

EU Regional Groups: To Speak With One Voice

The influence of regional groups on their level of consensus in EU decision-making

Master thesis

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1 Introduction

“In a broader Union of 27 countries there is plenty of reason for the Benelux to speak on a broad area of issues with one voice.” (Benelux Governments, 2008: 2; translated by author). This statement was written down in the political declaration of the governments of the Benelux that accompanied the renewal of the Benelux Treaty. Benelux’ is the cooperation between Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. The name of this cooperation is an acronym of the names of these countries (BeNeLux). Within the EU there are more regional groups of EU member states that cooperate with each other on a regulated basis through, for example, annual meetings like the Baltic States and the Visegrad cooperation. The Baltic States are the cooperation between Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in which ‘Baltic’ refers to their geographic location at the Baltic Sea. ‘Visegrad’ is the cooperation between Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The name of this cooperation, ‘Visegrad’, refers to the name of the Hungarian city in which the cooperation between these countries started (Baltic Assembly, 2017; Reuters Staff, 2017; Visegradgroup.eu (A), 2018).

The fact that the Benelux countries while cooperating as a regional group within the EU wants to speak with one voice on a broad area of issues in this Union implies that it (currently) does not always ‘speak with one voice’. The other regional groups also aim to jointly contribute to the European Union and continue to ensure their common interests (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, 2018; Visegrad Governments, 2004). An interesting issue is what causes the degree that these regional groups ‘speak with one voice’ on the European level.

Wendt (1999) argues that the collective identity of countries cooperating in regional groups is formed by the characteristics of the countries in these regional groups. Three causal mechanisms that cause collective identity formation by countries cooperating in regional groups are: interdependence, homogeneity and self-restraint. In this situation interdependency is the degree that the countries of the regional group are dependent on each other. Homogeneity is the degree that there are differences between the countries cooperating in the regional group. Lastly, self-restraint is the degree that countries constrain their actions (Drulák, 2002: 48Wendt, 1999: 336-338, 343-345, 354 & 357-363).

This thesis will test whether the characteristics that Wendt (1999) argues creates collective identity of cooperating countries influences the expression of common views by the regional groups that these countries cooperate in. The focus thus lies on the effects that Wendt (1999)'s characteristics have on regional groups 'speaking with one voice'. To research whether these characteristics influence the degree that regional groups 'speak with one voice', the following research question is used in this thesis: *to what degree do the characteristics of the cooperating regional groups of EU member states influence their level of consensus in EU decision-making?*

Hypothesis are created to test the influence each dimension of the characteristics of the regional cooperation has on the level of consensus of the regional groups in EU decision-making. The first hypothesis deals with the degree of interdependency of the cooperation. It tests whether a regional cooperation that has highly interdependent countries has a higher level of consensus in EU decision-making than a regional cooperation that is less interdependent. The second hypothesis deals with the degree of heterogeneity. It tests whether a regional cooperation with countries that are heterogeneous has a lower level of consensus in EU decision-making than one that has homogenous countries. The third hypothesis deals with the organization of the regional cooperation. It tests whether a more formally organized regional cooperation, in which the actions of countries are more constraint, has a higher level of consensus in EU decision-making than one that is less formally organized (Dawn, 2015: 1-6; Holzinger & Schimmelfennig, 2012: 298-302; Vabulas & Snidal, 2013: 209-210).

The societal relevance of this research is that further insight is gained into the behaviour of those EU member states that cooperate in regional groups. Further insight into the degree these member states 'speak with one voice' will be gained and what factors influence this degree of consensus. Citizens can through this insight gain further understanding of the reasons that their government works together with other governments and what consequences this cooperation has for the behaviour of their government (in EU decision making). Governments can through this insight assess and predict the level of consensus they would have when cooperating with other governments.

Further societal relevance of this thesis is that insight is gained into the real or alleged homogeneous views on certain issues of the regional groups. Examples of (alleged) homogeneous views of the regional groups are the view on Russia by the Baltic States, the view on European

integration by the Benelux countries and the view on immigration by the Visegrad countries. Insights are gained into whether these views exist and what the causes of these views are (Dangerfield, 2004: 207; Person, 2015; Zalan, 2017).

The academic relevance of this thesis is related to gaining further insight in the occurrence of regional cooperation by EU member states. There is growing evidence that institutionalized intergovernmental coalitions on a geographical affinity basis (like the Baltic, the Benelux and Visegrad) play a role in EU decision-making. However, the (academic) knowledge of the effects of these territorially constituted coalitions is limited and largely unexplored (Ruse, 2012: 320-321). This thesis therefore focusses on the effects of the regional groups have on EU decision-making by analysing the degree the regional groups 'speak with one voice' in EU decision making.

Further academic relevance is insight into whether Wendt's (1999) causal mechanisms for collective identity formation by countries cooperating in regional groups affects or can explain the expression of (common) opinions by the regional group. This is tested by examining the effects of the characteristics of the regional group of the degree of consensus of the regional groups in EU decision-making. The factors of which the relationship with the degree of consensus of regional groups are tested: are the interdependency of the subregional group, the (political, economic, social and cultural) heterogeneity of the member states operating in the subregional group and the form the intergovernmental cooperation is organized.

This thesis will start with explaining the theory used. The idea of states cooperating in regional groups and their reasons for regional cooperation will be further explored by using the concept of subregional groups. Then the theory of differentiated integration will be used to explain what factors drive the existence of differentiation (of opinion) in a regional organization and on what bases differentiation (of opinion) is possible. The hypotheses used in this thesis will also be developed in this section.

In the methodology section the methodology used in this thesis will be expanded upon. In this section the rationale behind the case selection and the data selection will be explained. An explanation of the operationalization of each variable is also given in this section. In the case section the cooperation of the Baltic, the Benelux and the Visegrad countries will be briefly described. This section will have a focus on their cooperation within the EU-framework. A brief

description of the cooperation of every regional block will be given. Subsequently, the cooperation of the regional groups will be compared with a focus on the similarities and differences of the cooperation.

In the analysis, the variables that are used in this thesis will be analysed for each subregional group. Thereafter, the results of the subregional groups will be compared. The hypotheses will also be tested in this section. In the conclusion the research question will be answered. Finally, the strengths and weaknesses of this thesis and interesting directions for further research will be given.

2 Theory

In this section, the theory that will be used in this thesis will be elaborated. Seeing as this thesis focusses on the consensus of the regional groups of EU Member States in EU decision making the concept of consensus will firstly be explained. Wendt's (1999) describes four mechanisms (common fate, interdependency, homogeneity and self-restraint) that cause states to cooperate in regional groups. In this section all four variables are described. The way three of these mechanisms can influence the level of consensus of regional groups in EU decision-making is also described while it is also explained why the fourth variable (common fate) is not being tested in this thesis (Drulák, 2002: 48; Wendt, 1999: 343).

2.1 Consensus

Consensus in decision-making processes is a prevalent practice on the EU level. For example, even when decisions in the EU Council of Ministers do not have to be decided by unanimity this is often sought. This can be illustrated by the fact that, according to Novak (2013), 80 percent of the decisions taken in the Council under Qualified Majority Voting are uncontested (Novak, 2013: 1092). This is partly caused by the fact that regional cooperation and integration often occurs through processes that are aimed at consensus building. The European Council, in which the heads of states or governments of the European Union members meet, is even described as a “consensus-building body par excellence” (Bickerton, Hodson, & Puetter, 2015: 704). A high degree of consensus in decision-making between countries in regional organisations is thus not only a result but also an aim of the cooperation to build consensus between countries (Bickerton, Hodson, & Puetter, 2015: 703-6).

The previous paragraph described that consensus in decision making is often strived for on the EU level. Seeing as the focus of this thesis is the degree of consensus of the subregional groups in EU decision-making it is important to elaborate the concept of consensus. According to Scheff (1967), the majority of researchers studying consensus use the individual agreement approach. The researches using the individual agreement approach focus on the actions of the individual actors in groups on a particular issue. These researchers see consensus on an issue to mean that the group agrees on this issue. An example of the way this approach works is that the degree of consensus of the group on statement X is the extent to which the individual actors of the group state their agreement with X. In contrast to the degree of consensus, the degree of differentiation

of a group is based on the extent the members of the group do not agree with each other on a particular issue. The reason this thesis uses this theoretical approach to consensus because it clearly shows the way the behaviour of individual actors influences the consensus of the group (Scheff, 1967: 33).

This thesis sees the concept of consensus as a spectrum ranging from complete agreement of the individual actors of the group (complete consensus) to complete disagreement (complete differentiation). This thesis focusses on the level of consensus of groups of cooperating EU Member States in EU decision-making. Therefore, the individual actors of the group that determine the degree of consensus of the group are, in this thesis, the EU Member States that belong to the cooperating group. The reason this thesis uses this theoretical approach to consensus because it clearly shows the way the behaviour of individual actors influences the consensus of the group.

In sum, the occurrence of disagreement in EU decision making might be rare but variation in the level of consensus still occurs in EU decision-making. The voting outcome of territorially based institutionalized coalitions can show the pattern of consensus of the coalitions across multiple issues and periods (Novak, 2013: 1092-1095; Ruse, 2012: 321; Scheff, 1967: 33).

2.2 Common Fate

Common fate is one of the four causal mechanisms for cooperation between states developed by Wendt (1999). Common fate is defined as a situation in which the welfare or survival of an actor is dependent on what happens to the group as a whole. Common fate is typically constituted by an external threat to the group in which the (threat from the) third party defines the group (Wendt, 1999: 349).

The reasons that the effect of common fate on the level of consensus of regional groups is not tested is Wendt (1999) argues that (a high degree of) common fate can have different effects on regional cooperation. These effects from the causal mechanism common fate on the regional cooperation of countries depend, according to Wendt (199) both on the countries and on the kind of common fate the countries face (Drulák, 2002: 50; Wendt, 1999: 351-353). Countries with a high degree of common fate, due to an external threat, can come together into “an alliance of threatened states” (Drulák, 2002: 50). On the other hand, the countries might also not join due to

fear of exploitation or could even join the threatening power out of self-preservation (Drulák, 2002: 50; Wendt, 1999: 353).

The effects of higher or lower levels of common fate on the level of consensus of these countries can thus vary a lot according to Wendt's (1999) theory. The focus of this thesis lies on regional groups with various common fate's, that might have different or even opposite effects on the level of consensus. Comparing the effects of a difference in degrees of common fates between countries with various common fates thus does not show the effects of the degree of common fate because these effects can move in multiple directions. For example, imagine a situation where one of the regional groups has a higher degree of common fate than another regional group. In this situation, the first regional group might decline to cooperate because of the fear of exploitation while the other regional group, with a relatively lower degree of common fate, will cooperate more. Due to this reason the effects of common fate on the level of consensus in regional groups on the EU decision-making level are not tested in this thesis is thus not tested.

2.3 Interdependency

The second causal mechanism developed by Wendt (1999) is interdependency (Wendt, 1999: 343). Interdependency refers to the situation that the outcome of one interaction for each depends on the choices of the other(s). Mutual interactions bind the countries to one another and leads to the sharing of profits and losses. The idea behind this theory is that an overlap in the profits or losses of one country with the profits of other countries should be conducive to mutual cooperation (Drulak, 2002: 48-49). The theory of subregional cooperation explains why this interdependency of countries leads to cooperation between groups of (neighbouring) states. Subregional groups are groups of countries that cooperate while being within a larger framework (Dawn, 2015: 1-7).

The explanation of the way interdependency between countries can lead to cooperation by subregional groups starts with an explanation of the concept of subregional groups. To begin, subregions should be contrasted with (larger) regions. Regions, at the most basic level, refer to physical areas. According to Dawn (2015), the importance of regionalism in international relations is not so much the geography of an area but its interdependency (Dawn, 2015: 3). The states that are part of the region have certain economic, political and cultural relations amongst another and there is therefore a certain level of interdependency between the parts of the region is

implied. This means that, generally, what happens to one state of the region affects the other states of the region more than events outside of the region do. States within a region may thus be expected to accord a greater significance to the relations with states belonging to their own region. Therefore, they might interact with each other with greater intensity than with states outside their region. Areas that can be perceived as being regions under this definition are, for example, North America, sub-Saharan Africa and Europe (Dawn, 2015: 1-4).

A subregion can be defined as a subset of a given region. Similar to the region, the subregion has interdependence among its constituent parts and in this smaller framework of states the level of interdependency can be expected to be even more intense. Consequentially, direct (cooperative) action between the states of the subregion is more likely. Perceiving Europe as a region, the security and stability of Belgium is interconnected with that of Poland. However, it is probable that the relationship between Belgium and the Netherlands is more intense due to their close (geographical) proximity to each other. Belgium and the Netherlands are neighbouring countries and part of the same subregion (the Benelux) while Poland is not part of this subregion. Belgium and the Netherlands thus have a greater interdependence than Belgium and Poland (Dawn, 2015: 1-4).

Subregional cooperation is the conscious process of cooperation between the actors in the subregion. Subregional cooperation is thus the process of regularised, significant political and economic interaction among a group of neighbouring states. This interaction can take place at multiple levels. It can take place at the national governmental level or at the substate level between regional or local authorities. Subregional cooperation does not only take place between governmental actors of neighbouring states but also occurs between private business actors and between civil society actors. Successful occurrences of subregional cooperation usually involve a diverse mix of non-state and state actors interacting simultaneously on a broad range of political, economic and cultural issues (Dangerfield, 2008: 632-634; Dawn, 2015: 1-4).

To sum up, according to Dawn (2015), Drulák (2002) and Wendt (1999) interdependence between states leads to (sub-)regional cooperation. A high degree of interdependency can even lead to a “harmony of interests” (Drulák, 2002: 50). Following this assumption, a hypothesis of the effect interdependence between countries in a regional group has on the behaviour of this regional group in EU decision-making is created. This hypothesis tests whether the greater the

interdependency between the states of the regional group the greater the cooperation of the regional group in EU decision-making is. Otherwise said, it tests whether the higher the degree of interdependency between the members of the (sub-)regional group the more their opinions on EU-decision making are similar (Dawn, 2015: 1-4).

The hypothesis that tests the influence of interdependency between the members of the regional group on EU decision-making is: (H1) *the higher the interdependency between the members of the subregional group the lower the differentiation of opinions in EU decision-making.*

2.4 Heterogeneity

The third causal mechanism that according to Wendt (1999) leads to regional cooperation is homogeneity which can be understood as a likeness between actors (Wendt, 199: 353). The idea behind this mechanism is that a likeness between actors (homogeneity) is expected to reduce conflicts and induce co-optation (Drulák, 2002: 52). To illustrate the effects of this causal mechanism this thesis will test the effects of heterogeneity in inducing conflicts or threatening co-operation. In this part of the thesis, the way that heterogeneity could possibly influence the differentiation of opinion of the members of the regional group in EU decision-making is explained. Heterogeneity will be divided into multiple dimensions that could influence the level of consensus of regional groups in EU decision-making. Hypotheses are developed to test the ways these dimensions of heterogeneity influence the level of consensus of regional groups in EU decision-making.

The conventional wisdom on heterogeneity is, according to according to Holzinger and Schimmelfennig (2012), that an increase in heterogeneity threatens to create a deadlock in EU decision-making. This is because the EU as an organization is largely based on intergovernmental consensus. Differentiation in the way that countries want to work together occurs as a consequence of higher heterogeneity according to Holzinger and Schimmelfennig (2012)(Holzinger & Schimmelfennig, 2012: 298-302). One of Leuffen's (2013) organization-specific hypotheses also deals with the possibility of heterogeneity influencing the occurrence of differentiated integration. These organization-specific hypotheses are about how the characteristics of the regional organization could influence the occurrence of differentiated integration in the regional organization. Leuffen (2013) expects that the higher the degree of

heterogeneity in a regional organization is the higher the degree of differentiated integration will be (Leuffen, 2013: 18-21).

If Leuffen (2013) and Holzinger & Schimmelfennig (2012) expect that increased heterogeneity in the regional organization leads to more differentiated integration then logically increased heterogeneity also affects the preferences of the members of the regional organization. The reason for this is that differentiated integration is the occurrence of a section of the membership of the integration project deciding to integrate differently than the entire regional project (Leuffen, 2013: 8-9). That the preference of the members of the regional group differentiate is thus a requirement for differentiated integration to occur. Therefore, if the expectation exists that when the heterogeneity of the regional organization is higher the differentiated integration is more likely then it makes sense that this also increases the differentiation of opinion (Leuffen, 2013: 8-9 & 18-21).

The term heterogeneity is quite broad and can be defined as the description of a unit which is composed of differing elements (Merkel & Weiffen, 2012: 389). Heterogeneity is a term that describes that diversity in the elements of a union exist. This diversity of the elements of a unit can occur along different dimensions. This thesis has the behaviour of regional groups of EU member states in EU decision-making as the unit of research and tests what influence heterogeneity has on this behaviour. To take into account the multiple dimensions of heterogeneity this thesis will, therefore, test the influence of different kinds of heterogeneity on the level of consensus of regional groups in EU decision-making (Drulák, 2002: 52-53; Holzinger & Schimmelfennig, 2012: 292-3 & 302; Merkel & Weiffen, 2012: 389).

The dimensions of heterogeneity that are tested through hypotheses to find whether they influence the behaviour of regional groups in EU decision-making are: economic, political, cultural and Eurosceptic heterogeneity (Drulák, 2002: 62). Euroscepticism and political heterogeneity are both tested even though Euroscepticism can be seen as a political ideology. The reason for this is that when the regional groups are divided on the degree of Euroscepticism, this is a difference whether to approach something on the European level (or not). Contrasting, a difference in political ideology is a difference in how and whether to approach an issue. The two kinds of heterogeneity can thus affect the level of consensus of the regional groups based on different reasons. These dimensions of heterogeneity cover the needs and interests, the

perspectives on problems and solutions, the degree of understanding and the perspective on the EU of the regional groups. An increase in these dimensions of heterogeneity means thus that these characteristics of the member states of the regional groups are less similar (Holzinger & Schimmelfennig, 2012: 292-3 & 302; Merkel & Weiffen, 2012: 389). The different dimensions of heterogeneity are all tested whether they influence the differentiation of opinions within the subregional groups. To test the effects of heterogeneity four different hypotheses that are based on the (influence of the) four dimensions of heterogeneity are thus tested.

The first of the dimensions of heterogeneity that this thesis tests whether it affects the behaviour of regional groups in EU decision-making is the political dimension. To find the degree of difference in the political thoughts and ideas of the regional group, political heterogeneity will in this thesis be based on the diversity of the political ideology of the group (see Scheufele, Hardy, Brossard, Waismel-Manor and Nisbet, 2006: 739-740). An example of political heterogeneity is that the ideology of the biggest political party of one of the members of the regional group is liberal while the ideology of the biggest political party in a different member of the regional group is socialist.

When members of the regional groups have different streams of political thought being important to them then they might have different opinions on how to deal with problems or issues.

Alternatively, their opinion could even differ whether certain situations are issues that should be dealt with or merely logical consequences of trade. If one of the members of the regional group is being led by a liberal political party, then this country might not perceive (relatively) low wages as a problem but as an advantage for the trading position with other countries. A different country of the regional group that is being led by a socialist political party might perceive this situation as a problem that should be dealt with for the protection of employees. Following this line of thought, it is logical if the larger the differences in the political dimensions between the countries the greater the likelihood that the governments will have different opinions on EU decision-making (Dyson & Marcussen, 2010: 19-22).

The hypothesis that is developed based on the political dimension of heterogeneity is: H2.1: *the higher the political heterogeneity within a regional group the higher the differentiation of opinions in EU decision-making.*

The second dimension of heterogeneity of which the influence on the behaviour of regional groups in EU decision-making is tested is the economic dimension. Economic heterogeneity is in this thesis perceived as the diversity of the economies of the EU member states that cooperate in regional groups. Examples of economic heterogeneity between countries that are part of the same regional group are the difference in the (relative) size of the economy and the difference in the trade-balances between the countries with the rest of the world (Dyson & Marcussen, 2010: 21-22).

Heterogeneity in the economic dimension could cause differentiation of opinion in European decision making because the members of the subregional groups could have different economic needs and interests. The economic needs are not only focussed on the policies and the conditions that are necessary for a member of the subregional group to grow its economy but also on issues that can negatively impact the economy of the members of the subregional group. If one member of the subregional group has, for example, a trade deficit and another member has a trade surplus then they might have different opinions about decisions that affect trade. The economic dimension of heterogeneity implies that when the economies of the member states of the subregional group are different they might have other (economic) problems. Therefore, they might want to take different actions on the EU level. Consequently, when the economic heterogeneity of the subregional group is larger the likelihood that the member states have different opinions in EU decision-making also increases (Dyson & Marcussen, 2010: 19-22).

