



The Impact of Turkey's Membership on EU Voting

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Abstract

This policy brief investigates the decision-making impact of admitting Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Croatia into the EU-25, focusing on the EU's 'capacity to act' and the power distribution among the member states. The enlargement is projected to have relatively little impact on the EU's capacity to act, as long as the Constitutional Treaty (CT) voting rules come into effect, but if the CT is rejected, enlargement would cripple EU decision-making. Turkish membership is calculated to have a big impact on the power distribution among member states. Under the Nice or CT voting rules, Turkey would be the second-most powerful member state in an EU-29. Under the CT rules, Turkey would be substantially more powerful than France, Italy and the UK, while under the Nice rules, the power differences among the member states with populations of more than 50 million would be small. Plainly, this distribution of power might decrease the acceptability of the Constitutional Treaty or Turkey's membership (or both).

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1. Introduction

The Treaty of Nice in 2001 and the Constitutional Treaty in 2004 radically reformed the Council of Ministers' voting rules.¹ Political acceptance of the Constitutional Treaty rules was achieved at the Brussels summit in June 2004. Soon after, the Nice Treaty rules came into effect in November 2004. The changes made in the Constitutional Treaty were postponed by five years and even that requires that the Constitution is ratified in all 25 member states. The next enlargement is 'pencilled-in' for 2007, when Bulgaria and Romania should enter the Union. Thus, they will enter under the current Nice rules but the next new members are likely to join under the rules of the Constitutional Treaty.

In this paper, we evaluate the impact of Turkey's membership on EU voting. The aspects that we discuss are decision-making efficiency and the distribution of power in the EU's leading decision-making body, the Council of Ministers. We compare two alternative Council voting rules: those accepted in the Treaty of Nice and implemented by the Accession Treaty for the 10 entrants in 2004 and the rules that are laid down in the Constitutional Treaty.

2. Council of Ministers' voting reforms

The Constitutional Treaty explicitly sets out two frameworks for the Council's voting procedure and implicitly recognises the current system set up by the Accession Treaty (Art. 24) as detailed below.

Up to 31 October 2004

The pre-Treaty of Nice voting rules applied, i.e. qualified majority voting with weighted votes and the old majority threshold of 71% to win. The numbers of votes for the EU-15 member states were unchanged; those for the 10 newcomers were a simple interpolation of EU-15 votes as specified in the Accession Treaty.

From 1 November 2004 to 31 October 2009

The Nice Treaty voting rules apply (as per the Draft Council Decision relating to the implementation of Article I-24).² The Nice rules maintain the basic qualified-majority voting framework, but add two extra criteria concerning the number of yes-voters and the population they represent. Specifically, the vote threshold is 72.2% of the Council votes (232 of the 321 votes), the member threshold is 50% of the member states (i.e. 13), and the population threshold is 62% of the EU population.³

From 1 November 2009

The Constitutional Treaty (CT) rules apply, so weighted voting is out and double majority voting is in. A winning coalition must represent at least 55% of the EU member states and 65% of the EU population. A last-minute summit compromise inserted the requirement of a winning coalition having at least 15 members to vote 'yes'; however, this is irrelevant – 15 members of 25 is 60% and thus greater than 55%, but by the time these rules take effect, the EU should have 27 members and 55% of 27 is 15 (Bulgaria and Romania are expected to join in 2007). The 15-member rule will be redundant when it takes effect. Turkey's and Croatia's membership will, in any case, materialise after that date.

To come into force, the CT voting rules need ratification by all the member states. The fall-back position is the Nice rules, which make it possible that Turkey and Croatia could enter under the Nice voting framework. Therefore, in the following sections we evaluate these two voting rules in the EU-25 and the EU-29, and especially compare the impact of Turkey's membership on the countries of the EU-25, who have the most substantial say in the ratification process of the Constitution.

3. Tools of assessment

'Capacity to act' and 'decision-making efficiency' are slippery concepts. There is, however, a quantitative tool in voting game theory that helps make things more precise. The so-called 'passage probability' gauges how likely it is that the Council would approve a randomly selected issue – random in the sense that each EU member state would be equally likely to vote for or against it. The best way to describe this measure is to explain how it is calculated.

