

Minister attendance in Brussels

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Introduction

The Council of the European Union consists of roughly three levels; working groups, senior committees and a ministerial level. Decisions are always formally adopted at the highest of these levels, by government ministers, but much of the legislative work is performed at the lower, preparatory levels. The ministerial level of Council decision-making is however the forum to deal with unresolved issues and issues with high stakes that are salient to member state governments. This implies that it matters who attends these meetings. Nevertheless, not all governments are represented by their minister at Council meetings. Sometimes they delegate this task to a civil servant. We believe that minister attendance in Brussels can be seen as an indicator of government activity and engagement in the EU. Whether a minister is sent to a particular meeting is an indication of how salient the issues dealt with are to this member state. However, there may also be other factors explaining minister attendance.

The main aim of this paper is to make a first explorative description of the variation in minister attendance, both across member states, policy areas and over time. The empirical data was collected from the attendance lists in the press releases that are published after every meeting in the Council. It covers all meetings in the Council from January 1 2000 to September 19 2010, in total 808 meetings.¹

The following empirical presentation is divided in two parts. First, a comparison of minister attendance for all 27 EU member state will be presented, casting light on differences between member states, policy areas and years. Secondly, a more thorough case study of Swedish minister attendance will be presented. The Swedish case is especially interesting since it includes a shift in

¹ This includes Special council meetings but not meetings in the European council. The data collection relies on online press releases and for some meetings these are not available, in total missing press releases approximately sums up to 4 meetings during the complete period.

The meetings are also coded by the council configuration they belong to according to the division made in the Seville declaration of 2002. One consequence of this is that meetings before 2002 have been coded to the new council configuration it would have belonged to after 2002. In some cases where this probably has been unclear have the same meeting appeared under two configurations. In those cases they have randomly been assigned one of the configurations, in total this sums up to 13 meetings. Another consequence of using council configurations according to the Seville declaration is that the meetings from December 1 2009 onwards in the External Affairs Council (EAC) and the General Affairs Council (GAC) in parts of the following presentation where nothing else is stated are coded to belong to the previous council configuration of General affairs and external relations (GAERC).

government where the new government explicitly stated that it wanted to signal more engagement in Brussels compared to its predecessor.

Minister attendance – why it matters and what it indicates

A lot of research has focused on various aspects of the preparatory bodies in the Council and the legislative processes therein (e.g. Beyers and Trondal 2004; Lewis 2005; Thomson et al. 2006; Naurin 2010; Naurin and Lindahl 2010). Studies undertaken at the ministerial level have often focused on voting in the Council (e.g. Mattila 2008; Mattila and Lane 2001) or have been a part of examining the development of a particular legislative proposal (e.g. Broman 2008; Hennessy 2008). So far we have seen no systematic analysis of minister attendance.

Even though a lot of the legislative work is performed at preparatory stages of the Council more than 60 percent of the issues are at some point up for negotiations at the ministerial level (Häge 2008, 92). This figure points to a previous underestimation of the involvement of the ministerial level in Council decision making, which urges further attention to this level in forthcoming research. Issues that are up for discussion at the highest of Council levels are less technical, more political, more salient and more controversial. (Häge 2008, 241-251; Hayes-Renshaw and Wallace 2006). From a democratic point of view it is clearly preferable that such issues are dealt with by elected representatives. One of the elements of the alleged democratic deficit of the EU is the heavy influence of bureaucrats. Not only can it be assumed that ministers are better to deal with political issues, they are also *de facto* acting on a political mandate. Having unelected officials negotiating in the EU Council makes the chain of delegation one link longer. As have been shown elsewhere and for other circumstances this is not without democratic effects as it increases the risk of defection from voters' preferences (Müller, Bergman, and Strøm 2003, 23).

The issues dealt with at the ministerial level can be assumed to be more important, and with a political imprint, although not necessarily for all member states simultaneously. Ministers are

regarded as a having higher status (cf. Nugent 2010, 143). Having civil servants attending Council meetings at a large scale might affect both member states' influence in the processes and have effects on the Council's democratic credentials. Not attending Council meetings with minister might in addition cause formal problems with the quorum requirements of voting in the Council (Council of the European Union 2009, Article 11).

What is decisive for whether to attend a Council meeting seems to be if the issues dealt with are salient or of high political status (Hayes-Renshaw and Wallace 2006, 34), but minister attendance is of course also determined in competition with outside options of various attractiveness and urgency (Nugent 2010, 143). Attending EU Council meetings should thus be regarded at the individual level as a matter of priority over activities in a usually crammed agenda. It is a prioritization governed by which activity is most salient at a given time. At an aggregate level on the other hand minister attendance can be used as an indicator for how prioritized the work in the Council is. It indicates how salient the issues on the EU agenda are to a particular government, and how much of a priority it is compared to other government business.

