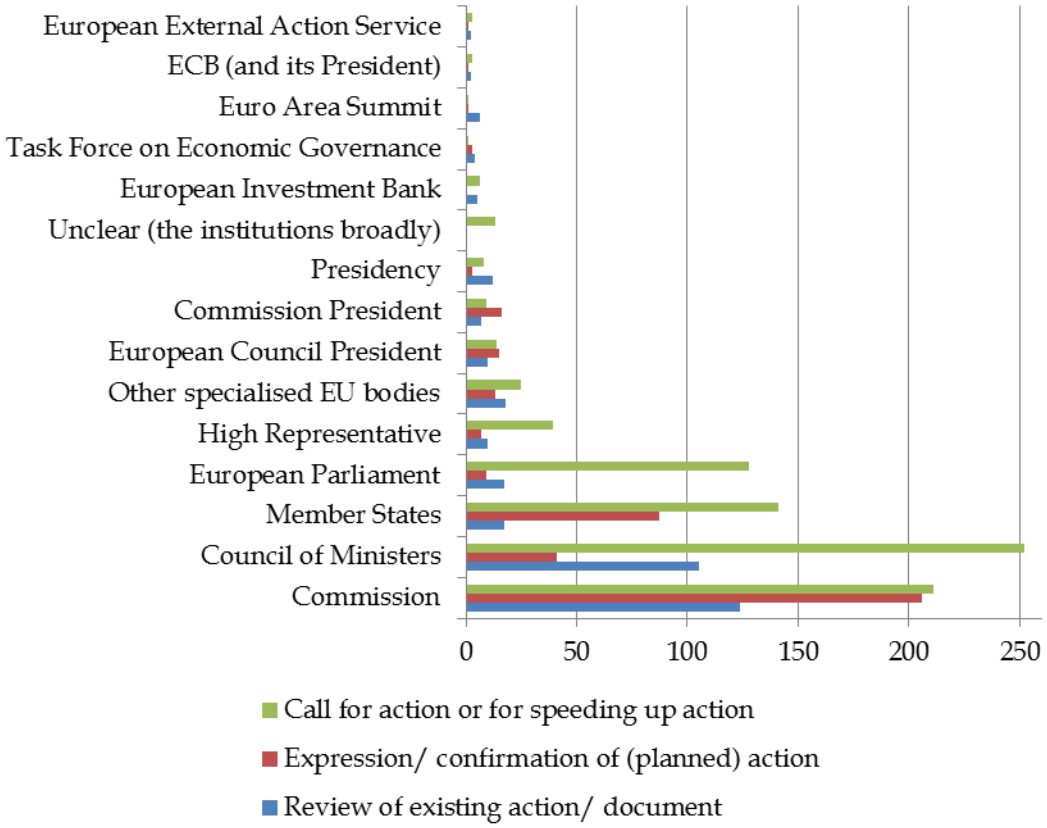
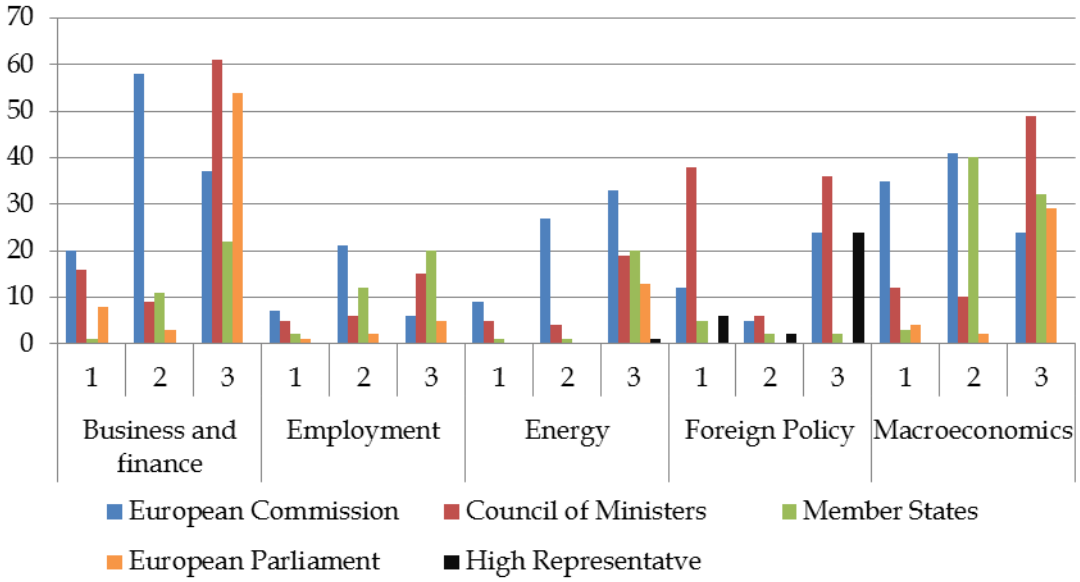


Figure 18. Types of references to actions across EU institutions

The Council has been invited to take action slightly more often than the Commission. Yet here again, action taken is often duly acknowledged, testifying to a vibrant exchange. With respect to calls for adoption of legislative dossiers, the Council and the EP have often been mentioned together. In some cases they have been asked to speed up agreement and adoption of a legal act rather than produce a certain outcome, although the latter may also be implied to an extent. Action undertaken or planned by the EP seems to be of little interest to the European Council.