The hypothesis that is developed based on the economic dimension of heterogeneity is: H2.2: *the higher the economic heterogeneity within a regional group the higher the differentiation of opinions in EU decision-making.*

The third dimension of heterogeneity of which the influence on the behaviour of regional groups in EU decision-making is tested is the cultural dimension (Drulák, 2002: 62). This thesis will compare the national cultures of the member states of the regional groups to come to the degree of heterogeneity of the regional group. Culture is defined as the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others (Hofstede, 2011: 3). The cultural heterogeneity is compared because of the influence a (higher) difference in culture can have on cooperation. Fearon (2003), for example, assumes that a bigger difference in

culture, i.e. a higher cultural heterogeneity, leads to more difficulty for people to coordinate and cooperate (Fearon, 2003: 210-213).

National culture will in this paper be defined using Hofstede (2011) six dimensions of national culture. The six dimensions of this cross-cultural model are power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, long term versus short-term orientation and indulgence versus restraint (Hofstede, 2011: 8).

The first of these dimensions of national culture, power distance, is defined as the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions accept and expect that power is distributed unequally (Hofstede, 2011: 9). The second dimension, uncertainty avoidance, deals with a society's tolerance for ambiguity. It indicates to what extent a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations (Hofstede, 2011: 10). The third dimension of national culture, individualism versus collectivism, refers to the degree that people in a society are integrated into groups. The spectrum of this societal characteristic ranges from having a low degree of integration into groups (individualism) to a high degree of integration into groups (collectivism) (Hofstede, 2011: 11).

The fourth dimension of national culture, masculinity versus femininity, refers to the distribution of values between the genders (Hofstede, 2011:8). Masculinity stands for a society in which social gender roles are very distinct while femininity stands for a society in which social gender roles overlap (Hofstede & Minkov, 2013: 7). The fifth dimension of national culture, long-term versus short-term orientation, is related to the choice of focus for people's efforts. Societies with a short-term orientation focus on the past or the present while societies with a long-term orientation focus on the future (Hofstede, 2011: 8 & 13-15). Indulgence versus restraint is the sixth and final dimension of Hofstede's national culture model. This dimension is a spectrum which is related to the gratification versus control of basic human desires related to enjoying life. Indulgence is one side of the spectrum and refers to societies that allow relatively free gratification of desires related to enjoying life and having fun. Restraint is one the other side of the spectrum and refers to societies that control the gratification of needs (Hofstede, 2011: 8 & 15).

An example of a consequence of cultural distance of the regional group is when the member states of the regional group have a different value for uncertainty avoidance. Imagine that there

are two regional groups that are both rather homogenous. The difference is that one of the regional groups has two countries that both have a very high uncertainty avoidance while the third country has a rather low uncertainty avoidance value. While the other regional group consists of countries that all have a very high uncertainty avoidance. In this case, it could be expected that the first regional group has a lower degree of consensus on a proposal that carried risk, but still aimed to reach the goals of the regional group than the second regional group. The reason for this expectation is the (cultural) variance in this regional group on how to deal with risk (uncertainty)(Hofstede, 2011: 8-11).

To show the position on the dimensions of national cultures a country has, Hofstede (2011) uses scores. To come to the cultural heterogeneity of the regional groups the scores on the dimensions of national cultures of all the countries of the regional group will be compared. A great variety in the scores of the members of the same regional group will imply a greater cultural heterogeneity of the regional group. In contrast, a greater similarity of the scores of the dimensions of national culture of the member states of a regional group will imply a greater cultural homogeneity (Hofstede, 2011: 8 & 21-22).

The hypothesis that is developed based on the cultural dimension of heterogeneity is: *H2.3: the higher the cultural heterogeneity within a regional group the higher the differentiation of opinions in EU decision-making.*

The fourth dimension of heterogeneity of which the influence on the behaviour of regional groups in EU decision-making is tested is the Eurosceptic dimension. Euroscepticism expresses the idea of contingent or qualified opposition as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration (Taggart, 1998: 366). In this thesis the Eurosceptic dimension of heterogeneity is based on be the difference of the opinion of the governments of the member states of the regional groups towards European integration. The opinion of the governments is chosen because they are the ones that make the decisions on the European level. The cooperation of the regional groups also occurs through the governments of the member states (Ruse, 2012: 320-323).

The reason that the Euroscepticism of the governments is analysed is because the Euroscepticism of a government can influence the behaviour of the government on the EU level and thus influence the level of consensus of the regional group. This can occur even when political

homogeneity exists on the way an issue should be solved. The reason for this is that a government that is highly Eurosceptic and a government that is pro-European integration that even when they agree on an issue and agree on a solution they might differ in the level (European or national) that they want the issue to be solved due to their respective positions towards the EU (Dyson & Marcussen, 2010: 26-29; Schimmelfennig & Winzen, 2014: 360-365; Szczerbiak & Taggart, 2008: 254-255).

Following this reasoning, a member of the subregional group with a high level of Euroscepticism would generally be more likely to be against organizing an issue on EU level than one with a low level of Euroscepticism. The greater the difference in public opinion on the EU between the member states of the subregional group (i.e. the greater Eurosceptic heterogeneity of the subregional group) is, the more likely it is that the members have differing opinions on EU-level (Schimmelfennig & Winzen, 2014: 360-365).

The hypothesis that is developed based on the Eurosceptic dimension of heterogeneity is: *H2.4: the higher the Eurosceptic heterogeneity within a regional group the higher the differentiation of opinions in EU decision-making.*

2.5 Formality

The fourth and last causal mechanism developed by Wendt (1999) that can cause regional cooperation is self-restraint (Wendt, 1999: 343). The previous mechanisms focussed on the influences of the (characteristics of the) members of the subregional group on the level of consensus of the cooperation. The self-restraint mechanism focusses on the degree that countries hold themselves voluntarily back so that the needs of the others are respected. Otherwise said, self-restraint is about a country practicing constraint (Drulák, 2002: 53). To test the level of self-restraint that is practiced by the regional group this section will focus on the organization of the regional cooperation. To be precise this section focusses on the degree that the cooperation restraints the actions the countries belonging to the regional group can take (the degree of formality).

According to Vabulas and Snidal (2013) the degree of formality that constrains countries in intergovernmental organizations influences the outcome of the cooperation of these intergovernmental organizations. They describe that intergovernmental organizations can be organized along different degrees of the institutional spectrum and thus have a different degree of

formality. The institutional spectrum ranges from a completely formalized cooperation with strong supranational authorities that can exert a unifying force on the cooperation to decentralized cooperation without institutionalized interactions (Vabulas & Snidal, 2013: 194-197).

An intermediate category on the institutional spectrum is by Vabulas and Snidal (2013) described as informal intergovernmental organizations (IIGO's). This category is on the institutional spectrum between formal intergovernmental organizations and non-institutionalized interactions. The members of informal intergovernmental organizations members have, according to Vabulas and Snidal (2013), explicitly shared expectations about the purpose for coming together. States are also explicitly members of the IIGO's and the IIGO has regular meetings but it has no independent secretariat (Leuffen, 2013: 20-21; Vabulas & Snidal, 2013: 196-199).

IIGO's differ from non-institutionalized interactions in that they have regular meetings. These regular meetings can be based on a fixed schedule. The meetings of the IIGO can also be driven by a need or by other considerations. The important point is that the group expects to interact in the future. The cooperation between the states is not a one-off occurrence. IIGO's differ from formal intergovernmental organizations (FIGO's) in that IIGO's do not have an independent and permanent secretariat to coordinate bureaucratic tasks. The delegation of independent decision-making capacity does thus not occur in an IIGO. This distinction is a matter of degree seeing as every organization needs some minimal capacity to perform bureaucratic tasks such as the setting up of meeting dates. IIGO's often achieve this through a rotating chairmanship in which the chairing country carries out the tasks of an institutionalized secretariat. In other cases, the informal intergovernmental organization uses the facilities of a formal organized intergovernmental organization to fulfil the necessary rudimentary organizational functions. However, these arrangements do not involve the delegation of significant independent decision-making capacity. The degree of formality is thus based on both the institutionalization of the cooperation and on the degree of decision-making capacity that is delegated to the intergovernmental organization (Vabulas & Snidal, 2013: 198-200).

All the regional groups of cooperating EU member states that are researched in this thesis are informal intergovernmental organizations (IIGO's). That the researched cooperating regional groups have the form of IIGO's is because the cooperation between the member states happens regularly and without supranational institutional authorities. Furthermore, the power to decide

remains firmly in the hands of the member states of the subregional group but the members of the subregional group do cooperate and coordinate through institutionalized interactions (Leuffen, 2013: 20-21; Vabulas & Snidal, 2013: 194).

Vabulas and Snidal (2013) argue that the institutionalization of the intergovernmental organization (the degree of formality) influences the outcome of the cooperation of the intergovernmental organizations. The degree of flexibility to act is one of the outcomes that is mentioned to be affected by the difference in formality. Intergovernmental organizations that cooperate with a lower degree of formality are assumed to have more flexibility because it is easier to get out of commitments. Vabulas and Snidal (2013) state that there is a higher flexibility in IIGO's because there are less (formal) constraints to differentiate the behaviour in organizations with a low degree of institutionalization. It is therefore likely that the greater the flexibility (lower strength of commitments) the higher the likelihood that organizations differentiate in behaviour. The effect of the degree of formality of the regional group on the level of consensus in EU decision-making is tested through a hypothesis (Vabulas & Snidal, 2013: 194-200 & 209).

The hypothesis that is used to test the influence of the degree of formality of the regional cooperation on their level of consensus in EU decision-making is (H3): *The lower the degree of formality the higher the differentiation in opinions in subregional groups in EU decision-making.*

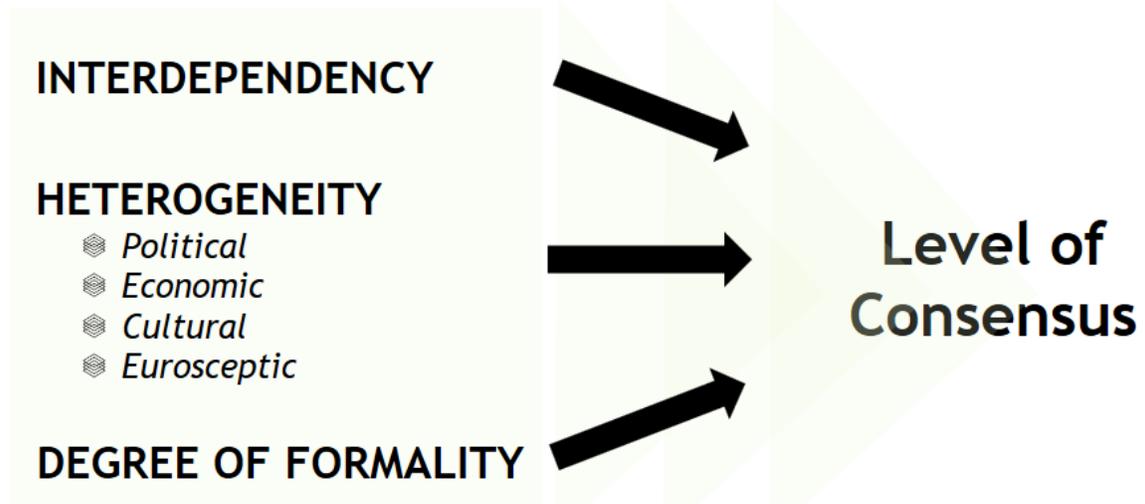
2.6 Summary

In sum, the theoretical section of this thesis has described and explained the theories used in this thesis. It has described that the degree regional groups have consensus on an issue, 'speak with one voice' on it, is defined as the degree the members of the regional group agree on an issue (Scheff, 1967: 33). The relationship between three variables, (interdependency, heterogeneity and formality) and the degree of consensus of regional groups in EU decision-making is tested in this thesis (See figure 1).

The variable interdependency refers to the degree of dependency of the members of the regional group. The variable formality refers to the formality of the organization of the cooperation of the regional group. The variable heterogeneity refers to the differences between the members of the regional group. The influence of this variable on the degree of consensus of the regional group in EU decision-making is tested for four different kinds of heterogeneity that might influence the

cooperation between the governments of the members of the regional group (political, economic, cultural and Eurosceptic)(See figure 1).

Figure 1: Main theoretical model



3 Method section

The goal of this thesis is to analyse the levels of consensus of the subregional groups in EU decision-making and the factors that influence these levels. To do this, the levels of consensus of the Baltics, the Benelux and the Visegrad countries in EU decision-making in the period of 2010 until 2016 are compared. This thesis is thus a comparative case study that compares the behaviour of the above-mentioned subregional groups in EU decision-making.

A case study is an in-depth examination of a case, such as a policy or an institution (Bryman, 2002: 66-68). A case study does not imply the use of a particulate type of evidence. Both quantitative and qualitative data can be used as evidence for case studies. The case study also does not imply the use of a particular data collection method. What the case study does represents is a research strategy, like surveys and experiments (Yin, 1981: 58-60). A research strategy is an overall plan for conducting a research study. A survey can provide a broad but shallow view of an area, an experiment reduces complexity by controlling factors while a case study paints a detailed picture of its subject in the complex world (Johannesson & Perjons 2014: 44-45). The distinguishing characteristic of the case study as a research strategy is that it attempts to examine a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context. This is interesting especially when the boundaries between the context and the phenomenon are not clearly evident (Yin, 1981: 58-60).

In this thesis, multiple cases are analysed to better understand the researched phenomenon through a so-called comparative case study. This method has advantages and disadvantages in comparison to the single case study. The disadvantage of analysing multiple cases is that the rationale for the selection of cases for multiple case studies can be difficult. The advantage of using multiple cases is that the evidence from multiple cases is often considered more compelling to explain the researched phenomenon and that the overall study is therefore regarded as being more robust (Yin, 1994: 43-45)

The comparative case study is chosen as a method in this thesis because of the advantages this method has for gaining insight into patterns and influences of patterns in multiple cases. The goal of this thesis is to gain more insight into patterns of consensus of subregional groups in EU decision-making and a method that helps gain insight into the patterns is therefore advantageous (Goodrick, 2014: 1-3).

This thesis is an explanatory case study that explores what factors influence regional groups ‘speaking with one voice’ (Benelux governments, 2008: 1). Competing theoretically plausible explanations for the degree of consensus are tested to explore what specific variable makes a difference. (Yin, 1994: 3-7; Zainal, 2007: 3). This thesis explores whether the researched variables can influence the degree of consensus of the regional groups through the so-called co-variational analysis (COV). This approach investigates whether a specific factor makes a difference and thus makes it crucial to demonstrate that it was indeed variation in X and not in another factor that created the effect. The COV approach assumes that the causal factors function independently from each other. When there is co-variation among the scores of the dependent variable of interest and the scores of the independent variable, it can be assumed that the independent variable has a causal effect on the dependent variable. A necessary condition for this interference is that no other theoretically plausible co-variation among scores of other independent variables and the dependent variable exists (Blatter & Haverland, 2012: 9-12 & 15). This method is chosen because it fits well with cross-case work to estimate the average effects of variables (Goertz & Mahony, 2013: 16). In this thesis, the dependent variable is the level of consensus of regional groups in EU decision-making and the independent variables of which the influence is tested are interdependency, heterogeneity and formality.

3.1 Case Selection

The regional groups of which the level of consensus is being analysed in this thesis are the Baltic States, the Benelux and Visegrad. The reasons these groups are chosen is that they are institutionalized territorial coalitions whose members are all part of the Council of Ministers of the European Union (Ruse, 2012: 331-333). These groups consist of countries that are all member states of the EU. All three are regional groups that have cooperated since before the countries joined the EU. All of the discussed subregional groups also have substantial practical cooperation on the economic level. The Benelux countries cooperated the most on the economic level through the Benelux Economic Union while the Baltic and the Visegrad countries cooperated through free trade agreements (FTA). The Baltic Free Trade Agreement (BAFTA) was the FTA of the Baltic countries and the Central European Free Trade Association (CEFTA) was the FTA of the Visegrad countries. All the discussed regional groups have also adjusted their cooperation based on the changed opportunities and challenges of being part of the EU. The Baltic and the Visegrad Countries adjusted after they joined the EU in 2004 and the Benelux

countries adjusted through the renewed Benelux Treaty that was implemented in 2010. (Benelux.int, 2018; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, 2018, Salvatore, 2016: 321; Visegrad Governments, 2004). Following Yin's (1994) multiple case study design, each of the analysed cases is also chosen to serve a specific purpose within the overall scope of inquiry (Yin, 1994: 45).

For each independent variable three cases are selected based on the, so-called, theoretical replication along a spectrum of having a high value on the variable to a low value of this variable. This means that these cases produce contrasting results but for predictable reasons (Yin, 1994: 46-47). For the variable interdependency, the Baltic States are selected due to being on the high side of the spectrum, the Benelux are chosen due to being more moderate on the spectrum and the Visegrad countries are chosen due to having a lower position on the spectrum (Benelux Secretariat-General, 2016; Vilpišauskas, 2012: 41-42; Zdrazil, & Applová, 2016). For the variable heterogeneity, the Visegrad is chosen due to having a high value on this spectrum, the Benelux are chosen because they are seen as having a moderate value on this spectrum and the Baltics are chosen for having a relatively low value on this spectrum (Benelux Secretariat-General, 2016; Dudzinska, 2012: 1-2; Gadomski, 2016). For the variable formality, the Benelux are chosen for the organization of their cooperation being seen as having a high value on their spectrum, the Baltics are chosen due to being seen to have a more moderate value on this spectrum and the Visegrad is chosen due to it being seen as having a low value on the spectrum (IOB, 2012: 36; Ruse, 2012: 331-333; Visegradgroup.eu (B), 2018). The positions of the regional groups of the spectrums of the independent variables are thus the reason for the case selection. These are theoretical predictions and it is tested in the analysis section whether the regional groups have these values on the variables in practice (Yin, 1994: 46-47).

The period under research (2010-2015) is selected based on the adjustment of the cooperation of the subregional groups to the EU context. This is the selection criteria because the goal of this thesis is to gain insight into the behaviour of the regional group on EU level. A period in which all regional groups cooperate on the EU level is thus researched. During the period under research, all of the members of all of the researched regional groups were part of the EU and the cooperation between them took place. The adjustment of the Visegrad cooperation resulted in the 2004 Kroměříž declaration. The Baltic countries changed the structure of their cooperation (the

Baltic Council of Ministers) directly after joining the EU. The Benelux countries updated their cooperation through the renewal of the treaty that was signed in 2008 and ratified in 2012. The Benelux cooperation started the execution of the new Benelux Treaty in 2010 and therefore the start of the researched period is 2010 (Benelux.int, 2018; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, 2018; Visegrad Governments, 2004).

The end date of the period of research is the 31st of December 2016 because of the perception by some authors (like Nič (2016), Zgut (2017) and Zalan (2017)) that 2016 was a turning point for the cooperation of the Visegrad group. These authors see a division in the Visegrad starting to either exist or become more pronounced. They refer to the stronger cooperation of Poland and Hungary within Visegrad as well as to the cooperation of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, sometimes called V2+2. These authors thus argue that the Visegrad in this period turns more into two bilateral sets of cooperation than a regional cooperation. Seeing as the focus of this thesis is on the level of consensus of regional groups that cooperate in EU decision making the regional groups should be analysed during a period in which they cooperated, multilaterally, on the EU level. Therefore, the period after all the subregional groups adjusted their cooperation to the EU context and the start of a (possible) schism of one of the subregional groups is analysed (Nič, 2016; Zgut, 2017).

3.2 Operationalisation

3.2.1 Dependent Variable

3.2.1.1 *Degree of Consensus*

The level of consensus of the subregional groups in EU decision-making voting behaviour of the subregional groups in the European Council of Ministers is analysed based on the following method. Differentiation of the voting behaviour within the European Council of Ministers is taken as an indicator of a difference of opinion within the regional group. Voting behaviour in the European Council of Ministers is taken as a good indicator of the differentiation of opinion within subregional groups because all of the researched countries have to vote on the same issues at the same time. The vote of a country in the Council of Ministers will in this thesis be seen as an expression of the opinion of the member state.

This method is based on members of the regional groups voting differently on the same proposal in the EU Council of Ministers. It is possible to vote three ways in the Council: to vote in favour, to vote against and to abstain (Votewatch.eu, 2018). The votes in the period that are tested

occurred under two different voting rules, namely the unanimity rule and the Qualified Majority Voting Rule (Council of the European Union, 2018). Under Qualified Majority Voting rule abstention is counted as a vote against (Novak, 2013: 1092). With the way the countries vote on a proposal, they express whether they agree with it. A change in the level of consensus of the regional groups thus appears when the countries of the regional group vote differently (Scheff, 1967: 33).

