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Can Small States Influence EU Norms?

Insights From Sweden's Participation in the Field of Environmental Politics

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IN A FORTHCOMING BOOK, Christine Ingebritsen challenges the view that small states lack power in international relations by pointing to the Scandinavian countries' influence on the setting of international norms. For example, since the early 1970s, Sweden has been particularly active in pushing for environmental norms in various international settings. The Swedish government announced it would continue to do so as well in terms of its EU membership. In 1995 the government promised a skeptical electorate that it would not compromise domestic environmental norms (Kronsell 1997a). Looking back at Sweden's six years of EU membership, we note some evidence that these ambitions have at least partly materialized. One important example is the EU acidification strategy (COM 2001); another, the efforts at common legislation on the control of the use of chemicals. The commitment to environmental issues was stressed further as the strategies for the Swedish presidency of the EU during the first part of 2001 were announced. The main goals of the Swedish presidency were enlargement, employment, and environment. The foundation for the arguments in this article is a set of interviews conducted participants in EU environmental policy making,¹ as well as

I want to express my gratitude to the Swedish Research Foundation (HSFR) and to the Department of Political Science, University of Washington for making my year as a visiting scholar so successful. I am particularly thankful to Professor Christine Ingebritsen who encouraged me to pursue my research in the direction of this article and Dr. Baldur Thorhallsson for valuable comments. The most recent set of interviews, of November 2000, were done with the help of a financial contribution from a Project on the Presidency led by Bo Bjurulf and Ole Elgström at the department of Political Science, Lund University.

¹ In January and February of 1998, I conducted nineteen telephone interviews and in November of 2000, seventeen interviews with key policy makers in the National Environmental Protection Agency, the Chemical's Inspectorate, the Ministry of Environment, with members of the Parliamentary EU committee, the Nature Conservation Society, and Greenpeace. I want to thank all of the participants for patiently answering my questions and inquiries.

studies commissioned by the Swedish government.² The main goal in this article is to challenge the arguments that small states have little or no influence in global politics by analyzing Swedish relations to the EU in the area of environmental issues. The article will assess that relationship in terms of what kind of influence can be discerned.

SWEDEN IN INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL RELATIONS

Ingebritsen suggests that small states like the Scandinavian countries can make important contributions to world politics as norm setters or as “entrepreneurs of good practice” even with limited power and resources. Norm setting can hence be a means of influencing world affairs. Like other international organizations, the EU too is a norm-generating arena, even more extensive than other international, regional organizations or regimes. If we take Ingebritsen’s thesis as valid for the international context, it may be relevant to the EU as well. Before looking at exactly how Sweden has exerted influence in the EU, I want to briefly outline the background of Sweden’s involvement in international environmental politics and highlight aspects that are relevant for the Swedish position on environmental issues in the EU today.

Over the years, the pollution problems perceived as particularly threatening and urgent by policy makers and the public have been problems of a transnational kind. Motivations for Sweden’s active involvement in international environmental policy making have been largely associated with environmental vulnerability and a perceived threat to national interests. In other words, many of the environmental issues that Swedish policy makers have pursued internationally have also been issues related to environmental problems that could only be resolved by other nations also taking action.

² These governmentally-commissioned studies are based on extensive interviews and surveys with policy makers involved in EU work. The following have been most valuable as empirical material for this study: Ds 1994:126, *Det svenska miljöarbetet i EU*; Ds 1997: 68 *Det svenska miljöarbetet i EU—uppföljning av 1995 års strategi*, Ministry of Environment; Statskontoret 2000:20 *Fem år i EU—en utvärdering av statsförvaltningens medverkan i eu-samarbetet*; Statskontoret 2000: 20A *Den svenska förvaltningsmodellen i EU arbetet*; Statskontoret 2000: 20B, *Fallstudier av tre eu-intensiva politikområden*, The Swedish Agency for Public Management; SOU 2001: 4, *Kemikalieinspektionen—översyn av verksamhet, resurser och finansiering*, Ministry of Environment.