Member States are also often directly referred to. Such mentions usually cover national governments, although depending on the issue at stake national parliaments might also be included in the general reference. As the European Council consists of the top representatives of all Member States, the conclusions are used as a communication instrument for action at national level that is required to complement EU level activities. In areas where soft law dominates and benchmarking is an important tool, such as the European Semester, the two levels are interlinked.

The domains in which cross-institutional interaction occurred most often are some of the topics which also gained most attention in the conclusions. Thus, more attention seems to be a natural precondition for more interaction. The highest number of references to other institutions and Member States is present in macroeconomics, the most prominent topic on the agenda, followed by the other two priorities in reverse order – business and finance and foreign policy, and energy and employment at some distance. Figure 19 features an overview of the three types of exchange.



Note: 1 = Review of existing action/document, 2 = Expression/confirmation of (planned) action, 3 = Call for action or for speeding up action

Figure 19. Institutional interaction across policy areas

In business and finance and macroeconomics input clearly came or was expected from the Commission, although expectations of upcoming action were also prominent with respect to the Member States (especially on macroeconomics). Work was delegated to many institutions and levels. Calls for agreement to be reached or for faster decision making were mostly directed to

the EP and the Council, and more often only to the latter on macroeconomic affairs. However, the Commission and the Member States were also allocated tasks. This might suggest that at a time of economic and financial crisis all possible levels need to be activated. In addition to the five actors shown on the graph, these two policy fields have given rise to references to specialised bodies: the ECB, the European Investment Bank, the newly established Task Force on Economic Governance, the Eurozone summit, the Eurogroup, and others.

In energy and employment, both delivered and expected input stemmed again predominantly from the Commission. Owing to the dissimilar modes of governance in the two domains, requests for action followed a different pattern. Calls for action on employment matters were first of all directed to the Member States in the framework of the European Semester, where they have to prepare National Job Plans. As employment policies remain predominantly a national competence, which is merely coordinated at EU level, this is quite in line with expectations.

Work on energy matters was delegated to many bodies, but the Commission received the heaviest workload. This is explained by the fact that two new policy initiatives were developed during the last five years which the Commission had to elaborate further – the climate and energy policy framework and the nuclear safety programme with stress tests for nuclear power plants (see section I of this chapter). On the other hand, the desire for completion of the internal market in energy generated requests for speedier decision making by the co-legislators. The Member States had to be taken on board too, as implementation and further action at national level are a prerequisite for a fully functioning common energy market.

In foreign policy the Council was, as expected, the main actor both with respect to the contribution to European Council discussions and the receipt of feedback from the summits. In this field, an additional actor – the High Representative – was very prominent. Calls for action often required close cooperation between the High Representative and the Commission.

Conclusion

This study presents an in-depth analysis of the agenda of the European Council between December 2009 and November 2014. It investigates developments during the five-year period immediately after the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon. The latter listed the European Council among the EU institutions and introduced a permanent President. The first permanent President, Herman Van Rompuy, finished his second term at the end of November 2014. While the analysis focuses on the presidency of Van Rompuy, comparisons with earlier periods are made.

The number of European Council summits has been on the rise since the early 1990s and especially since 2006. In the post-Lisbon period, three meetings per half year have become standard and a higher number possible. Informal summits have maintained their rate of occurrence in the last five years (five in total), whereas extraordinary summits have become more common (also five). Informal meetings continue to be used for open discussions on sensitive issues. Whether and to what extent publicity of the results is sought depends on whether substantial agreements have been reached.

The increased frequency of extraordinary summits in the recent period can be explained by two factors. The first has to do with the higher number of focusing events in the neighbourhood, especially violent conflicts (Arab Spring, Ukrainian crisis, Syrian Civil War, and fighting in Gaza). The second concerns disagreements among the Member States on crucial points carrying a risk of institutional stalemate (MFF negotiations and choice of the new Commission President). The higher frequency of meetings overall has been very much in line with the ideas of the President, who envisaged a working method for the European Council as a regular institution.

After Lisbon the size of the ECCs remained relatively stable (hardly going beyond 400 quasi-sentences) with the exception of two meetings with major agreements. One of them covered new instruments to tackle the financial and economic crisis (Euro Plus Pact and term sheet for the ESM). The other offered a way out of a deadlock between the Member States and the EU institutions (MFF). In both cases a sense of urgency was invoked. The relative stability apart from these two cases was to an extent ensured by the high frequency of the summits.