¹ Legally, the Accession Treaty concerning the entrance of the 10 new member states in 2004 implemented the voting system agreed politically in the Nice Treaty. The voting rules of the Constitutional Treaty come into force on 1 November 2009 if it is ratified in all member states.

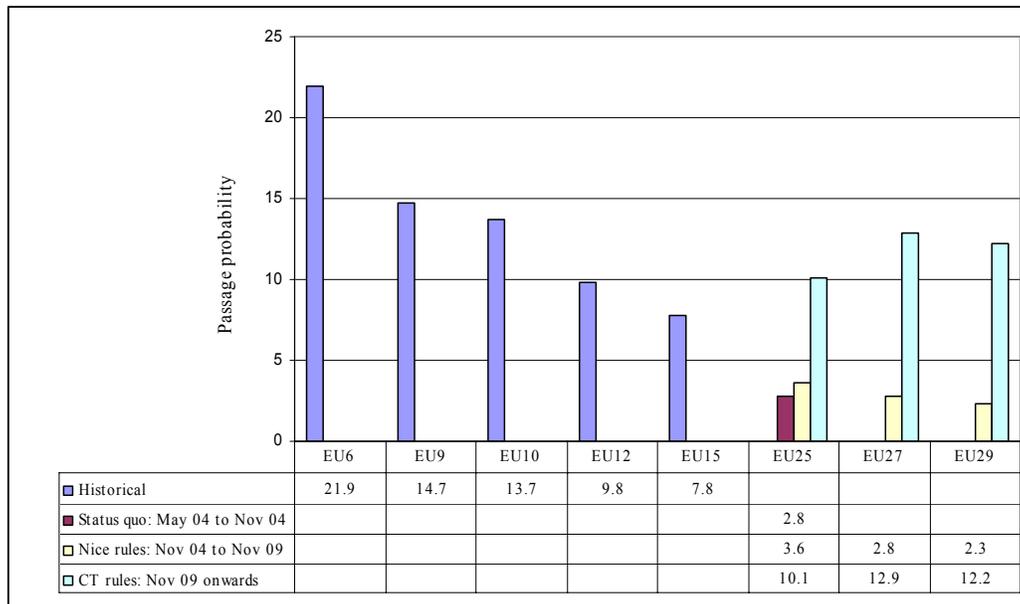
² See the Press Release "IGC 2003 – Meeting of Heads of State or Government, Brussels, 17-18 June 2004", DOC/04/03, 21.06.2004.

³ The rules that take effect in November 2004 are not those agreed at the Nice summit in December 2000. The deal struck at 4 a.m. at the end of the longest EU summit in history was a political commitment. The legally binding changes are in the Accession Treaty. Since EU leaders eventually realised how inefficient the Nice rules were, they improved efficiency by lowering the vote threshold from the 74% threshold mentioned in the Nice Treaty.

First, the computer calculates all the possible coalitions among EU member states, namely every possible combination of yes- and no-votes by EU members (there are 134 million possible coalitions in the EU-27). Then the computer checks each coalition to see if it is a winning coalition under the Nice voting system; this is done using each member's actual weight on the three criteria (votes, members and population) and the three thresholds. The passage probability tells us what fraction of these coalitions are winning coalitions. It is called the 'passage probability' because it is the likelihood that a random proposal would attract a winning coalition, assuming all coalitions are equally likely (random in the sense that member states do not know what their stance would be). Admittedly, this is a crude measure, but it is objective, precise, and its strengths and shortcomings are clear.

Even if the exact passage probability is meaningless (the Commission does not put forth random proposals), Figure 1 shows that the Nice Treaty fails on efficiency grounds since it implies a level of efficiency that is far, far below that of the EU-15. Indeed, the Nice reforms actually made matters worse. Admitting 12 new member states without any reform would have cut the passage probability to a third of its already low level, namely to 2.5%. With the Nice reforms, the figure drops even further to 2.1%. We note that the main source of the lower efficiency is the high threshold of the Nice rules for Council votes. A second, cruder but more transparent efficiency-measuring tool – i.e. blocking-minority analysis – confirms these efficiency findings.

Figure 1. Passage probabilities in the EU Council 1957-2004 and after the entry of Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia and Turkey



Notes: The figure shows the passage probability, which measures the likelihood that a randomly selected issue would pass in the Council of Ministers.