Variation between member states and policy areas over time

The empirical data that has been collected allows both member state comparisons and within state comparisons across policy fields and over time. We present two measures of minister attendance; 1) the average number of ministers attending and 2) the share of meetings for which at least one minister is attending. Furthermore, since some member states are represented not only of regular (senior) ministers but also of deputy, vice and/or regional ministers we present the figures in two versions – one including and one excluding such lower level ministers.

The average number of regular (senior) government ministers who attend EU Council meetings – our first measure of attendance - for the whole period is 0,89 per meeting. Our second measure of attendance shows that governments send at least one regular minister to 74 percent of the EU Council meetings. Including lower level ministers these figures are 1 and 79

percent respectively. The figures indicate a fairly high level of overall attendance. Still, in more than 20 percent of the cases member states fail to be represented by a minister when the most important decisions are taken.

Furthermore, the variation between member states is quite substantial. Figure 1 shows the average attendance using the second measure - the share of meetings for which at least one minister is attending – and including lower level ministers. The Czech Republic scores the highest attendance, having ministers present at 98 percent of the meetings. Interestingly, Slovakia - the Czech Republic's closest neighbour, geographically and historically - is at the other end of the scale. The Slovak government is represented only by civil servants at 37 percent of the meetings (63 percent attendance). Another striking difference is that between Bulgaria and Romania, the two newest member states, who are second from the top and the bottom respectively.

Czech Republic and Slovakia are at the opposite ends of the scale also when looking at the other measure of minister attendance – the number of ministers at meetings. Czech Republic has on average 1.46 ministers present, Slovakia 0.69, when including lower level ministers (see Appendix for all the four different versions of the attendance measure).

Figure 1. Minister attendance (share of meetings including at least one minister)