A TRANSNATIONAL AGENDA FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

In the 1960s, there was an increasing problem with urban air pollution in Sweden. Within a few years Swedish scientists had discovered that urban air pollution could be traced to high contents of sulfur in heating oil. When alerted to the problem, politicians simply outlawed the use of high-sulfur oil.³ The urban air quickly improved but acidification remained a problem because the jet stream brought winds, particularly from Germany and Great Britain, with precipitation that polluted Swedish lakes and forests. Starting in the 1970s, policy makers and experts, who had exhausted what could be done within the borders, tried to come to terms with acidification by inaugurating international cooperation. The first UN conference on environmental issues was held in Stockholm in 1972, partly on the initiative of Swedish policy-makers, who also presented their position paper on acid rain to the conference.

Another more recent issue firmly based in the national interests of Sweden is the regulation of chemical products. Sweden is a country with comparatively strict chemical legislation. Many chemicals allowed in Europe and the rest of the world are forbidden or have their use highly restricted in Sweden. Such restrictions come into conflict with norms of free trade, particularly in terms of the integrated market of the EU. Swedish experts and policy makers have tried to play a prominent and active role in the work on international standardization of chemicals for a long period of time.⁴ The interest of Swedish policy makers in the regulation in the field of chemicals and products has been particularly geared toward the desire to control the content of goods imported into the country. The urgency of convincing other member states to adopt regulations similar to Swedish policy is striking. If they are not successful in their efforts, previously banned chemicals might have to be reintroduced on the Swedish market as an effect of the standardization and harmonization of the trade in goods. An example is the use of the pesticide 2,4-D which was banned from the Swedish market in 1991, but because it is not banned in the EU countries, will now be

³ That it went so quickly is in itself very interesting. In brief terms, it appears to have been due to an unusual relationship between experts and policy makers at this particular point in time.

⁴ For a longer discussion on Sweden’s ambition to set an example in international relations and the EU and how that relates to domestic developments in policy and polity see Annica Kronsell (1997a).

again allowed in Sweden, needless to say, a development much to the disappointment of policy makers.

The participation in international environmental cooperation is the rationale of the activities conducted in the EU arena, but it is carried out differently by the various actors involved. The Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) and the Chemicals Inspectorate (ChemI) are the two main actors who provide expertise both in the Commission working group and to the political representation in the Ministry of Environment and to the Swedish representation in Brussels.⁵

In international politics, it is often argued that important power bases can be such things as the country's size, its population, natural resources, and military or economic status. The criteria certainly apply to the EU as well and give certain countries more esteem and legitimacy apart from what is granted by the institutional organization exemplified by the number of votes in the Council. While it is always important and interesting whether one of the bigger member states is likely to be supporting or blocking an initiative—act as a laggard or a forerunner—it might be less important how one of the smaller states intends to act. However, voting strength is not the only way of making an impact. Most agreements are made in the many day to day negotiations carried out throughout the EU. Hence, most of the work is done in various meetings between people who are representing sometimes only vague notions of a national interest. This fact suggests that important power resources may be the ones employed successfully in that context. This claim, then, is the basis for the following argument that small states' influence may be enhanced by being active EU members.

SWEDISH GOALS FOR EU ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

When it comes to environmental policies, the EU has developed into a far-reaching regime incomparable in scope and strength to any other international cooperative arrangement. This is mainly due to the pro-

⁵ The work of the two Agencies, the Chemical's Inspectorate and the Environmental Protection Agency, toward the EU differs substantially. This is because chemical policy is concerned with trade and hence is subject to standardization directives; environmental regulation, however, is normally based on minimum directives. This is important because standardization directives requires identical standards over the entire community while the latter allows for member states to go beyond minimum directives in their efforts at environmental protection.

cess of integration, which seems continuously to increase the areas of jurisdiction and the mechanisms for enforcement at hand in the EU. Furthermore, it is an ongoing negotiating arena where the steady input of ideas, perspectives, and comments seem to be encouraged and, at least, always expected. Norms that have been used in national contexts have served as models for EU directives or proposals. The explicit intention of the Swedish government has been, even before membership negotiations, to try to push the EU in the direction of Swedish environmental policy. There seems to be a very strong conviction among policy makers today that this is also at least to some degree possible. However, as five years in the EU has shown, compromises are necessary, and Swedish environmental policy is not always perfect but has its own flaws and weaknesses.

