

EU Presidency note on the weightings of votes in the Council (24 March 2000)

Caption: Note from the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, dated 24 March 2000, on the weightings of votes in the Council. In its note, the Presidency proposes to the Conference that the discussion be refocused on the main characteristics of the future system for weighting votes in the Council, irrespective of the option chosen (dual majority or reweighting of votes).

Source: Conference of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States Presidency note – IGC 2000 – Weightings of votes in the Council, CONFER 4728/00. Brussels: 24.03.2000. 7 p.
http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/cig2000/en/04728en.pdf.

Copyright: (c) European Union, 1995-2013

URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/eu_presidency_note_on_the_weightings_of_votes_in_the_council_24_march_2000-en-21ed9f01-913b-485f-b62d-bc273c61aa46.html

Publication date: 18/12/2013

CONFERENCE
OF THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE
GOVERNMENTS
OF THE MEMBER STATES

Brussels, 24 March 2000 (24.03)
(OR. fr)

CONFER 4728/00

LIMITE

PRESIDENCY NOTE

Subject : *IGC 2000: Weightings of votes in the Council*

I. INTRODUCTION

*The Protocol on the institutions annexed to the EU Treaty explicitly mentions the possibility of modifying the **weighting of votes** by reweighting or by dual majority. It links this issue to that of Member States giving up the possibility of nominating a second Commissioner. The Helsinki European Council conclusions explicitly refer to both reweighting and the introduction of a dual majority, as well as to the threshold for qualified-majority decision-making as subjects to be examined by the Conference. On this latter point, Declaration No 50 attached to the Final Act of Amsterdam also states that the Ioannina compromise will be extended until the entry into force of the first enlargement and that by that date, a solution for the special case of Spain will be found.*

For information, delegations will find attached:

- in Annex I, the current weightings and the most recent Eurostat population figures for EU-15;*
- in Annex II, the weightings and population figures for EU-28 (i.e. the States approved as applicants for accession) if a linear extrapolation is made of the current system.*

In the light of the above facts and figures, delegations are invited to consider the following questions with the objectives of ensuring that the system of majority voting in Council meets the essential requirements of an enlarged Union: fairness, transparency and efficiency, and that it is acceptable to the citizens of Europe.

II. QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE REPRESENTATIVES GROUP

*Debate on the weighting of votes has so far been polarised around a **choice between reweighting votes, or introducing a dual majority system**. The Presidency considers that at this stage in the proceedings it might be useful to leave these alternatives aside for the moment and ask the Conference to look at a number of fundamental questions regarding the **features of the future system – whatever it might be** – in order to give some direction to the course of future discussions:*

(i) Criteria to be used as the basis for majority voting in the Council

The general view appears to be that population size is the most objective criterion on which either to undertake a reweighting of votes or to construct a dual majority system (in the latter case, coupled with a specified number of Member States).

Does the Conference consider that other criteria merit consideration, possibly in combination with population?

(ii) Minimum population threshold required for a qualified majority

With each successive enlargement, it became possible for the qualified majority threshold to be reached by a cluster of Member States whose populations represented an ever decreasing percentage of the total population of the Union. That percentage currently stands at 58,16%. If the current system of weighting is extrapolated in a linear way to 28 Member States, the percentage would fall to 51,45%.

Does the Conference consider that there should be a minimum threshold, expressed in terms of total EU population, to ensure the democratic legitimacy of Council decisions? If so, what minimum percentage of the population should be reflected in a qualified majority? The present level (roughly 58%)? A lower/higher figure? (bearing in mind that the same result can be achieved **either** through a dual majority system **or** by reweighting of votes).

(iii) *Minimum number of Member States required for a qualified majority*

*The current system of weighting is designed in such a way that a qualified majority vote in the Council always represents at least half of the Member States (when deliberating on the basis of a Commission proposal). For acts adopted by the Council other than on the basis of a Commission proposal, Article 205 of the Treaty stipulates **an additional requirement that a qualified majority in terms of votes must comprise two-thirds of Member States**. The Conference is therefore called upon to address the following questions:*

- (a) Could a decision be taken by a qualified majority in the Council without the support of **at least half** the Member States?
- (b) Should there be an extension of the rule in Article 205 of the Treaty whereby decisions taken on a basis **other than a Commission proposal** require the support of a minimum number of Member States higher than that required for a vote on a Commission proposal, to cover other cases? If so, should this requirement remain **at two-thirds of Member States**?