A negative vote under the unanimity rule is in this thesis taken as an expression that a country does not agree with the proposal. When this country belongs to the Baltic States and the other two Baltic States do agree with the proposal then differentiation of consensus occurs. To be precise the level of consensus of the Baltic States on this proposal is then 67 percent because two-third of the regional group have consensus on the proposal while the other state is completely against.¹ When the situation stays the same except that the one Baltic state votes to abstain instead of against, the level of consensus of the regional group becomes 83 percent². This is because in this thesis to abstain from voting under the unanimity rule is taken as an expression that the country is neither in favour nor against the proposal. Therefore, the country is taken to half agree and half disagree with the proposal in the Council of ministers which means that two and a half of the three Baltic States are then in consensus on this proposal (Scheff, 1967: 33). Under QMV rule, abstentions are in this thesis counted as expressions of the country against the proposal because the Council counts an abstention as a negative vote (See table 1)(Hayes-Renshaw, Van Aken & Wallace, 2006: 162-163; Novak, 2013: 1092-1095; Plechanovová, 2011: 87; Scheff, 1967: 33).³

Table 1. Level of consensus of the regional group		
Consensus	No consensus	Degree of consensus
The entire regional group votes the same way on a proposal	The members of the regional group vote differently*	Percentage of the regional group that votes the same on a proposal
*under QMV rule an abstention is counted as a negative vote		

¹ $2/3=67$

² $(1/3*0.5)+2/3=83$

³ Annex A lists the precise actions taken to gain the data on differentiation of opinion of the regional groups

Attention will also be paid to statements from the members of the regional group on proposals where differentiation occurred. This is done to check whether members of the regional group that did not vote the same might still have the same objections. A description of when this occurs will be given. It will also be noted in which policy fields the contestation in the Council occurs most often (Hayes-Renshaw, Van Aken & Wallace, 2006: 162-163; Novak, 2013: 1092-1095; Plechanovová, 2011: 87).

The data for the voting behaviour of the Council of Ministers is gathered through both VoteWatch.eu (VoteWatch.eu, 2018) and the “Dataset: Council votes on legislative acts” published by the General Secretariat of the Council (Council of the European Union, 2018). In both datasets, the Council of Minister decisions in which (member states of) the regional groups voted against the decision or abstained from voting are identified. When a decision is in both datasets, it will be used in this thesis. When a Council decision is in only one of the datasets or differences exist between the datasets the respective Council decision is checked in the EUR-Lex site (EU Publications Office, 2018) to check whether this decision will be used. A Council decision will be used when one of the countries of the researched regional group votes differently than the other members of the same regional group.

3.2.2 Independent Variables

The independent variables of which the effect on the level of consensus of the regional groups in EU decision-making are tested in this thesis are the degree of interdependency, the degree of heterogeneity and the degree of formalization. The data is in this thesis gathered and analysed through different methods.

3.2.2.1 Degree of Interdependency

The degree of interdependency of the subregional group is the degree that the countries of the subregional group are connected and interdependent to each other. To find the degree of interdependency between the countries the economic interdependency of the regional group will be calculated based on the business cycle co-movement across the regional group. This method is chosen for this thesis because it clearly calculates the economic interdependency of the countries in a regional group in a comparable way by comparing the economic situations of countries. Comparing the economic ups and downs from a country with the movements in another country clearly shows whether these situations occur in (roughly) same way. This method compares both between periods and between countries. The business cycle co-movement will be compared

between for all the members of the regional groups to calculate the degree of economic interdependence between the members of the regional groups. The higher the distance between the business cycles of the states of the regional group the lower the degree of interdependence of the regional group will be (Gomez, Torgler and Ortega, 2013: 6-8 & 16).

The method the distance between the business cycles of regional groups are calculated is based on the article of Gomez, Torgler and Ortega (2013) on measuring global economic interdependency. This research design has produced robust statistic valid results for the countries researched for a longer period. Data on the economies of the states of the region is retrieved from the Total Economy Database at the Conference Board (Conference Board, 2018). This is the updated version of the data Gomez et al. (2013) used in their article. Following Gomez et al. (2013), data on the growth rate of the GDP per capita of the countries is used to calculate the business cycles of these countries (Gomez et al., 2013: 6). The data on the GPD per capita data that is used in this thesis is that from the Total Economy Database (The Conference Board, 2018). This data in this database is converted to a common denominator, the purchasing power parity (PPP), to make the data internationally comparable. The purchasing power parity shows the value a dollar can buy in goods or services in any country (de Vries & Erumban, 2017: 6-8). The Total Economy Database uses the 2017 price level to convert the GDP per capita to the purchasing power parity (The Conference Board, 2018).

The GPD growth rate (g) per country will be calculated based on the GPD per capita as

$$g_i(k) = \frac{GDP_i(k+1) - GDP_i(k)}{GDP_i(k)} \quad (\text{Gomez et al., 2013: 7})$$

In this formula GDP_i is the annual GDP per capita value of country i at year k and $g_i(k)$ is the corresponding growth rate of country i in year k (Gomez et al., 2013: 7). After having calculated growth rate of the purchasing power parity of the countries of the regional groups the correlation between the (development of the) economies of the regional groups is calculated (Gomez et al., 2013). This correlation describes the (strength of the) relationship between the economies of the regional groups in the researched period or more precisely the way that the business co-cycles are correlated to each other. This degree of synchronization between the two timeseries is calculated through the sample Pearson correlation coefficient, described by Gomez et al. (2013) as the

method most commonly used in academic research. This calculation gives the correlation between the business cycles of the countries of the regional group. A correlation can be range from -1 to 1 points in which -1 stands for a completely negative relationship and 1 stands for a completely positive relationship. A positive correlation coefficient indicates that an increase in the first variable would correspondent in an increase of the second variable and a negative correlation indicates an inverse relationship were when one variable increases the other decreases. This means that when, for example, the business-cycles of the Netherlands and Poland have a correlation of -1 then every time the economy of the Netherlands increases the economy of Poland decreases with the same amount and vice versa (Dowd, 2017; Taylor, 1990: 36-37) The correlation between all countries of the regional group to the other countries of the regional group are calculated. A relationship of 1.0 only exists in the relationship between a country and itself (Gomez et al., 2013: 8).

The correlation between the economies of the regional groups is then transformed into the distance between the economies of the regional group through Gower (1966)'s formula as used by Gomez et al. (2013) as an indication for the degree of economic interdependence. The higher the distance between the states of the regional group the lower the degree of interdependence of the regional group will be (Gomez et al, 2013: 6-8).

When the two time windows are $\bar{x}_i = x_i(k), k = 1, N_{dat}$ and $\bar{x}_j = x_j(k), k = 1, N_{dat}$ the Pearson correlation coefficient between country i and country j with the two timeseries in a time window of N_{dat} is defined as:

$$\rho_{i,j} = \frac{\sum_{k=1}^{N_{dat}} (x_i(k) - \bar{x}_i)(x_j(k) - \bar{x}_j)}{\sqrt{\sum_{k=1}^{N_{dat}} (x_i(k) - \bar{x}_i)^2 \sum_{k=1}^{N_{dat}} (x_j(k) - \bar{x}_j)^2}} \quad (\text{Gomez et al., 2013: 7}).$$

In this thesis, the time windows are the period under research in this thesis (2010-2015). To transform correlations ($\rho_{i,j}$) into distances Gower (1966) is used to define the distance $d(i,j)$ between the evolution of the two time series as:

$$d(i, j) = \sqrt{\rho_{i,i} + \rho_{j,j} - 2\rho_{i,j}} = \sqrt{2(1 - \rho_{i,j})} \quad (\text{Gomez et al., 2013: 8}).$$

3.2.2.2 Degree of Heterogeneity

The variable of heterogeneity will be divided into four dimensions that are together taken to encompass the entire concept. Each of these dimensions will be analysed and the data for the four dimensions will be gathered from different sources. The political heterogeneity of the regional group is in this thesis based on the difference in the ideology of the governments of the regional group (Scheufele, et al., 2006: 739-740). When the governmental parties of all members of the regional group are in the same ideological category the political heterogeneity of the regional group is low. When the governmental parties of the regional group belong to different ideological categories (i.e. Belgium right wing, Netherlands centre and Luxemburg left wing) the political heterogeneity of the regional group is high. This method of assessing the political ideology of governments of the regional group through broad ideological categories is chosen because it clearly shows the political ideologies of the governments of the members of the regional groups in a comparable way. The data that is used in this thesis to analyse the political heterogeneity between the governments of the regional group comes from the Government Composition - Supplement to the Comparative Political Data Set (Armingeon, et al., 2016).

This dataset gives comparable data on the governments of a multitude of countries. This thesis uses the data on the government composition from 2010 up to and including 2015. The political heterogeneity of the regional groups will be based on the distance of the relative power position of the three ideological categories (right, centre and left) between the governments of the regional group. The variation in the power share of the countries of the regional group will be calculated per year and then as an average distance for the entire researched period. To illustrate this, imagine that in one year one of the Baltic States only has left-wing governmental parties while the other two countries only have right wing governmental parties. In that case, the ideological category right has the power share of 100 for the two Baltic States that have right wing governments and the other ideological categories (centre and left) have 0 as power share. There is thus a big diversity in the ideologies between two of the three Baltic States but between two others the political ideologies of the government are homogenous. The most heterogeneous the Baltics could be would thus be if, for example, Estonia was led by a centre government, Latvia by a right-wing government and Lithuania by a left-wing government (Armingeon, et al., 2016).

This data is divided into the categories right, centre and left based on the ideologies of the governmental parties. The data is weighted for the days in office of the political parties for a given year. This data thus shows the degree the governments of the members of the regional groups are ideological left wing, right wing and centre during the period that is researched. (Armingeon, et al., 2017: 3-6).

To measure the economic heterogeneity of the regional groups the variance in the economic indicators of the members of the regional group are analysed. The economic indicators of which the differences between the members of the regional groups are researched are the unemployment level, the inflation level, the industrial production, the governmental deficit or surplus, government debt, labour cost, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and GDP per inhabitant. These economic indicators are chosen because together they give an overview of the macroeconomic situations of the researched countries. Multiple economic indicators are analysed to measure various aspects that influence the macroeconomic (in-)stability of countries to comprehensively analyse the economic situation of the countries of the regional groups. Indicators are selected so that the economy is most comprehensively analysed by each indicator covering a macroeconomic aspect of the country that is not covered by the other indicators. When all countries of a regional group have a high GDP it might, for example, be thought that the countries are economically homogenous. However, the effects of population differences or labour market are not measured by this indicator, so the GDP per Capita and the unemployment level are used to measure these aspects of the macroeconomy (Eurostat (A), 2018; Brue, McConnell & Flynn, 2014: 8, 268-271, 358, 430).

The degree of economic heterogeneity of the regional groups is calculated based on the variation of the data. The bigger the variation in the economic indicators between the members of the regional group the bigger the economic heterogeneity is. The variety of each economic indicator of the regional group is used to calculate the heterogeneity of the regional group on that aspect of the (macro-)economy. The (heterogenic) positions of the regional groups on the aspects of the economy are then used to measure the (difference of the) heterogeneity of the regional groups on the entire economic dimension (Eurostat (A), 2018; Brue, et al., 2014: 8, 268-271, 358, 430). The data used in this thesis for economic heterogeneity will come from the Macro-economic database AMECO. This is the annual macro-economic database of the European Commission's

Directorate General for Economic and Financial Affairs (European Commission, 2017). This database is chosen because it has comprehensive information about the economic situation of all the countries that are being researched in this thesis through comparable economic indicators.

The degree of cultural heterogeneity is calculated based on the Hofstede (2011)'s six dimensions of national culture. This thesis will use the differences between the values on the dimensions of national cultures to quantify the cultural differences (cultural heterogeneity) of the regional groups (Hofstede, 2011: 16). When the range of the values of one regional group on a dimension of national culture, and this is not merely due to one outlier, is higher than a different regional group then this first group is more culturally heterogeneous. The cultural heterogeneity is greater when the states of the regional group have a greater difference between these values (Hofstede, 2011: 8 & 21-22).

The data for the cultural heterogeneity of the regional groups comes from the 2013 version of the Values Survey Module (Hofstede & Minkov, 2015). This survey is the replication of previous research done by Hofstede and is based on a survey of matched respondents. These are people similar on all criteria apart from nationality that could systematically affect the answers. The mean scores on the survey questions connected to the cultural dimensions are used to calculate the scores of countries on these dimensions (Hofstede & Minkov, 2013: 2-3 & 5-8). The point scale for the dimensions of national culture ranges from zero (the lowest score) to hundred (the highest score). The dimensions of national culture that are spectrums (such as the masculinity versus femininity dimension) have one side of the spectrum at the top of the score and the other side at the bottom of the score (Hofstede & Minkov, 2013: 5-9). The reason Hofstede's national culture is chosen as the method for the cultural heterogeneity of the regional groups is because its data shows different national cultures in a comparable way. That Hofstede's method divides national culture in multiple dimensions and clearly shows the variation between countries along these different dimensions is another advantage of the method. (Hofstede, 2011: 8 & 21-22). The reason the 2013 Values Survey Module is chosen as the source of data for the national cultural dimensions is that it calculates the values for the dimensions of national culture through the same research design that developed the model of national culture. The values that the 2013 Values Survey Module gives for the dimensions of national culture can thus be assumed to (mostly)

cover the way the dimensions of national culture should be interpreted (Hofstede, 2011: 8 & 21-22; Hofstede & Minkov, 2015).

The heterogeneity of Euroscepticism of the governments of the regional groups is in this thesis calculated based on the view the governments of the regional groups have on the European Union. The Eurosceptic positions of the governments of the regional group is calculated based on the view on the European Union by the political parties that make up the governments. This method is chosen because the view of an organization is dependent on the views of the parts that make up the organization and the views of these parts (governmental political parties) are clearly shown through this method. Furthermore, this method does not only take into account negative views on the European Union but also positive views on the European Union to come to the degree of Euroscepticism of the governments of the regional groups (Bakker, et al. (A), 2015).

The dataset used for the view on the European Union of the governmental political parties is the Chapter Hill expert survey (Polk, et al., 2017; Bakker, et al. (A), 2015).⁴ This dataset is used because it provides data on the positioning of European integration of the political parties of all the member states of the regional groups that are researched in this thesis in a comparable way. It shows the position of political parties towards European integration on a spectrum of 1 to 7 in which 7 is the least Eurosceptic and 1 is the most Eurosceptic (Bakker, et al. (B), 2015:1).

The data on the Euroscepticism of the political parties of the regional groups will be transformed to the degree of Euroscepticism of the governments of the regional groups based on the part of the government the political party is. For data on the governmental political parties the Supplement to the Comparative Political Data Set (Government Composition) will be used (Armingeon, 2017). The percentage of parliamentary seats that the government has and the percentage that a political party is of that amount will be used to calculate the Euroscepticism of the government in a particular year. Thus, when a government has 60 percentages of the seats in the parliament and a political party that belongs to that government has 15 percent of the seats in parliament than the Euroscepticism of that political party decides the Euroscepticism of that government for 25 percent ($15/60$). Changes of the governmental coalitions and the consequences of elections are also taken into account by paying attention to the days in power of government.

⁴ The 2014 CHES data (which is within the research period) is used but when political parties are due to termination not in this version, an earlier version is used and this will be mentioned in the data.

For example, if Lithuania has a government with a Euroscepticism of 6.4 that is in power for 200 days in the leap year 2012 and the following government has a Euroscepticism of 6 and is in power for 166 days in 2012 than the Euroscepticism of Lithuania's government in 2012 is 6.2.⁵ The variation of the Euroscepticism of the governments of the regional groups are the determinant of the Eurosceptic heterogeneity of the regional group (Armingeon, et.al, 2017; Bakker, et al. (A), 2015; Polk, et al., 2017).

Attention should be paid to the data on the Czech's government political ideology and Euroscepticism. In the researched period two technocratic governments existed in the Czech Republic (the Fischer and the Rusnok government). The data on the political ideology and Euroscepticism of the political parties that supported these governments in the parliamentary votes of confidence is used to come to the political ideology and Euroscepticism of the technocratic Czech governments. This is done because such governments, despite their formally non-partisan ministerial structure are fundamentally shaped by the political parties. This is even more the case in the Czech Republic where (technocratic) governments need to get a vote of confidence from the Chamber of deputies (Hloušek & Kopeček, 2014: 1327, 1334 & 1343). Data on the political parties in the Czech Republic is gotten from the election results published by the Czech Statistical Office (Czech Statistical Office (A), 2017; Czech Statistical Office (B), 2017).

All of the four dimensions of heterogeneity of the subregional groups will be compared with the variance in the level of consensus of the subregional groups to test the hypotheses (H2.1, H2.2, H2.3 and H2.4) on the effect of heterogeneity.

3.2.2.3 Degree of Formality

Insight into the formal aspects of the cooperation of the regional groups is gained through the document analysis. The document analysis focusses on the institutional structures and formal agreements of the cooperation of the regional groups. The focus of the content analysis will lie on official documents from the subregional groups themselves that discuss the structure of the cooperation. The (legal) structure, the power-delegation, the frequency and the level of meetings and the decisions that can be taken by the cooperation will be analysed. These documents will include declarations, treaties, statements and organigrams. At every point, it will be taken into

⁵ $200*6.4/366+166*6/366=6.2$

account who the authors of the documents being analysed are so that the ways the perspectives of the authors could influence the content is accounted for. When necessary the origin of certain data will also be explicitly stated. (Bryman, 2012: 556-560).

The degree of formalization will be analysed through an assessment of the institutional structure of the cooperation of the subregional groups. The degree of formality of the regional groups will be measured as relative to each other (i.e. regional group X is more formal than regional group Y). This way of formulating the degree of formality clearly shows the differences between the regional groups and their position relative to each other. The formalization of the regional organization will be researched through semi-structured interviews and through document analysis. The semi-structured interviews have been held with seven public officials working on the cooperation of the regional groups following an interview guide. Four of these public officials work for the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and three work for the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Bryman, 2012: 471-472).⁶

No interviews were held with representatives of the Baltic States but email contact was had with the secretary general of the secretariat of the Baltic Assembly. This was done so that further insight into the subject matter could be gained. The interviews are used to get the insight of experts into the practical workings of the cooperation of the regional groups. The focus of the interviews is on the practical experience the experts had with the cooperation and on how much decision-making capacity they thought was delegated to the cooperation. Questions about the process of decision-making, most important factors influencing the decision-making, follow-up on decisions and the power of the decisions helped to gain this insight. The interviews are in this way used to gather information about the informal issues and on the way the cooperation of the regional groups occurred in practice (Bryman, 2012: 471-472).⁷

3.3 Reliability and Validity

In this section of the thesis issues with the validity and the reliability of the methods of this thesis and the reasons for these issues are described. This is done so that there is an indication of the validity and the reliability of the outcomes of this thesis. Validity refers to the issue whether an indicator that is devised to gauge a concept really measures that concept (Bryman, 2012: 172).

⁶ Annex B lists the persons interviewed and Annex C contains the interview guide used in the interviews

⁷ Annex C contains the interview guide used in the interviews

Measurement validity deals with the question whether a method really measures the concept it is supposed to be measuring (Bryman, 2012: 47). One issue with this form of validity is in the method used in this thesis to calculate the level of consensus of the regional groups in EU decision-making. This is the case because this method does not cover all of the expressions of the countries of the regional groups in EU decision-making. The reason for this is that much of the data on the other expressions of the countries in EU, i.e. in the working groups of the council, are secret (Zalan, 2018). The voting behaviour of the regional groups in the EU Council of Ministers is therefore used to show the (difference in the) level of consensus of the regional groups. This is a valid way to measure the level of consensus because all of the members of the regional groups express their position on the same issue at the same time for a multitude of issues (Shuttleworth, 2008).

An issue that occurs with the measurement of interdependency is that the economic dimension of this concept is measured. This is done because this dimension can be objectively measured and because literature when describing the degree of interdependency between countries often focusses on only the economic dimension (i.e. Drulák, 2002: 61). A further issue is that the economic interdependency is measured for quite a short time-period (2010-2015) and that this might influence the data. However, the research design that is used to come to the economic interdependency of the regional groups has been used to come to valid data for a longer period (see Gomez et al., 2013). Furthermore, the topic of interest in this thesis was what the economic interdependency was in the researched period and whether and how this affects the level of consensus of the regional groups in EU decision-making. A period for the calculation of economic interdependency that is not the same as the period to measure the level of consensus could affect the outcomes as well.