Looking back, it is clear that Swedish policy makers have had some success in pursuing their goals in the area of environmental policy. Although causal links cannot easily be verified, the EU has nevertheless adopted an acidification strategy and has agreed to a revision of the existing chemical policy and recently launched a chemical strategy (KOM 2001:88). Policy makers also attest to a whole range of small-scale or partial successes within the negotiations of specific directives. Evidence of small successes are exemplified by such things as convincing the rest of the member states to adopt the Swedish version of the definition of BAT (Best Available Technology), or adopting central parts of the Swedish equivalent in the EU IPPC (Integrated Pollution Prevention Control) directive. What will be investigated in what follows is the type of influence that is important in this issue area and how that influence is asserted.

HOW CAN SMALL STATES INFLUENCE THE EU AGENDA?

The remainder of this article discusses the factors that have contributed to Sweden's modest success in making an impact on the formation of common EU environmental policies. Before going into these factors in more detail, it is necessary to say something about perceptions of "the nature of the EU." There are various theoretical examinations and equally as many views on what European integration is all about. Hence, there is no one way to study EU processes. One suggestion, however, is to approach EU as a case of new governance (Kohler-Koch 1996). From this perspective, the vision of the EU is as a new governance form resulting

from a range of parallel processes such as states pooling their sovereignty, the influence of a discourse of integration over time, spillover effects, and path dependency in policy making. One key characteristic of new governance is that it takes place in networks, where relations between different actors are important (Kohler-Koch 1999). Policy making in the EU can, therefore, perhaps be best understood as an integrated system of multi-level negotiations and bargaining (Grande 1996). The difference from a national system and the uniqueness of EU is that there is not one central authority in a multi-level governance system. This may be particularly fruitful as we address how this multi-level governance system may empower new and different actors.

Here I want to suggest that small states have been partially empowered by this new governance system and have gained influence particularly as norm setters. I will consider four different aspects and discuss how they have contributed to Sweden's influence on EU environmental policy. They are: (1) reputation and expectation on behavior, (2) expertise and knowledge as an important resource in the environmental policy process, (3) the importance of national policies as examples of success, and (4) successful coordination of national interest. Each aspect will be discussed in turn.

REPUTATION: SWEDEN AS A FORERUNNER STATE IN ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

What reputation may mean for the relations between states has been extensively and theoretically analyzed, for example, in the field of conflict resolution. In the past, the concern in international relations has been largely overshadowed by super power relations and dealt mainly with those relations and much less with small states.⁶ Nevertheless, such approaches tend to indicate that impressions and perceptions of the partners to the negotiation process are important for the outcome (Shelling 1960; Snyder and Diesing 1977; Axelrod 1984). The perception that the participants at any negotiation table have of one another seems to be a function of previous experiences and earlier interactions. Cognitive frames that are based on previous experience constitute the expectations that partners in any negotiations hold of

⁶ There are obviously exceptions such as Peter Katzenstein (1985) and Baldur Thorhallsson (2000).

one another. Furthermore, reputation will have an impact on current relations because behavior is interpreted and judged against those frames. What is less understood is how those previous interactions are framed and exactly how they determine current activities (Mercer 1996). As Jonathan Mercer stresses, we need to be particularly cautious in drawing causal links between reputation and behavior because such processes are highly subjective and interpretive. While proceeding with some caution, we will here infer that Sweden's behavior is interpreted positively because of the general cooperative ambition between the EU member states.⁷ Furthermore, we will presume that the expectations of Sweden's behavior in EU environmental relations during the past years have been informed by the reputation incurred in previous engagements in international environmental relations. Swedish policy makers concerned with issues related to the environmental field have been very active in international negotiations, cooperation, and organizations and hence enjoy a reputation of being "activists" or "forerunners" on such issues. This means that the behavior of Swedish negotiators in the field of environmental politics was likely subject to such pre-established interpretive frames at the time of membership. There were expectations that Swedish policy makers would pursue environmental goals and line up with the so called "forerunner states." Among the policy makers of the other EU member states—the partners in negotiations—there was already an established image-based on the domestic environmental record and, perhaps more importantly, previous engagement in international environmental relations. Based on this fact, we can conclude that reputation and previous relations can become important resources for small states in EU negotiations. Simply because, as in this case, it gave Swedish representatives and experts alike a certain legitimacy to act on such matters.