The post-Lisbon period was the first for the European Council with a permanent President. However, external factors seem to have had the most substantive effect on the agenda. Notably, the international economic and financial crisis required swift measures and in many cases very detailed agreements that had to be achieved at the top level of political power. The crisis also had an impact on other sectors, either by causing a spill-over in attention (as on employment) or constraining the leeway for directing attention to other topics such as foreign policy and many smaller areas. Focusing events, in particular the eruption of violent conflicts, as well as their further development, also played an important role. In addition, the Heads of State or Government could not escape from 'rolling dossiers', i.e. recurring themes or files in progress, which they had decided to monitor because of high political salience (such as energy and to some extent environment) or which needed a compromise at the top level of decision making (the budgetary framework and appointments). Both the economic crisis and the monitoring of 'rolling dossiers' meant that the European Council had a more operational rather than

prevailingly strategic orientation. The interaction with the other institutions was quite intensive. Input usually came from the Commission, except on foreign policy, where the Council had a leading role. Requests for action by the European Council were directed towards a number of actors in its environment.

The attention of the European Council concentrated on three domains that took up half of the agenda – macroeconomics, foreign policy, and business and finance. While the first two have always been prominent in the institution's discussions, the latter is an exception, clearly brought about by the global crisis and the need to find solutions to its negative effects in the EU. Moreover, even though macroeconomics is a core topic in the ECCs, in the last five years it has been prioritised more often than usual. Notably, even the fact that separate Euro Summits were held did not reduce the macroeconomic element of the agenda. The only other similar period was the late 1970s, a time of economic recession. Thus, the crisis clearly triggered more attention to both macro- and microeconomic initiatives. Foreign policy discussions suffered from this and if it were not for focusing events in the neighbourhood, the domain would have been largely ignored. This is quite untypical of meetings at Head of State or Government level, and President Van Rompuy's aspiration to focus on strategic thinking in foreign policy could not be met to the extent he desired. Whether this is also related to the absence of Foreign Affairs Ministers at the summits in the post-Lisbon period requires further examination.

The European Council follows a punctuated pattern of attention to policy issues, which results in the interspersal of incremental change with a high frequency of extreme increases and decreases in attention to particular topics (punctuations). Analysed separately, the period since the Lisbon Treaty also confirms theoretical expectations. Notably, however, the number of 'punctuations' is higher than in preceding periods. The reasons for this are several. First, some topics which hardly make it onto the European Council's agenda normally became very prominent in a single year, compared to the average attention they had received at summits (agriculture in 2013, regional policy in 2013, health in 2011). Second, the year 2010 was preoccupied with discussion on saving the euro and ensuring growth and jobs. This left less space for lower-ranking issues that came back the year after, further increased by focusing events (civil rights, immigration). Third, the overcrowding of the agenda with urgent matters made exclusion of topics more common (culture, health, natural resources and territories).

While foreign policy is one of the major topics in the ECCs, attention to issues linked to third countries or the international arena does not stop there. A range of other domains has fallen within the external dimension of the agenda in the last five years, taking up a substantial share of attention. The most prominent include defence, civil rights, environment, energy, immigration and others. The salience of most of these topics in the external dimension can be explained by the multiple conflicts in which the EU had a stake and which involved violence, humanitarian disasters and refugee outflows (especially North Africa, Ukraine and Syria). Regarding the field of environment, the reason is different and relates to the EU's desire to be a global leader in action on climate and international negotiations on this topic.

The attention to third countries in the ECCs carries a clear message. Ukraine, a state that has never attracted much attention previously, is the frontrunner. The ongoing conflict in the EU's major Eastern neighbour caused a reshuffling of the agenda, since most of the references to Ukraine in the post-Lisbon period were made in 2014, the year when the conflict began. Russia

is the second most prominent third country in the conclusions. While it has often been the focus of the European Council, 2014 clearly presents a peak in attention to it because of the Ukrainian conflict. Other states commonly referred to, such as Syria, Libya, Palestine, Israel and Egypt also featured in the ECCs as a result of violent struggles and civil wars. In addition, two other countries were quite prominent – Iran because of its nuclear programme and the United States for three reasons: traditional partnerships, negotiations on a transatlantic trade and investment agreement and an eavesdropping scandal involving US intelligence services.

The economic and financial crisis not only focussed attention on economic issues but also caused other topics to be linked to the economy. The best example of this is employment. This is a domain which has to be reviewed by the European Council in the context of the OMC and more recently the European Semester. But the general coordination of employment policies at EU level was not the driver behind the relative prominence of the employment domain. This was instead the result of associations with economic performance and growth. Conflicts in third countries also acted as triggers for attention to domains beyond foreign policy (e.g. defence and civil rights). Energy, the fourth ranked domain, was more prominent than usual but this was only partially due to a spill-over effect. The development of a comprehensive energy policy for the EU has been a goal in sight since 2006. Thus, discussions on this topic were driven by the desire to complete plans on which work was ongoing. Further stress was added by the conflict in Ukraine and the EU's ambition to be a global leader on climate policy; but these elements were only of secondary importance.

