

## The Dichotomy of Large and Small States in the European Communities: a Challenge for Historians

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Within the European communities, states of different size cooperate. This has been the case ever since the beginning of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1952. In historiography the process of integration is often described with emphasis on the cooperation between the larger states. Perhaps there is an exception for the 1950s, when the smaller countries of the Benelux played a substantial role in the further development of European cooperation. In this period, the larger states France and Germany seem to have taken a less dominant share in the European integration process. Germany was still reluctant to play a large political part in the Communities while France was preoccupied with economic instability and decolonisation problems. But thereafter, as the major European states re-established their political role in the Communities, the role of the smaller states became less perceptible.<sup>1</sup>

It is not always clear what role the small states played in the European communities. Their actions were less eye-catching, probably for the obvious reason that these were less decisive than the policies of the larger states. Take for instance the French-German axis which has been critical in the integration process. Moreover, in the European Parliament and Commission, the larger states had a larger participation and in the Council their vote weighted often more. It seems that the actions of the smaller states are noticed mostly when conflicting with the interests of the larger states. For example, the Dutch and Belgium opposition against the so-called Fouchet plan in the early 1960s is well

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<sup>1</sup> The role of the small states in the 1950s has been described in detail by, for example, Alan Milward and Richard T. Griffiths (Milward, A.S., *The European Rescue of the Nation-State*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1992; Griffiths, R.T., "The Netherlands and the European Communities," in Griffiths, R.T. (ed.), *The Economy and Politics of the Netherlands since 1945*, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1980, p. 277-303, especially p. 298-299); See also: Trausch, G. (dir.), *Le Luxembourg face à la construction européenne*, Luxembourg, CERE, 1996; Brinkhorst, L.J., "Nederland in de Europese Gemeenschap: terugblik en vooruitzicht," in *Internationale Spectator*, xxxii-12, December 1978, p. 760-770, especially p. 765-766; Loth W., "L'Allemagne et les petits États dans la construction européenne", in Dumoulin, M., Duchenne, G. (dir.), *Les petits États et la construction européenne*, Bruxelles, P.I.E.-Peter Lang, 2002, p. 247-258.

known, especially because they frustrated the initiative of a larger state, France. However, the strategies of small states to achieve national objectives within European decision making process are less noticed. These are not necessarily a response to the policies of the larger states.

This paper argues first that there is a dichotomy of small and large states in the European cooperation. This will be illustrated by a case study. This paper will then continue to argue that though less eye-catching, the small state's strategies influence European policy making and are thus of major interest for historical research. Having made these arguments, the paper explores theoretical dimensions of the large and small states dichotomy and its influence on European policy making. The paper finishes with short conclusions about the usefulness of political science theories for the historian.

### **Illustrating Small State – Large State Dichotomy: a Foreign Policy Crisis**

The dichotomy of small and large states and the effects of state-size on position and strategy are illustrated with the following study on the small states' response to the American "Year of Europe" initiative in 1973. This response concerned the European cooperation in foreign politics, which was apart from the cooperation in the communities and principally intergovernmental in character. At this time, the European political cooperation was still in its infancy since its launch at the 1969 Conference in The Hague and concerned principally an exchange of views on the foreign European policy. The "Year of Europe" was thus a major challenge for the Nine.

It was during his speech at the annual lunch of the Associated Press in New York that Henri Kissinger proclaimed 1973 the "Year of Europe." He distinguished several problems in the relationship between the European Communities and the United States of America, mainly in the field of economics, defence and diplomacy. In order to overcome these problems, Kissinger proposed the renewal of the Atlantic charter and a visit of the President of the United States to the European Communities in the end of 1973.<sup>2</sup> But this Year of Europe did not develop the way Nixon and Kissinger had hoped for. The European leaders reacted on a more critical way than expected, and their first

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<sup>2</sup> The complete address given by Henry Kissinger of 23 April 1973 can be found at the website of the Centre virtuel de la connaissance sur l'Europe, <http://www.ena.lu>. It is also reprinted in Mally, G., (ed.), *The New Europe and the United States: Partners of Rivals*, Lexington, Lexington Books, 1974, p. 29-37.

proposition for the new Atlantic charter, which was named the Declaration of Principles, was elaborated only 5 months later.