Many policy makers have confirmed in interviews that Sweden's history of international environmental cooperation has been to their advantage in the EU and is illustrated by the following quotations from a recent study of the Chemicals Inspectorate (ChemI). ChemI is one of the two administrative agencies responsible for the management and implementation of environmental policy, domestic as well as European. Many of those interviewed in connection with the study of ChemI "point

⁷ Mercer discusses the different impact that the type of relationship has on cognitive frames of the actors and suggests that between enemies negative interpretation will prevail and between allies positive interpretations (1996:59–65).

to the fact that ChemI is perceived as having highly reliable expert knowledge and a high legitimacy internationally and within the EU.” One policy maker is quoted as saying: “This means that we have won acceptance for more than what is motivated for a country the size of Sweden. Sweden and ChemI have a solid reputation internationally” (SOU 2001:4:58). Even though these quotations and the study in general focus on ChemI, similar views have been expressed with regard to the EU work of the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA), which is the other agency responsible for environmental policy implementation.⁸ While international reputation as an environmental forerunner might benefit Swedish representatives and outfit them with particular power resources wherever they find themselves in the multi-levels of EU governance, in time it may be limiting to a new member. As negotiation and network relationships develop within the EU, it is likely that intra-EU experiences will overshadow pre-EU relations. It is highly likely that Sweden’s success or failure in handling the EU presidency is an important challenge which will also be an input to the way that Swedish policy maker’s future behavior will be interpreted by other member states. Indeed, from the perspective of the policy makers involved, an important goal for the presidency was to demonstrate to the member states that Sweden is a very competent and dedicated EU member. A satisfactory performance of the presidency creates trust and legitimacy that is expected to benefit Sweden significantly in future EU relations. Again, it supports the proposition that reputation and previous relations can become important resources for small states in international relations.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EXPERTISE AND KNOWLEDGE

In the field of environmental policy, the need for expert knowledge is often addressed. Indeed, what we broadly call to environmental concerns are often highly complicated issues demanding the input of technical and scientific experts. While the EU acidification strategy has a more general framework character and perhaps can adequately be handled by generalists, most of the EU directives required much more specific and detailed knowledge. For example, specific directives sug-

⁸ Both of the agencies play an important role in the transposition of EU environmental legislation partly due to the traditional division of labor between autonomous agencies and the ministries in Swedish policy making are partly due to the high demands on administrative capacity of smaller member states (see Baldur Thorhallsson [2000]).

gested ways of implementing the acidification strategy have to do with the limitation of exhaust in various vehicle types. Experts, who can provide facts about exhaust processes, are aware of current updated techniques and can provide cost-benefit calculations that become an extremely valuable resource in such a context. Triumphant about the success of including producer responsibility in the auto/oil directive, Anna Lindh, the former environmental minister, exclaimed, “we have been pushing hard and stubbornly for standards according to a Swedish model. Although there was ample resistance, *facts* won in the long run.” She goes on and repeats: “the small countries won with *facts*.”⁹ I have heard similar claims that scientific facts and expertise are crucial elements in environmental policy making ever since I started to work in the field of EU environmental politics in the early 1990s.

It may be expected that scientific knowledge is particularly influential in agenda setting or the initial stages of policy making mainly carried out in the Commission and its many expert committees. While this has certainly been shown to be true, it seems as if, at least for environmental policy making, expertise is crucial in all stages of the policy making process. For example, the proposed EU chemical’s strategy is of a general nature and is accessible to the layman. However, the issues that will have to be resolved in order to realize the strategy will most likely demand qualified scientific input both with regard to scientific knowledge about a range of specific chemical products as well as expertise in methods and techniques of risk assessment and cost estimates. Such issues may also come up for debate at the decision-making level in the Council and the European Parliament.

What has been learned from this case so far supports Karen Litfin’s claim in which she highlights the interdependence of knowledge and influence. In her work on international environmental negotiations, she points to “the central importance of knowledge ... as both a political resource and an arena for struggle” (1994:177). In my earlier research on the development of EU environmental policy, I argued along a similar vein pointing out that scientific knowledge has been particularly important for a growing environmental awareness in the EU polity (Kronsell 1997b). I suggested that scientific “facts” have had an important standing and at times have been absolutely crucial to the introduction of new environmental policy in the EU. There appear to be a number of ways in which experts can provide resources for successful environmental

⁹ My translation.

negotiations. One is scientific knowledge, i.e. familiarity with natural processes such as how chemical compounds are broken down and why certain lakes have high pH levels, etc. Another type is technical expertise, the knowledge of cleaner technologies, how they work, and how they can be constructed. Still a third type of expert knowledge is generated from experience as, for example, with applying a particular kind of policy or knowledge about financial costs incurred when making a particular choice of policy, economic instrument, or technology.