Source: Authors' calculations.

As with the ability to act, there can be no perfect measure of power, but even imperfect measures are useful when considering complex voting rules since a voting scheme's political acceptability turns almost completely on its power implications.

The measures we use are called the Normalised Banzhaf Index (NBI) and the Shapley-Shubik Index (SSI). In plain English, they gauge how likely it is that a nation finds itself in a position to 'break' a winning coalition⁴ on a randomly selected issue. Thus, the NBI and SSI tell us how influential a country is likely to be on a randomly chosen issue. More concretely, the NBI assumes that each possible coalition has the same probability of occurrence. This makes all winning coalitions equally likely as well and the measurement of power is simply counting the score of breaking positions for each player. To derive a relative measure of power this is then divided by the total number of scores. Of course, on particular issues various countries may be much more or much less powerful – especially if they are part of a like-minded group,⁵ but the NBI has recently proved its worth, especially as an un-bribeable tool in assessing and designing voting rules.

To make our approach to political power more transparent, let us illustrate how it works with the following example. Consider a simple three-person voting body, like the Council of Ministers, with voters labelled as A, B and C. Suppose that

⁴ In the literature, the term 'swing' is quite often used instead of 'break'.

⁵ See Baldwin et al. (2001) for details and simple numerical examples.

A has four votes, B has two votes and C has one vote. The total number of votes is seven. Let us assume that five votes are needed to pass proposals. Here, we have three winning coalitions, AB, AC and ABC, where the actors that are able to ‘break’ a winning coalition are underlined. Now, A has three breaking positions, B has two and C has only one. The number of breaking positions is six, which means that the NBI of A is one-half, whereas the NBIs of B and C are one-third and one-sixth respectively.

The SSI tries to capture a different abstract voting model. It assumes that voters have different tendencies to accept or reject a proposal. Suppose that these tendencies can be expressed on a line having the extremes of, for example, more EU spending or less spending. For instance, when the issue is support for hillside farmers it may be that A is the most reluctant to increase spending, then B, leaving C as the most in favour of increasing support for this purpose. On another day, the issue might be the inclusion of reindeer meat in the CAP’s price support mechanism. At that time we might derive a different order of preferences.

In general, one can think that after considering a big enough number of issues, all the preference orders of A, B and C are equally likely. Our numerical example results in six orderings as follows:

ABC ACB BAC BCA CAB CBA

where the critical voter is underlined. A critical voter exerts power as (s)he is able to break a winning coalition. In the first order of ABC, B can do that by breaking a winning coalition of AB. Voter A favours more spending on this issue than B. Therefore A is not critical. Should voter A try to break the winning coalition of AB by voting against spending, voter B would have already broken that as (s)he is less enthusiastically in favour of spending. In the example, voter A has four pivotal positions, and voters B and C each have one. In relative terms, we derive voting power shares of two-thirds for A and one-sixth for both B and C. If the SSI is a meaningful estimate for power and if power politics is able to explain the EU budget, these should represent A’s, B’s and C’s budget shares respectively.

Clearly, these measures of power do not provide a detailed description of real-world voting procedures. For instance they lack all the strategic aspects, such as who initiates the proposal to be voted upon or the sequence of moves. They both contain, however, some information of voters’ preferences understood as tendencies to hold a favourable position. On the other hand, the measures consider all the possible orderings of tendencies (SSI) or presume an equal likelihood of all coalitions (NBI), which makes them a very long-term concept. For a general evaluation of voting rules this is a desirable property.

The example above demonstrates that the NBI and SSI can have very different values. Which one should we then choose? There is no clear answer to that, but as a rough distinction, if one is interested in voting rules as such the NBI is more advantageous, however, if one is more interested in decision-making and bargaining under certain rules knowing that actors communicate then the SSI is a far more suitable tool.⁶

4. Turkey’s impact

4.1 Implications for the EU’s capacity to act

Turkey’s membership would have only moderate implications for the passage probabilities as Figure 1 shows. This is not surprising since moving from 27 members to 29 does not change much. Although Croatia increases the number of small nations in the EU, Turkey’s large population means that there is little damage in efficiency. (Efficiency, if not legitimacy, tends to be higher when a large share of power is in the hands of just a few nations.) The vote thresholds that are used in the calculations are extrapolations of the current Nice/Accession Treaty threshold. In an EU-29, it is 276 out of a total of 381 votes plus the two additional criteria: at least 15 member states and 62% of the population are necessary for a winning coalition. In the EU-27, it is 250 out of a total of 345 votes plus the two additional criteria: at least 14 member states and 62% of the population.