The Nine member states differed of opinion on the policies within the European political cooperation. Especially France reacted reserved or even dismissive to the American proposition, but that did not seem to affect negatively its relations with the United States. Several documents in the archives of the Richard Nixon Security Files show that the countries of the Benelux and also Italy reacted somewhat aggrieved to the “special treatment” of the French in the transatlantic relations. Notwithstanding French reservation, the Americans had more intensive contact with France than with the smaller European states, which were far more willing to cooperate. Also, in June, Kissinger did send a draft version of the declaration on the renewed cooperation only to the large states France, Germany and the United Kingdom. In response, the other countries and apparently especially the Government of Luxembourg were “concerned about being left out in the cold.”<sup>3</sup> In August, the proposition of the English Prime Minister Edward Heath for a Tripartite Summit with France and West-Germany seems to have worsened the situation.<sup>4</sup> In October, Gaston Thorn, then Minister of Foreign Affairs in Luxembourg, pleaded for a more intensive dialogue between the US and the five smaller states in the European communities.<sup>5</sup> During a conversation with Kissinger he even seemed to make allusion to a shared position of these five, when stating: “We Luxembourgers and the other small countries in the Community [...]”<sup>6</sup>

The larger states were well aware of the small states’ irritation. When Richard Nixon proposed to the French President at their meeting

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<sup>3</sup> Cited from L.S. Eagleburger for Henry Kissinger: Roosevelt Study Center (RSC) Collection, Richard M. Nixon Security Files (RNSF), 1969-1974, Reel 18 (microfilm edition), Report of Meeting with the Luxembourg Ambassador, 23 June 1973. See also documents from States other than Luxembourg, as for example: Italian perception: RSC Collection, RNSF, Reel 2, Telegram from Embassy in Brussels to the Secretary of State in Washington, 17 January 1974; on Belgium perception: RSC Collection, RNSF, Reel 10, Memo from Helmut Sonnenfeldt to Secretary Kissinger, 3 October 1973.

<sup>4</sup> Noble, A., *Kissinger's Year of Europe, Britain's Year of Choice*, paper given at conference “The Atlantic Community Unraveling? States, Protest Movements and the Transformation of US-European Relations, 1969-1983,” University Vanderbilt, 2004 Sept., p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> RSC Collection, RNSF, Reel 18, Telegram from Mr. Farkas (US Embassy in Luxembourg) to Assistant Secretary Stoessel (Secretariat of State in Washington), 17 October 1973.

<sup>6</sup> RSC Collection, RNSF, Reel 18, Memorandum of Conversation between Gaston Thorn, Jean Wagner, Henry Kissinger, Walter Stoessel and Richard Vino, 2 October 1973.

in Reykjavik (31 May-1 June) to prepare the transatlantic dialogue with just the three larger European countries and the United States, Pompidou replies (without rejecting though): “Nous sommes là dans un domaine délicat, car nous avons affaire à la susceptibilité des petits.”<sup>7</sup> In fact, it seems that the French President Georges Pompidou was not less annoyed than the small states. During a conversation with Edward Heath on 16 November, he remarked: “On a un peu l’impression que les Hollandais croient toujours que la France est celle de Louis XIV, l’Espagne celle de Philippe II, l’Angleterre celle de Guillaume d’Orange!”<sup>8</sup> Apparently the Dutch were the most ardent opponents to the idea of the Tripartite Summit.

These documents show that the distinction between small and large states in the European cooperation was a reality which could even arouse friction between them. Interestingly, the small states seem to present themselves as one solid group. Or, at least, the Luxembourg Minister of Foreign Affairs makes allusion to such a group in his conversation with Kissinger in October 1973.

We also get the impression that the smaller states didn’t have a serious say in the European political cooperation of the time. They seem to search for a new role in international politics. With European integration, traditional relations between states had changed. Even the smallest state acquired a vote within European intergovernmental negotiations on matters that had before been out of their range, as for example security issues.<sup>9</sup> The question raises which role the small member states assumed in European cooperation and what strategies they could employ in negotiations. This certainly does not only concern political cooperation but also the European Communities. Diplomacy between the member states has altered since the 1950s. Not only did the European Commission enter the negotiating table. Interaction between governments intensified as well, both at governmental as administrative level.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Roussel, E., *Georges Pompidou 1911-1974*, Paris, Éditions Perrin, 2004, p. 555.