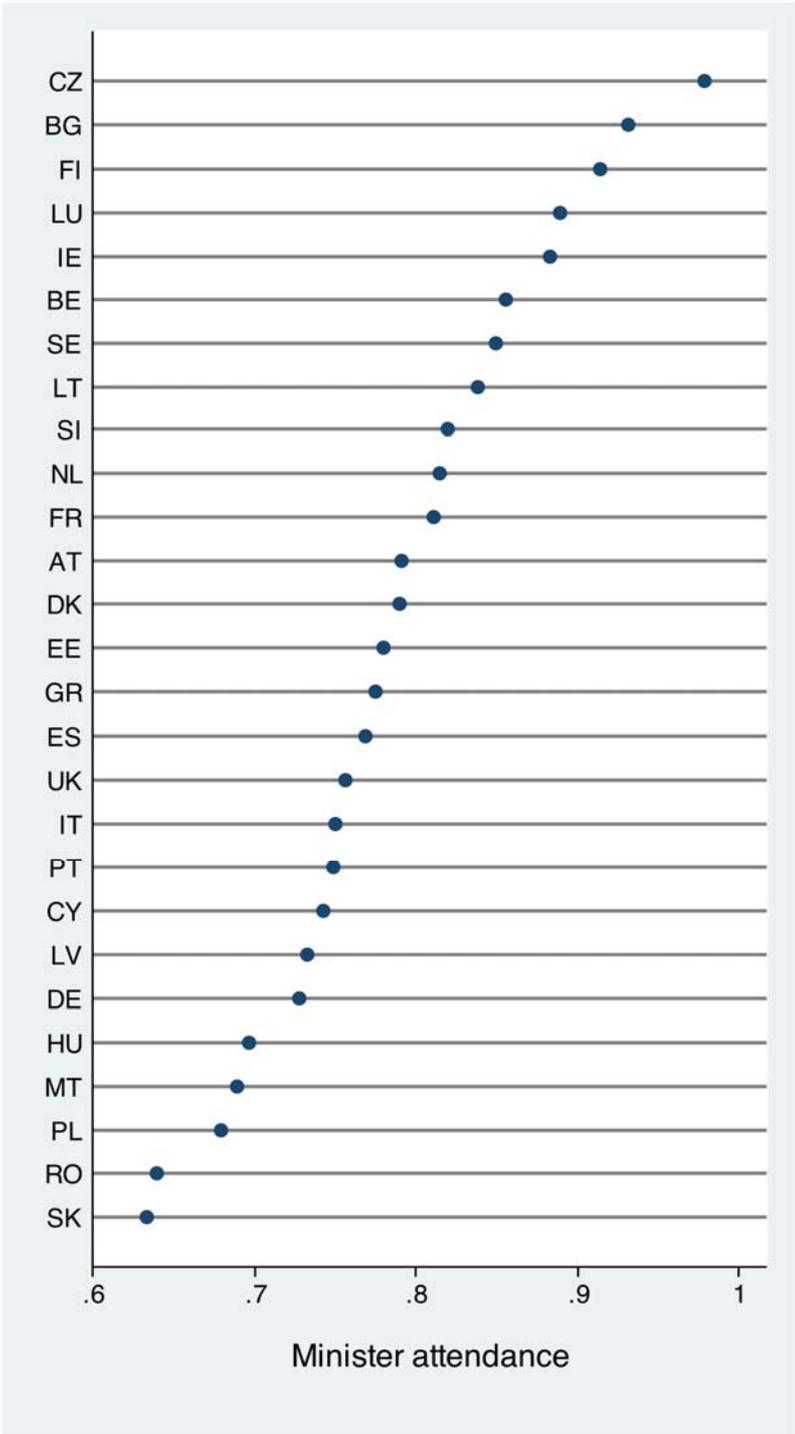


Table 1 looks at the variation between new and old member states, on the one hand, and big and small member states, on the other hand. During the time period included in the data, two

enlargement rounds took place, 2004 with ten new members and 2007 with two additional members entering. It is quite clear from table 1 that the older member states have an overall higher attendance at Council meetings (although with important variations also within this group) than the new members. It is likewise clear that big states have an overall lower attendance at Council meetings than do small states. This we will get back to.

Table 1. Group comparisons contingent on EU entrance and member state size

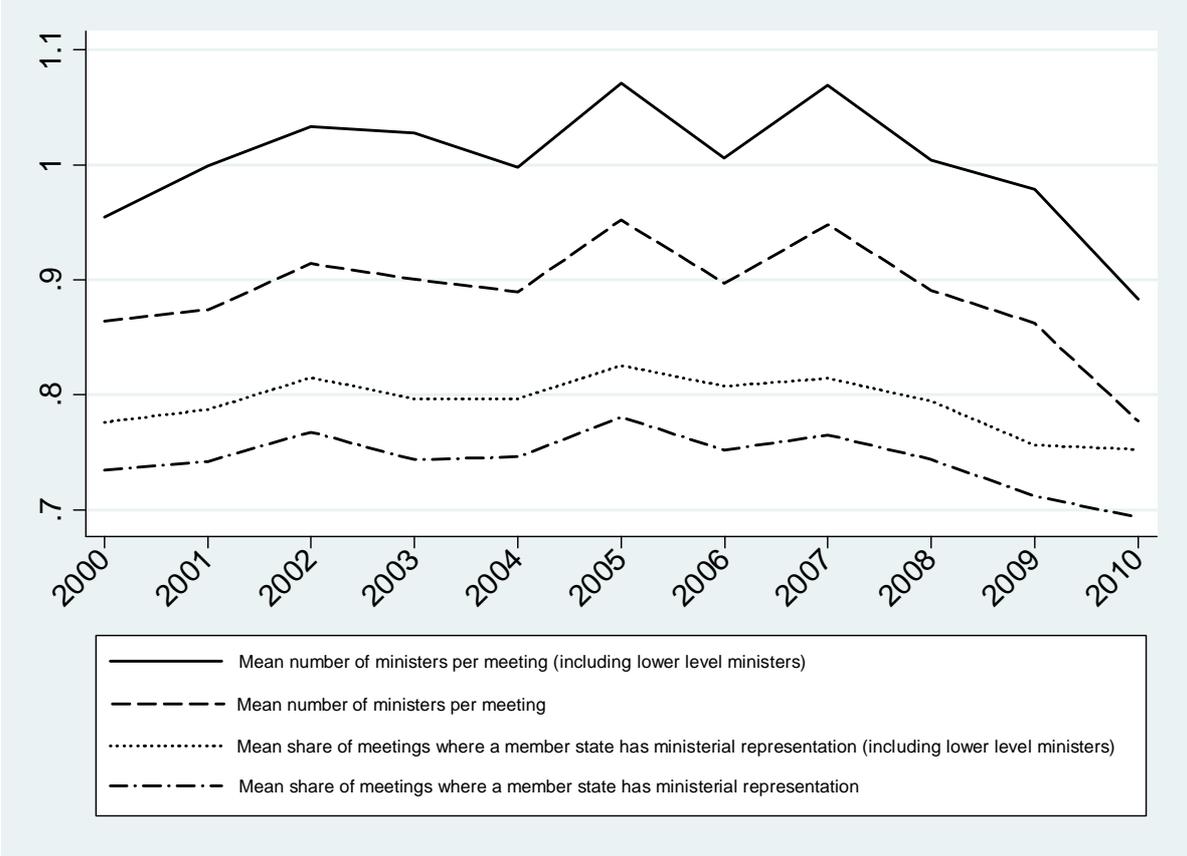
	Mean number of ministers per meeting	Mean number of ministers per meeting (including lower level ministers)	Mean share of meetings where a member state has ministerial representation	Mean share of meetings where a member state has ministerial representation (including lower level ministers)
EU15	0,93	1,05	0,76	0,81
EU12	0,80	0,90	0,71	0,76
Diff. EU15-EU12	0,16***	0,20***	0,06***	0,06***
Big states	0,79	0,97	0,68	0,75
Small states	0,93	1,02	0,77	0,81
Diff. big-small states	-0,14***	-0,05***	-0,08***	-0,05***

Comment: *** indicates statistically significant at the 0,001-level. EU12 (new states) includes both the 10 states that entered the EU in 2004 and the 2 states entering in 2007. The comparisons made between old and new member states are taking into consideration the member state entrance which implies that when EU15 is compared to EU12, only meetings that occurred after the 2004 enlargement are included. The classification of states into small and large is based on their strength in the council where large states are Germany, France, Spain, United Kingdom, Poland and Italy.