As usual, the Nice voting rules – which are essentially unworkable even in the EU-27 – become even less viable in an EU with 29 member states. But the same does not hold for the Constitutional Treaty’s voting rules. The passage probability jumps drastically from the low levels of the Nice voting rules up to the level of the EU-12 and even higher. Surprisingly, under the Constitutional Treaty’s rules the European Union’s ability to act improves when its membership expands from 25 to 27 or 29 member states. There is only a slight drop from the EU-27 to the EU-29 from 12.9 to 12.2%.⁷

⁶ See for example Laruelle & Widgrén (1998), Widgrén (1994) and Laruelle & Valenciano (2004). A recent empirical application of the SSI is that by Kauppi & Widgrén (2004).

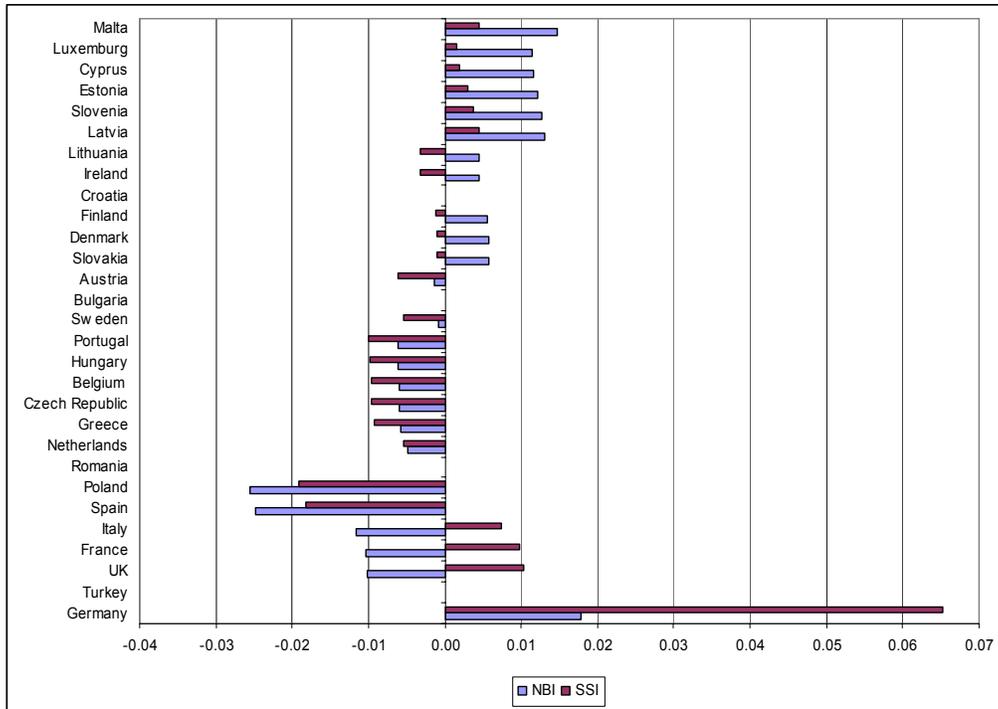
⁷ Note that in the EU-28 (the EU-27 plus Turkey), the passage probability is 11.2%, hence lower than it is in the EU-29 (see Baldwin & Widgrén, 2003b). That is because the membership quota – 55% of membership – is 16 in both the EU-28 and the EU-29. It is thus closer to 55% in the EU-29 than in the EU-28, the exact numbers being 55.2% and 57.1% respectively.

In sum, the passage-probability calculations demonstrate that Turkey's membership does not deteriorate the EU's ability to act. Under the Constitutional Treaty's rules, the effect of Croatia and Turkey together is significantly smaller – one percentage point – than Turkey's alone. The most important impact on the EU's capacity to act is the switch from the Nice rules to those of the Constitutional Treaty.

