



Can the New Small Member States Endanger the Future of European Integration?

«Can the New Small Member States Endanger the Future of European Integration?»

by Robert Zbiral

Source:

Contemporary European Studies (Contemporary European Studies), issue: 01 / 2006, pages: 71-75,
on www.ceeol.com.

Can the New Small Member States Endanger the Future of European Integration?

Reviewed by Robert Zbíral, Law Faculty of Palacký University, Olomouc

Review of: Lee, Moosung (2006) *How do Small States Affect the Future Development of the E.U.* New York: Nova Science Publishers. 234 pages.

The recent enlargement of the European Union is often compared to the ‘Big Bang’ not only in terms of the number of countries acceding, but also in their impact on the future of integration as such. The new member states are generally poor and politically unstable; they just recently underwent a transition to democracy and need to acquaint themselves with the ethos of compromise that is so important for achieving ‘win-win’ solutions (compare contributions in Nugent 2004). There is a vast amount of literature available dealing with the topic of the enlargement and the threat it may inflict on the operation of the Union, but it usually conceptualises the new member states (MS) as one bloc, which might be a case of over-simplifying given the differences among the countries.

In his book, Moosung Lee, researcher from Handong Global University (South Korea), concentrates only on a distinctive group of states from the last enlargement round, namely the small ones. Small states as the objects of research are not unknown in European studies (e.g. Thorhallsson 2000, Magnette and Nicolaïdis 2003, Goetschel 1998), but use of the concept with relation to enlargement and the future of the EU may be considered innovative and certainly justify itself as a useful theme to study.

Lee begins his text with presenting ‘conventional wisdom’ (Lee 2006, *passim*), claiming that for most authors the accession of new small member states (SMS) is considered as a matter of concern for the future development of the Union. Specifically he argues that the general view is that there will be problems with decision-making, SMS will not be able to assure proper functioning and enforcing of *acquis* in certain policies and also the governance of the EU institutions will be affected. The central hypothesis of the book is that these wor-

ries might be unfounded, as there are several factors that form innate characteristics of the SMS that will work against the feared development. Lee identifies three main aspects which play the role: a) SMS are too small to influence international politics and in order to make their voice heard, they have to cooperate with others and accept the rules and obligations (process called adaptive acquiescence), b) SMS have only limited interests, and are willing to act flexibly in areas where their interests are not affected, c) SMS tend to have proportionally smaller level of *acquis* disruption than large member states (LMS). In addition, the new SMS have a positive attitude towards EU membership and possess the motivation not to endanger the integration process that is an overall benefit to them. Lee's aim is to test these sub-hypotheses not only in traditional perspectives (e.g., voting in the Council), but also in specific policies of the EU.

The first chapter lays down the theoretical framework of the book. Given the topic, it is logical that the author relies mainly on various forms of intergovernmentalism; however, he admits this would not cover all particularities of the theme and certain parts of the book are based on the theories of new institutionalism, multi-level governance and constructivism. It is of course a question of how such diverse approaches can be accommodated in one text. Fortunately, Lee uses non state-centric theories only very sparingly.

The question of which member states can be labelled as SMS forms the core of second chapter. SMS may be defined through either a quantitative or qualitative method. The first one chooses numerical thresholds in selected variables (e.g., population, area, GDP) and all states below these thresholds are defined as SMS. The qualitative approach compares the states to a wider environment (SMS compared to XY). The author combines both methods and divides the EU countries into four clusters: large, medium, small and mini states. A country qualifies as SMS if its population is below 10 million or it has less than ten votes in the Council (for QMV purposes). The definition of SMS forms the cornerstone of the book and while Lee tries extensively to justify his selection by using various theoretical tools and arguments, he admits himself that the choice, in the end, was arbitrary in order 'to make the whole study manageable.' (Lee 2006: 36) This is, in my view, regrettable. It might be more logical to move the group of countries that have 10 votes in the Council to the medium-sized group, as the distinction of 'smallness' between, e.g.,

Sweden and Hungary is less visible than between Sweden and Ireland. The separate categories of SMS and mini states are also not logical as Lee subsequently, tacitly merges them into one group. The second part of the chapter presents the characteristics of the SMS (economic and administrative smallness, military weakness) and links them to behaviour patterns in the economic (open-door policy preference), political (common domestic front, building a coalition with others, being cooperative with others, institutional dependence) and military/security (collective security regime, preference for rules and norms) dimensions. Although Lee supports his arguments with statistical data, it is again noticeable, even from the presented numbers, that despite many commonalities the SMS differ from one other in numerous cases and it would be very hard to make any general observations in the chapters that follow.