Policy statements can be classified in two broad categories: operational and strategic. The first refers to short-term plans with limited scope and many details, whereas the second reflects long-term guidelines across a range of activity areas with straightforward goals. The European Council has the task of setting political directions for the EU and is precluded from exercising legislative functions. Yet, in the period 2010–2014, its agenda contained a slightly higher portion of operational discussions than strategic ones. While a third of them was linked to other institutional actors, the level of detail that the European Council decided to deal with on a number of occasions was quite remarkable.

As operational language was more dominant in the economic domains, the pattern is possibly the result of the crisis. The urgency of tackling its consequences required agreements on specific policy instruments at the level of Heads of State or Government. Operational decisions and planning also related to areas where the European Council is traditionally involved, such as agriculture and regional policy (in the context of the MFF) and political appointments. The high degree of detail on energy was the result of two factors: design of large frameworks (in which strategic goals were supplemented by announcements of concrete action or calls for such action) and external policy learning (nuclear stress tests following the disaster in Japan). The only areas where the strategic share of the agenda was substantially larger were foreign policy, external trade and defence.

The European Council often refers to other EU institutions or to the Member States at its meetings, paving the way for various interactions. Most notably, it reviews actions conducted by the institutions, takes note of upcoming activities or formulates requests for action. The last category was the largest of the three in the post-Lisbon period. The core institutions, the Commission, the Council and the EP, as well as the Member States collectively were primarily

featured, and the Commission was the main addressee. Except for foreign policy, where the Council took this role, the Commission was the institution whose actions or documents were mostly reviewed and used as a basis for discussions. The Commission was also the actor commonly associated with expectations for upcoming input, except in macroeconomics where the Member States had an equal stake. The recipients of policy delegation differed across policy fields, and the European Council usually called on a number of actors within a single area. Higher stress was put on the Council in macroeconomics, on the Council and the Parliament in business and finance, on the Member States in employment and on the Commission in energy. The Council received the most requests to react on foreign policy, although the High Representative and the Commission followed closely behind.

The analysis of the agenda of the European Council in the period December 2009 – November 2014 was based primarily on the text of the ECCs, the only written evidence of the output of the European Council's agenda. These texts generally conceal disagreements, and so triangulation of results with published studies on similar topics was carried out. However, existing research is scarce owing to the difficulty of gaining access to the members of the European Council and their inner circles.

This analysis was able to draw only some preliminary conclusions on the role which the European Council President exercised in agenda setting during the post-Lisbon period. According to a few published studies, Herman Van Rompuy performed more in the function of facilitator (Devuyst, 2012; Fabbrini, 2014). Although he regularly supplied input for policy solutions, he is said to have been ready to give up his ideas when they did not fall on fertile ground in the Member States. But to what extent Herman Van Rompuy determined the allocation of attention across topics on the agenda is still an open question. Comparisons with earlier periods are not enough to draw conclusions in this respect, as multiple intervening variables need to be controlled for. For example, in the context of the economic and financial crisis, it is impossible to know for sure whether the increased attention to micro- and macroeconomic issues would have been lower or even higher under the old rotating Presidency system. Further research aimed at estimating the potential agenda structuring effect of the President should collect rich qualitative data via interviews with civil servants and top officials. The recently published book by Puetter (2014) offers promising insights into the added value of such a research strategy.

Furthermore, future research should concentrate on tracing policy ideas in the context of the economic and financial crisis in the EU more broadly in order to estimate which actors had power and under what conditions. While the prominence of the European Council (and the Council) in economic governance is clear and explanations focusing on the Franco-German axis are quite common (Dinan, 2013), the multiplicity of other actions and individuals in different relevant venues requires more investigation.

In relation to this, research should also expand in the direction of exploring institutional interactions with the involvement of the European Council. This study offers the first quantitative estimate of the extent to which the Heads of State or Government consider input from other EU bodies or request further action (cf. Alexandrova & Timmermans, 2015). The fact that such interactions are important for policy making in the EU and that the European Council has over time encroached upon the Commission's monopoly of legislative initiative is largely

acknowledged (see e.g. Eggermont, 2012; Ponzano, Hermanin, & Corona, 2012; Rasmussen, 2007; Werts, 2008). The analysis here showed that the Heads of State or Government engage with operational policy much more than the nature of their collective body might suggest. Areas in which the European Council leaves an impact on EU legislation and the extent to which this happens therefore need to be examined carefully. Such research can tell us more about the substantive role of the top political arena in the EU in day-to-day policy making, a question which has implications for democratic legitimacy and accountability.

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Annex I: Methods of Data Processing and Analysis

The data used in this study was initially collected within the framework of the EU Policy Agendas Project (Alexandrova et al., 2014). The existing dataset, which ends in 2012, was extended by two years. The final dataset covers all European Council Conclusions published before December 2014. It includes all types of documents produced by the European Council. When reporting statistics for more than a single meeting, the data are referred to as conclusions in the text, even if they contain declarations or statements as the end result of specific meetings. The same holds for two occasions when the European Council met as a Council in the composition of Heads of State or Government (in 2004).