4.2 Impact on the distribution of power

There are also substantial differences in the evaluation of power between the Constitutional Treaty rules and those of the Nice Treaty. Figure 2 shows the differences between these rules in terms of the NBI and SSI in the EU-25 and Figure 3 presents the respective numbers for the EU-29. The difference is measured in percentage points.

Figure 2. Changes in voting power in the EU-25, from the Nice to the CT rules (percentage points)



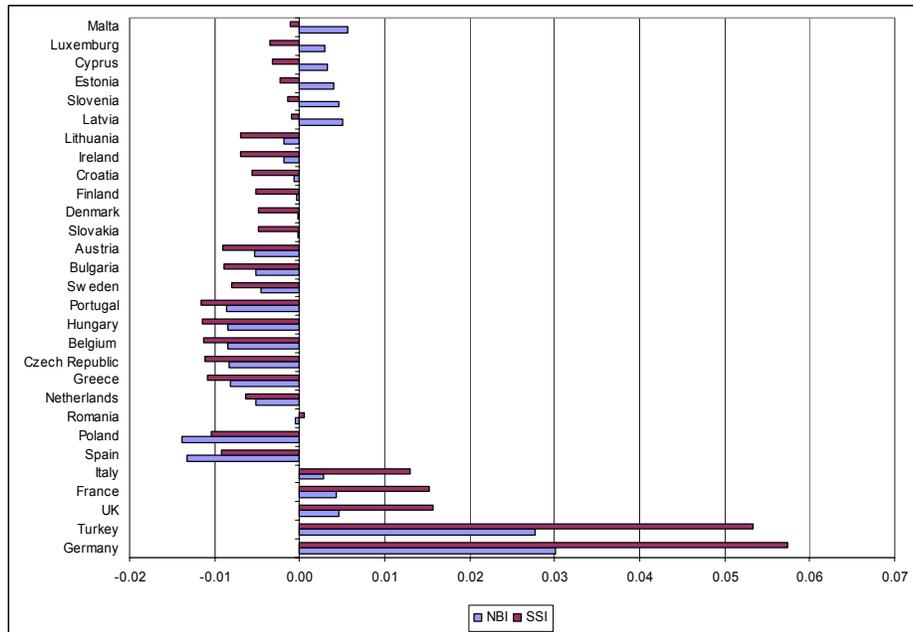
Source: Authors' calculations.

Figure 2 shows that prior to Turkey's entry the CT rules favour the four biggest nations and the six smallest (i.e. Latvia and smaller), if the comparison is made using the SSI. When based on the NBI, however, the conclusion is somewhat different: then Germany, Slovakia and smaller countries would gain from the CT rules compared with the Nice rules. Note that this result differs from what was obtained in Baldwin & Widgrén (2004b) for the EU-27, where the NBI showed exactly the same pattern as the SSI here.

After Turkey's accession, the biggest nations would gain more from the CT rules than in EU-25. This holds for both power measures. For the smallest countries, the effect is ambiguous: the NBI shows gains for Latvia and smaller nations whereas the SSI shows small losses. Otherwise both indices show consistent results.