Swedish policy makers may be fortunate in this respect because they have a foundation built on broad national expertise and more extensive experience with various environmental measures than many other member states. One specific example here is the assessment of biocides,¹⁰ where only Sweden and seven other member states have any experience at all with biocide regulation. The other countries lack any legislation whatsoever on biocides. In such a context the potential for influence is high, simply because policy makers can draw on national experience (SOU 2001:4:201). In turn, the Swedish experiences have resulted from early involvement in environmental problem solving as well as a certain innovative aptitudes among Swedish policy makers. Not surprisingly, the acidification strategy, an initiative which originated in Sweden was the outcome of both the long experience internationally and the development of a strong competence and extensive expertise with regard to issues of acidification. Similarly, the chemical's revision and strategy would most probably not been possible had it not been for the Swedish representatives and particularly the resources of ChemI, which has been put to use in the Commission and in both multi- and bilateral negotiations with member states.

The importance of expertise might be particularly pertinent in the EU because the Commission, despite its role as an initiator of proposals, possesses only limited resources and, thus, often relies on expertise outside the EU institutions. The appointment of national experts who, for a limited time, work in the Commission is an important resource for the Commission. At the same time, the procedure gives member states an opportunity to appoint certain experts to work on topics with

¹⁰ A biocide is a biological or chemical product that is used to destroy damaging organisms, for example, pests or bacteria. In the EU, there is now a biocide directive 98/8/EC in effect since May 2000. Although biocide products can be similar in their composition to pesticides or insecticides used in agriculture, products used in agriculture are regulated in separate EU legislation.

which they are concerned and for which they push. In the case of the EU acidification strategy, the Swedish government as early as 1995 had appointed a national expert who was to work on the acidification strategy of the EU. The national expert was Christer Ågren, also head of the Secretariat for Acidification, an organization based in Gothenburg with extensive involvement, high standing, and ample international experience with the problem of acid rain. The ministry recognized the importance of national experts and one comment highlighting the importance of national experts, was voiced in an interview of 1997. "When it concerns chemicals policy, we have thought it important to have a national expert in DG III (Industry). The same expert is now permanently employed there, and that is good. Our ambition is also to get a Swedish head of unit (Chemicals) in the Commission." In 1997 it was an ambition, today a Swedish woman heads the unit on chemicals in DG XI (Environment). The placement of key individuals in the EU institutions is not only about making sure the expertise and knowledge on a topic become known to the Commission and the member states. It is also a response to the multi-governance structure where network relations are a key element. Therefore it becomes necessary to build inter-personal relations among a group of key individuals in an issue area.

We can hence conclude that facts from scientific sources or from experience gained with policies or particular technologies may be an important resource in trying to have an impact in setting the EU agenda. Such knowledge can serve as a legitimating force, as a resource for Commission work, or be put to use in the actual negotiation process. The importance of expert knowledge—particularly fitting for environmental politics—may derive from the way environmental issues are closely related to scientific discoveries about what chemicals and pollutants do to our bodies and to nature and technical innovations concerning what can reverse or compensate for environmental degradation. Only further comparative research can tell us whether this is relevant for other sectors of policy making as well.

NATIONAL POLICIES AS EXAMPLES OF WHAT CAN BE DONE

Another way of influencing EU policy would be to try to "up-load" national policy to the EU level. Uploading can be explained as a way of

successfully convincing the Commission that a particular national policy could and should be adopted as a standard or as a policy applicable in all the member states. The efforts to revise the chemicals' policy and the push for a community chemical strategy, possibly including an EU Chemical's Inspectorate facility, seem to be an attempt at this. This approach is really nothing new or out of the ordinary in that many policies in the EU actually have their origin in specific national policies. While it is probably rare that national policies are copied precisely as they were originally formulated, they are, in a moderated form, an important contribution to EU policy. The Commission often glances at national policies when preparing proposals, a procedure which was most definitively the case with the Fifth Environmental Action Program, which had as its major inspirational source the Dutch Environmental Action Plan (Kronsell 2000). Furthermore, two civil servants in SEPA recently argued that the Swedish national environmental policy partly inspired the IPPC directive even though at that time Sweden was not yet an EU member. More commonly, however, and also more difficult to trace and verify, parts of member state's legislation are adopted in a Commission proposal.