Figure 2 shows the variation in the EU average of the two measures of minister attendance (including lower level ministers) over time. The number of ministers per meeting drops in 2010 due to the division of the General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) into one General Affairs Council (GAC), where usually the EU-ministers attend, and one External Relations Council (ERC) for the foreign ministers. However, even before that, and also for the share of meetings including at least one minister, there seems to be a slight overall downward

trend since 2007. There is of course also variation within the member states between the years (see the Swedish case study below), but they have different years at which they peak and descend and the overall trend is fairly stable as can be seen in Figure 2.

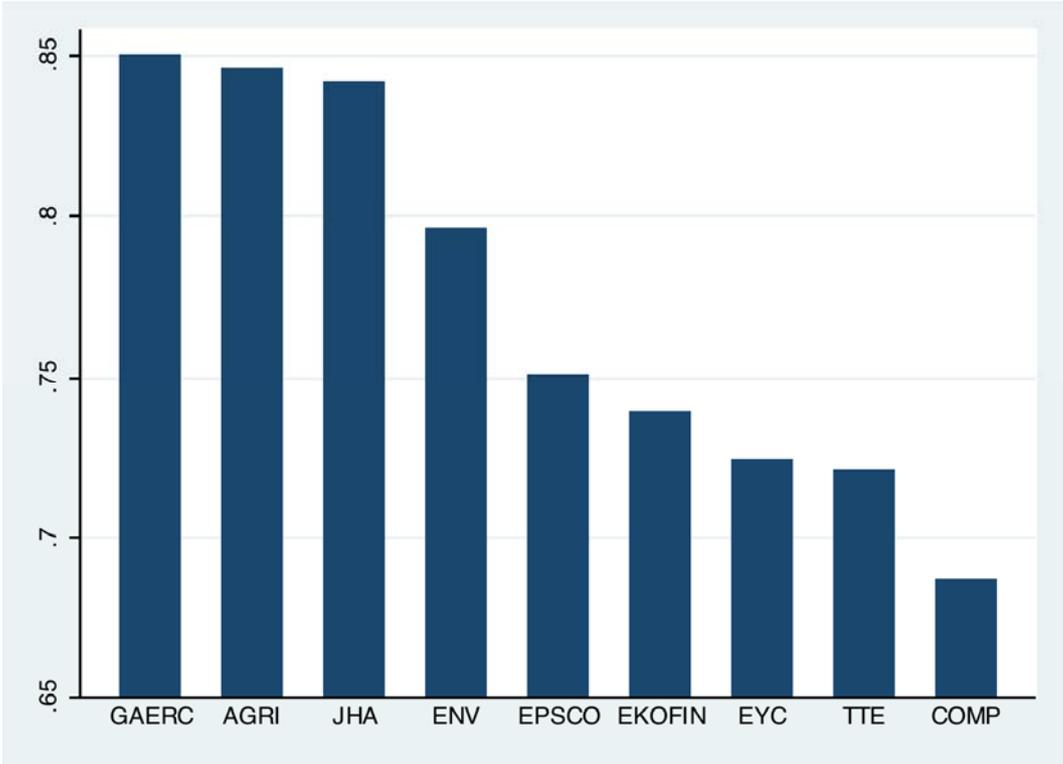
Figure 2. Minister attendance over years



There is also substantial variation between policy areas. Three Council configurations stand out with a comparatively high attendance - the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council, the General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) and the Agriculture Council (figure 3). It should be noted that Council configurations have different characters; some comprise merely one policy area whereas other configurations comprise a larger span of policy areas potentially involving more than one minister. Looking at the standard deviations for minister attendance in the different configurations shows that it is lowest in the configurations that are most purely one

issue focused; the Economic and financial affairs Council (Ecofin), the Agriculture Council and the Environment Council. Furthermore, the Ecofin Council has the lowest mean of lower level ministers attending (0,04) whereas the Agriculture and Environment Councils are rather mid range configurations taking this measure (0,11 and 0,12 respectively). The highest mean of attending lower level ministers are found in the Competition Council and in the Education, Youth and Culture Council (EYC) (0,21 and 0,30 respectively). There are also differences in policy competences of the EU in the different Council configurations.