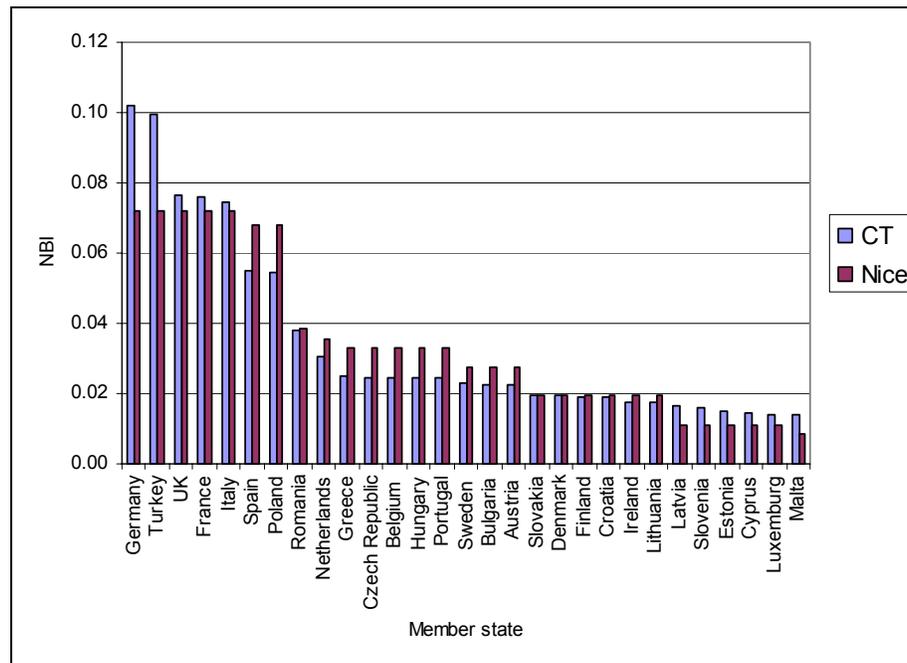
Figure 4 makes an explicit comparison of the Nice rules and the CT rules. The figure shows the NBI values under both rules. The message of the figure is very clear. The countries that would gain the most from the CT rules are the largest nations – Germany and Turkey. The biggest losers are Spain and Poland, but also the medium-sized countries from the Netherlands to Austria. That might affect these countries' attitudes towards either the ratification of the Constitution or Turkey's membership. An interested reader can find both index values in the EU-25 and the EU-29 in the Appendix.

Figure 3. The power difference between the CT and Nice rules in the EU-29 (percentage points)



Source: Authors' calculations.

Figure 4. The NBI-values under the Nice rules and the CT rules in the EU-29

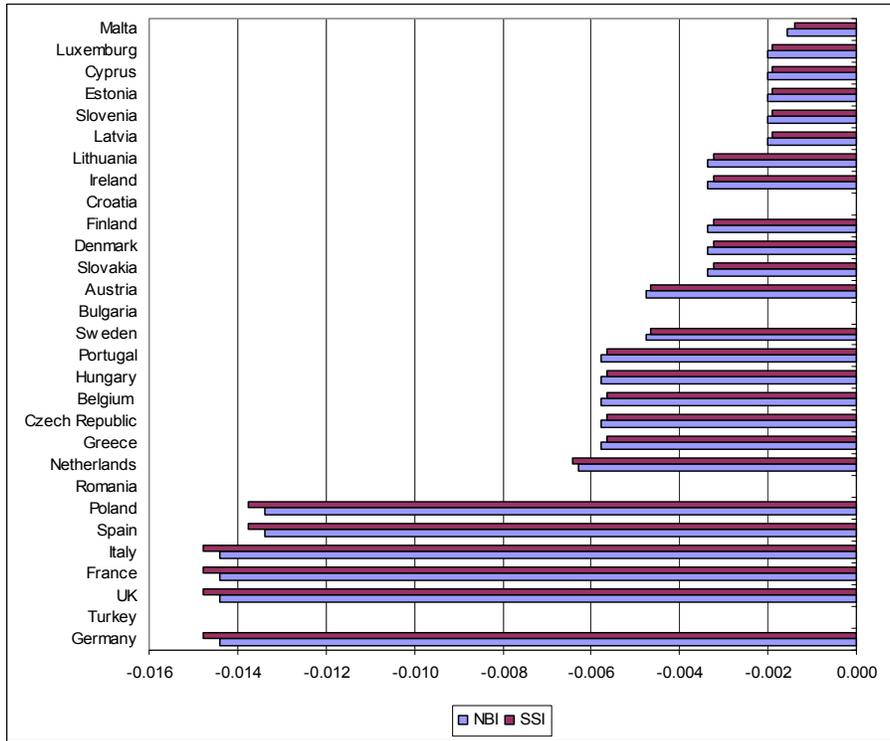


Source: Authors' calculations.