The ECCs are coded for policy content using the EU Policy Agendas Codebook, presented in Annex II. For this purpose the documents are first split into quasi-sentences, the lowest possible level of policy content, and then a single code is assigned to each. The total dataset comprises 48 267 quasi-sentences over a 40-year period (1975–2014). The time frame in the focus of this study (December 2009 – November 2014) contains 7686 quasi-sentences.

Here are some specific examples of what is meant by quasi-sentences. The sentence 'Substantial progress has been made towards the attainment of the EU targets for greenhouse gas emission reduction, renewable energy, and energy efficiency, which need to be fully met by 2020.' (21 March 2014) is split in three. The three sub-codes attached to it are global warming, alternative and renewable energy, and energy conservation, which fall under the major topics environment, energy and energy, respectively. The separate parts split out of a single sentence can be assigned the same codes when they belong to the same issue category. Such an example is the following sentence, in which flexibility and the speed of deployment are both coded as defence alliances and security assistance within the major topic defence: 'The European Council invites the Commission, the High Representative and the Member States to ensure that the procedures and rules for civilian missions enable the Union to be more flexible and speed up the deployment of EU civilian missions.' (20 December 2013). Whenever a sentence does not contain more than one issue, no splitting takes place. For an instance, 'Furthermore, the European Council calls for the reinforcement of Frontex activities in the Mediterranean and along the Southeastern borders of the EU.' (25 October 2013) is classified by a single code, border control, within the major topic immigration.

The analysis in Chapter 3 presents the shares of attention to different topics out of the total attention in a given period, where the total equals 100%. In section III of that chapter, the frequency of annual attention change is measured. The calculation is based on the percentage-percentage method (Jones, Sulkin, & Larsen, 2003; Jones & Baumgartner, 2005; see also Alexandrova et al., 2012). This involves estimating the percentage of the total agenda covered by a single topic category in a given year,

extracting from it the percentage dedicated to the same topic in the preceding year, and then dividing by the percentage in the preceding year. The formula is the following: (percentage t_2 − percentage t_1)/percentage t_1. Using this approach (instead of the percentage-count method) allows for comparisons in attention which are not dependent on the agenda size (i.e. the total number of quasi-sentences). The percentage-percentage method also provides a more reliable estimation of kurtosis (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005).

The approach to coding foreign affairs in the EU Policy Agendas Project, applied in this study, is two-fold. The topic category foreign policy does not include all types of issues which can relate to external events or EU policy on third countries and regions. It covers only general discussions and issues with broad orientation, such as foreign aid or international terrorism. Any other aspects of foreign affairs are categorised under their substantial meaning. For example, the fight against corruption in Ukraine (mentioned in May 2014) is coded as subtopic white collar crime within the major topic law and crime. Meanwhile, an additional dummy variable records the fact that this is an external matter (and a further variable classifies the specific third country). This enables two types of analysis at the same time. First, substantial topics can be studied irrespective of whether they are internal or external (as presented in chapter 3). Second, a specific focus on the full spectrum of issues in foreign affairs is possible, where all substantial topics of the external dimension of the agenda can be seen (as presented in chapter 4, section I).

Section II of chapter 4 analyses attention to third countries and regions. This is again calculated on the basis of quasi-sentences. Thus, the reported values of references do not represent keyword mentions of the respective countries in the text. Such a calculation would be misleading as it would not equate to the real amount of attention. Quasi-sentences are therefore again used as a basis. Any quasi-sentence which is related to a particular country is classified. This allows interpretation of units of analysis of comparable size. Furthermore, a single quasi-sentence can contain reference to more than one external actor. Hence, sums of total references across all countries are not reported.

Annex II: EU Policy Agendas Project Codebook

The table below provides an overview of all major topic categories in alphabetical order and the respective subtopics contained in each of them. Only the subtopics which have been found in the ECCs are listed. For the sake of readability the code numbers are left out. Each of the 21 categories includes the subtopics 'general' (broad issues related to the major topic) and 'other' (specific issues for which no subtopic code is available). The EU Policy Agendas Codebook is developed within the framework of the Comparative Agendas Project (www.comparativeagendas.info) and is compatible with the other country codebooks in this international collaboration.

The full version of the EU codebook is available at: www.policyagendas.eu/codebook.