In both the method to come to the political heterogeneity and the method to come to the Eurosceptic heterogeneity of the regional groups there is an issue with the measurement for the government of the Czech Republic. The reason for this is that technocratic governments existed in the researched period (in 2010, 2013 and 2014) in the Czech Republic. For the days that these governments were in power the political support for these technocratic governments is used to come to the data of the Czech Government. Nevertheless, the Czech government's political

ideology and Euroscepticism is measured differently in the affected years than the other researched governments (Armingeon, et al., 2017; Hloušek & Kopeček, 2014: 1327).

Furthermore, the data on the Euroscepticism of the political parties is a snapshot of the Eurosceptic positions of the political parties in 2014. The data for the Euroscepticism is thus adjusted per year for the changes in the (coalitions of the) governments of the political parties but not for the possible changes in the Eurosceptic positions in these years. Big changes in the Euroscepticism of the governmental political parties are thus not taken into account in the analysis. However, this method is used because it does give the Euroscepticism of all political parties in the researched period in a comparable way. Nevertheless, the fact that a snapshot of the Euroscepticism is used affects the validity of the data (Armingeon, et al. 2017; Bakker, et al. (B), 2015).

Internal validity concerns itself with the causality of the relationship between two variables (Bryman, 2012: 47). One possible issue with the causality in this thesis concerns the degree of formality. While the causal relationship between the degree that countries restrain their interactions and the level of consensus of these countries in EU decision-making is logical a different direction is also possible. Regional group that, in the past, have had a high level of consensus might decide to constrain their cooperation more (have a higher degree of formality). For the external validity, that concerns itself with the generalization of the results of the study, it should be noted that only cooperation in EU decision-making is researched ((Bryman, 2012: 48). Generalization of the results of this thesis for cooperation of regional groups outside of the EU is thus not possible.

For the reliability of the method used in this thesis it should be mentioned that it is possible to repeat the (methods used in the) entire thesis. The interviews that have been used to gain insight into the practical workings of the regional groups might need, in a second study, to be undertaken with different people in comparable positions and thus gain slightly different findings but they can be repeated. Furthermore, these interviews have not been undertaken with representatives of all researched regional groups. This has been (partly) mitigated because contact has been had with a representative of the regional group that had no interview. All of the steps, apart from the interviews, that have been taken to come to the conclusion of this thesis can be precisely repeated in a second study (Shuttleworth, 2008).

4 Casus

In this section of the thesis, the cooperation of the subregional groups that are being researched will be briefly described so that the similarities and the differences of the regional groups become clear. The focus in the casus section will lie on the form of the cooperation, the priorities of the regional groups, changes to the cooperation due to the EU and contacts between the regional groups. The goal of the description of the cases is to show the context the regional groups operate in when they ‘speak with one voice’ (or not).

4.1 Baltic Cooperation

The first of the three cooperation’s between subregional groups of EU countries described in this thesis is the cooperation of the Baltic countries. Baltic cooperation refers to the cooperation between Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia, (hereinafter referred to as “the Baltic States”). The first attempts to cooperate between the Baltic States already started soon after the Baltic States became independent in the 1920’s and 1930’s and cumulated in the Treaty on Union and Cooperation, that was signed by the three states in 1934 in Geneva and that was illegally suspended in 1940. Full-scale cooperation between the Baltic States was re-established on the 12th of May 1990 with the signing of the declaration on the Unity and Cooperation by the Republic of Estonia, Republic of Latvia and Republic of Lithuania. This declaration stated that the treaty signed in Geneva is renewed and the further legal basis of the renewed cooperation was based on declarations, agreements and protocols agreed upon by the Baltic States (Baltic Governments, 1990; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, 2018)

The way the Baltic cooperation takes place is through an intergovernmental and a parliamentary cooperation. The intergovernmental cooperation takes place through the Baltic Council of Ministers and the parliamentary cooperation transpires through the Baltic Assembly. The Baltic Council of Ministers and the Baltic Assembly hold an annual joint meeting which is known as the Baltic Council (Cogen, 2016: 181-184).

The Baltic States have in recent years cooperated on topics such as foreign and security policy, defence cooperation, energy, and transport. Cooperation in the field of economics has become more project-based, relying on common interests which is a change from the Baltic Free Trade Area (BAFTA) that existed from 1994 until the Baltic States’ accession to the EU. Part of the

priorities of the Baltic States in 2018 under the chairmanship of Lithuania are an efficient management of the EU's external borders and a common position of the Baltic states on the EU 2021-2027 financial perspective further enhance regional security, to develop strategic infrastructure and to continue ensuring the interests of the Baltic States in the European Union (Laizāne-Jurkāne, 2018, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, 2018; Salvatore, 2016: 321).

After the Baltic States joined the EU in 2004, the Baltic cooperation was adjusted. This adjustment mainly focussed on clarifying the relations and tasks of the institutes of the Baltic cooperation. Since 2007, there has been further intergovernmental cooperation between the Baltic and the Benelux countries through more than 20 meetings of representatives of the countries. Parliamentary cooperation between the Baltic Assembly and the Benelux Interparlementaire Assemblée also took place since the Common declaration on parliamentary cooperation was signed in 1994. Cooperation was encouraged by common interests, especially on the EU institutional and external relations issues within the EU and by the similar size of the participating countries (Baltic Assembly & the Baltic Council of Ministers, 2004; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, 2017).

4.2 BeNeLux cooperation

The second of the regional groups of cooperating EU countries that are researched in this thesis are the Benelux countries. The term Benelux is an acronym for Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg and is in this thesis used to refer to the political and policy-based cooperation between the three countries. The Benelux cooperation can be divided into the cooperation through the Benelux Union and the Benelux Political Cooperation (Inspectie Ontwikkelingssamenwerking en Beleidsevaluatie (IOB), 2012: 27-28).

The Benelux Union was originally the Benelux Economic Union and focussed on the integration of the economies of the Benelux countries. The Treaty for the Benelux Economic Union was valid until 2010. Due to the change in context between the signing of the original Treaty for the Benelux Economic Union in 1960 and the new Treaty in 2008 the Benelux cooperation was seen need change as well. The name of the cooperation, the structures and the tasks were changed to reflect the new (European) context the countries were cooperating in. The Benelux Union now consists of five institutes namely the Committee of Ministers, the Benelux Council, the Benelux Interparlementaire Assemblée, the Benelux Secretariat General and the Benelux Court of Justice.

The new treaty identifies economic union and internal market, sustainable development and justice and internal affairs as key areas in which cooperation between the Benelux countries will take place (Benelux governments, 2008; IOB, 2012: 27-28, 35-36 & 42)

The Benelux Political Cooperation is the political and diplomatic cooperation and coordination between the Benelux countries. This cooperation occurs on various levels of government between representatives of the Benelux countries and has an informal character. An example of this form of cooperation is the meetings of the prime ministers of the Benelux countries before the meetings of the European Council to coordinate on the issues that will be discussed. This coordination does not have to ensure that a common view on the issue comes forward but might also simply be an exchange of positions on the issues by the Benelux countries before the European Council meeting. The activities of the Benelux cooperation in the Benelux Union and in the Benelux Political cooperation also does not necessarily have to correspond or be related to each other (Interview 2: IOB, 2014: 3 & 17-24).

The Benelux Political cooperation also changed due to the membership of the (changed) European Union because the Benelux governments realized the challenge of keeping the relevance of their cooperation in a changed world. The Benelux governments declared that they would intensify their political cooperation through, for example, meeting one another before more meetings of variants of the EU Council of Ministers (Benelux governments, 2008; IOB, 2012: 27-28 & 35-36; IOB, 2014: 3, 17).

Something that should be mentioned is that the (stated) aims of the (broader) Benelux cooperation are not only the improvement of the political and economic power of the Benelux countries. The Benelux cooperation also wants to offer innovative solutions for all Europeans and to have a pioneering role in the (integration of the) European Union. To achieve this the Benelux aims to improve relations with surrounding countries, regions and regional groups such as the Visegrad and the Baltic countries (Benelux governments, 2008; IOB, 2014: 128-130).

4.3 Visegrad cooperation

The cooperation between Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic is known under names such as the Visegrad Group, Visegrad 4, the V4 or simply Visegrad. Visegrad is the name of the Hungarian town, in which the Visegrad Group was created. The founding of the Visegrad Group by the leaders of the governments of the Republic of Poland, the Republic of Hungary and

the (then) Czechoslovak Republic occurred on the 15th of February 1991. Visegrad is used to refer to both the sum of these countries as to the cooperation of these countries within the structure of the Visegrad Group. After the Velvet Divorce resulted in the disintegration of Czechoslovakia in 1993 both successor countries, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, joined the Visegrad Group (Visegradgroup.eu (A), 2018). The Visegrad countries also started a cooperation in the economic area through the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA)(Dangerfield, 2008: 633-640; Visegradgroup.eu (A), 2018).

The cooperation in the Visegrad Group was started to facilitate the accession of the member states to the European Community/EU and the Northern Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The goal of joining the NATO was achieved in 1999 for Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. In 2004, the original goal was fulfilled with all the Visegrad countries joining the EU and Slovakia joining the NATO. Having reassessed the cooperation, the Visegrad countries signed a new declaration with new goals of the cooperation in the Czech town of Kroměříž on the 12th of May 2004. According to this declaration, the Visegrad countries will continue to focus on regional initiatives and activities aimed at strengthening the identity of the Central European region. The Visegrad cooperation also aims to maintain its flexible and open character and to be based on concrete projects (Visegrad Governments, 2004; V4.gov.hu, 2018).

The way the Visegrad cooperation is organized clearly shows this flexible character since the cooperation is not institutionalized in any form. It is based solely on the periodical meeting of the representatives of the countries at various levels. These meetings can range from meetings between the prime ministers and heads of states to expert consultations. On an annual basis, the prime ministers of the Visegrad Group meet in an official summit and between these summits one of the Visegrad countries holds the presidency of the Visegrad Group. The only organization within the platform of the Visegrad Group is the International Visegrad Fund, which was established in 2000. This Fund aims to promote regional cooperation between the Visegrad countries and has since 2014 an annual budget of 8 million Euro (Visegradfund.org, 2018; Visegradgroup.eu (B), 2018).

One additional thing to mention to illustrate the flexible character of the Visegrad cooperation is that the cooperation has a framework and priorities to cooperate with countries outside the regional group. The Visegrad group aims to cooperate both with single countries in the region

and with other regional bodies. This cooperation can be done both ad-hoc and on a regular basis. This format of cooperation is sometimes referred to as the V4+. The Benelux countries are explicitly mentioned as a regional body the Visegrad countries cooperate with (Visegradgroup.eu (C), 2018).

In conclusion, the cooperation of the regional groups researched in this thesis have similarities such as the (original) focus on economic cooperation and the fact that all countries adjusted their cooperation to the context of the European Union. It is also interesting to note that the regional groups all have contact or aim to have contact with other regional groups within the EU. Differences between the regional groups researched in this thesis, such as the organization of the cooperation of the regional groups, also exist. In the next section of this thesis, the analysis, differences between the researched regional groups are analysed. Furthermore, the degree that the regional groups researched in this thesis “speak with one voice” on the European level is also analysed. Whether and in what way the differences between the regional groups affect this level of consensus is also analysed in the next section to answer the research question of this thesis.

5 Analysis

In this section of the thesis the effects of the independent variables on the level of consensus of regional groups in EU decision-making. The analysis starts with an analysis of the level of consensus of the regional groups in the researched period. The (possible) influences of the interdependence of the regional group, the heterogeneity of the group and the degree of formality are tested in the subsequent sections of the analysis. The focus is thus on the effects that the interdependence between the countries belonging to the same regional group have on each other, the differences in characteristics of the regional group and on the way that the cooperation of the regional group is organized have on their level of consensus.

5.1 Degree of Consensus

In this section of the analysis the degree of consensus of the researched regional groups (Baltic, Benelux and Visegrad) in EU decision-making will be analysed. This will be done based on the voting record of the member states of the regional groups in the EU Council of Ministers between 2010 and 2015. The EU Council of Ministers in this period decided on 741 legislative acts. Of these legislative acts, 685 were taken through the qualitative majority voting (QMV) rule and 56 through the unanimity-voting rule (Council of the European Union, 2018). The Council currently only releases information on the final votes at ministerial level on budgetary and legislative issues. For that reason, the legislative acts dealt with in this section of the thesis are limited to these decisions (Council of the European Union, 2018; Votewatch.eu, 2018).

In the period under research, there were no proposals under the unanimity-voting rule that member states of the researched regional groups have voted against or abstained (Council of the European Union, 2016). Novak (2013) has commented that this might be caused by the practice of the Council to only vote in cases where adoption of a proposal is guaranteed (Novak, 2013: 1092-1095). There have been a multitude of proposals that the member states of the regional group under research have voted abstain or against while using the qualified majority voting rule in the period from 2010 until and including 2015 (Council of the European Union, 2016; Votewatch.eu, 2018).

Estonia, one of the three Baltic States, has voted in the researched period against a proposal three times and abstained nine times. The country, Estonia, has thus not voted in favour of a proposal

12 times. Latvia, one of the three Baltic States, has voted in the researched period abstain three times and voted against twice. Latvia has thus not voted in favour of a proposal five times. Lithuania has in the researched time never voted abstained or against in the Council of Ministers. In total the Baltic States have thus voted abstain or against a proposal in the Council of Ministers 17 times in the researched period (see table 2)(Council of the European Union, 2018; Scheff, 1967: 33).

Regional groups	Abstain	Against	Total
Baltics	12	5	17
Estonia	9	3	12
Latvia	3	2	5
Lithuania	0	0	0
Benelux	27	38	65
Belgium	10	5	15
Netherlands	13	27	40
Luxembourg	4	6	10
Visegrad	46	34	80
Czech Republic	14	10	24
Hungary	11	11	22
Poland	16	9	25
Slovakia	5	4	9

In total, the Baltic States had 16 proposals in the researched period in which they did not have complete consensus. This is the case because one of Latvia's votes against and one of Estonia's abstain were votes about the same proposal. This proposal dealt with the enforcement of the directive concerning the positive of workers. It has therefore occurred 16 times in the researched period that one of the Baltic States had a different opinion than the other two states. The Council configuration that the most differentiation of the level of consensus occurred in was the Economic and Financial Affairs Council. A differentiation of consensus in this variation of the Baltic States is not unexpected because the Baltic States have stated that their cooperation on the economic field is project based (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, 2018). The level of consensus of the Baltic States in those sixteen cases was thus 67 percent of consensus. The level of consensus is this level because 67 percent (two-thirds) of the Baltic States had the same opinion (consensus) on those 16 proposals (see table 2)(Council of the European Union, 2018; Scheff, 1967: 33).

Belgium, one of the Benelux countries, has in the researched period voted against a proposal in the Council of Ministers of the EU five times and abstained ten times. The total amount of times Belgium has not voted in favour of a proposal in the council of minister in the researched period is thus 15 times. Luxembourg, another of the Benelux countries, has voted to abstain four times and voted against a proposal six times in the researched period. The total amount of time Luxembourg has voted to abstain and/or against is thus ten times. The Netherlands, one of the Benelux countries, has voted 27 times against a proposal and voted to abstain 13 times in the researched period. In total, the Netherlands has thus following the calculation of the QMV rule voted against a proposal 40 times. The total amount of times the Benelux countries have, in the researched period, voted not in favour of a proposal is thus 65 times (see table 2)(Council of the European Union, 2018). Interestingly the Council configuration in which the Benelux countries differentiated the most was the General Affairs Council. This is interesting because this is one of the Council configuration where the Benelux representatives meet beforehand before each meeting. A higher level of consensus in this Council configuration could have been expected based on this coordination (Benelux Governments, 2008: 1-2; Council of the European Union, 2018).

This total includes multiple times the Benelux countries have voted against or abstained from a proposal in various combinations. Only once in the researched period the Benelux countries were all against a proposal and this, naturally, means that the regional group had complete consensus on this issue. The proposal all Benelux countries were against was to amend Directive 2006/116/EC on the term of protection of copyright (Council of the European Union, 2018). Luxembourg and the Netherlands have both not voted in favour of a proposal two times in the Council of Ministers. One of these proposals had to do with the budget for 2012 while the other had to do with the milk products sector. Luxembourg and Belgium have only once both not voted in favour of a proposal and this proposal dealt with the cultivation of genetically modified organisms (GMO's). Belgium and the Netherlands have six times both not voted in favour of a proposal under QMV rule in the Council. These proposals ranged from issues as the amending the statute of the Council of Justice to the regulation of timber and timber production (Council of the European Union, 2018).

The amount of times the Benelux has thus not had complete consensus in the Council in the researched period is 53 times.⁸ It has therefore occurred 53 times in the researched period that from the Benelux countries one of the states has a different opinion on an issue than the other two states had. The level of consensus of the Benelux countries in those 53 cases was thus a degree of consensus of 67 percent. The reasoning for this degree of consensus is that in those 53 cases two-third (67 percent) of the Benelux countries had the same opinion on an issue (Council of the European Union, 2018; Scheff, 1967: 33).

The third regional group of which the level of consensus in EU decision-making is analysed is the Visegrad Group. The Visegrad Group is a cooperation between Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia. In the researched period Poland has voted abstain 16 times and voted against nine times in the EU Council of Ministers. In total it has thus voted not in favour of a proposal 25 times. In the researched period the Czech Republic has 14 times voted to abstain and 10 times against a proposal. The Czech Republic has in the researched period thus 24 times not voted in favour of a proposal in the Council of Ministers under QMV rule. Hungary has voted against a proposal in the Council 11 times and voted to abstain 11 times in the researched period. In total it has thus voted 22 times not in favour of a proposal in the researched period. Slovakia has voted to abstain on a proposal 5 times in the researched period. It has voted against a proposal in the Council 4 times and has thus in total voted nine times not in favour of a proposal. In total the Visegrad group has thus 80 times voted not in favour of a proposal (see table 2). The Visegrad countries voted the most not in favour of proposals in the field of environment and public health. This is interesting because the environmental area is a focus of the Visegrad cooperation. Coordination on national positions on proposed EU legislation and coordination meetings before EU Council meetings are part of this Visegrad focus on environment (Council of the European Union, 2018; Hungarian Government, 2009; Slovakian Government, 2014).

The implications of the amount of times the Visegrad countries voted not in favour of a proposal on the level of consensus of Visegrad depends on the amount of times these votes were on the same proposal. In the research period it occurred 14 times that two members of the Visegrad voted in favour of a proposal while two others did not vote in favour of the proposal. The Czech Republic and Hungary were the two countries that both voted not in favour on the same proposals

⁸ 65-3-9=53

the most often (5 times). Four times three of the four Visegrad countries voted not in favour of a proposal while one of them did vote in favour. The Czech Republic and Hungary were the Visegrad countries that, each one time, voted in favour of a proposal while the other Visegrad countries abstained and Poland voted as the only Visegrad country in favour of an issue twice. The Czech Republic was the only Visegrad country in favour of a proposal that dealt with priority substances in the field of water policy while Hungary was the only Visegrad country in favour of a proposal that dealt with amending the general provisions of European funds. The proposals in the Council that Poland was the only Visegrad country to vote in favour of dealt with European demographic statistics an international protection. Interesting to note is that no policy field exists in which one Visegrad country clearly has a different opinion than the other countries (Council of the European Union, 2018).

In total the Visegrad countries thus had a different degree of consensus 59 times in the researched period.⁹ Thirteen of those times the level of consensus of the Visegrad group was 50 percent because two of the Visegrad countries were in favour of a proposal while two others were not. The remaining 46 times the Visegrad countries did not have complete consensus they had 75 percent of consensus because three thirds of the Visegrad group had the same opinion on a proposal and one Visegrad country had a different opinion. It should once more be noted that the votes in the Council occurred under the QMV rule in which both the against and the abstain votes are counted as votes against a proposal (see table 2)(Council of the European Union, 2016; Council of the European Union, 2018).

The countries belonging to the regional groups sometimes give statements to explain why to vote a certain way on a certain proposal in the EU Council of Ministers. Interesting is that there is a difference in the statements that the countries belonging to the regional groups give when multiple countries of the regional group vote not in favour of a proposal. The Baltic States have only one proposal in the researched period in which differentiation of consensus occurs through two countries not voting in favour of a proposal (on the posting of workers). Even though Latvia and Estonia both voted not in favour of this proposal Latvia gave a statement together with an outsider (Hungary) instead of with Estonia. The Benelux countries rarely published shared statements on why they voted on a certain proposal in the EU Council of Ministers in cases of

⁹ 80-13-2*4=59

differentiation of consensus. Even in the case of the proposal on copyrights that all Benelux countries voted against on, Belgium was the only of the Benelux countries that gave a statement and did this unilateral. The Visegrad countries give shared statements on proposals in which differentiation occurs more often than the other regional groups. On the proposal on the European Funds in which Hungary was the only Visegrad country that voted in favour the Visegrad countries gave a shared statement with all four members of the Visegrad group (and Cyprus, Lithuania and Slovenia). Furthermore, a second shared statement was given by the Visegrad countries that voted not in favour of the proposal (Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia), It is interesting to note that the shared statements of the regional groups are done in the described way but it should be noted that quite often no statement on the reason a country has voted in the EU Council is made. Conclusions connected to the occurrence of statements are therefore not made (Votewatch.eu, 2018).