Various national studies on topics relating to environmental policy making may serve as important background information. This type of expertise can be used not only to influence actual negotiations and help persuade adversaries but may also form important input or contributions to EU strategies and policies.¹¹ One example is a national project carried out by SEPA on traffic and environment during 1995–96 (MATS), which served as an example for and initiated a similar European project that is to provide background information and suggestions to the Commission. We can note that the various Swedish governmental studies on environmental policies, for example the extensive work on chemical policy, have provided input into the work in DG XI (Environment).

A voice in the ministry expresses the usefulness of such studies in the following way: "Expert knowledge is important, it is crucial to have information and knowledge, and there we have a lot of experience in SEPA. It is great that there are substantial studies with English summaries that we can rely on." It is clear that these studies, their suggested strategies, and the expertise in the agencies generate important facts,

¹¹ An indication that the government takes such a strategical consideration is given in SOU 2001:4, where it spells out that proposals issued in a previous study were written as a direct input to the EU green paper on products (*Varor utan Färor* SOU 2000:53).

experiences, and accounts that can successfully be drawn upon both while the agenda is being set in the Commission and while policies are debated, contested, and decided upon in the various EU institutions. However, since such studies are generally written in Swedish there are limitations on their applicability and usefulness outside the national context and that of the Swedish representatives in the Commission. It is notable that the Dutch Environmental Action Plan was published in English.

Member states, successful in uploading domestic policy to the EU, reap two-fold rewards. For one, they are able to influence EU norms, and secondly, they can avoid later complications in the transposition and implementation of EU directives. However, such up-loading may have unwanted consequences and even cause complications in the long run with the effect of delaying or stalling the integration process. "Policy misfits" can generate problems of compliance with EU measures (Börzel 2000). Such misfits arise because there are incompatibilities between different policy styles and instruments in the different member states. A policy, which looks too much like a national member state's, may generate a misfit rather than what was intended, more adequate common European environmental legislation.

NEGOTIATING FROM AN UNDISPUTED NATIONAL INTEREST

The decision-making body in the EU is the Council of Ministers. Although it can no longer be considered a classic intergovernmental body, since votes are weighed and qualified majority decisions taken on many issues, national interests are still important stakes in this venue of decision making. When negotiating in such a context, it is important to articulate and present arguments that closely reflect a clear and unified national position.¹² Failure to do so may lead to the exposure of domestic differences in points of view. When one member state's national interest is perceived as either non-existent, divided, or contested, it can be used strategically by adversaries in the negotiation process to undermine and weaken the arguments proposed.

¹² Here I draw on such classic work in international relations as that by Thomas Schelling, which has also been confirmed in my own interviews.

As was argued earlier, scientific experts are extensively involved in the field of EU environmental politics. Much of the work that takes place in the various committees is often a preparatory step for policy making. Experts are gaining increasing influence since most of the groundwork on Commission proposals is carried out in such committees (Van Schendelen 1998). Theoretically, there should be a division of labor between the agencies and the ministry: the representatives from the agencies attend the working groups of the Commission and provide expertise while the representatives of the ministry attend the Council working groups. In practice, however, the divisions of responsibilities are much less clear. Experts also pay careful attention to national interests. No clear division of what is political and what is expert knowledge exists since what appears as a highly technical question is often laced with political considerations. Hence, it has become increasingly evident that this division can not really be strictly maintained.

This interpenetration of politics and science as evident in the EU may be termed the “scientization of politics” and “politicization of science.” It has been observed and studied previously in international environmental cooperation (Haas 1990; Litfin 1994; Bäckstrand 2001). The sheer complexity of such pre-negotiations taking place in the multi-levels of EU governance challenges the ability for member states to coordinate the various actors involved in representing the member states. Hence, there is obviously a potential that different and perhaps contradictory positions and views may be articulated by those who are to be representing experts or member states in those various bodies handling EU pre-negotiation, a situation that may lead to contradictory messages about what a specific member state’s national position is.