Figure 3. Comparing Council configurations (share of meetings including at least one minister)



Note: GAERC: General Affairs and External Relations council. ECOFIN: Economic and Financial Affairs council. EPSCO: Employment, Social Policy, Health and consumer Affairs council. JHA: Justice and Home Affairs council. COMP: Competitiveness council (internal market, industry, research and space). TTE: Transport, Telecommunication and Energy council. AGRI: Agriculture and fisheries council. ENV: Environment council. EYC: Education Youth, Culture and Sport council.

Member states direct their priorities to different Councils. For example, some member states more frequently participate with lower level ministers in some Council configurations. Belgium,

for instance, participates only with lower level ministers in the Education, Youth and Culture Council. What participation of lower level ministers implies must therefore be subject to careful examination of the state specificities, and the effects of making the distinction between regular ministers and lower level ministers must also be carefully considered when drawing conclusions from the data.

One factor which may cause variation in the level of minister attendance between member states is access to resources, both economic and administrative. Smaller states have been assumed to have less resources to engage in EU politics, due to administrative capabilities, and therefore to be forced to focus their attention to specifically prioritized policy areas or issues (Archer and Nugent 2002; Thorhallsson 2000). At the same time it should be emphasized that smaller states have been described as able to punch above their weight in the Council, pointing to potential benefits of having a less obstructing administration (Archer and Nugent 2002; Panke 2010, Naurin and Lindahl 2010). However, if there is any merit to the claim that smaller states have to direct their attention more clearly to certain policy areas of vital interest this might also affect their minister attendance in certain Council configurations. This would require an examination of state by state prioritized national interests. What would point to an expectation of higher minister attendance in general for small states would be that individual ministers from smaller states could be assumed to have a less dense calendar, with fewer obligations, and hence for that reason be able to attend meetings in Brussels. This can be supported by the figures in Table 1 which point to a statistically significant difference between big and small states in the minister attendance at the Council meetings where small states attend with minister more often. Member state size in conclusion affects EU Council meeting attendance but there is still room for further elaboration using more precise indicators of member state size and on the effects of state interests in various policy areas.

There might also be differences dependent on what government that currently holds office. Attending EU Council meetings is basically a matter of priority between different options, which

can be seen as an indication of how salient issues on the EU agenda are for a particular government. This must be assumed to vary depending on the parties in government and their prioritization both domestically and at the EU level. There are a number of party factors that can be assumed to govern this priority, such as EU-support, left-right alignment, and if issues at the EU agenda are of particular political interest for the parties in government. In the preceding section a case study of Sweden will be presented, that includes a change in government office, to explore domestic party factors as explanations for minister attendance.

The Swedish case

Sweden has long been thought of as a reluctant European or as “another awkward partner” (Dinkelspiel 2009; Johansson 2003; Jerneck 1993). This description has not been without merit; Swedish public and political establishment were for a long time hesitant towards European integration, although Sweden was never completely isolated from it. Sweden was for example a member of the EFTA before taking the step towards full membership of the EU in 1995. Particularly three structural factors have been pointed out that contributed to the Swedish orientation towards EU membership in the beginning of the 1990's. The end of the cold war provided a new opportunity to seek cooperation in Europe without being obstructed by the longstanding neutrality. The increasingly disadvantageous free trade agreement with the EC, and the economic downturn in the beginning of the 1990's, also facilitated the social democratic turn on the membership issue (Gustavsson 1998).

The acceptance of EU-membership has increased over the years. Public opinion has become increasingly positive, in comparison to other EU member states, and since 2002 more Swedes think that EU-membership is a good rather than a bad thing for their country, according to the polls (Standard Eurobarometer 72 2009; Linde and Ekman 2010). The acceptance of the EU has also increased among the political parties. During the election campaign for the latest parliament elections in September 2010 the only remaining Swedish party with EU secession in the political

program – the left party – accepted to drop that demand in the political agreement with the social democrats and the green party (Rödgröna 2010). For the social democrats this secession demand had been an obstacle, during previous government formations, for letting the left party gain government seats in a potential coalition government (e.g. Persson 2008, 327).

In the 2006 elections the social democrats lost government office to the centre-right alliance (hereinafter the alliance). The new government was quick to demonstrate being more Europe friendly than their predecessors, by stating that they would be more active in the EU and that they wanted Sweden to belong to the “core of Europe”. This was a recurrent theme in official comments, and in the government’s foreign policy declarations that are presented to the parliament on an annual basis, the most recent one on February 16 2011 (for an example from the media, see Malmström 2010). At the rhetorical level, thus, the alliance government consciously and explicitly positioned themselves as being more active EU-members than the previous social democratic governments. The government shift can be seen as a shift also with respect to government support for the EU and engagement for EU issues.²

But did this shift also translate into increased minister attendance in Brussels? The results, as we shall see, are a bit mixed. The alliance government created a new ministerial post for an EU-minister, which did increase the number of ministers in the GAERC. Apart from that, however, overall minister attendance did not increase other than marginally.