Table 3. Level of consensus of the regional groups in EU Council under QMV rule	
Regional Group	Level of consensus
Baltic States	99.22%
Benelux	97.42%
Visegrad	97.37%

In sum, all regional groups had a complete level of consensus in the Council of Ministers in the researched period under the unanimity-voting rule. There was no member state of the three regional groups that voted abstain or against in the reported voting in the researched period. There was a variation in the 685 votes in the Council under the QMV rule (Council of the European Union, 2018). Under that rule the Baltic States had 16 occurrences of their level of consensus being 67 percent. The Benelux countries had in this period 53 proposals in the Council on which they had a level of consensus of 67 percent. The Visegrad countries had in this period 14 proposals on which their level of consensus was 50 percent and 46 proposals on which they had level of consensus of 75 percent (Council of the European Union, 2018; Scheff, 1967: 33).

The level of consensus of the Baltic countries in the EU Council in the researched period is therefore 99.22 percent for all the votes undertaken under the QMV rule.¹⁰ The level of consensus of the Benelux countries in the EU Council in the researched period is 97.42 percent for all the

¹⁰ $((685-16)*1+(16*2/3))/685=99.22$

votes undertaken under the QMV rule.¹¹ The Visegrad Countries have in the same period a level of consensus of 97.37 percent for all the votes undertaken under the QMV rule.¹² It can therefore be concluded that, in the researched period, the level of consensus of the Visegrad Countries in the decision-making process through the EU Council of ministers is higher than that of the Benelux countries and that the level of consensus is even higher. All of the regional groups had the same level of consensus in the votes under the unanimity voting rule while the Benelux countries had a higher level of consensus of the votes under the QMV rule than the Visegrad countries and the Baltic countries had an even higher level of consensus (see table 3)(Council of the European Union, 2018; Scheff, 1967: 33).

5.2 Degree of Interdependency

In this section of the analysis, the interdependency of the regional groups will be analysed to come to an insight about whether the degree of interdependency of the regional groups influences the degree of consensus of the regional groups in EU decision-making. When countries are interdependent, there is a chance that they will have a high level on consensus on issues because it affects them in the same way. The interdependency of the regional groups will in this analysed be measured through the economic interdependency because authors (like Dawn, 2015) have argued that this factor is among the most important reasons to begin regional cooperation.

The correlation between the business cycles of the Baltic countries in the researched period is relatively high. All values are in the high range of 0,9-1,0. This means that whenever the economy of a Baltic State increases the economy of a different Baltic State will (generally) increase with 90 percent of that original value as well. This means that a strong positive linear relationship exists between all Baltic States. The highest correlation between the economies of the Baltic States is between Estonia and Lithuania while the lowest correlation is between Latvia and Lithuania. However, even the lowest correlation between the economies of the Baltic States is still 0,91 (see table 4)(Conference Board, 2018).

Countries	Estonia	Latvia	Lithuania
Estonia	1,0	0,94	0,98
Latvia	0,94	1,0	0,91
Lithuania	0,98	0,91	1,0

¹¹ $((685-53)*1+(53*2/3))/685=97.42.$

¹² $((685-13-46)*1+(13*0.5+46*0.75))/685=97.37$

Once the correlation of the economic growth of the Baltic States is transformed into the distances between the business cycles of the countries it is clear that the Baltic States have a (relatively) low distance from each other. Therefore, they have a relatively high degree of economic interdependency in the researched period (Gomez et al., 2013: 6-8). The lowest degree of distance between the business cycles of the Baltic States, and thus the highest degree of economic interdependency, exists between Estonia and Lithuania while the biggest distance is between Latvia and Lithuania (similar to the correlation). In addition, no distance between the economies of the Baltic States is bigger than 0.5 points (see table 5)(Conference Board, 2018; Gomez et al., 2013: 6-8).

Table 5. Distance between business co-cycles of the Baltic countries from 2010-2015

Countries	Estonia	Latvia	Lithuania
Estonia	0,0	0,35	0,22
Latvia	0,35	0,0	0,42
Lithuania	0,22	0,42	0,0

The correlation between the economic growth of the Benelux countries is in the researched period varied. Even though the values are all in the upper half of the positive range, a clear difference in the relationships between the countries is visible. A moderate to strong positive relationship between the Benelux countries thus exists. The highest correlation of the Benelux countries is that between Belgium and the Netherlands while the correlation between Luxembourg and Belgium and Luxembourg and the Netherlands are very similar (both around 0.55). However, the correlation between Belgium and Luxembourg is slightly lower than that between the Luxembourg and the Netherlands (see table 6)(Conference Board, 2018; Gomez et al., 2013: 6-8).

Table 6. Correlation Matrix Benelux countries from 2010-2015

Countries	Belgium	Luxembourg	Netherlands
Belgium	1,0	0,54	0,95
Luxembourg	0,54	1,0	0,55
Netherlands	0,95	0,55	1,0

The distance between the Benelux countries reflects the difference in the correlation. While the distance between the business cycles of the Netherlands and Belgium is not large (0.30) the

distance between the business cycle of Luxembourg and that of the other two Benelux countries is quite a bit larger. The distance in business cycles is the biggest between Belgium and Luxembourg (0.96) but the distance between the business cycle of the Netherlands and Luxembourg is only slightly smaller (0,95). The economic interdependency of the Benelux countries as a regional group is thus moderate to low while it does have a higher economic interdependency between two of the countries (see table 7)(Conference Board, 2018; Gomez et al., 2013: 6-8; Gower, 1966-327-329).

Table 7. Distance between business co-cycles of the Benelux countries from 2010-2015

Countries	Belgium	Luxembourg	Netherlands
Belgium	0,0	0,96	0,30
Luxembourg	0,96	0,0	0,95
Netherlands	0,30	0,95	0,0

Table 8. Correlation Matrix Visegrad countries from 2010-2015

Countries	Czech Republic	Hungary	Poland	Slovakia
Czech Republic	1,0	0,72	0,68	0,96
Hungary	0,72	1,0	0,48	0,61
Poland	0,68	0,48	1,0	0,73
Slovakia	0,96	0,61	0,73	1,0

The Visegrad countries also have a varied degree of correlation of the economic growth of the countries in the researched period. The Czech Republic and Slovakia have a rather high correlation with 0.96 while Hungary and Poland have the lowest correlation with 0.48. The other correlations between the business cycles of the Visegrad countries are between these values ranging between 0,6 and 0,75 (see table 8)(Conference Board, 2018). The distances between the business cycles of the Visegrad countries are thus also rather varied with the Czech Republic and Slovakia having a small distance between them while Poland and Hungary have a rather big distance between them. The other distances between the business cycles of the Visegrad countries are varied but are all relatively high (see table 9)(Conference Board, 2018; Gomez et al., 2013: 6-8; Gower, 1966: 327-329).

Table 9. Distance between business co-cycles of the Visegrad countries from 2010-2015

Countries	Czech Republic	Hungary	Poland	Slovakia
Czech Republic	0,0	0,74	0,80	0,28
Hungary	0,74	0,0	1,02	0,88
Poland	0,80	1,02	0,0	0,73
Slovakia	0,28	0,88	0,73	0,0

In conclusion, the Baltic States are the regional group that have the lowest distances between their business cycles in the researched period and is thus the regional group that has the highest degree of (economic) interdependence. The difference between the distance of the Visegrad and the Benelux countries is rather close. The average distance between the business cycles of the Visegrad countries is 0,743 (average correlation 0,604) while the average distance between the business cycles of the Benelux countries is 0.738 (average correlation 0,638). Therefore even though the difference is small the Benelux group has the second biggest distance and the Visegrad group has the biggest distance between the business cycles of the regional group. The Benelux countries, therefore, have the second highest economic interdependence and the Visegrad countries therefore have the lowest economic interdependence of the researched regional groups in the researched period (Conference Board, 2018; Gomez et al., 2013: 6-8; Gower, 1966-327-329).

The hypothesis that tests the effects of interdependency between the members of the subregional group on EU decision-making is in this thesis: (H1) *the higher the interdependency between the members of the subregional group the lower the differentiation of opinions in EU decision-making*. The findings of this thesis are that the Visegrad is the regional group with both the lowest level of economic interdependence and the lowest degree of consensus. The Benelux is the regional group with both the second highest degree of economic interdependence and the second highest level of consensus in EU decision-making in the researched period. Last but not least, the Baltic States have both the lowest level of economic interdependence and the highest level of consensus of the regional groups. A note that has to be made about the decision about the hypothesis is that the difference in economic interdependence of the Visegrad and Benelux countries in the researched period is small. Nevertheless, a difference that is in line with the theoretical predictions exists and therefore the hypothesis (H1) cannot be rejected.

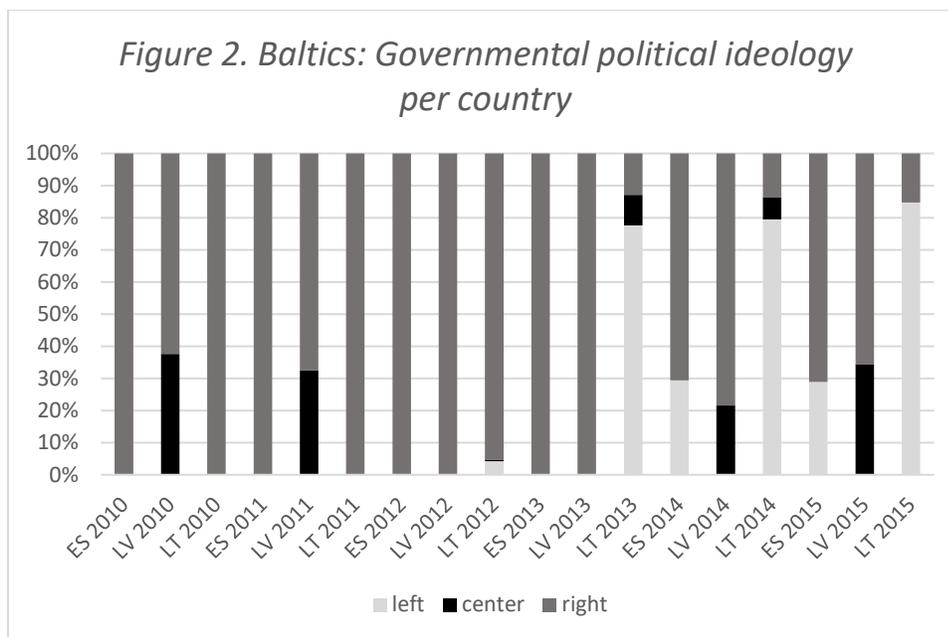
5.3 Degree of Heterogeneity

In this section of the analysis the effects of heterogeneity of the members of the regional groups on their level of consensus in EU decision-making is tested. As previously mentioned the four different kinds of heterogeneity of the regional group that are mentioned are political, economic, cultural and Eurosceptic heterogeneity.

5.3.1 Political Heterogeneity

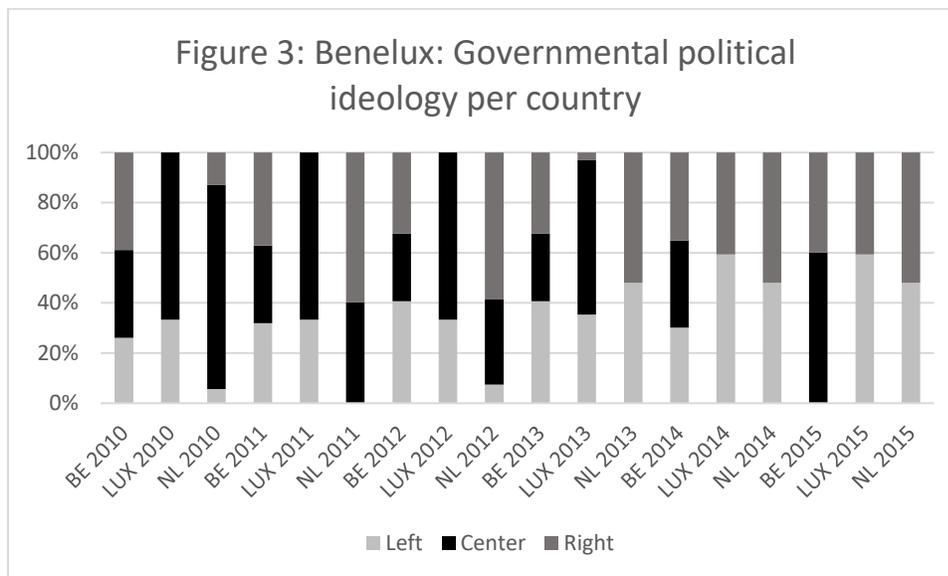
In this section of the thesis the political ideologies of the governments of the regional groups are analysed to test the effects that political heterogeneity of the regional group has on its decision-making.

The data on the political ideology of the Baltic States in the researched period shows that governmental parties of the Baltic States are overwhelmingly right wing. In the 2010 until 2013 the political ideologies of the governmental parties, was for more than 80 percent right wing. This means that 80 percent of the governmental seats in the parliaments of the Baltic States belonged to right wing parties. From 2013 until and including 2015, the governmental parties of the Baltic States were also partly left-wing parties mainly due to a governmental change in Lithuania. Nevertheless, the right wing governmental parties were dominant in the Baltic States in the entire researched period and the political heterogeneity of the Baltic States was thus rather low (see figure 2)(Armingeon, et al., 2016; Armingeon, et al., 2017; Scheff, 1967: 33).



The governmental political parties of the Benelux regional group have a varied range of ideologies in the researched period. The majority of the governments of the Benelux parties were centre parties at the start of the researched period but during the researched period the power share of both the right and the left wing political parties in the Benelux governments increased. Belgium was the country that had the most ideologically varied government in the researched period, the Netherlands and Luxembourg on the other hand were mostly combinations of parties

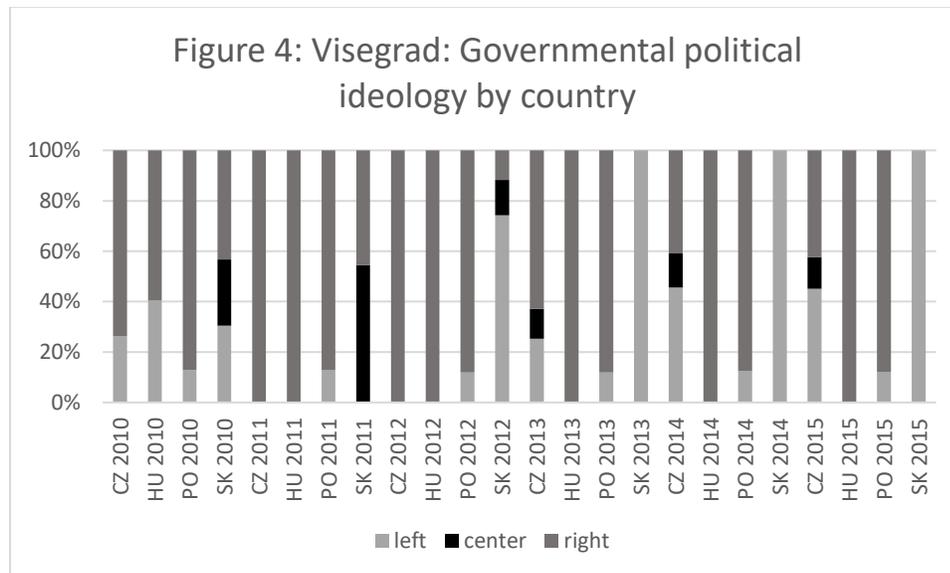
from two of the three ideological categories (see figure 3)(Armingeon, et al., 2016; Armingeon, et al., 2017).



The political ideology of the governments of the Visegrad countries are more difficult to compare than the two other regional groups due to the Czech Republic having two technocratic governments in the researched period (see also the Eurosceptic section). The way this thesis uses to analyse the ideology of the Czech government in the years that it has technocratic governments is based on the ideologies of the parties supporting the technocratic government. This approach is based on the fact that such governments, despite their formally non-partisan ministerial structure, are fundamentally shaped by the political parties (Hloušek & Kopeček, 2014: 1327). Data on the political parties in the Czech Republic is gotten from the election results published by the Czech Statistical Office (Czech Statistical Office (A), 2017; Czech Statistical Office (B), 2017)

This approach thus affects the ideological variety of the Visegrad countries in 2010, 2013 and 2014 because the ideology of the Czech government is in these years measured differently. The majority political ideology of the governments of the Visegrad countries is right wing in the researched period but the political ideology of the governments is, nevertheless, rather varied. This is most clearly visible through the difference in political ideology of Hungary and Slovakia in the years 2013 up to and including 2015 when Hungary has a completely right-wing government while Slovakia has a completely left-wing government. The political ideology of

Poland's government is largely right wing in the researched period and the Czech governmental political ideology is largely right wing in the earlier years while becoming more varied in the later years (see figure 4)(Armingeon, et al., 2016; Armingeon, et al., 2017).



In conclusion, the Baltic States are the regional group with the most homogenous governmental political ideology in the researched period with a higher degree of homogeneity in the earlier years of the researched period than in the later years. The Benelux countries are the regional group with the second most politically heterogeneous governments. Even though the Benelux governments have a mix of all three ideological categories this is the case in all the Benelux countries. The ideology that is shared between the governments of the regional group in the beginning of the researched period is the centre ideology and this shifts in the later years to a mix of left wing and right wing and then to the right-wing ideology. The Visegrad countries are the most politically heterogeneous regional group in the researched period largely due to the difference in the political ideology of the Hungarian and the Slovakian government in the years from 2013 up to and including 2015. Slovakia was the outlier in ideology of the Visegrad countries by having a different ideology than the other countries in multiple years (Armingeon, et al., 2016; Armingeon, et al., 2017).

The hypothesis used to test the effect of political heterogeneity between the members of the regional group on EU decision-making is: (H2.1) *The higher the political heterogeneity within a regional group the higher the differentiation of opinions in EU decision-making.* The findings of

this section show that the Baltics are the regional group with both the highest level of consensus and the regional group with the lowest level of political heterogeneity. The Benelux countries have the second-most differentiation of the level of consensus in EU decision-making in the researched period and they have the second most politically heterogeneous governments of the researched regional groups. Furthermore, the Visegrad are the regional group with both the lowest degree of consensus of the researched regional groups and the regional group with the highest degree of political heterogeneity. The relationship between the level of consensus of the regional groups and the level of political heterogeneity thus correspond with the hypothesis. Therefore, the hypothesis (2.1) cannot be rejected.

5.3.2 Economic Heterogeneity

In this section of the analysis the economic heterogeneity of the regional groups researched in this thesis is analysed by comparing the economies of the member states of these regional groups on eight economic indicators (Eurostat (A), 2018).

The first of the economic indicators researched in this thesis is the unemployment level. The unemployment levels of the member states of the regional groups are shown in the researched period (2010-2015) in percentages of the active population. To increase the degree of comparability of the indicator, data from the EUROSTAT definition for unemployment is used (European Commission, 2017). The Baltic States have in the researched period an unemployment level that is the highest in the start of the researched period and is decreased at the end of the period. The unemployment level in Estonia is constantly the lowest of the Baltic States while the unemployment level in Latvia is continuously the highest of the Baltic States (European Commission, 2017)(see table 10).

The Benelux countries have during the researched period an unemployment level in the lowest decimal. In the researched period, Belgium has constantly the highest unemployment level of the Benelux countries and Luxembourg has constantly the lowest unemployment level of the Benelux countries. The unemployment level of the Visegrad countries is in the researched period in the lowest and the second lowest decimal. The Czech Republic constantly has the lowest degree of unemployment in the researched period and Slovakia has the highest unemployment level. In all Visegrad countries the unemployment level at the start of the research period is higher than that of the end of the researched period. The Benelux is the most homogenous

regional group on the indicator of unemployment because their unemployment levels differs the least from each other in the researched period. The Baltics are the second most homogenous regional group on this economic indicator because, like in 2012, they differ more in their unemployment level. The Visegrad countries are the most heterogeneous regional group on this indicator because they constantly differ the most on this indicator. Both 2010 and 2012 clearly show that the unemployment level of the Visegrad countries is heterogeneous (it has a range of 7 percent)(European Commission, 2017)(See table 10).