<sup>8</sup> Centre historique des Archives nationales françaises (CHAN), Fonds Georges Pompidou, 5AG2/1015, Premier entretien entre le Président de la République et M. Heath à Chequers, 16 novembre 1973 de 11h30 à 13 heures, p. 10-11.

<sup>9</sup> Wivel, A., “The Security Challenge of Small EU member states: Interests, Identity and the Development of the EU as a Security Actor,” in *Journal of Common Market Studies*, No. 2, Vol. 43, 2005, p. 393-412.

<sup>10</sup> Ludlow, N.P., “Diplomacy with Different Rules: Learning to Negotiate in the EEC”, in Bitsch, M.-T., Poidevin, R., Loth, W. (dir.), *Institutions européennes et identités européennes*, Bruxelles, Bruylant, 1998, p. 241-255.

## Current Historical Research: an Example

The issue of the behaviour of small states in the policy process has recently been approached by a small circle of historians.<sup>11</sup> They not only focus on the *adaptive* policies of smaller states to the power game of the larger states, but also the *participative* policy of the smaller states in this game. Their research is a welcome addition to the numerous studies on the economic and political history of individual member states in the European communities. It gives insight into the play of interaction between states, large and small.

A good example is the analysis of Olivier Maunoury on the Franco-Dutch relations during the preparations for the 1969 conference in The Hague. He shows that the two states applied a different strategy in order to influence the policy process. While France disposed of the political weight to persuade the other member states of most of its ideas, the Dutch government had to make several concessions during the conference. At the same time it focused on some, apparently minor elements which were of particular interest to the Netherlands like the development and the strengthening of the European Parliament. Eventually, the Dutch government succeeded to achieve these objectives. First, the final report of the conference uses the contestable term “European Parliament” which implies a more powerful institution than the terminology preferred by the French government (*l'Assemblée générale*). Second, the report refers to discussions within the Council on the direct elections for Parliament. Now, the Dutch government had gained the possibility to evoke the subject in the Council in the next few months. In an indirect way, they had played a substantial role in setting the agenda.<sup>12</sup>

This research gives a better understanding on the interaction between the member states and on the development towards the election by universal suffrage of the European parliament. It also shows that, forced by its size, the small state followed a different path than the large state. Its actions were less flashy but it succeeded to achieve its goals. The behaviour of the Netherlands in the policy process was shaped by its size. The distinction in size is thus an interesting additional perspective for historians. It offers a new window to understand the positions and

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<sup>11</sup> See for example: Trausch, G. (ed.), *Small Countries in Europe. Their Role and Place in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, Brussels, Bruylant, 2005. Trausch, *Le Luxembourg face à la construction européenne, op. cit.*; Dumoulin, Duchenne, (dir.), *Les petits États, op. cit.*; Dumoulin, M., Duchenne, G., Van Laer, A. (dir.), *La Belgique, les petits États et la construction européenne*, Brussels, P.I.E.-Peter Lang, 2003.

<sup>12</sup> Maunoury, O., « La Conférence de La Haye et les relations entre la France et les Pays-Bas », in Dumoulin, Duchenne (dir.), *Les petits États, op. cit.*; p. 313-326.

strategies of the member states and therefore the development of European integration.

### **Towards a Theoretical Framework**

Arguably, historical research of specific case studies can benefit of the theoretical framework on the issue of large and small states, mainly developed within political sciences. Within this field, small and large states have been topic of thorough research since the beginning of last century.<sup>13</sup> The European cooperation is a special area in the field since the member states interact individually with each other, but have also transferred partially their national sovereignty to a supranational organ. Consequently, the state's size might not only have a role in the relationship between member states, but has also an impact on the relationship of a state to the supranational body. Most of their studies on European cooperation concentrate on the recent European Union, but their analyses might help to understand the diverse issues which played a role in the European communities as well.