Impact of enlargement on the power of the EU-25 countries

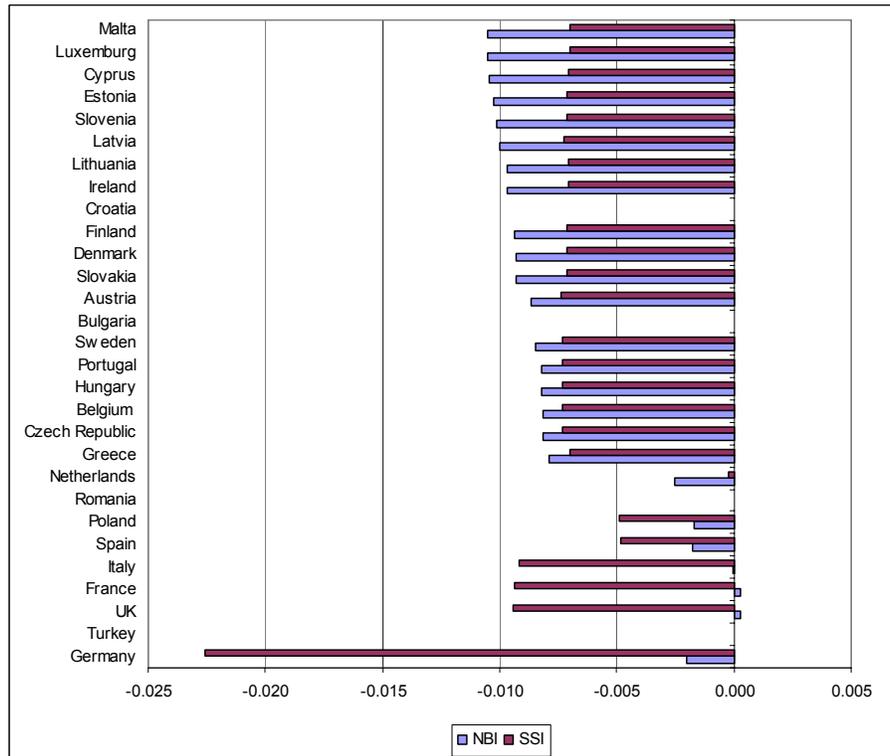
Figures 5 and 6 evaluate the impact of enlargement from the EU-25 to an EU-29 in terms of both power indices. Under the Nice rules, the countries' power losses are proportional to their sizes. Germany, the biggest country, loses most while the smaller nations lose less. The relative losses are of the same magnitude. This reflects the fact that in weighted voting, power indices tend to converge to voting weights if the number of actors increases and if the voting weights have a relatively small variance.

Figure 5. Impact of enlargement on the voting power of EU-25 countries under the Nice rules (percentage points)



Source: Authors' calculations.

Figure 6. Impact of enlargement on the voting power of EU-25 countries under the CT rules (percentage points)



Source: Authors' calculations.

In Figure 6, the result is more interesting. When evaluated by the NBI, the expansion from an EU-25 to an EU-29 benefits France and the UK.⁸ The losses of other big countries are very small (the Netherlands and larger nations). For the countries smaller than Romania the losses slightly increase towards the smallest nations. The SSI, however, gives a somewhat different picture. The most notable exceptions are the biggest countries, especially Germany. The power loss of the Netherlands remains small.

5. Conclusions

This paper investigates the decision-making impact of expanding the EU from 25 to 29 member states through new memberships for Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Croatia. We focus on a measure of the EU's capacity to act – the passage probability of a proposal in the Council of Ministers – and the voting power distribution among member states.

As far as the capacity to act is concerned, enlargement is projected to have a relatively small impact, as long as the voting rules of the Constitutional Treaty come into effect. In particular, Turkey's membership has only a negligible effect on the EU's capacity to act. The answer, however, is quite different if the Constitution is rejected and the Nice Treaty rules remain in place. Under the Nice voting rules, the 25-to-29 member state enlargement would substantially reduce the EU-25's ability to act. Thus, our findings confirm that the enlarged EU cannot function well under the Nice Treaty rules. It also suggests that if the Constitution is rejected, the Nice voting rules must be reformed before further enlargement.

The impact of the 25-to-29 member state enlargement on the voting power of the EU incumbents depends heavily upon the rules. Under the CT rules, enlargement lowers the power of all the incumbents on a fairly even basis with the marked exception of Germany, which loses more than twice as much as any other member state. Under the Nice rules, the power loss is more heavily skewed towards the larger incumbents. Again, all incumbents are projected to lose power, but power loss increases progressively with member size. For example, the power loss of France under the Nice rules is something like seven times larger than the power loss of Malta.