Table 10. Unemployment level of regional groups in percentages of the active population

Regional Groups	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Baltics						
Estonia	16,7%	12,3%	10,0%	8,6%	7,4%	6,2%
Latvia	19,5%	16,2%	15,0%	11,9%	10,8%	9,9%
Lithuania	17,8%	15,4%	13,4%	11,8%	10,7%	9,1%
Benelux						
Belgium	8,3%	7,2%	7,6%	8,4%	8,5%	8,5%
Luxembourg	4,6%	4,8%	5,1%	5,9%	6,0%	6,5%
Netherlands	5,0%	5,0%	5,8%	7,3%	7,4%	6,9%
Visegrad						
Czech Republic	7,3%	6,7%	7,0%	7,0%	6,1%	5,1%
Hungary	11,2%	11,0%	11,0%	10,2%	7,7%	6,8%
Poland	9,7%	9,7%	10,1%	10,3%	9,0%	7,5%
Slovakia	14,5%	13,7%	14,0%	14,2%	13,2%	11,5%

The second of the economic indicators that are researched in this thesis is the inflation level of the members of the regional groups. The inflation level of the member states of the regional groups that is used in this thesis is the Harmonised Indices of Consumer Prices (HICP) as used by Eurostat. This method to calculate the inflation level of countries is used because it is calculated according to a harmonised approach and a single set of definitions. HICP therefore gives a comparable measure of the inflation level (Eurostat (B), 2018).

The reference level of the inflation level for the Harmonised Indices of Consumer Prices is in the AMECO data 2015. This means that the price level of all countries in 2015 is calculated as 100 and the data for any other year show the price level of that year relative to the price level in 2015 in that country. This method clearly shows the movement of the inflation level per year (European Commission, 2017; Eurostat (B), 2018). In the researched period the inflation level of

all researched countries moved upwards with all countries having a higher price level in 2015 than in 2010. The movement of the inflation level of the Baltic States was rather varied. Estonia's price level was in 2010 only 88 percent of its price level in 2015, the price level grew between 2010 and 2013 and then only gradually increased until 2015. Latvia's price level in 2010 was 93 percent of its price level in 2015, it increased between 2010 and 2012, stayed the same for a year and then gradually increased. Lithuania's price level was 92.4 percent of its 2015 price level in 2010, it grew continuously between 2010 and 2014. In 2013 and 2014 Lithuania's price level was higher than its 2015 price level and it decreased between 2014 and 2015. The movement of the inflation level of the Baltic States was thus rather heterogeneous (See table 11)(European Commission, 2017).

Table 11. Harmonised consumer price index of regional groups (2015=100)						
Regional Groups	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Baltics						
Estonia	88,0	92,4	96,3	99,5	99,9	100,0
Latvia	93,0	96,9	99,1	99,1	99,8	100,0
Lithuania	92,4	96,2	99,3	100,4	100,7	100,0
Benelux						
Belgium	92,1	95,2	97,7	98,9	99,4	100,0
Luxembourg	91,4	94,9	97,6	99,3	99,9	100,0
Netherlands	92,0	94,3	97,0	99,5	99,8	100,0
Visegrad						
Czech Republic	92,6	94,6	98,0	99,3	99,8	100,0
Hungary	89,5	93,0	98,2	99,9	99,9	100,0
Poland	92,7	96,3	99,8	100,6	100,7	100,0
Slovakia	91,7	95,4	99,0	100,4	100,3	100,0

The development of the price level of the Benelux countries is rather homogenous. During the entire researched period, the price levels of Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands stay within 1 point of each other and increase the entire time. The increase of the price level of the Benelux countries becomes lower over the time (See table 11)(Eurostat (A), 2018). The price level of the Visegrad countries moves rather varied. The price level of all Visegrad countries mainly increases but even though the countries do not start with the same price level there seems to be a division in the movement of the price level of the countries. Poland and Slovakia have roughly the same changes of the price level in the researched period and the Czech Republic and

Hungary have roughly the same movement from 2012 onwards (See table 11)(European Commission, 2017).

It is thus clear that the Benelux have the most homogenous movement of the price level of the researched regional groups. The Visegrad group has the second most homogenous movement of the price level of the researched regional groups and the Baltic States is the regional group that is the most heterogeneous. The reason for this is that the Visegrad countries have movements of their price level that are within 2 points of each other during the entire researched period. The movements of the price level are in the last three years even within 1 percent of each other. The Baltic States also have a movement of the price level that is within 2 points of each other but from 2012 to 2013 the difference in the movement of the price level is bigger (see table 11)(European Commission, 2017).

The industrial production of the member states of the regional group is the third economic indicator that is researched in this thesis (Eurostat (A), 2018). For the economic indicator industrial production, the reference value of the AMECO data is 2010. This means that all the data on industrial production in a country of any other year is given relative to the level of industrial production in 2010. The AMECO data excludes construction from the industrial production but covers all other industrial production of the researched countries (European Commission, 2017). The Baltic States have an interesting development in the researched period. All of the Baltic States increase their industrial production in the researched period. Latvia and Lithuania increase their industrial production in roughly the same amount in the researched period. Estonia increases its Industrial production clearly more than the other Baltic States, mainly through a surge from 2010 to 2011 (See table 12)(European Commission, 2017). The Benelux countries either roughly maintain the same level of industrial production or decrease it in the researched period. The Netherlands, in particular, decreases its industrial production relative to the 2010 level with some amount (from 100 to 93.2). Nevertheless, the Benelux countries stay rather similar in their movements of the industrial production with only 2015 not having the Benelux countries in a range of 10 point from each other (See table 12)(European Commission, 2017).

Regional Groups	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Baltics						
Estonia	100,0	119,9	121,2	126,2	131,1	131,5
Latvia	100,0	109,0	115,8	114,7	113,5	117,6
Lithuania	100,0	106,3	110,2	113,7	113,8	119,4
Benelux						
Belgium	100,0	104,7	102,4	103,2	104,1	104,3
Luxembourg	100,0	101,4	96,5	93,4	97,5	98,9
Netherlands	100,0	99,3	98,7	99,3	96,4	93,2
Visegrad						
Czech Republic	100,0	105,9	105,0	104,9	110,1	115,2
Hungary	100,0	105,6	103,7	104,8	112,9	121,2
Poland	100,0	106,7	108,1	110,6	114,4	119,9
Slovakia	100,0	105,2	113,6	117,9	122,1	131,0

The Visegrad countries increased their industrial production from the beginning to the end of the researched period. From 2010 to 2011 all Visegrad countries had roughly the same increase of the industrial production. The Czech Republic and Hungary both had a decrease of the industrial production in the researched period (the Czech Republic twice). Slovakia had the highest increase of industrial production of the Visegrad countries (see table 12)(European Commission, 2017).

The Visegrad countries thus had the most homogenous development of the industrial production of the regional groups because apart from 2011 the countries had a development of the industrial production within 5 points of each other. The Benelux countries were the second most homogenous in their development of industrial production because the movements of the industrial production of the countries were not within 5 points of each other in the years from 2010 to 2011 and from 2013 to 2014. The Baltic States were the most heterogeneous in their development of the industrial production. This was mostly caused by the development of Estonia going along a different pattern than that of Latvia and Lithuania (see table 12)(Eurostat (A), 2018; European Commission, 2017).

The fourth researched economic indicator is the governmental surplus or deficit (Eurostat (A), 2018). In this thesis, the data for this indicator originates from the net lending or net borrowing of the general government in percentages of the GDP at current prices from the AMECO database (European Commission, 2017). The governmental surplus of the Baltic States is rather varied.

Estonia mostly had a surplus or a little deficit in the researched period. Latvia and Lithuania on the other hand mostly had a deficit and in respectively 2011 and 2012 quite a large deficit (8.7 and 8.9 percent). The Benelux countries also had a quite varied governmental budget pattern. Both Belgium and the Netherlands had a governmental deficit during the entire period while Luxembourg only had a deficit in 2010 and a surplus in the other years. The governmental deficit of the Visegrad countries is more homogenous due to there being a deficit for all countries in the entire researched period. Poland and Slovakia do have a larger deficit than the Czech Republic and Hungary in a multitude of the years researched but this difference is not big (see table 13) (European Commission, 2017).

Table 13. Governmental net lending (+) or borrowing (-) of regional groups in percentages of GDP

Regional Groups	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Baltics						
Estonia	0,2%	1,2%	-0,3%	-0,2%	0,7%	0,1%
Latvia	-8,7%	-4,3%	-1,2%	-1,2%	-1,5%	-1,45
Lithuania	-6,9%	-8,9%	-3,1%	-2,6%	-0,6%	-0,2%
Benelux						
Belgium	-4,0%	-4,1%	-4,2%	-3,1%	-3,1%	-2,5%
Luxembourg	-0,7%	0,5%	0,3%	1,0%	1,3%	1,4%
Netherlands	-5,0%	-4,3%	-3,9%	-2,4%	-2,3%	-2,1%
Visegrad						
Czech Republic	-4,2%	-2,7%	-3,9%	-1,2%	-2,1%	-0,6%
Hungary	-4,5%	-5,4%	-2,4%	-2,6%	-2,6%	-1,9%
Poland	-7,3%	-4,8%	-3,7%	-4,1%	-3,6%	-2,6%
Slovakia	-7,5%	-4,3%	-4,3%	-2,7%	-2,7%	-2,7%

The Visegrad countries thus have in the researched period the most homogenous governmental deficit or surplus of the researched regional groups. It is difficult to judge whether the Benelux or the Baltic countries are the most heterogeneous in their governmental surplus or deficit. While the Benelux has a difference in the indicator of more than 3 points, more often the Baltic States have a large variation in both 2010 and 2011. Looking at the overall differences between the countries in the entire researched period the Benelux countries are more heterogeneous but the heterogeneity of the Baltic States on this indicator should not be discounted (see table 13)(European Commission, 2017; Eurostat (A), 2018).

The situation of the governmental finances of the Baltic States is varied with the governmental debt of Estonia markedly different from that of Latvia and Lithuania. This difference in governmental debt is even clearer in the Benelux countries with the Benelux countries having a varied degree of governmental debt. Luxembourg clearly has the lowest governmental debt of the Benelux countries and Belgium has the highest degree of governmental debt. The degree of governmental debt of the Netherlands is roughly in the middle of the other two Benelux countries. The Visegrad countries also have a rather varied governmental debt with Hungary having the highest degree of governmental debt and the Czech Republic the lowest. It has to be noted that Hungary is quite an outlier in degrees of governmental debt in the Visegrad countries. The other three Visegrad countries have degrees of governmental debt that differ from each other but are far closer to each other than to Hungary (see table 14)(European Commission, 2017).

Table 14. Governmental debt of regional groups in percentages of GDP						
Regional Groups	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Baltics						
Estonia	6,6%	6,1%	9,7%	10,2%	10,7%	10,0%
Latvia	46,8%	42,7%	41,2%	39,0%	40,9%	36,8%
Lithuania	36,2%	37,2%	39,8%	38,8%	40,5%	42,6%
Benelux						
Belgium	99,7%	102,6%	104,3%	105,5%	107,0%	106,1%
Luxembourg	19,8%	18,7%	22,0%	23,7%	22,7%	22,0%
Netherlands	59,3%	61,6%	66,3%	67,8%	68,0%	64,6%
Visegrad						
Czech Republic	37,4%	39,8%	44,5%	44,9%	42,2%	40,0%
Hungary	80,2%	80,5%	78,4%	77,1%	76,6%	76,7%
Poland	53,1%	54,1%	53,7%	55,7%	50,3%	51,1%
Slovakia	41,2%	43,7%	52,2%	54,7%	53,5%	52,3%

The Baltic countries are the most homogenous regional group on the indicator of governmental debt. This does not imply that they have a homogenous degree of governmental debt, but their degrees of governmental debt are closer to each other than that in the other researched regional groups. The governmental debt of the Visegrad countries is the second least heterogeneous with the governmental debt of the Benelux countries being clearly the most heterogeneous. The difference between the most different Visegrad countries on governmental debt (the Czech Republic) is almost the same size as the difference between the closest Benelux countries on this indicator (see table 14)(European Commission, 2017).

The sixth economic indicator of the economic heterogeneity of the regional groups in this thesis is the labour costs (Eurostat (A), 2018). The labour costs are hereby the ratio of compensation per employee to real GDP per person employed (nominal unit labour costs) with the reference value of 2010. In the researched period, the labour costs of the Baltic and Benelux countries increased, with the labour costs of the Baltic countries increasing more than that of the Benelux countries. The labour costs of the Visegrad countries, on the other hand, mostly decreased in the researched period. Only the labour costs of Slovakia (slightly) increased in the researched period (see table 15)(European Governance, 2017).

Table 15. Ratio of compensation per employee to real GDP per person employed (2010=100)

Regional Groups	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Baltics						
Estonia	100,0	99,8	104,8	109,1	113,8	118,9
Latvia	100,0	98,1	104,3	109,2	114,6	121,6
Lithuania	100,0	100,8	103,0	106,2	109,6	115,0
Benelux						
Belgium	100,0	102,7	106,1	108,3	108,3	107,8
Luxembourg	100,0	102,3	107,1	107,6	106,6	109,6
Netherlands	100,0	101,3	104,3	105,5	105,6	104,1
Visegrad						
Czech Republic	100,0	103,5	104,2	101,5	96,1	96,2
Hungary	100,0	100,3	100,3	98,6	96,1	93,4
Poland	100,0	97,8	98,2	98,1	99,1	98,5
Slovakia	100,0	101,0	101,9	102,2	102,7	104,4

The development of the labour costs is the most homogenous in the Benelux countries with most of the Benelux countries developing in a similar way. The biggest difference between the Benelux countries is in 2015 and this difference is 5.4 points. The Baltic countries are the second most homogenous regional group in their development of the economic indicator labour costs. They develop in a largely similar way with Lithuania being just a bit out of step in the development with the other Baltic countries. Their largest difference is in 2015 and is 6.6 points. The Visegrad countries are the most heterogeneous regional group on this economic indicator in the researched period with the development of the countries labour costs going along different lines with a multitude of ups and downs. The biggest difference is between the development of the labour costs in Hungary and Slovakia, which results in a difference of 11 points in 2015 (see table 15)(European Commission, 2017).

The seventh indicator of the economic heterogeneity analysed in this thesis is the Gross Domestic Product (GDP)(Eurostat (A), 2018). This indicator is different from the other economic indicators used in this thesis. Where previous economic indicators were done in percentages of the GDP of the countries, this economic indicator will give the GDP in Billion Euro's. This economic indicator thus clearly shows the difference in the size of the economies of the regional groups in absolute numbers (see table 16)(European Commission, 2017; Eurostat, 2018).

Table 16. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of regional groups in Billion Euro's						
Regional Groups	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Baltics						
Estonia	14,7	16,7	17,9	18,9	19,8	20,3
Latvia	17,8	20,2	22,1	22,8	23,6	24,3
Lithuania	28,0	31,3	33,3	35,0	36,6	37,4
Benelux						
Belgium	365,1	379,1	387,5	392,3	400,3	410,4
Luxembourg	40,2	43,2	44,1	46,5	50,0	52,1
Netherlands	631,5	642,9	645,2	652,7	663,0	683,5
Visegrad						
Czech Republic	156,7	164,0	161,4	157,7	156,7	168,5
Hungary	98,8	101,3	99,5	101,9	105,6	110,7
Poland	361,8	380,2	389,4	394,7	411,0	430,1
Slovakia	67,6	70,6	72,7	74,2	76,1	78,9

The Baltic States have GDP's that are within the researched period within 20 Billion Euro from each other and are all between the 10 and 40 Billion Euro. Estonia has the lowest GDP of the Baltic countries while Lithuania has the highest GDP of the Baltic countries in the researched period. Latvia has a GDP that is in the researched period closer to Estonia than to Lithuania. The GDP of the Benelux countries varies quite a lot. Luxembourg has the lowest GDP of the Benelux countries with an average of 46 Billion Euro in the researched period, while the Netherlands has the highest GDP with an average of 653 Billion Euro in the researched period. The GDP of the Visegrad countries also varies quite a lot but this is mainly due to the outlier Poland that has an average GDP of 395 Billion Euro in the researched period. The GDP of the other Visegrad countries range closer around 100 Billion Euro with the Czech Republic having an average GDP of 161 Billion Euro, Hungary an average GDP of 103 Billion Euro and Slovakia having an average GDP of 73 Billion Euro (see table 16)(European Commission, 2017).

The Baltic States are clearly the regional group with the most homogenous GDP in the researched period seeing as their GDP ranges within 20 Billion Euro of each other in the entire researched period. The Visegrad are the second most homogenous regional group on the indicator GDP seeing as their variation is larger than that of the Baltics and smaller than that of the Benelux. It has to be noted that the GDP of the Visegrad countries does vary quite a bit (mostly between Slovakia and Poland). The Benelux are the regional group with the highest economic heterogeneity on GDP. This can be most clearly seen by the difference between the GDP's of Luxembourg and the Netherlands that are in the researched period often more than 600 Billion Euro (see table 16)(European Commission, 2017).

The eight and last indicator of economic heterogeneity analysed in this thesis is the GDP per capita (Eurostat (A), 2018). This indicator takes the difference in population of the member states of the regional groups into account, by giving the GDP at current prices per head of the population. In this thesis, the GDP per capita is given in thousand Euro's (European Commission, 2017).

Table 17. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per Capita of regional groups (in 1000 Euro)

Regional Groups	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Baltics						
Estonia	11,0	12,5	13,5	14,3	15,0	15,5
Latvia	8,5	9,8	10,8	11,3	11,8	12,3
Lithuania	9,0	10,3	11,2	11,8	12,5	12,9
Benelux						
Belgium	33,5	34,5	35,0	35,3	35,8	36,5
Luxembourg	79,2	83,1	83,0	85,3	89,5	91,5
Netherlands	38,0	38,5	38,5	38,9	39,3	40,4
Visegrad						
Czech Republic	14,9	15,6	15,4	15,0	14,9	16,0
Hungary	9,9	10,2	10,0	10,3	10,7	11,2
Poland	9,4	9,9	10,1	10,3	10,7	11,2
Slovakia	12,4	13,1	13,4	13,7	14,0	14,6

The Baltic States all have GDP per capita's that range around ten thousand euro with the biggest difference between the Baltic States being in 2015, when the difference is 3.2 thousand Euro. The Benelux countries have quite a varied range but this is mainly due to the larger difference between Luxembourg and the other Benelux countries. Luxembourg has by far the largest GDP

per capita of the Benelux countries. The Visegrad countries are rather similar in their GDP per capita. The Czech Republic continuously has the highest GDP per capita of the Benelux countries and Poland the lowest in most years of the researched period. Hungary has a GDP per capita that is closer to Poland and Slovakia has one that is closer to the Czech Republic in the researched period (see table 17)(European Commission, 2017).

The Baltic countries are the regional group that is the most homogenous on the economic indicator of GDP per capita. The reason for this is that their GDP per capita differs only slightly from each other in the researched period. The Visegrad countries are the countries with the second most homogenous data on this economic indicator due to the difference in the GDP per capita of these countries differing only slightly more than that of the Baltic countries. The Benelux countries are clearly the most heterogeneous regional group on this economic indicator. This is mainly caused by the GDP per capita of Luxembourg being rather higher than that of the other two Benelux countries (See table 17)(European Commission, 2017).

In sum, the degree of economic heterogeneity of the regional groups was in this section analysed by analysing the heterogeneity of the member states of the regional group on eight economic indicators (Eurostat (A), 2018). The regional groups have differing levels of heterogeneity on these economic indicators. The Benelux is the most economic heterogeneous regional group because it is the most heterogeneous regional group on four of the eight economic indicators (government deficit, government debt, GDP and GDP per capita). The Baltics and the Visegrad are both the most heterogeneous regional group on two indicators, respectively inflation level and industrial production and unemployment level and labour costs. The Visegrad is the second most heterogeneous group because it is four times the second most heterogeneous regional group. The Baltics are the most homogenous regional group with it being the least heterogeneous on three economic indicators (government debt, GDP and GDP per capita) a score that is shares with the Benelux. Nevertheless, the Baltics is more homogenous than the Benelux because it is on more economic indicators the second most economically heterogeneous regional group. It should be noted that even though the Baltics is the most homogenous regional group economically it is still more heterogeneous on some economic indicators than the most economically heterogeneous regional group (the Benelux)(see table 18)(European Commission, 2017).