### ***Formal Structures Linked to Size***

Formally, political power of member states in the European communities was partly linked to their size. In its final years, the European communities counted five large states. West-Germany, Italy, France, Spain and the United Kingdom had a larger population, larger surface and larger economies. Although all states had equal representation in the Court of Justice, the distinction in size was reflected in the number of seats in the Commission and Parliament. In the Council, the key European decision-making institution, size mattered for the partition of votes for voting with a qualified majority in the Council. There was thus a formal explicit link between the political strength of each state and its size. At the same time, every member state, small and large, had the right to veto, seemingly strengthening disproportionately the political power of the smaller states. But in reality the advantage of this right was not very large. Vetos were only applied sparsely because, especially when used by a small state, they evoked irritation and might have counteracted in a negative way in other areas of the cooperation. Moreover, although veto right gave the possibility to

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<sup>13</sup> A thorough survey of the history of academic research on small states is given by I. Neumann and S. Gstöhl in their Introduction "Lilliputians in Gulliver's World?", in Ingebritsen, C. *et al.* (eds.) *Small States in International Relations*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2006, p. 3-36.

block certain policies, it did not facilitate the successful launch of new policies.<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, the formal structure in European decision making does not fully explain the policy processes. One more example is the rotating presidency, another non discriminating feature within European cooperation. Although the same rules applied to all states, they seem to have played a different role according to their size. The larger states had more political power to enforce breaking political impasses, while the smaller states were in a better position for brokering in the negotiations. However less political power, the latter could benefit from the fact that they were less entrusted with other international responsibilities, had fewer priorities to defend and a smaller administration to coordinate.<sup>15</sup> The difference in role of small and larger states was painfully experienced by the Dutch government during their presidency in the second half of 1991. In the intergovernmental conferences on the Economic and Monetary Union and the Political Union, it hoped to push its preferences for a larger political role for the European institutions by altering the earlier version which was already accepted by the other member states. This Dutch initiative flopped dramatically on 30 September, also known as “Black Monday”, when it was rejected by almost all other member states.<sup>16</sup>

### ***Linking General Characteristics to Behaviour***

Political scientists have developed a theoretical framework on large and small states which might help to interpret the processes. Most studies concentrate on the recent European Union, but their analysis might help to understand the divers issues which played a role in the European Communities. In one approach, political scientists have linked the typical characteristics of small states to their behaviour in European policy processes. Roughly, small states have been characterised under two main headings: economics and politics. Economically, they are considered to be more dependent on import and export because of their more limited and more specialized home market. They are thus believed

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<sup>14</sup> Rozemond, S., “De Positie van de Kleine Staten in de Europese Unie,” in *Internationale Spectator*, Special issue: Van Staden, A. (ed.) “De Nationale Staat. Onhoudbaar maar Onmisbaar? Het Perspectief van Europese Integratie en Mondialisering”, Nov.1996, p. 115-124, especially p. 116-117.

<sup>15</sup> Elgström, O., “Introduction”, in Elgström, O. (ed.), *European Union Council Presidencies. A Comparative Perspective*, London, Routledge, 2003, p. 1-17, esp. p. 8-9.

<sup>16</sup> Brouwer, J.W., Pijpers, A., “Nederland en Luxemburg: een Grote en een Kleine Mogendheid?”, in *Internationale Spectator*, No. 1, Jan.1999, p. 31-35, esp. p. 33.

to be more open to the world economy. Politically, in foreign relations they are more dependent on others in, for example, security issues. Moreover, smaller states are characterised of being more consensus minded and therefore having a more domestic corporatist structure, as political arrangements have been created between main actors in the national scene.<sup>17</sup> The political scientist Baldur Thorhallsson did a thorough empirical research on the relation between these characteristics and small states behaviour in the decision-making process, while focusing on the areas of the Common Agricultural Policy and the Regional Policy in the 1990s. In his conclusions he emphasizes the importance of the relatively small dimension of political administration and the small diversity in economic interests. These would generally result in the prioritizing of national strategies to only a few important areas. Moreover, communication on governmental and administrative level within the smaller state was more informal than in larger states. Permanent representatives of smaller states are thus in a more direct contact with the policy-makers at the highest national level than in the larger states and receive guidelines rather than instructions when the issues are not of primary interest for the state.<sup>18</sup> This situation gives some advantages to the small states in negotiating European policies. Their focus on some prioritized issues enables them to be more flexible in other areas. They might even act as coordinator while influencing results “on the sideline.” Moreover, the limited administration of small states and its informal structure favours more efficiency and effectiveness on European level, especially when matters are discussed which have a special priority for that small state.<sup>19</sup>