As far as power is concerned, we find that the accession of Turkey will have a significant impact. Under either the Nice or the CT voting rules, Turkey would be the second-most powerful member of the EU-29. Under the CT rules, Turkey would be substantially more powerful than France, Italy and the UK, while under the Nice rules the power differences among those countries with populations of 50 million or more would be small. Plainly, this might decrease the acceptability of the Constitutional Treaty or Turkey's membership (or both).

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⁸ This phenomenon is often referred to as the paradox of new members.

Appendix
Table A1. Power indices under the CT rules

Member state	NBI EU-29	NBI EU-25	SSI EU-29	SSI EU-25
Germany	0.10203	0.10407	0.13556	0.15816
Turkey	0.09960	–	0.13152	–
UK	0.07644	0.07614	0.09389	0.10332
France	0.07611	0.07587	0.09339	0.10278
Italy	0.07469	0.07475	0.09121	0.10041
Spain	0.05491	0.05670	0.06313	0.06798
Poland	0.05429	0.05602	0.06203	0.06694
Romania	0.03786	–	0.03664	–
Netherlands	0.03052	0.03715	0.02701	0.03440
Greece	0.02495	0.03304	0.01991	0.02721
Czech Republic	0.02474	0.03287	0.01964	0.02693
Belgium	0.02463	0.03279	0.01950	0.02680
Hungary	0.02453	0.03271	0.01936	0.02666
Portugal	0.02442	0.03262	0.01922	0.02651
Sweden	0.02314	0.03162	0.01758	0.02489
Bulgaria	0.02250	–	0.01676	–
Austria	0.02239	0.03103	0.01663	0.02403
Slovakia	0.01940	0.02870	0.01288	0.02000
Denmark	0.01940	0.02870	0.01288	0.02000
Finland	0.01918	0.02854	0.01261	0.01975
Croatia	0.01886	–	0.01221	–
Ireland	0.01768	0.02737	0.01077	0.01785
Lithuania	0.01768	0.02737	0.01077	0.01785
Latvia	0.01628	0.02630	0.00905	0.01631
Slovenia	0.01585	0.02598	0.00853	0.01568
Estonia	0.01521	0.02547	0.00774	0.01487
Cyprus	0.01445	0.02490	0.00680	0.01384
Luxembourg	0.01413	0.02465	0.00641	0.01342
Malta	0.01413	0.02465	0.00641	0.01342

Source: Authors' calculations.

Table A2. Power indices under the Nice rules

Member state	NBI EU-29	NBI EU-25	SSI EU-29	SSI EU-25
Germany	0.07189	0.08630	0.07814	0.09292
Turkey	0.07189	–	0.07814	–
UK	0.07189	0.08630	0.07814	0.09292
France	0.07189	0.08630	0.07814	0.09292
Italy	0.07189	0.08630	0.07814	0.09292
Spain	0.06821	0.08159	0.07237	0.08613
Poland	0.06821	0.08159	0.07237	0.08613
Romania	0.03832	–	0.03615	–
Netherlands	0.03565	0.04195	0.03340	0.03983
Greece	0.03305	0.03881	0.03082	0.03648
Czech Republic	0.03305	0.03881	0.03082	0.03648
Belgium	0.03305	0.03881	0.03082	0.03648
Hungary	0.03305	0.03881	0.03082	0.03648
Portugal	0.03305	0.03881	0.03082	0.03648
Sweden	0.02771	0.03246	0.02560	0.03024
Bulgaria	0.02771	–	0.02560	–
Austria	0.02771	0.03246	0.02560	0.03024
Slovakia	0.01954	0.02291	0.01777	0.02099
Denmark	0.01954	0.02291	0.01777	0.02099
Finland	0.01954	0.02291	0.01777	0.02099
Croatia	0.01954	–	0.01777	–
Ireland	0.01954	0.02291	0.01777	0.02099
Lithuania	0.01954	0.02291	0.01777	0.02099
Latvia	0.01124	0.01324	0.00999	0.01190
Slovenia	0.01124	0.01324	0.00999	0.01190
Estonia	0.01124	0.01324	0.00999	0.01190
Cyprus	0.01124	0.01324	0.00999	0.01190
Luxembourg	0.01124	0.01324	0.00999	0.01190
Malta	0.00841	0.00998	0.00755	0.00895

Source: Authors' calculations.

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