Regional groups	Most heterogeneous	Second-most heterogeneous	Most homogenous
Baltics	<i>2 indicators</i>	<i>3 indicators</i>	<i>3 indicators</i>
Benelux	<i>4 indicators</i>	<i>1 indicators</i>	<i>3 indicators</i>
Visegrad	<i>2 indicators</i>	<i>4 indicators</i>	<i>2 indicators</i>

The hypothesis of the influence of the economic heterogeneity of regional groups on the level of consensus of the regional groups in EU decision-making that this thesis tests is: (H2.2) *The higher the economic heterogeneity within a subregional group the higher the differentiation of opinions in EU decision-making.* The findings of this thesis show that the regional group that is the most differentiated on the most economic indicators (4 from 8) is the regional group with second-most differentiated in EU decision-making (the Benelux). The regional group that is the second most heterogeneous on the most economic indicators (4 from 8) is the regional group that is the most heterogeneous in EU decision-making (the Visegrad countries). The regional group that is the most homogenous on the most economic indicators (3 from 8) is also the regional group with highest level of consensus (the Baltic States). It is not only the overview of all economic indicators that does not fit with the theoretical predictions. None of the researched economic indicators proceed along the line of the theoretical prediction tested in the hypothesis. Based on the fact that the differentiation of the level of consensus of the regional groups does not proceeds along the same lines as the degree of economic heterogeneity of the regional groups the hypothesis (H2.2) is thus rejected (see table 18)(Council of the European Union, 2018; European Commission, 2017; Eurostat (A), 2018; Scheff, 1967: 33).

5.3.3 Cultural Heterogeneity

In this section of the analysis, the cultural heterogeneity of the regional groups and its effects on the level of consensus of the regional groups in EU decision-making is analysed. Cultural heterogeneity matters because greater cultural distance between the countries of the regional group might make it more likely for misunderstandings to start within the regional group and thus for the cooperation of the regional group to suffer (Fearon, 2003: 211).

The Baltic States have rather similar values on the dimensions of national culture. In three out of the six dimensions of national culture (power distance, uncertainty avoidance and indulgence versus restraint), the variation in the scores of the three countries is within 5 points. The most homogenous dimension of national culture is the indulgence versus restraint dimensions where

the variation in the score of the Baltic States is only three points. In three out of six dimensions (indulgence versus restraint, individualism versus collectivism and short- versus long-term orientation), Estonia and Lithuania have the exact same score. Masculinity versus femininity is the dimension of national culture that is the most heterogeneous for the Baltic States with a total variation of 21 points. Estonia has with thirty points the most masculine culture of the Baltic States while Latvia has the most feminine culture with 9 points and Lithuania is in the middle of these countries with 19 points. In sum, the cultural heterogeneity of the Baltic States is thus rather low because the scores on multiple of the dimensions are very similar and the biggest variation is only 21 points (see table 19)(Hofstede, 2011: 8-9 & 11-13; Hofstede & Minkov, 2015).

Table 19. National culture of the Baltic States

Baltic State	Power distance	Individualism	Masculinity	Uncertainty avoidance	Long-term orientation	Indulgence
Estonia	40	60	30	60	82	16
Latvia	44	70	9	63	69	13
Lithuania	42	60	19	65	82	16
<i>Range</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>3</i>

The Benelux countries also have rather heterogeneous values on the dimensions of national culture. Roughly similar scores (5 points or less difference) between two of the countries occur, in four dimensions (power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity and short- versus long-term orientation). The issue is that two countries having roughly similar scores on the dimensions of national culture occurs in all possible combinations of Benelux countries. Luxembourg and the Netherlands are the combination that occurs the most often (two times) in the dimensions power distance and short- versus long-term orientation. Two dimensions have a variation of 40 or higher points with uncertainty avoidance being the most heterogeneous dimension of national culture. This dimension of national culture has a variation of 41 points with Belgium having the highest degree of uncertainty avoidance of the Benelux countries with 94 points and the Netherlands having the lowest degree of uncertainty avoidance of all Benelux countries with 53 points. Luxembourg had with 70 points a score in the middle of the other two Benelux countries for the dimension uncertainty avoidance. Masculinity versus femininity was the other dimension that had a forty or more points variation but this mostly had to do with the Netherlands having a relatively low score (14 points) while Belgium and

Luxembourg (with respectively 54 and 50 points) had relatively similar scores. In sum, the Benelux countries have a relatively high degree of cultural heterogeneity because they have only one dimension with a variation within 5 points and two dimensions with a variation of 40 or more points (see table 20)(Hofstede & Minkov, 2015).

Benelux country	Power distance	Individualism	Masculinity	Uncertainty avoidance	Long-term orientation	Indulgence
Belgium	65	75	54	94	82	57
Luxembourg	40	60	50	70	64	56
Netherlands	38	80	14	53	67	68
<i>Range</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>12</i>

The score of the Visegrad countries on the dimensions of national culture are varied. Indulgence versus restraint is the dimension in which the countries are the closest and is also the only dimension in which the variation of scores is 5 or less. Countries having a score that is within 5 points of difference from another country only occurs, apart from the indulgence versus restraint dimensions, between Czechia (58 points) and Poland (60 points) in the individualism versus collectivism dimension. There are three dimensions of national culture (power distance, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity versus femininity) in which the variation between the countries is more than 40 points. In the power distance dimension, the variation is even greater than 50 points with a 54-point difference between Hungary (46) and Slovakia (100). Czechia (57) and Poland (68) are in between the power distance of the other Visegrad countries but are both closer to Hungary's score than Slovakia's score. In sum, the cultural heterogeneity of the Visegrad countries is high because half of the dimensions of national culture variate more than 40 points and the scores on only one dimension were rather similar (see table 21)(Hofstede & Minkov, 2015).

Visegrad country	Power distance	Individualism	Masculinity	Uncertainty avoidance	Long-term orientation	Indulgence
Czechia	57	58	57	74	70	29
Hungary	46	80	88	82	58	31
Poland	68	60	64	93	38	29
Slovakia	100	52	100	51	77	28
<i>Range</i>	<i>54</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>43</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>3</i>

In conclusion, of the regional groups researched in this thesis the Baltic States are the least culturally heterogeneous. The Baltic States have on half the dimensions of national culture scores that are within 5 points of each other and the biggest variation that occurs in the dimensions of national culture is only 21 points. The Benelux countries have a higher degree of cultural heterogeneity than the Baltic States. This is the case because the Benelux countries have two dimensions in which the variation of the scores is more than 40. The highest variation the Benelux countries have is 41 points. The Visegrad countries have an even higher degree of cultural heterogeneity than the Benelux countries. This is the case because the Visegrad countries have three dimensions in which the variation of the Visegrad countries is more than 40 points. Furthermore, the biggest variation in a dimension of national culture of the Visegrad countries is 54 points.

The hypothesis on the effect of the cultural heterogeneity of the regional groups on the level of consensus of the regional group in EU decision-making that is tested in this section of the thesis is (H2.3): *The higher the cultural heterogeneity within a subregional group the higher the differentiation of opinions in EU decision-making.* The findings of this thesis show that the Baltic States is the regional group with both the lowest degree of cultural heterogeneity and the highest level of consensus in EU decision-making. The Benelux countries is the regional group with the second highest level of consensus in EU decision-making and also the regional group with the second highest level of cultural heterogeneity. The Visegrad countries is the regional group with the most differentiated level of consensus in EU decision-making of the regional groups and also has the highest level of cultural heterogeneity. The relation between the level of consensus of the regional groups in EU decision-making and the degree of cultural heterogeneity therefore corresponds with the hypothesis. The hypothesis of the effect of cultural heterogeneity on the level of consensus of regional groups (2.3) cannot be rejected.

5.3.4 Eurosceptic Heterogeneity

This section of the analysis will analyse the influence the Eurosceptic heterogeneity of the regional groups has on the degree of consensus in EU decision-making. The Euroscepticism of the governments of the regional groups is based on the views of the political parties that make up these governments in which one is the least and seven is the most Eurosceptic score (Bakker, et al. (B), 2015).

The data on the Euroscepticism of the regional groups show that, even though the Euroscepticism of the governments is changing, the majority of the governments of the regional group are in favour of European integration. The major exception to this statement is the Euroscepticism of Hungary from 2011 until 2015 (the Fidesz government). It is also clear that it is more rule than exception that the Euroscepticism of the governments changes during the researched period. This is due to changes in the government (coalitions)(See table 22)(Armingeon, et al., 2017; Bakker, et al. (A), 2015; Polk, et al., 2017).

Regional groups	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Baltics						
Estonia	6,7	6,7	6,7	6,7	6,8	6,8
Lithuania	6,4	6,4	6,4	5,4	5,5	5,5
Latvia	5,6	6,1	6,2	6,2	6,1	5,9
Benelux						
Belgium	6,4	6,3	5,7	5,7	5,8	5,9
Luxembourg	6,9	6,9	6,9	6,8	6,4	6,4
Netherlands	5,3	5,3	5,3	5,3	5,3	5,3
Visegrad						
Czech Republic	4,5*	4,6	4,6	4,8*	5,7*	5,8
Hungary	4,2	2,7	2,7	2,7	2,7	2,7
Poland	6,4	6,4	6,4	6,4	6,4	6,1
Slovakia	5,1	5,1	5,9	6,1	6,1	6,1

*years with this symbol had technocratic governments. The Euroscepticism for the time that the technocratic governments are in power calculated based on the views of the parties that supported the technocratic governments.

The Euroscepticism of the Baltics moves in interesting ways. Estonia is the least Eurosceptic of the Baltic countries in the entire researched period with a score of 6.7 in 2010 until 2013 and 6.8 from 2013 until and including 2015. This is with the scoring being 1 the most Eurosceptic and 7 the least Eurosceptic. Lithuania and Latvia exchange the position of being the most Eurosceptic country of the Baltic States in the researched period. Latvia is from 2010 until 2013 the most Eurosceptic country of the Baltic States and Lithuania has that position from 2013 until and including 2015. At the same time, it should be noted that all Baltic States had rather pro-European governments in the researched period. The most Eurosceptic score, of Lithuania in

2013, was only 5.4 points (See table 22)(Armingeon, et al., 2017; Bakker, et al. (A), 2015; Polk, et al., 2017).

The Benelux countries have during the researched period a rather low degree of Euroscepticism. The most Eurosceptic Benelux country in the entire researched period is the Netherlands with a score of 5.3 points. Luxembourg is constantly the least Eurosceptic country of the Benelux countries. Belgium had a Eurosceptic score in the middle of the scores of the Netherlands and Luxembourg. Furthermore, Belgium is the Benelux country of which the Eurosceptic score of its government changed the most in the researched period (See table 22)(Armingeon, et al., 2017; Bakker, et al. (A), 2015; Polk, et al., 2017).

In the researched period, the government of Poland is the least Eurosceptic of the Visegrad countries while the government of Hungary is the most Eurosceptic of the Visegrad countries. The Euroscepticism score of Slovakia is between the scores of these two countries but is closer to that of Poland. The Euroscepticism score of the Czech government should be approached with caution for the years 2010, 2013 and 2014. In (part of) these years the Czech Republic had technocratic governments. The Euroscepticism of the Czech (technocratic) government is therefore based on the support of the political parties for the technocratic governments. Overall, the Euroscepticism of the Czech government is in the middle of that of the Visegrad countries but more on the side of low Euroscepticism (See table 22)(Armingeon, et al., 2017; Bakker, et al. (A), 2015; Polk, et al., 2017).

The regional group with the lowest Eurosceptic heterogeneity of the researched regional groups in this thesis is the Baltic States. This is visible through the fact that in all of the researched years the scores for Euroscepticism of the Baltic States was within a range of 1.5 points. The Benelux countries are the regional group with the second lowest heterogeneity of the researched regional groups. The range in the scores of the Euroscepticism of the governments of the Benelux countries is bigger than that of the Baltic States. Even taking into account the difficulties in measuring the Euroscepticism of the Czech government the Visegrad countries are clearly the most heterogeneous regional group on the indicator Euroscepticism. This is because the range between the scores of the Visegrad countries on Euroscepticism is bigger than that of the other regional groups and the distance between the Euroscepticism score of Hungary's government

with the other Visegrad countries is quite large (See table 22)(Armingeon, et al., 2017; Bakker, et al. (A), 2015; Polk, et al., 2017).

The goal of this section of the analysis is to test the influence that the Eurosceptic heterogeneity of the regional group has on the level of consensus of the regional group in EU decision-making. This is done through testing the hypothesis (H2.4): *The higher the Eurosceptic heterogeneity within a subregional group the higher the differentiation of opinions in EU decision-making.* The findings show that the Baltics is the regional group that has both the highest level of consensus in EU decision-making and the lowest Eurosceptic heterogeneity. The Benelux countries have a lower differentiation of opinion than the Visegrad countries and they also have a lower Eurosceptic heterogeneity than the Visegrad countries. The findings thus show that the Eurosceptic heterogeneity of the regional groups correspond with the hypothesis. Therefore, hypothesis 2.4 cannot be rejected. (See table 19)(Armingeon, et al., 2017; Bakker, et al. (A), 2015; Council of the European Union, 2018; Polk, et al., 2017).

To conclude, the effects of four different kinds of heterogeneity on the level of consensus of the regional groups was tested in this section of the analysis. The hypothesis that the economic heterogeneity of regional groups affects the level of consensus of the regional groups is rejected. The effects of the hypotheses about the political, cultural and Eurosceptic heterogeneity of the regional groups can on the other hand not be rejected. The reason for this is that in the case the degree of (political, cultural and Eurosceptic) heterogeneity of the regional groups has the same sequence as the level of consensus of the regional groups in EU decision-making as hypothesized. For example, the Baltic States is the regional group with both the highest level of consensus in EU decision-making and the lowest degree of political heterogeneity.

5.4 Degree of Formality

In this section of the analysis the institutionalization of the cooperation of the regional groups is analysed. The reason for this is that the institutionalization of cooperation makes cooperation easier because it gives rise to trust in the agreements that have been made (Drulák, 2002: 62). Intergovernmental organizations that cooperate with a lower degree of formality are assumed to have more flexibility because it is easier to get out of commitments and this thus creates lower trust in the agreements that have been made (Vabulas & Snidal, 2013: 194-200 & 209). It is therefore tested in this section of the analysis whether a difference in the degree of the formality

of the regional groups effects the degree of consensus of the regional groups in EU decision-making. The degree of formality of the cooperation of each regional group is first deliberated and then compared to each other. The relation between the degree of formality and the degree of consensus of the regional group in EU decision-making is then analysed to answer the hypothesis.

The cooperation between the Baltic States occurs through two institutes that are two pillars of one cooperation model. The institute for governmental cooperation is the Baltic Council of Ministers (BCM) and the institute for parliamentary cooperation is the Baltic Assembly. The focus of this thesis lies mostly on the Baltic Council of Ministers due to this institute being the one that coordinates the work of the executive power and thus affects the decisions taken by the governments of the regional group on EU level (i.e. in the Council of Ministers). The Baltic Assembly will also be briefly described (Laizāne-Jurkāne, 2018: 13). The Baltic States describe their cooperation as pragmatic and practical and relying on common interests. The Baltic States meet regularly before EU Council meetings and depending on the circumstances before meetings of the EU Council of Ministers (Jurkynas, 2004; Laizāne-Jurkāne, 2018: 29-33; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, 2018).

The Baltic Council of Ministers (BCM) operates with a rotating chairmanship and presiding country actively coordinates the cooperation on all levels. The multiple organs belonging to the BCM are the Prime Ministers' Council, the Cooperation Council, the Secretariat and the Committees of Senior Officials and all operate with the rotating chairmanship. The Prime Ministers' Council is the meeting of the heads of governments of the Baltic States and generally meets once a year. The task of the Prime Ministers' Council as the highest organ of the BCM is to provide guidance for the intergovernmental cooperation of the Baltic States. The Cooperation Council consists of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Baltic States. The Cooperation Council is responsible for overall coordination of the Baltic cooperation and usually meets in the framework of the meeting of the Baltic Council (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, 2018; Baltic Governments (A), 2003).

The Secretariat of the Baltic Council of Ministers consists of the public officials responsible for the Baltic cooperation at the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the Baltic States. The Secretariat prepares meetings, drafts reports and the annual action plan and serves as a link for the exchange

of information with the Committee of Senior Officials. The Committee of Senior Officials is the cooperation between the governments that takes place at expert level and submits proposals and recommendations for the cooperation to the other Baltic institutes. There are currently five Committees of Senior Officials operating in the BCM in the areas energy, transport, defence, environment, and internal issues (Baltic Governments (A), 2003; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, 2018).

The BCM only has power to decide issues when authorized representatives of all the Baltic States are present. The decisions in the Baltic Council of Ministers are taken by consensus and are binding for the Baltic States, if the decision that is taken is not against the national legislation of each country (Baltic Governments A, 2003).

The parliamentary coordination between the Baltic States occurs through the Baltic Assembly. The Baltic Assembly is an entity under international law that was established in 1991 and consists of members of three delegations from the parliaments of the Baltic States. The members of these three delegations are appointed so that they are a proportionate (political) representation of the national parliaments. The political delegation of each Baltic State to the Baltic Assembly consists of 12 to 16 parliamentarians and the Baltic Assembly has its own permanent Secretariat. It is a coordinating and consultative institution. It should be mentioned that once a year the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Council of Ministers meet in a joint session that is called the Baltic Council. (Baltic Assembly, 2018; Cogen, 2016: 181-184).

The legal basis of the cooperation of the Baltic States goes back to the Treaty on Concord and Cooperation that was signed in 1934 in Geneva. This Treaty was renewed with the Declaration on Unity and Co-operation by the Republic of Estonia, Republic of Latvia and Republic of Lithuania that was signed in 1990. The tasks and powers of both the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Council of Ministers and their cooperation with each other are clearly defined and described in protocols and regulations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, 2018). Important is that in the Agreement on Baltic Parliamentary and Governmental Co-operation between the Republic of Estonia, the Republic of Latvia and the Republic of Lithuania mention is made that a report on the activities related to the resolutions that were adopted in the previous year has to be presented during the meeting of the Baltic Council (Baltic Governments (B), 2003: 4).

In sum, the cooperation of the Baltic States has quite a high degree of formality. This is because the cooperation of the Baltic States occurs through two formal institutes that have a strong legal basis and definition of tasks and responsibilities. The interactions between the two institutes are also formalized and the meeting of the two institutes could even be described as being a third institute (the Baltic Council) due to the formal rules and tasks this meeting encompasses. The annual report following up on the decisions taken last year also shows the formality of the Baltic cooperation.

The cooperation of the second regional group researched in this thesis, the Benelux countries, is organized along two different streams, the Benelux Union and the Benelux political cooperation. The cooperation through the Benelux Union is the more formally structured cooperation that is regulated through the Benelux Treaty and is done through multiple institutes. The practical Benelux cooperation began during World War 2 and first focussed on economic cooperation. In 1960 the Treaty that created the predecessor to the Benelux Union, the Benelux Economic Union, was signed. To understand the importance of the Benelux cooperation it is important to note the relationship between the Benelux cooperation and the European integration. In Article 233 of the EEC-treaty (now Article 350 of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) it was stated that (the content of) this treaty should not preclude either the existence or the completion of the regional union between the countries of the Benelux. The (formal) Benelux cooperation is thus mandated to integrate further than the European integration (Interview 3, IOB, 2012: 27-28 & 35-36; Strategische Adviesraad internationaal Vlaanderen (SARiV), 2009: 3).

The original Benelux Treaty was valid until 1 February 2010. The negotiations for the new Treaty started in June 2007, were completed on 17 June 2008 and the Treaty was ratified on 1 January 2012. The new Treaty aimed to improve the Benelux cooperation so that it can continue to play a leading role in the EU and so that the cross-border cooperation is improved. The three core policy focusses of the new Treaty are: Economic Union and Internal Market, Sustainable Development and Justice and Internal Affairs. Due to the broadening of the focus of the cooperation from the economic union to other fields, the name of the (formal) cooperation was changed from the Benelux Economic Union to the Benelux Union. Since 2011 the presidency of the Benelux cooperation through the Benelux Union and the Benelux Political Cooperation rotates annually (IOB, 2012: 3, 37 & 40-46; IOB, 2014: 128-129).

The Benelux Union now consists of five institutes. These are the Committee of Ministers, the Benelux Council, the Benelux Interparlementaire Assemblee, the Benelux Secretariat General and the Benelux Court of Justice. The Committee of Ministers is the institute of the Benelux Council that creates the priorities, guidelines and the budget of the Benelux Union. The Committee is under the new Treaty required to meet at least once annually and to consist of at least one representative of ministerial level of each of the three countries. The Benelux Council consists of high level public officials from each of the three countries and has the task to prepare the meetings of the Committee. It can also create or end Benelux working groups and controls the implementation of the decisions from the Committee. Both the Committee of Ministers and the Benelux Council can differ in configuration based on the issues being discussed (IOB, 2012: 42-46).