### ***Individual Characteristics and Subjective Criteria***

While helpful to understand small states’ strategies in policy processes, the approach linking general behaviour to general characteristics is not concluding. The behaviour of a state is not only explained by its political or economic characteristics and their translation to European policy making. It is also influenced by other

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<sup>17</sup> See for example Barston, R.P. (ed.), *The Other Powers. Studies in the Foreign Policies of Small States*, New York, Barnes & Noble, 1973; Wivel, *The Security Challenge*, *op. cit.*; Katzenstein, P.J., “Small states in World Markets. Industrial Policy in Europe”, in Ingebritsen, *et al* (eds.), *Small States*, *op. cit.*, p. 193-217; Baillie, S., “The Seat of the European Institutions. An Example of Small-State Influence in the EU”, in Trausch (ed.), *Small Countries in Europe*, *op. cit.*, p. 465-479, especially p. 470-471. Thorhallsson, B., *The Role of Small States in the European Union*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2000.

<sup>18</sup> Thorhallsson, *The Role of Small States*, *op. cit.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222-223; Baillie, *The Seat of the European Institutions*, *op. cit.*, p. 470-471.

factors such as history, geography or language. For example, founding members of the European Communities had an early development of the national diplomatic mechanisms and institutions tuned to the European cooperation. Even the smallest founding member, Luxembourg, benefited from its early involvement. Its politicians and diplomats had fairly more experience with European affairs than larger small states that later joined the communities.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, another source of influence for a state's behaviour is the perception of the state's decisive impact on the international system. This might be the subjective opinions of domestic and foreign governments or populations. One of the sources for inspiration for this perception is the past of the state, such as its colonial history or having a "founding father status."<sup>21</sup>

Subjective criteria seem to play a role within the European cooperation. A classic example is the behaviour of the Dutch government on 5 November 2001 when the Dutch Prime Minister suddenly showed up, uninvited, at a diner in London for the then largest states of the European Union. Apparently, the Dutch government considered its state as the smallest of the largest nations (and not as the largest of the smallest).<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, Italy, while being a large member state based on objective criteria, was not always considered by the other members of taking part in the inner circle of most important decision makers. For example, we have seen in the short study on the political cooperation in 1973 that Italy seems to have been considered by the United States to be on the side of the smaller states. But its size in terms of population, surface and economy would classify it as a large state.

This distinction in size based on subjective criteria does not make historical analysis easy. It implies a flexible perception on the size of a certain state and makes it difficult to grasp the implications for its behaviour in the decision making process. Another challenge to understand small states' behaviour is their variety. They each have their

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 468.

<sup>21</sup> See for a discussion on the criteria: Thorhallsson, *The Role of Small States, op. cit.*, especially p. 1-11; Archer, C., Nugent, N., "Introduction: Small States and the European Union", in *Current politics and economics of Europe*, Special issue: "Small States and the European Union", No. 1, Vol. 11, 2002, pp. 1-10. Focus on subjective criteria: Miles, L., "Small States and the European Union: Reflections", in *Current Politics and Economics of Europe*, No. 1, Vol. 11, 2002, p. 91-98, especially p. 93-95. Keohane, R., "Lilliputians Dilemma's: Small States in International Politics", in *International Organization*, No. 2, Vol. 23, 1969, p. 291-310.