Topic	Subtopic
Agriculture	General
	International Agricultural Trade
	Agricultural Subsidies
	Food Inspection and Safety
	Agricultural Marketing, Research, and Promotion
	Animal Welfare in Agriculture
	Environmental Issues in Agriculture
	Fisheries and Fishing
	Animal Disease
	Crop Disease
	Common Organisation of Agricultural Markets
	Agricultural Research and Development
	Other
Banking, Finance and Internal Trade	General
	Banking System and Financial Institution Regulation
	Financial Market Regulation
	Consumer Finance, Mortgages, and Credit Cards
	Insurance Regulation
	Debt and Bankruptcy
	Small Business Issues
	Intellectual Property Rights and Patents
	Tourism
	Consumer Protection
	Sports and Gambling Regulation
	Common/Single/Internal Market
	Competition policy
	State Aid
	Corporate Governance
	Harmonization of Technical Requirements
	Research and Development
	Other

Topic	Subtopic
Civil Rights	General
	Ethnic Minority and Racial Group Discrimination
	Gender and Sexual Orientation Discrimination
	Age Discrimination
	Handicap or Disease Discrimination
	Voting Rights and Issues
	Freedom of Speech
	Right to Privacy and Access to Government Information
	Freedom of Religion
	Democracy and Democratisation
	Other
Culture and Media	General
	Audio-Visual and Performing arts
	Books
	Radio and television
	Museums, heritage, historical monuments and archives
	Defence and promotion of European culture
Defence	General
	European Defence Industry and Defence Equipment Markets
	Defence Alliances and Security Assistance
	Military Intelligence, Intelligence Services, and Espionage
	Military Capabilities and Coordination of Armed Services within the EU
	Arms Control and Nuclear Non-Proliferation
	Military Aid and Weapons Sales to Other Countries
	Military Manpower and Personnel
	Military Procurement and Weapons System Acquisitions and Evaluation
	Military Installations, Construction, and Land Transfers
	Military Nuclear and Hazardous Waste Disposal, Military Environmental Compliance
	Direct War Related Issues and Military Operations
	Research and Development
	Other
Education	General
	Higher Education
	Elementary and Secondary Education
	Education of Underprivileged Students
	Vocational Education
	Educational Excellence
	Research and Development
	Other
Employment	General
	Worker Safety and Protection
	Employment Training and Workforce Development
	Employee Benefits
	Employee Relations and Labour Unions
	Working Conditions
	Youth Employment and Child Labour
	Pension Related Issues
	Seasonal and Migrant Workers (EU citizens)
	Other

Topic	Subtopic
Energy	General
	Nuclear Energy and Nuclear Regulatory Issues
	Electricity and Hydroelectricity
	Natural Gas and Oil
	Coal
	Alternative and Renewable Energy
	Energy Conservation
	Research and Development
	Other
Environment	General
	Drinking Water Safety, Water Pollution and Conservation, and Water Supply
	Waste Disposal
	Recycling
	Indoor Environmental Hazards
	Forest, Species and Biodiversity Protection
	Land and Water Conservation
	Environmental Technological Risks
	Transport of Hazardous Waste
	Radioactive Waste and Regulation of Dangerous Chemicals
	Air and Noise Pollution
	Global Warming
	Research and Development
	Other
Foreign Trade	General
	Trade Negotiations, Disputes and Agreements
	Export Promotion and Regulation
	International Private Business Investment and Corporate Development
	Productivity and Competitiveness of EU Business, EU Balance of Payments
	Tariff and Import Restrictions, Import Regulation
	Exchange Rates and Related Issues
	Other
Governance (and Government Operations)	General
	Government Efficiency and Bureaucratic Oversight
	Postal Service Issues
	Government Employee Benefits, Civil Service Issues
	Nominations and Appointments
	Currency, Commemorative Coins, Medals, Royal Mint
	Government Procurement, Procurement Fraud and Contractor Management
	Government Property Management
	Organization of Tax and Customs Administration
	Fraud and Scandals in the EU Institutions
	Regulation of Political Life and Governmental Ethics
	Statistics and Eurostat
	Relief of Claims against the EU
	Domestic Disaster Relief and Civil Protection
	Institutions and Institutional Relationships
	EU Treaties and Treaty Reform
	Relations EU-Member State Governments
	Relations EU-Regional Governments
	Relations EU-Local Authorities
	Other

Topic	Subtopic
Health	General
	Comprehensive Health Care Reform
	Insurance Reform, Availability, and Cost
	Medical Ethical Issues
	Regulation of Drug Industry, Medical Devices, and Clinical Labs
	Facilities Construction, Regulation, and Payments
	Provider and Insurer Payment and Regulation
	Health Manpower and Training
	Prevention, Communicable Diseases and Health Promotion
	Infants and Children
	Controlled and Illegal Drug Abuse, Treatment, and Education
	Research and Development
	Other
Immigration	General
	Immigrant workers
	Refugees and Asylum Issues
	Acquisition of Nationality
	Illegal Immigration and Repatriation
	Entry of Immigrants
	Integration of Immigrants
	Border Control
	Other
International Affairs	General
	Foreign Aid
	International Resources Exploitation and Resources Agreement
	Developing Countries Issues (except financial issues)
	International Finance and Economic Development
	Human Rights
	International Organizations Other Than Finance
	International Terrorism and Hijacking
	EU Diplomats, EU External Service, Delegations and Offices, EU Citizens Abroad, Foreign Diplomats in the EU, Passports
	EU Enlargement
	Other
Law and Crime	General
	Government Departments and Agencies Dealing With Law and Crime
	Illegal Drug Production, Trafficking, and Control
	Court Administration
	Prisons
	Juvenile Crime and the Juvenile Justice System
	Child Abuse and Child Pornography
	Family Issues (Including Family Law and Domestic Abuse)
	Riots and Crime Prevention
	Organized Crime
	White Collar Crime
	Domestic Security Concerns Related to Terrorism
	Prostitution and Human Trafficking
	Criminal Code
	Civil Code
	Other