The number of Swedish ministers attending EU Council meetings did increase from an average of 1 to 1,3 after the government shift in 2006 (a difference which is statistically significant). However, looking at the share of meetings with at least one minister present there is

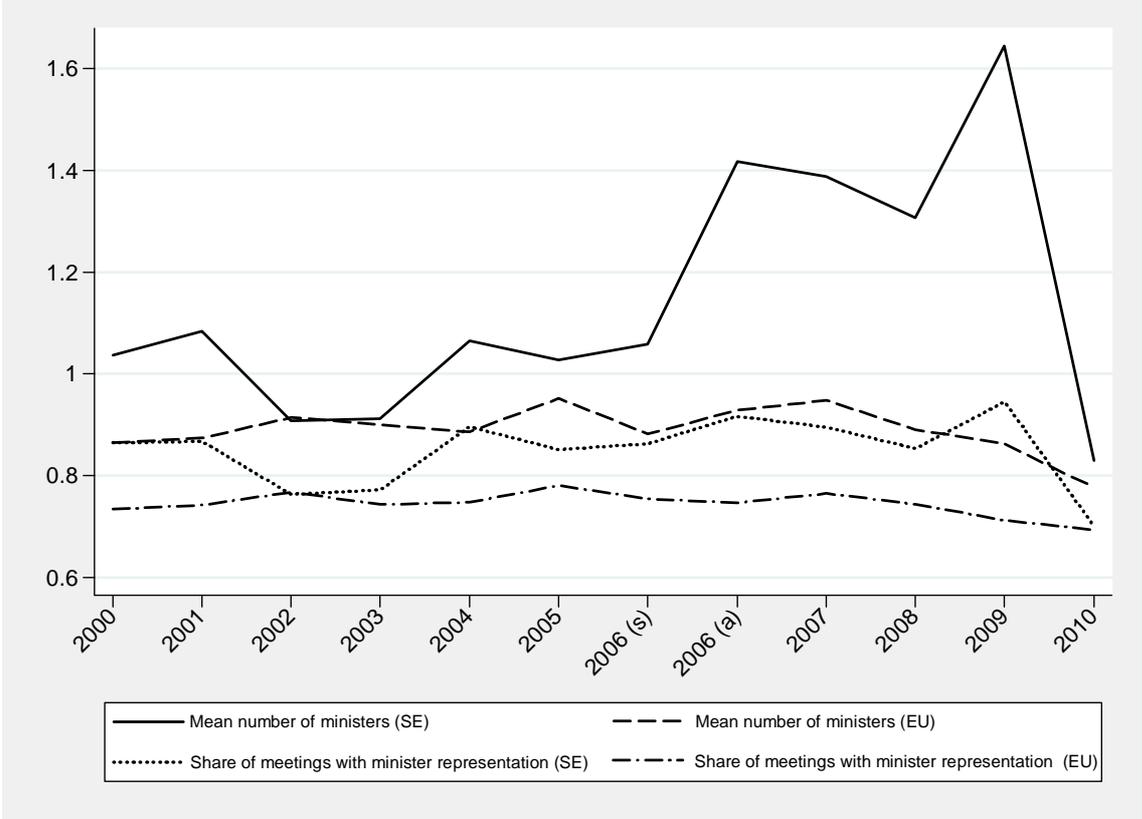
² The proposition that the alliance government is more positive towards the EU is supported by Benoit and Laver’s expert survey data on political parties. The alliance parties taken together are more integration positive than the previous social democratic governments. The alliance gets a combined score on integration support of 7,42 and the social democrats gets 8,68 on a scale from 1-20 where 1 means “Favors increasing the range of areas in which the EU can set policy”. When looking at EU engagement, the importance of the issue, the alliance gets a combined score of 14,03 and the social democrats scores 12,98 on the 1-20 scale where 20 means “very important” (Benoit and Laver 2006). The numbers have been calculated by taking each of the alliance parties’ scores on their view on EU authority and their share of cabinet seats and compared it with the score for the social democrats. For the different shares of cabinet seats, the European journal of political research political data yearbook where used (see the articles by Widfeldt 2003, 2007).

no significant change. The alliance government has at least one minister at the meeting in 87 percent of the cases, whereas the previous social democratic governments had at least one minister at 84 percent of the meetings, a difference which is not statistically significant (Table 2).

Figure 4 shows the minister attendance in Sweden over the whole period. Comparing with the EU as a whole both the social democratic and the alliance governments perform well and have an above average minister attendance in Brussels, both with respect to the number of ministers and the share of meetings with minister attendance (Figure 4). During both the social democratic and the alliance governments the numbers are significantly higher than the EU averages. It is also higher in all years except 2002.