<sup>22</sup> "Europe's Small Countries versus its Big Ones", in *The Economist*, 8 November 2001; See also Trausch, G. "La place et le rôle des petits pays en Europe", in Frank, R. (dir.), *Les identités européennes au 20<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 2004, p. 111-124, especially p. 121.

own specific characteristics which influence their individual position within European cooperation. For instance, unlike other small states, Luxembourg is well located in the centre of Europe, on a crossroad between France and Germany. Moreover, its steel industry in the early 1950s favoured its good position in the ECSC negotiations.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Sources of Influence***

This problem is avoided by Helen Wallace in her approach to understand policy processes within the European Union. Although the distinction between large and smaller states is not the main focus, her model enables a study of individual state input and impact within common decision making. Wallace has distinguished seven resources for states to influence policy processes. Two of these (political and economic weight) are probably reserved for the larger states, but the smaller states might affect decision making while using the other sources of influence like credibility and consistency, persuasive ideas, social and economic practice, political practice and compelling demands. This is evident in the historical analysis on the role of Belgium and the Netherlands in the creation of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) by Ivo Maes and Amy Verdun. They show that these countries had a substantial influence on the emergence of the EMU through persuasive ideas, compelling demands, social and economic practice and credibility and consistency. Belgium had for instance a so-called “pace-setting role” in which it worked to advance the project by shaping the debate, setting the agenda and brokering consensus. The Netherlands had a more “gate-keeper role” by pushing the German idea of economic cooperation prior to monetary integration from the late 1960s to the early 1990s. The Dutch offered persuasive ideas, stressed repeatedly the need for economic cooperation and kept the EMU on the agenda.<sup>24</sup>

In their study on the EMU, Maes and Verdun did not only demonstrate the fact that small states could play a major role in the European integration process. They also showed that this role was variable in time and depended on circumstances, such as the

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<sup>23</sup> Baillie, *The Seat of the European Institutions*, *op. cit.*, p. 468-469.

<sup>24</sup> Wallace, H., “Exercising Power and Influence in the European Union: The Roles of member states”, in Bulmer, S., Lequesne, C. (eds.), *The member states of the European Union*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 25-44, especially p. 36-42. Maes, I., Verdun, A., “Small States and the Creation of EMU: Belgium and the Netherlands, Pace-Setters and Gate-Keepers”, in *Journal of Common Market Studies*, No. 2, Vol. 43, 2005, p. 327-348.

contemporary monetary situation.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the study of small states' influence in the European policy process is a rather complex subject.

### **Conclusive Remarks**

This paper has explored theories on the behaviour of small states in the European decision making process. The issue of small and larger states has been approached both from a historian perspective as from the political sciences. Arguably, the political scientist's approach of developing comprehensive theories of general small states' strategies on European level will help the historian in his research on specific cases.

Policy making in the European Communities was an affair of all member states regardless of their size. Economic and political weights were not the only sources of influence in the negotiations. Small states played nevertheless a different role than the larger states. Their approaches to the negotiations were partly determined by their general characteristics. Sometimes their size yielded fairly strategic advantages. On the other hand, their behaviour also depended on their individual characteristics or preferences. And, to make it even more complicated, one state's behaviour was variable in time and depended on circumstances.

Indeed, small states' behaviour is difficult to enhance and calls for various theories. It is the challenge for the historian to go beyond general theories and to interpret the specific behaviour of European member states on a specific policy field in a specific period. But, historical sources are not always easy to understand, especially not on small states', less eye-catching, strategies. The theoretical framework developed within political sciences gives the historian a better interpretation of its sources and a tool to interpret the development of European cooperation.

### **Résumé**

Cet article examine la distinction entre petits et grands États dans la coopération européenne. Les États avaient des rôles différents dans le processus de décision. Alors que les actions des grands États sont plus saillantes, le rôle des petits États se révèle moins clairement. Pourtant ces derniers n'ont pas seulement une politique d'adaptation aux politiques des grands, ils ont aussi leur agenda politique propre qui agit sur la coopération. Un examen de leur apport au processus d'intégration européenne donne une meilleure compréhension de l'interaction des

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 339.

grands et petits et donne une image plus complète de cette dynamique. Les études des sciences politiques peuvent contribuer à une meilleure compréhension des stratégies et ainsi aider les historiens à une meilleure interprétation des sources historiques. Ainsi, des études empiriques ont montré le reflet des caractéristiques générales des petits États, comme leur structure administrative et économique, sur leur comportement sur la scène européenne. D'autres ont mis l'accent sur la diversité des sources d'influence que les États peuvent avoir sur le processus de décision. Les poids politique et économique des grands États ne représentent que deux des sept sources d'influence.