The EU is mainly an economic organization and impact of enlargement on the EU economy has been widely discussed. In the next chapter Lee explores immediate consequences of

SMS accession to two policies that form the core of EU operations, namely regional policy and the CAP. The author analyzes the threats to decision-making, implementation of the *acquis* and EU budgetary balance. The new SMS have only a limited portfolio of interests in these sectors and they will be flexible and consensus seeking. Even when it is not the case, it is likely that any possibility of using the veto by the new SMS will be dismissed by the LMS. In terms of budgetary costs the new SMS accounted only for a limited amount of the overall enlargement expenditures. The *acquis* implementation might even be easier in case of the new SMS, because due to their smallness it is the central government that will play the role of regional authority and these policies will be operated from the centre. It is concluded that new LMS such as Poland are much more likely candidates for substantiating the abovementioned worries than the new SMS.

The fourth chapter also deals with economic implications, but this time the selected sectors for analysis are the Single European Market, the euro and trade policy. These policies are analysed separately from those in the previous chapter as they also have important external dimensions. This division is not entirely apparent, for example the future of CAP might too have significance for EU foreign partners. The conclusions are otherwise similar to those of chapter three, with Lee arguing that the new SMS, due to their characteristics, will not become obstacles to the unhindered free internal market, the stability of euro or the liberal trade policy.

Moving from economic issues, chapter five seeks to contemplate the role of the new SMS in the development of Common Foreign and Security Policies. Here we can show the line of reasoning that Lee uses throughout the whole book in more detail. Many fears that the accession of states that are either neutral or in the proximity or centre of international conflict (some share both characteristics-- Cyprus) may cause serious problems for decision-making in the CFSP, as all MS have veto rights in this policy. Lee answers by stressing the rule of adaptive acquiescence, when the SMS rather agree with LMS and receive some benefits than risking a firm stance with zero results. Even if this were not the case, Moosung Lee draws his trump card and argues that in the EU 'the dividing line is almost never between large and small states.' (Lee 2006: 147–8) In light of this claim, one must ask oneself why study the impact of the SMS on decision-making at all? Is it only a theoretical exercise as in the case of quantitative voting power theories (see Journal of Theoretical Politics 1999)? If we move back to the content of the chapter, the accession was often seen as the possible reason for worsening relations with certain powers, namely Russia (due to the accession of the Baltic states) and Turkey (due to the Cyprus question). The counterargument stands that the CFSP does not cover hard security issues and is not a danger from a purely military perspective for the neighbouring powers.

The last chapter analyses the impact of new SMS on the functioning of EU institutions. In intergovernmental organs, the LMS are worried about 'the tyranny of the tiny' because of overrepresentation of SMS in the Council; the SMS are conversely suspicious of the LMS dominance in the operational environment in the Council (the culture of consensus where the SMS are expected not to stand in a way) and in the European Council. All of them are asking if the SMS are able to run the EU presidency effectively and efficiently. The willingness of the SMS to be flexible and compromise with other states, to distance themselves

from domestic pressure and to rely on cooperation with supranational institutions (mainly the Commission) might mitigate the scepticism. The predicted difficulties of supranational institutions are rather more tied to their increased workload that would result from enlargement than to problems of decision-making. On a more positive note, the SMS belong to countries that have the highest compliance rate with EU legislation and are not often targets of the Commission's proceedings or the Court's actions. The conclusion summarizes the findings of the book and confirms the initial hypothesis of the author. The conventional wisdom that the accession of numerous SMS might cause difficulties to the future development of the EU has been generally disproved.