During the first years of the alliance government (2006-2009) the number of ministers increased sharply, from having ranged between 0,9 and 1,1 for the social democrats, to be ranging between 1,3 and 1,6 ministers per meeting for the alliance government. The number of Swedish ministers in Brussels peaked during the Council presidency period, in the fall of 2009. After that, however, 2010 saw a sharp decline in minister attendance (which is partly explained by the split of the GAERC Council, as described earlier).

Figure 4. Minister attendance over years



Note: The Social Democrats were in government until September 2006, when the Alliance came to power.

The sharp decrease in 2010 in the number of ministers present per meeting is partly explained by the division of GAERC into one configuration for general affairs and one for external relations, as already noted. The number of ministers who attend Council meetings does however decrease during 2010 in all other Council configurations too, except for in the Ecofin Council where it is stable. The GAERC split explanation hence proves insufficient. Also the share of meetings with minister attendance decreased in 2010, with an all time low of 70 percent. Neither this can be explained completely by the GAERC split.

An additional explanation for the lower level of attendance in 2010, apart from the GAERC split, could be an “EU fatigue” after finishing the Council presidency in the fall of 2009. However, no such fatigue was observed after the previous Council presidency in 2001. To the contrary, the number of ministers increased during the six months period after the 2001

presidency, compared to the preceding 12 months³, and there is a statistically significant increase in the share of meetings with at least one Swedish minister attending (by 14 percentage points compared to the preceding 12 months). Another possible explanation for the sharp decrease in minister attendance in 2010 could be the fact that the government faced a national election campaign in that period, and therefore shifted focus to domestic business. Comparing with the previous national elections during the period of investigation – 2002 and 2006 – there is a small but statistically significant decrease in the number of ministers attending the Council meetings before the elections in 2002 (0,24 ministers less compared to the preceding year). However, no such difference exists in 2006. The same applies to the second measure of minister attendance; there is a decrease in the share of meetings with minister attendance before the 2002 elections⁴, but not before the 2006 elections. In sum, national elections and recently finished Council presidencies have only affected previous social democratic governments marginally and not clearly in one direction.

Looking at the Swedish minister attendance in different Council configurations reveals further variation (Table 2). A statistically significant difference between the social democratic and alliance governments in the number of ministers attending each meeting is found in the Competition Council, where the alliance has 0,73 ministers more per meeting than the social democrats had. The difference in the share of Competition Council meetings with minister attendance is not statistically significant, however. On the other hand, the social democratic governments were more often represented by a minister at the meetings of the Justice and Home Affairs Council (16 percentage points difference, also statistically significant).

The largest difference between the social democratic governments and the alliance is found in the GAERC, which can be explained by the new EU-minister post. The responsibilities of the present Swedish EU minister are the horizontal issues, which are dealt with in the General Affairs Council (GAC, until December 2009, GAERC). In the new Council configurations that were

³ This increase is almost statistically significant, p-value of 0,0528.

⁴ This decrease is almost statistically significant, p-value of 0,0515.

previously the GAERC, the attendance is on average 1,1 for the External Relations Council (ERC) and 1 for the GAC, compared to 1,9 for GAERC. The alliance government had ministerial representation in 98,5 percent of the GAERC meetings, but only in 78 percent of the GAC and 82 percent of the ERC meetings. When GAERC⁵ is excluded from the analysis the total difference between the governments with respect to the number of ministers is reduced to 0,12 ministers per meeting, which is very small (although still statistically significant). The share of meetings with minister attendance is almost identical before and after September 2006 (only 1 percentage point higher for the alliance, which is not statistically significant).

Table 2. Minister attendance per Council configuration and government

Council configuration	Mean number of ministers (s)	Mean number of ministers (the alliance)	Share of meetings with minister (s)	Share of meetings with minister (the alliance)
GAERC	1,08	1,88***	0,89	0,94
ECOFIN	0,85	0,89	0,81	0,83
EPSCO	1,50	1,81	0,95	0,94
JHA	1,41	1,25	0,95**	0,79
COMP	0,90	1,63**	0,67	0,81
TTE	0,55	0,81*	0,53	0,65
AGRI	0,91	0,90	0,91	0,90
ENV	0,96	1,00	0,93	1,00
EYC	1,04	1,50	0,76	0,75
Total	1,01	1,34***	0,84	0,87

Note: * indicates statistically significant at the 10%-level, ** indicates statistically significant at the 0,05-level, *** indicates statistically significant at the 0,001-level. The significance test is based on comparisons between the governments and is indicated after the highest value.

GAERC: General Affairs and External Relations council. ECOFIN: Economic and Financial Affairs council. EPSCO: Employment, Social Policy, Health and consumer Affairs council. JHA: Justice and Home Affairs council. COMP: Competitiveness council (internal market, industry, research and space). TTE: Transport, Telecommunication and Energy council. AGRI: Agriculture and fisheries council. ENV: Environment council. EYC: Education Youth, Culture and Sport council.