(iv) *Population as an absolute or relative criterion*

If it is felt that population size will remain the most acceptable criterion to underpin the system:

- (a) Should Member States, as under the present system, be grouped into largely homogeneous **clusters in which each Member State has the same number of votes**?

- (b) In the event of a system of clusters of States with the same number of votes being retained, would it be useful to introduce the possibility of a **greater degree of differentiation** (e.g. by doubling the number of votes) in order to **extend the range of options** and to be able to **slot in new Member States more easily**?
- (c) Should the voting system be based on **calculation models** applied to population?
- (d) Conversely, should the system of voting contain a factor which reflects in an **absolute and directly proportionate** way the ratio between the populations of each Member State (a dual majority system)?
- (v) *General approach on reweighting*

If the Conference were to decide to examine reweighting options stricto sensu in greater detail, consideration would need to be given to the methodological approach to such an exercise; there is more than one possibility:

- either a **purely political** approach as part of an overall compromise;
- or more **objective** approaches, for example trying to determine in a measurable way the shift to the detriment of the grouping of large Member States which has occurred following successive enlargements.

In both cases, the question arises as to whether any reweighting exercise should be confined to certain Member States (e.g. those who gave up their second Commissioner) or should it take place across the board?

(vi) *Qualified majority threshold*

The threshold for a qualified majority has remained practically unchanged at around 71% of total votes. In the event of retaining a system of weighted votes:

Should the threshold for a qualified majority remain at its present level? Be lowered?
Be raised?

(vii) *Entry into force of changes to the weighting of votes in Council*

Should any amendments agreed upon by the Conference enter into force after ratification of the Treaty or only on the first enlargement?

ANNEX IEU-15 MEMBER STATES

(1999 Eurostat Population Data)

MEMBER STATES	VOTES	POPULATION /000
Germany	10	82 038
United Kingdom	10	59 247
France	10	58 966
Italy	10	57 612
Spain	8	39 394
Netherlands	5	15 760
Greece	5	10 533
Belgium	5	10 213
Portugal	5	9 980
Sweden	4	8 854
Austria	4	8 082
Denmark	3	5 313
Finland	3	5 160
Ireland	3	3 744
Luxembourg	2	429
TOTAL EU	87	375 325

Total Votes = 87	Votes	% Votes	Min. % Population
Qualified Majority	62	71,26%	58,16%
Blocking Minority	26	29,89%	12,38%

ANNEX II**EU-28 MEMBER STATES¹**
(1999 Eurostat Population Data)

MEMBER STATES	VOTES	POPULATION /000
Germany	10	82 038
Turkey ³	10	63 400
United Kingdom	10	59 247
France	10	58 966
Italy	10	57 612
Spain	8	39 394
Poland	8	38 667
Romania	6	22 489
Netherlands	5	15 760
Greece	5	10 533
Czech Republic	5	10 290
Belgium	5	10 213
Hungary	5	10 092
Portugal	5	9 980
Sweden	4	8 854
Bulgaria	4	8 230
Austria	4	8 082
Slovakia	3	5 393
Denmark	3	5 313
Finland	3	5 160
Ireland	3	3 701
Lithuania	3	3 744
Latvia	3	2 439
Slovenia	3	1 978
Estonia	3	1 446
Cyprus	2	752
Luxembourg	2	429
Malta ²	2	377
TOTAL EU	144	544 579

Total Votes = 144	Votes	% Votes	Min. % Population
Qualified Majority	102	70,83%	51,45%
Blocking Minority	43	29,86%	11,88%

¹ Maintaining and extrapolating the current weighting of votes in the Council for States approved as applicants for accession. This model was used during the Amsterdam IGC (without Malta or Turkey) - see CONF/3815/97.

² 1998 Eurostat Population Data.

³ Estimated figures.