Having noted that there is no clear dividing line between expertise and political considerations in environmental policy making, a governmental report addressing the issue comes to the conclusion that it is very rare that Swedish representatives, whether they are in expert committees or council groups, exhibit different views (Statskontoret 2000:20B:5–32). It seems as if experts and governmental representatives have a common understanding of what the Swedish interest are on a particular question no matter how technical.¹³ The report argues that this is due to the way that the ministry and the agency personnel relate to one another. They have close, informal and frequent contacts, which makes coordination

¹³ It was also confirmed in my interviews of November 2000.

not only possible but also easy. The Swedish government is small and the ministries need to work closely with the administrative agencies. In turn this creates a tightly knit network of actors familiar with each other. There is also a significant amount of interchange between the ministry and the agencies with regard to job positions. To illustrate, it is common that a civil servant from the Environmental Protection Agency takes on a position with the Ministry of Environment and, after a few years, moves on to permanent representation and a position as environmental attaché, only to return to the Agency again after a few years. It is also argued that the experience of international environmental relations prior to EU membership has contributed to this pattern of working (Statskontoret 2000:20B:6–7).

In the multi-level governance system of the EU, small states may be better equipped to coordinate a national position because of their smaller and more tightly knit polity. Even when questions arise that are highly technical but laced with political interests and complications, it seemed from my interviews that there was actually little difficulty in establishing a “Swedish interest.” Either this was, as they told me at the Environmental Protection Agency, because everyone already knew what was in the Swedish interest or they would simply pick up the phone and talk to the one politically responsible for the issue. This suggests at least two considerations: there is some common understanding or are similar values within the close community of policy makers that deal with these issues, no matter whether they represent the agencies or the ministry; and, because small states also have a smaller administration and governmental apparatus, they may also be more efficient in coordinating the various representatives who are dealing with an issue in different venues of the EU. In the smaller setting, it is easier to establish a common understanding of what the national interest may be, something which also seems extremely important in order to achieve success in the negotiation process.¹⁴ For Sweden the experience of doing this many years prior to membership in the international setting of environmental policy was beneficial but may also suggest it does not necessarily apply to other policy sectors. The other side of the coin is that this transformation of bringing experts and governmental representatives into closer and more informal relationships, may have a detrimental effect on the transparency of the policy process associated

¹⁴ These findings are also congruent with those of Baldur Thorhallsson’s study.

with a lack of democratic control and possibilities to hold someone accountable for concessions made and decisions taken.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Starting from the argument proposed by Ingebritsen that small states can wield power in international relations as norm-setters, this paper considered Sweden's experiences of trying to influence EU norms on environmental policy. The ambition was that in doing so something could be said about the possibilities of small states making an impact in an era of globalization and shifting sites of authority.

The evidence from Swedish policy makers' involvement with EU environmental policy making since 1995 point to four important factors: the first is the importance of actors' reputation based on the perception and expectation, which has emerged from previous activities performed by Swedish policy makers internationally. Swedish policy makers' active involvement in international environmental cooperation since the 1970s has been an important resource for the work of ensuing high environmental standards in the EU. Already at time of membership, the expectation of Swedish engagement seems to have been measured against the reputation and experience of this previous engagement internationally. Secondly, the important role of expertise and knowledge in the policy process, perhaps particularly striking in the field of environmental policy, was discussed. Long experience with environmental policy in the domestic setting has provided a resource base which negotiators in the EU context can use to their benefit. The acidification strategy is perhaps the most significant example that attests to this. Third, since national policies often serve as an inspiration for EU policy, Swedish policy makers may find themselves in an advantageous position. The well-developed domestic policy and the associated experiences provide considerable input to negotiations in the EU. The chemicals revisions and the proposal for a chemical's strategy were examples in this paper. The final argument was that small states might have a better negotiating position due to their smaller polity. A clear and well-defined national position, absolutely essential in the EU negotiation process, may be more easily obtained in a smaller polity like Sweden's because coordination is facilitated by close, informal relations between different actors affected and concerned with the policy in question. Some reservations need to be made regarding the possibility

of speaking generally about small states' influence in the EU from one single case that draws exclusively from the environmental policy area, however, the conclusions generated here can be a fruitful starting point for future comparative research.

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