In sum, the alliance government, composed by more EU integration friendly parties, has indeed sent more ministers to Brussels than their predecessors. This corresponds to the repeated declarations – in particular from the EU Minister herself (Cecilia Malmström until December 2009) - on the ambition to bring Sweden closer to the core of Europe. However, the difference

⁵ Including the meetings that during December 2009 and 2010 were held in the two new council configurations.

can almost entirely be explained by the presence of the EU-minister herself in the GAERC Council. Looking at the other Council configurations, and the share of Council meetings including at least one Swedish minister, there is no evidence that the alliance government has had a higher degree of ministerial presence than the previous governments.

Conclusion

This is the first study of minister attendance in Council meetings, and the purpose of this paper has been mainly explorative. We believe that minister attendance is important, both for the individual member states and for the democratic legitimacy of the EU as a whole. Sending civil servants rather than ministers to take legislative decisions signals a low interest in the issues at hand, and is plausibly negative for the ability of the government to negotiate successfully. Further analysis of the data will connect minister attendance with other available data on bargaining success and network capital.

The descriptive findings presented here indicate a substantial variation in minister attendance, both between member states and Council configurations. We have seen less variation over time, although there seems to be a slight downward trend overall in the last years (partly explained by the lower attendance of the new member states).

The Swedish case included a government shift, where the new government – and in particular the new EU-minister - explicitly stated that they wanted to increase their presence and engagement in Brussels. Apart from the EU-minister herself, however, no such increase was discernable in the data. One conclusion from the case study might be that explanations for the rather substantial variation between member states and Council configurations should be sought in structural factors at the member state level or policy areas, rather than in party politics.

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Appendix 1.

	Mean number of ministers per meeting	Mean number of ministers per meeting (including lower level ministers)	Mean share of meetings where a member state has ministerial representation	Mean share of meetings where a member state has ministerial representation (including lower level ministers)
Year				
2000	0,86	0,95	0,73	0,78
2001	0,87	1,00	0,74	0,79
2002	0,91	1,03	0,77	0,81
2003	0,90	1,03	0,74	0,80
2004	0,89	1,00	0,75	0,80
2005	0,95	1,07	0,78	0,83
2006	0,90	1,01	0,75	0,81
2007	0,95	1,07	0,77	0,81
2008	0,89	1,00	0,74	0,79
2009	0,86	0,98	0,71	0,76
2010	0,78	0,88	0,69	0,75
Council				
GAERC	0,99	1,11	0,81	0,85
ECOFIN	0,75	0,78	0,71	0,74
EPSCO	0,95	1,09	0,69	0,75
JHA	1,24	1,31	0,82	0,84
COMP	0,73	0,94	0,58	0,69
TTE	0,81	0,91	0,66	0,72
AGRI	0,83	0,93	0,81	0,85
ENV	0,75	0,87	0,73	0,80
EYC	0,84	1,14	0,59	0,72
State				
AT	0,94	0,94	0,79	0,79
BE	0,92	1,27	0,75	0,86
BG	0,80	1,15	0,72	0,93
CY	0,82	0,82	0,74	0,74
CZ	0,85	1,46	0,71	0,98
DE	0,79	0,95	0,66	0,73
DK	0,99	0,99	0,79	0,79
EE	0,86	0,90	0,75	0,78
ES	0,87	0,98	0,75	0,77
FI	1,25	1,26	0,91	0,91
FR	0,81	1,07	0,71	0,81
GR	0,84	0,95	0,73	0,77
HU	0,77	0,77	0,69	0,70
IE	0,74	1,08	0,68	0,88
IT	0,88	0,92	0,73	0,75
LT	0,82	1,01	0,73	0,84
LU	1,26	1,26	0,89	0,89

LV	0,85	0,85	0,73	0,73
MT	0,72	0,72	0,69	0,69
NL	1,04	1,04	0,81	0,81
PL	0,71	0,74	0,66	0,68
PT	0,88	0,89	0,74	0,75
RO	0,70	0,70	0,64	0,64
SE	1,13	1,13	0,85	0,85
SI	0,98	0,98	0,81	0,81
SK	0,69	0,69	0,63	0,63
UK	0,63	1,06	0,57	0,76
Total	0,89	1,01	0,74	0,79

Note: GAERC: General Affairs and External Relations council. ECOFIN: Economic and Financial Affairs council. EPSCO: Employment, Social Policy, Health and consumer Affairs council. JHA: Justice and Home Affairs council. COMP: Competitiveness council (internal market, industry, research and space). TTE: Transport, Telecommunication and Energy council. AGRI: Agriculture and fisheries council. ENV: Environment council. EYC: Education Youth, Culture and Sport council.