The Benelux Interparlementaire Assemblee (originally called the Advisory Interparliamentary Benelux Council) is the forum of parliamentary cooperation between the Benelux countries. It consists of 49 members (21 Dutch, 21 Belgian and 7 Luxembourger) and meets three times a year. The legal basis of the Benelux Interparlementaire Assemblee is an additional Treaty between the Benelux countries that has been changed and renewed in 2015 (Benelux Governments, 2015; Benelux Interparlementaire Assemblee, 2018; IOB, 2012: 42-46).

The task of the Benelux Secretariat General is to facilitate the workings of the Benelux Council, Committee of Ministers and the various working groups and is based in Brussel, Belgium. In 2018 around 55 people work for the Secretariat-General. The Benelux Court of Justice consists of nine members from the magistrates of the highest courts of the Benelux countries and promotes the equality of the enforcement of the common legal rules of the Benelux laws on areas such as intellectual property (Benelux-Gerechtshof, 2018; Benelux Interparlementaire Assemblee, 2018; Secretariat General Benelux, 2018; IOB, 2012: 42-46).

The second form of Benelux cooperation is the Benelux Political Cooperation. This is a form of consultation and coordination between the governments of the Benelux countries and is organised outside of the Benelux Treaty framework. At the signing of the 2008 Treaty, the Benelux governments brought out a political declaration on the future of the Benelux Political Cooperation. The message of this declaration was that the Benelux Political Cooperation would be intensified because the governments of the Benelux saw in an extended European Union of 27

member states reason to speak with one voice on a broad issue of topics. The Benelux Ministers of Foreign Affairs already met before the meetings of the EU General Affairs Council and the EU Foreign Affairs Council and the European Council. To intensify the cooperation, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs will also meet before the start of every EU-presidency to attune their long-term positions so that a mark can be put on the EU decision-making (Benelux governments, 2008; IOB, 2012: 27-28; SARiV, 2009: 3).

In sum, the cooperation of the Benelux countries has a rather high degree of formality. Two treaties about the cooperation between the countries (for the governmental and for the parliamentary cooperation) are currently active. Through the EU Treaties the Benelux countries also have an explicit legal basis to integrate further than the EU. The cooperation has multiple institutions and their tasks and powers are defined. In addition, on the European level there are agreements on when (representatives of) the countries meet to align on issues.

The last regional group of which the organisation of the cooperation is analysed in this thesis is the Visegrad group. The organisation of the cooperation between the Visegrad countries is quite interesting because it is almost completely non-institutionalized. No institution exists to organize or maintain the cooperation between the Visegrad countries. Instead, the cooperation is solely based on periodical meetings between representatives at various levels. The Visegrad group has an annual rotating presidency and one of the tasks of this presidency is to organize the meetings of the Visegrad group. Some of these meetings are clearly scheduled, like the official summits between the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad countries that take place on an annual basis, while other meetings are ad-hoc, between representatives of the countries on issues that they can cooperate in. Cooperation between the respective ministries of the Visegrad countries constitutes an important part of the activities within the Visegrad framework. A different task of the presiding country of the Visegrad group is to draft a one-year plan of action, the Presidency program. The program is drafted by the presiding country with input and advice from the other Visegrad countries but is decided upon by the presiding country. The Visegrad countries meet regularly before EU Council meetings and depending on the circumstances before meetings of the EU Council of Ministers (Visegradgroup.eu (A), 2018; Visegradgroup.eu (B), 2018; Interview 4).

A further illustration of the low degree of institutionalization is the legal basis of the Visegrad cooperation. The legal basis of the cooperation between the Visegrad countries is based on a declaration by the leaders of the governments of the then three countries. After Czechoslovakia split up both successor countries joined the Visegrad cooperation. The reassessment of the goals of the Visegrad cooperation after the countries joined the EU was also based on a declaration by the governments of all Visegrad countries (Visegradgroup.eu (A), 2018; Visegradgroup.eu (B), 2018).

The fact that the cooperation of the Visegrad countries is not institutionalised does not mean that there is no organization within the platform of the Visegrad Group. The International Visegrad Fund, which was established in 2000, is the only organization that exists within the Visegrad platform. This Fund aims to promote regional cooperation between the Visegrad countries through subsidizing and assisting projects but does not assist the cooperation between the governments of the countries in any way (Visegradfund.org, 2018; Visegradgroup.eu (B), 2018)

In sum, the Visegrad cooperation has a rather low degree of formality. The reason for this is that the Visegrad cooperation is almost non-institutionalized. The cooperation is based on declarations by the governments of the countries, it is organized through a rotating presidency without assistance of a more permanent institute like a secretariat and only one organization exists within the Visegrad framework, the international Visegrad Fund. This organisation does not help coordinate the cooperation by the governmental but assists projects that are often started by NGO's.

Overall the regional groups all have rotating presidencies and all meet on regularly basis but the degree of formality that the cooperation of the regional groups have differs. The cooperation by the Visegrad countries has clearly the lowest degree of formality of the regional groups researched in this thesis. The reason for this is that the cooperation is based on declarations and that there is no institute that coordinates the cooperation. The Baltic States have the second lowest degree of formality of the regional groups. The reason for this is that the cooperation is based on a treaty from 1934 that was declared valid again in 1990 and that the regional group has institutes with clearly defined tasks and powers through which the cooperation occurs. The Benelux cooperation is the cooperation that has the highest degree of formality of the researched regional groups. The reason for this is that the Benelux cooperation is clearly decided in a

political and a practical cooperation. The practical cooperation is based on multiple treaties and has multiple institutes to coordinate and assists the cooperation. When the political cooperation occurs is also defined in declarations by the countries and this does not only occur before European Council meetings but also before meetings of variants of the EU council of ministers on a regular basis. It has to be mentioned that even though this difference in the degree of formality of the governmental cooperation exists the decision-making process in all three regional groups is based on consensus. The self-restraint is about the ways that the countries in the regional group interact (formalized or more flexible) and not necessarily about the decision-making process.

The hypotheses that is tested in this section of the analysis is: *(H3): The lower the degree of formality the higher the differentiation in opinions in subregional groups in EU decision-making.* Comparing the degree of formality of the regional groups and the degree of consensus in EU decision making of these same regional groups the hypothesis is rejected. The reason for this is that the degree of consensus and the degree of formality of the regional group do not correspond with the hypothesis. The Visegrad countries do have the lowest level of consensus and the lowest degree of formality but the situation of the Benelux and the Baltics are different. The Benelux countries have the second highest level of consensus of the regional groups while at the same time having the highest degree of formality. The Baltic States, on the other hand, have the highest level of consensus of the researched regional groups in EU decision-making while at the same time having the second highest degree of formality. Therefore, hypothesis 3 is rejected.

6 Discussion

In the previous section of this thesis the researched variables were analysed to come to the main findings of this thesis. In this section these findings are recapped and discussed. Explanations and alternative interpretations for the findings are given and the limitations of this thesis are discussed.

Three choices that have been made in this thesis should be mentioned because they affect the interpretation of the findings of this thesis. The first of these choices is that this thesis compares three regional groups with each other while two regional groups have three members and one regional group has four members. This choice has been kept in mind throughout the entire thesis and (possible) issues have been (partly) mitigated by the methods used to analyse the variables but it should be realized that the various regional groups have different amounts of members.

This thesis has chosen to research all members of the regional group with four members (Visegrad) as done by academic literature (i.e. Ruse 2012) instead of excluding a member of the regional group because this thesis focusses on the outcomes of the entire regional group.

Discounting one of the members of the regional group might influence the outcomes of this thesis more than comparing regional group with different amounts of members while accounting for this difference.

The second choice that should be mentioned is that this thesis compares the variables on the data of the researched period to test the hypotheses (as i.e. Van Aken, 2012). The year by year method could also have been chosen to analyse the effects of the independent variables year by year. A possible issue with the year-by-year method is that it could be affected by fluctuations between the years. Therefore, the method to compare the (variation in the) variables that occurred in the researched period was chosen so that the pattern of the variables became clear (Van Aken, 2012: 30-34; Yin, 1994: 25).

The third choice made in this thesis that should be mentioned is that the variables are interpreted based on the positions of the regional groups on these variables (i.e. regional group a has a higher degree of variable x than regional group b). This results in findings that clearly show the relative positions of the regional groups on the variables but do not show the precise distance between the positions. These distances are discussed in the analysis of the respective variables but the

positions of the regional groups on the variables are used to test the hypotheses. This was done because, through comparing cases, this thesis aims to test whether the independent variables affect the dependent variable but does not focus on the strength of this effect. An advantage of this method is that (strong) rejections of causal relationships between variables can be concluded (Blatter & Haverland, 2012: 9-12 & 15; Yin, 1994: 25-26 & 47-51).

In the previous paragraphs of the discussion the choices that influence the interpretations were discussed in the coming section the relation between the theoretical predictions and the finding of this thesis are discussed. The findings of the relations between the independent variables and the dependent variable of the researched cases in this thesis turn out as predicted for some variables but are contradictory for other variables (Yin, 1994: 46-47). The findings for the variable of interdependency are completely in line with the theoretical predictions inspired by Wendt (1999). The findings of this thesis are that the regional group (Baltics) with the highest economic interdependency also has the highest level of consensus of the researched regional groups, the regional group with the second highest level of economic interdependency (Benelux) has the second highest level of consensus in EU decision-making and the regional group with the lowest economic interdependency had the lowest level of consensus in EU decision-making.

The findings for the variable heterogeneity turn out as in line with the theoretical predictions inspired by Wendt (1999) and Holzinger and Schimmelfennig (2012) for most of the dimensions of this variable (political, cultural and Eurosceptic). The findings for the economic dimension of this variable are contrary to the theoretical predictions. In this thesis economic heterogeneity has been calculated on eight different indicators and both the overview of all indicators and no single economic indicator fit the theoretical predictions. These findings make the rejection of the hypothesis on the effect of the economic heterogeneity of regional groups on the level of consensus in EU decision-making quite strong. A possible explanation for the fact that economic heterogeneity of the regional group has does not have the theoretically predicted effect on the level of consensus is related to economic interdependency. It might be the case that the effect of the economic dimension on the level of consensus of regional groups is less related to the size of the differences between them and more to the degree that it affects the entire regional group (economic interdependency).

It should be noted that while the hypothesis about the effect of the economical heterogeneity on the level of consensus is rejected all of the other researched dimensions of heterogeneity (political, cultural and Eurosceptic) fit in with the theoretical predictions. The findings of this thesis could thus be interpreted as supporting the theoretical relation between (these dimensions of) heterogeneity and the level of consensus of the regional groups.

The last variable that is researched in this thesis is the degree of formality. The findings of the relation between the degree of formality and the level of consensus are contradictory to the theoretical predictions inspired by Wendt (1999) and Vabulas and Snidal (2013). While the Visegrad cooperation is both the regional group with the highest degree of formality and the lowest degree of consensus in EU decision-making the Benelux and the Baltics are different than theoretically predicted. A possible explanation of this striking finding is that even though the formality of the interactions between the countries of the regional groups and the decisions that the regional groups can take are quite different, the decision-making processes are not. Decisions within the regional groups are taken with consent of the representatives of all countries belonging to the group. This explanation would fit in Abbot and Snidal (1998) theory about the importance of power distribution in international organizations even though this thesis tests the level of consensus of the regional groups in the EU decision-making process instead of their own organisations.

An alternative explanation for the findings on the relation between the degree of formality and the level of consensus in this thesis is related to the organization of the regional cooperation. Regional groups not having an organization of cooperation that does not or interacts little between the various parts of the cooperation might influence the effects of the degree of formality of the organization. This division between various streams of the regional cooperation occurs for example in the Benelux cooperation with a division between the Benelux Political Cooperation and the cooperation through the Benelux Union (interview 3).

In conclusion, this section has discussed the findings of this thesis and choices that were made in this thesis that influenced the findings. Most of the researched relations between the independent variables and the dependent variable were in line with the theoretical predictions. For the other relations between the independent variables and the dependent variable alternative interpretations were given.

7 Conclusion

In this section the research question is answered. The goal of this thesis is to gain further insight into (the reasons for the) behaviour of regional groups in EU decision-making. To come to this insight, the following research question is used in this thesis: *To what degree do the characteristics of the cooperating regional groups of EU member states influence their level of consensus in EU decision-making?* The level of consensus of three regional groups active on the EU decision-making level, the Baltics, the Benelux and the Visegrad and the possible variables affecting their level of consensus are researched in this thesis.

The variables, of which the possible influence on the level of consensus in regional groups are tested, were inspired by Wendt's (1999) causal mechanisms for regional cooperation. The effects of interdependency between the countries of the regional groups, heterogeneity of the countries of the regional group and formality of the organisation of the cooperation on the level of consensus of regional groups are tested through hypotheses.

The hypothesis that tests the effects of interdependency of the regional group on the level of consensus of regional groups in EU decision-making is: *(H1) The higher the interdependency between the members of the subregional group the lower the differentiation of opinions in EU decision-making.* The findings of this thesis make that this hypothesis cannot be rejected because the findings are in line with the theoretical prediction. The regional groups with higher interdependency indeed also have a higher level of consensus in EU decision-making.

The effects of the variable heterogeneity on the level of consensus of regional groups on EU decision-making are tested by dividing this variable in four different dimensions (political, economic, cultural and Eurosceptic heterogeneity). The hypotheses that are used in this thesis to test the effects of political, economic, cultural and Eurosceptic heterogeneity of the regional group on the level of consensus of regional groups in EU decision-making are: *(H2.1) The higher the political heterogeneity within a subregional group the higher the differentiation of opinions in EU decision-making; (H2.2) The higher the economic heterogeneity within a regional group the higher the differentiation of opinions in EU decision-making; (H2.3) The higher the cultural heterogeneity within a regional group the higher the differentiation of opinions in EU decision-making; (H2.4) The higher the Eurosceptic heterogeneity within a regional group the higher the*

differentiation of opinions in EU decision-making. The findings of this thesis for the political, cultural and Eurosceptic heterogeneity fit within the theoretical predictions. The findings for economic heterogeneity are contrary to the theoretical predictions. When the political, cultural or Eurosceptic heterogeneity is higher the differentiation of opinion of the regional group on the EU level is also higher. Contrary to theoretical predictions the differentiation of opinion of the regional group is not higher when the economic heterogeneity is higher.

The hypothesis on the effects of the degree of formality of the regional group on the level of consensus of regional groups in EU decision-making that this thesis tests is: (H3): *The lower the degree of formality the higher the differentiation in opinions in regional groups in EU decision-making.* The findings of this thesis show that the relation between the degree of formality and the level of consensus in EU decision-making of regional groups contradicts with the theoretical prediction. It is not the case that the lower the degree of formality of the researched regional groups the higher the differentiation of opinion of this regional group in EU decision-making.

The answer to the research question: there is a covariation between the independent variables interdependency, political heterogeneity, cultural heterogeneity and Eurosceptic heterogeneity and the dependent variable of the level of consensus of the regional group. To conclude that an independent variable has a causal effect on the dependent variable the co-variational method requires that there are no theoretically plausible co-variations between other independent variables and the dependent variable. Therefore, it is not possible to infer a causal relationship between the researched independent variables and the dependent variable in this thesis. The reason for this is that, as the finding of this thesis show, there is more than one theoretically plausible independent variable that has a co-variation with the level of consensus.

When there is no co-variation between the scores of the independent variable and the dependent variable it can be concluded that there is no causal relationship between these variables. The findings of this thesis are that, contrary to academic literature and theoretical predictions, there is no covariation between the independent variables economic heterogeneity and the degree of formality of the regional group and the dependent variable the level of consensus of the regional group. A causal relationship between these independent variables and the dependent variable can, contrary to theoretical predictions, thus be rejected. This means that, contrary to the theory, it is not the way that the cooperation of the regional groups is institutionally organized and the

economic situation that cause the regional groups to “speak with one voice”. This has practical implications for the cooperation between EU member states in regional groups. A practical implication of the findings is that countries looking to start a regional cooperation on the EU level with a high level of consensus do not have to cooperate with countries in the same economic situation (rich and poor) to have this high level of consensus. A further practical implication is that a regional cooperation does not need to have formal institutions facilitating the cooperation to have a high level of consensus in EU decision-making.

A recommendation for further research is to replicate the research into the effects the degree of formality of the regional group has on the level of consensus of regional groups in EU decision-making. This can be done to gain further insights into the effects of the organization of the cooperation on the level of consensus and possible explanations for these effects. A research into the impact that updating the cooperation to the EU level has on the behaviour of the regional groups would also be intriguing. Through this way insights could be gained in the effects that cooperating in the EU context has on the behaviour and the cooperation of the regional groups. A research that could, for example, be done to research the effect of this update is a comparison between the level of consensus of the regional groups before and after they updated their cooperation to the EU context.

Intriguing to research are also the effects the cooperation between the various regional groups active on the EU level has on the behaviour of these regional groups. The frequency of meetings, the organization of the cooperation and the decision-making process of the regional groups and the effect this has on EU policy are also variables that could be influenced by the cooperation with other regional groups. Research into the precise causes of the level of consensus of regional groups in EU decision-making is also a field of research that deserves further attention.

To conclude, this thesis has found that regional groups ‘speaking with one voice’ on EU decision-making might be caused by the interdependency, political-, cultural- and Eurosceptic heterogeneity of the regional group. Contrary to the theoretical predictions, the economic heterogeneity and the degree of formality of the regional group do not have a causal relationship with the level of consensus of the regional group. Further research is advised, to understand the precise reasons behind the (difference of the) degree that EU regional groups ‘speak with one voice’.

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9 Annex

9.1 Annex A

The data on the degree of consensus is from both Votewatch.eu and the dataset of the Council “Dataset: Council votes on legislative acts” published by the General Secretariat of the Council (Council of the European Union, 2018). The data from Votewatch.eu has been gathered by going to the Council of Ministers section of the webpage. In this section, member states is chosen and then votes for all of the countries that are being researched. The votes between the period of 01-01-2010 and 31-12-2015 are then selected for each country that is being researched (Belgium, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia). When the country did not vote in favour of a proposal the information about this proposal (date vote, vote, country, other countries not voting in favour, name proposal, statements, votes by regional group, voting area, council configuration).

The online version of the dataset of the Council “Dataset: Council votes on legislative acts” (Council of the European Union, 2018) is also used to gather proposals in which countries of the regional group vote not in favour in the EU Council of ministers. The votes between the period of 01-01-2010 and 31-12-2015 are selected for each country that is being researched and date of the vote, vote of country and name of proposal are written down. The data from both datasets is then compared. When the data from both datasets on a proposal in the Council of ministers is the same, the data is used in the calculation of the degree of consensus. When differences occur the proposals on which these differences occur are checked in Eur-Lex (EU Publications Office, 2018). When this dataset shows that a member of the regional group voted not in favour on the proposal the data is used the calculation of the degree of consensus. The dataset with the precise proposals used is available on request.

9.2 Annex B

Interviews

Interview 1: Janneke Faber (Policy Coordinator Benelux/Deputy Head of Department Europe Division - Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs), 14 December 2017.

Interview 2: Marc Gerritsen (Head of Strategic Advice at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs), 24 January 2018.

Interview 3: Jan Willem Scholten (Desk Officer for Visegrad-4 countries, Europe Division of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs), & Lisa Gorter (Policy Officer Benelux, Europe Division of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs), 21 December 2017.

Interview 4: Ondřej Picka (Multilateral Economic Relations Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic), Adéla Rubešová (desk officer responsible for the V4 cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, Department of Central Europe) and Mr Pavel Stiegler (desk officer responsible for the V4 cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, Department of Central Europe), 21 May 2018.

Transcripts of interviews available on request

9.3 Annex C

Interview guide

Introduction.

Thanking for the interviewee for being there and letting them explain what their connection with the {regional group} is.

What is in your opinion the most important aim of the {regional group}?

What do you see at the greatest advantage of the {regional group}?

In your opinion, how much strength do the agreements made within the {regional group} have?

Are the agreements that have been made in the {regional group} collected, monitored and/or enforced?

Do you see a greater role for the {regional group} in managing crises or in routine situations?

Why?

How often do the countries in the {regional group} meet on EU level and how is this organized?

Are there in your opinion differences in the cooperation between the countries within {regional group}?

What do you see as the biggest difference between the cooperation in {your regional} group versus {other researched regional groups}?

Is there something you would like to add or something that I missed that we should have discussed?

Once more thanking for their time and goodbye