Topic	Subtopic
Macroeconomics	General
	Inflation, Prices, and Interest Rates
	Unemployment Rate
	Monetary Policy (EMS, ECB, EIB)
	Budget and Debt
	Taxation (excl. VAT)
	Industrial Policy
	Price Control and Stabilization
	VAT
	Other
Public Lands, Water Management and Territorial Issues	General
	Natural Resources, Public Lands, and Forest Management
	Water Resources Development and Research
	Other
Regional Policy	General
	Housing and Community Development
	Urban Economic Development and General Urban Issues
	Rural Housing and Farming Housing Assistance Programmes
	Rural Economic Development
	Cohesion Policy and Structural Funds
	Other
Science, Technology and Communications	General
	Space Agencies (ESA)
	Commercial Use of Space, Satellites
	Science Technology Transfer, International Scientific Cooperation
	Telephone and Telecommunication Regulation
	Newspaper, Publishing, and Broadcast Industry Regulation (TV, Cable, Radio)
	Weather Forecasting and Related Issues, Oceanography
	Computer Industry and Computer Security
	Research and Development
	Other
Social Policy	General
	Poverty and Assistance for Low-Income Families
	Elderly Issues, Elderly Assistance Programmes and State Pensions
	Assistance to the Disabled and Handicapped
	Social Services and Volunteer Associations
	Assistance to the Youth
	Parental Leave and Child Care
	Other
Transportation	General
	Mass and Public Transportation and Safety
	Road and Highway Construction, Transportation, Maintenance, and Safety
	Airports, Airlines, Air Traffic Control and Safety
	Railroad Transportation and Safety
	Maritime Issues, Transport and Safety
	Public Works (Infrastructure Development)
	Research and Development
	Other

Annex III: Ranking Order and Attention to All Topics across Five-Year Periods

	2010-2014		2005-2009		2000-2004		1995-1999	
	Rank	Att.	Rank	Att.	Rank	Att.	Rank	Att.
Agriculture	16	1.29%	19	0.42%	19	0.74%	12	1.61%
Business and Finance	3	10.24%	4	8.02%	5	7.89%	7	4.58%
Civil Rights	13	1.97%	11	3.71%	11	3.41%	8	4.04%
Culture	20	0.04%	20	0.31%	20	0.29%	20	0.61%
Defence	7	4.93%	8	5.98%	2	10.06%	5	7.14%
Education	17	0.62%	15	1.21%	14	1.60%	18	0.87%
Employment	5	6.79%	9	4.53%	7	5.94%	4	8.08%
Energy	4	7.33%	5	7.49%	15	1.45%	16	1.00%
Environment	11	2.75%	6	7.10%	9	4.66%	10	2.20%
External Trade	8	4.77%	14	1.87%	16	1.31%	9	3.44%
Foreign Affairs	2	15.04%	1	19.54%	1	22.46%	1	23.85%
Governance	6	5.07%	3	11.00%	4	8.49%	3	10.63%
Health	18	0.49%	16	0.90%	17	1.02%	19	0.82%
Immigration	9	3.46%	7	6.02%	8	5.01%	10	2.20%
Law and Crime	14	1.96%	10	3.97%	6	7.47%	5	7.14%
Macroeconomics	1	25.42%	2	11.47%	3	8.97%	2	16.65%
Natural Resources and Territories	21	0.03%	21	0.08%	21	0.16%	21	0.06%
Regional Policy	11	2.75%	18	0.70%	18	0.79%	13	1.57%
Science	10	3.29%	12	2.47%	12	2.99%	14	1.45%
Social Policy	15	1.40%	13	2.42%	10	3.59%	15	1.11%
Transport	19	0.37%	17	0.78%	13	1.69%	17	0.94%