Moosung Lee is convinced the SMS have certain characteristics, which subsequently influence their behaviour. Although he analyzed the impact of the SMS accession in several different policy sectors, the arguments are quite similar: SMS will not cause problems as they have only limited interests, they are flexible in negotiations and try to reach consensus. The EU will bring many benefits to them, which they do not want to put in danger, or they do not have enough resources to make a real difference. Another factor that affects the analysis is that Lee conceptualizes national interests as only issues involving the life-or-death of the state, and according to him only in these cases the SMS are willing to push the LMS and distance themselves from the behaviour patterns described above. Unfortunately, as Lee does not distinguish between the SMS, he does not identify those 'core' national interests and does not say how their defence may influence the development of the EU. For example, if each of the new SMS has three to five of their own distinguished national interests and these interests are issues where unanimity is required, it may seriously endanger the functioning of the EU. One of the most feared aspects of the last enlargement was the impact of accession of so many states on EU constitutional issues such as future enlargement or treaty revisions. These acts require internal ratification in all MS, which was problematic even in the EU-15 (Maastricht and Denmark, Nice and Ireland). Here behaviour patterns of SMS are not useable, as it is a purely domestic issue for each MS upon which the EU or LMS have little influence. Lee regrettably omits to discuss this flaw in his theory altogether.

Overall, the book paints a very bleak picture of SMS involvement in EU affairs. Either they get on the bandwagon and support the agenda prepared by LMS (and hope they will also benefit) or they try to insist on their interests and still eventually become muted by the LMS. In Lee's theory, the best moment of SMS is its role as honest broker and mediator between LMS. But are the SMS really only a universal mass that serves to grease the wheel of the consensus seeking process? And is this consensus-seeking role really neutral in terms of the SMS interests? In my view, it might be the fact in many instances, but it is hardly a pattern. The position of Luxembourg in EU matters may be mentioned as case in point.

There are very few factual mistakes or perhaps just typos in the text (wrongly defined interest rates condition in Maastricht criteria on p. 120, the European Central Bank was not founded in 1988, p. 182). A small number of arguments suffer from logical defects. It is claimed at several places in the text that SMS are overrepresented in the Council (e.g., Lee 2006: 163), but at the same time Lee concludes that the SMS feel vulnerable from continuing introduction of QMV and keep rather a low-profile approach during such voting (Lee 2006: 87). One of the main arguments throughout the book suggests that the insufficient

administrative resources of SMS limit their opportunities. But we might argue that the Permanent Representations of MS in Brussels are the main bodies responsible for MS input to day-to-day EU affairs, and the size of Permanent Representation is very similar for all MS (see the table in Lewis 2006: 277).

The book surely qualifies as an original research text with all the necessary requirements. The author used more than one hundred sources and the employment of citations is exemplary. It is true that he cited only sources in English and that there are no materials from new SMS or authors from these countries (even in English), but as was already written the book itself is a macro study that conceptualizes the new SMS as one bloc, so specialized data would be useless due to the book's format (it is a pity of course). A very detailed index and logical structure of the headings contribute to easy use of the text. Despite the several mentioned shortcomings, Lee's study is a welcome contribution to a yet unexplored research theme of the position of the SMS in the EU. I would recommend the book to everyone who is interested in EU matters, specifically the negotiations process and behaviour and influence of weak actors. It might also be a useful reading for policy-makers from the SMS- are they really so powerless? Hopefully they have at least enough clout to persuade their offices to finance the purchase, as the book is available only in hardcover and is a bit on the pricey side.

References:

- Goetschel, Laurent (ed) (1998) *Small States Inside and Outside the European Union: Interests and Policies*. London: Kluwer.
- Journal of Theoretical Politics*, special issue on voting power and power indices, vol. 11: 291–366.
- Lewis, Jeffrey (2006) 'National Interests: Coreper', in John Peterson and Michael Shackleton (eds) *The Institutions of the European Union*, pp. 272–92. Oxford: OUP.
- Magnette, Paul and Kalypso Nicolaidis (2003) 'Large and Small Member States in the European Union: Reinventing the Balance', *Notre Europe Research and European Issues* no. 25.
- Nugent, Neil (ed) (2004) *European Union Enlargement*. Houndmills: Palgrave.
- Thorhallsson, Baldur (2000) *The Role of Small States in the European Union*. Aldershot: Ashgate.