	1990-1994		1985-1989		1980-1984		1975-1979	
	Rank	Att.	Rank	Att.	Rank	Att.	Rank	Att.
Agriculture	16	1.24%	3	11.36%	5	7.05%	7	3.27%
Business and Finance	6	4.83%	4	10.15%	8	3.08%	11	1.67%
Civil Rights	5	4.90%	15	1.84%	10	1.86%	8	3.09%
Culture	19	0.49%	14	1.96%	15	0.93%	18	0.19%
Defence	4	7.08%	11	2.59%	4	8.12%	9	1.85%
Education	18	0.56%	19	0.84%	17	0.49%	19	0.00%
Employment	10	3.34%	6	5.55%	6	4.35%	5	6.05%
Energy	14	2.03%	20	0.46%	9	2.89%	4	9.94%
Environment	8	3.59%	7	4.18%	13	1.22%	14	0.86%
External Trade	9	3.39%	10	2.88%	7	3.96%	6	4.76%
Foreign Affairs	1	30.99%	1	19.62%	1	30.48%	2	17.91%
Governance	2	13.80%	5	9.98%	3	10.18%	3	15.07%
Health	20	0.24%	16	1.59%	19	0.20%	19	0.00%
Immigration	12	2.54%	18	1.21%	20	0.15%	16	0.31%
Law and Crime	7	3.95%	12	2.46%	17	0.49%	12	1.11%
Macroeconomics	3	8.97%	2	11.82%	2	19.91%	1	30.45%
Natural Resources and Territories	21	0.00%	21	0.13%	21	0.00%	19	0.00%
Regional Policy	13	2.05%	8	4.18%	14	1.13%	13	0.93%
Science	15	1.68%	9	3.88%	11	1.47%	17	0.25%
Social Policy	17	1.21%	13	2.00%	12	1.42%	9	1.85%
Transport	11	3.13%	17	1.34%	16	0.64%	15	0.43%

	All (1975-2014)		All excl. 2010-2014	
	Rank	Att.	Rank	Att.
Agriculture	15	1.92%	15	2.04%
Business and Finance	5	6.87%	5	6.27%
Civil Rights	11	3.40%	9	3.65%
Culture	20	0.46%	20	0.53%
Defence	4	6.89%	4	7.25%
Education	18	0.96%	18	1.02%
Employment	6	5.91%	6	5.75%
Energy	9	3.58%	11	2.91%
Environment	8	3.79%	8	3.98%
External Trade	12	2.96%	12	2.63%
Foreign Affairs	1	22.25%	1	23.55%
Governance	3	9.85%	3	10.71%
Health	19	0.74%	19	0.79%
Immigration	10	3.46%	10	3.46%
Law and Crime	7	4.79%	7	5.31%
Macroeconomics	2	14.91%	2	13.00%
Natural Resources and Territories	21	0.07%	21	0.08%
Regional Policy	16	1.59%	17	1.38%
Science	13	2.35%	13	2.18%
Social Policy	14	2.01%	14	2.12%
Transport	17	1.25%	16	1.41%

Note: Topics in alphabetical order, Att. = Attention.

Annex IV: Third Counties Mentioned in the Conclusions, December 2009 – November 2014

Country	Quasi-sentences	Proportion of the whole agenda	Proportion of the external agenda
Ukraine	273	3.64%	11.70%
Russia	153	2.04%	6.56%
Syria	134	1.79%	5.74%
Iran	99	1.32%	4.24%
Libya	97	1.29%	4.16%
USA	57	0.76%	2.44%
Palestine	53	0.71%	2.27%
Israel	51	0.68%	2.19%
Egypt	43	0.57%	1.84%
Afghanistan	36	0.48%	1.54%
Pakistan	31	0.41%	1.33%
Japan	27	0.36%	1.16%
Moldova	24	0.32%	1.03%
Iraq	23	0.31%	0.99%
Mali	21	0.28%	0.90%
Croatia	20	0.27%	0.86%
Serbia	20	0.27%	0.86%
Georgia	19	0.25%	0.81%
Tunisia	16	0.21%	0.69%
Montenegro	15	0.20%	0.64%
Iceland	14	0.19%	0.60%
Belarus	13	0.17%	0.56%
China	11	0.15%	0.47%
Central African Republic	10	0.13%	0.43%
Yemen	10	0.13%	0.43%
Turkey	8	0.11%	0.34%
Bahrain	7	0.09%	0.30%
Canada	7	0.09%	0.30%
Andorra	6	0.08%	0.26%
Ivory Coast	6	0.08%	0.26%
Liechtenstein	6	0.08%	0.26%
Monaco	6	0.08%	0.26%
San Marino	6	0.08%	0.26%
Switzerland	6	0.08%	0.26%

Country	Quasi-sentences	Proportion of the whole agenda	Proportion of the external agenda
India	5	0.07%	0.21%
Armenia	4	0.05%	0.17%
Kosovo	4	0.05%	0.17%
Azerbaijan	3	0.04%	0.13%
Jordan	3	0.04%	0.13%
Morocco	3	0.04%	0.13%
Singapore	3	0.04%	0.13%
Somalia	3	0.04%	0.13%
Sri Lanka	3	0.04%	0.13%
Albania	2	0.03%	0.09%
Algeria	2	0.03%	0.09%
Lebanon	1	0.01%	0.04%
North Korea	1	0.01%	0.04%
Norway	1	0.01%	0.04%
South Korea	1	0.01%	0.04%

The Treaty of Lisbon made the European Council an EU institution in legal terms, while its tasks remained virtually unchanged. It also introduced the function of a permanent President, a position which was occupied by Herman Van Rompuy for two consecutive terms until December 2014.

This study presents an analysis of the European Council's agenda in the five-year period under Herman Van Rompuy's Presidency.

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