

The Least Dangerous Chair?

REVIEW BY BEN CRUM

Department of Political Science, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Leadership and Negotiation in the European Union. By Jonas Tallberg. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 280 pp., \$75.00 cloth (ISBN: 0-521-86452-6), \$29.99 paper (ISBN: 0-521-68303-3).

In recent years, Jonas Tallberg has published a number of notable articles on “the power of the chair” in multilateral negotiations, looking in particular at the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU) (see, for example, Tallberg 2003, 2004). In a field that has traditionally been dominated by political practitioners and game theorists, Tallberg has developed an original perspective that draws on institutionalist approaches in political science. Most notably, whereas the dominant approaches tend to model negotiations as bargains between actors with comparable sets of resources under basic rules of exchange, Tallberg highlights how negotiations are actually meshed within a complex political context in which negotiation failure is rife and in which, hence, a demand for leadership emerges.

Leadership and Negotiation in the European Union presents a comprehensive theoretical framework for analyzing leadership in multilateral negotiations. It then applies this framework in six case studies that analyze the role of recent EU presidencies on selected dossiers. Finally, the book assesses the generalizability of the findings to international negotiations beyond the EU. Tallberg’s central theoretical claims are organized around the distinction between the demand for and the supply of leadership in international negotiations. With respect to the demand for leadership, he submits that it responds to the functional need to overcome the collective-action problems endemic in negotiations. With respect to the supply of leadership, Tallberg’s key claim is that formal leaders in international negotiations enjoy distinctive informational and procedural powers that they can use, not only to further the successful outcome of the negotiations, but also to skew this outcome to fit their own preferences.

In a historical chapter, Tallberg traces how European cooperation over time has given rise to ever more extensive demands for leadership. Initially, the European Commission was regarded as the institution best positioned to meet these demands. Over time, however, the expansion and institutionalization of the EU presidency has made it the premier source of leadership in the Union. The crucial turning point appears to lie around 1970, and Tallberg highlights two factors to account for this turn. First, on the supply-side, the Commission discredited itself by overplaying its hand in its relations with the member states. The Commission’s weakness became particularly apparent in the “empty chair crisis” of 1965–1966. Second, on the demand-side, the proliferation of European cooperation required coordination by an actor who was well versed in the intricacies of intrastate policy coordination. As European cooperation moved into new spheres beyond its initial economic orientation, new forums (such as European Political Cooperation and the European Council) emerged that bypassed the Commission and in which leadership naturally fell to the EU presidency-in-office.

The main body of *Leadership and Negotiation in the European Union* is made up of six case studies, which are taken from the EU presidencies in the period 1999–2003. These case studies are organized around the three functions that Tallberg ascribes to the chair: managing the agenda of negotiations, brokering agreements, and representing the member states collectively vis-à-vis third parties. The case studies nicely illustrate how EU member states have used the power of the chair to put new issues on the EU agenda (Finland's "Northern Dimension" initiative), to exclude issues from the agenda (Germany on the car recycling directive), to broker agreements to suit their own particular interests (Germany on the Agenda 2000 Financial Arrangements and France with the Treaty of Nice), to exploit their representative function as a lever over the other member states (Sweden on the EU transparency rules), and to further their own foreign policy interests (Denmark in concluding the 2004 enlargement negotiations).

In a penultimate chapter Tallberg moves beyond the EU to review how other international negotiation arenas (the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the World Trade Organization, and international climate negotiations) have handled the question of leadership. This comparative analysis demonstrates the value of Tallberg's theoretical framework beyond the EU. It also lends more general support to his claims that the assignment of leadership in international negotiations follows functional needs and that the chair performs important roles in furthering successful international agreements.

The primary merit of *Leadership and Negotiation in the European Union* is that it provides a comprehensive conceptual toolbox for analyzing the powers of chairs in multilateral negotiations and for tracing the effects of their interventions. Tallberg systematically lays out how functional needs related to agenda management, brokerage, and representation inform the establishment of formal leaders in multilateral negotiations with privileged powers over information and procedures. He then shows how these powers can be employed to further agreements and to distribute spoils.

Empirically, Tallberg convincingly demonstrates that member states holding the EU presidency should not be regarded as mere humble servants of the collective interest. In fact, wherever they discern a distinctive national interest, they are liable to exploit the powers entrusted to them over the whole range of the decision-making process to steer the outcome toward their desired direction. What is more, the conditions of EU decision making allow such partisan interventions, even when widely noted, to be successful, and thus they allow the presidency to leave its mark on the policies produced.

Although this distributional point is well demonstrated, the evidence that the presidency also makes negotiations more successful remains less striking. Tallberg's rationalist institutionalist theory suggests that the member states have opted for the rotating presidency as the least dangerous leadership arrangement. They prefer the diffuse benefits that come from taking turns in exploiting the privileges of the presidency over putting their trust in a supranational institution (or an elected chair, for that matter). One may well wonder whether this assessment can be justified in terms of efficiency. In fact, the idea of diffuse benefits may well be read as the systematic institutionalization of pork-barrel politics. Each member state takes its turn at the European trough, to the eventual detriment of collective European interests. Strikingly, the comparison with other international arrangements shows that alternative arrangements allow far less opportunities for the chair to appropriate the distributive spoils. In the end, one is left to wonder what masochistic inclination has led the EU member states to oppose supranational or elective leadership arrangements.

More generally, Tallberg's conception of negotiation efficiency remains under-elaborated. The concept plays a crucial role in his account of both the demand and

the supply of leadership. In the theoretical chapter, Tallberg, following the earlier negotiations literature (Schelling 1960; Raiffa 1982), invokes the notion of Pareto-efficiency, which requires that none of the parties involved finds that its interests are set back as a consequence of the negotiations. However, nowhere in the empirical chapters is this test of Pareto-optimality brought to bear upon the evidence. In fact, Tallberg's emphasis on distributional interventions would suggest that some parties actually stand to lose due to the presidency's strategies. In particular, it is hard to see how the presidency can push its own interests without any other country being set back when the issues involve very limited positive benefits—as in debates over financial burdens (Germany in the Agenda 2000 negotiations), voting shares (France in the Treaty of Nice negotiations), or even adding a new policy line (Finland on the “Northern dimension”). Rather than employing an independent measure of what makes an agreement efficient, Tallberg seems to reduce efficiency to the mere acquiescence of all states in the eventual agreement.

The under-elaboration of the concept of negotiation efficiency also precludes a more differentiated treatment of the demand for leadership in the EU. In particular, it makes it impossible to explain why different leadership arrangements are chosen under different conditions. Tallberg's focus on the rise of the EU presidency downplays the fact that the European Commission has also played important leadership roles since the 1970s. For instance, the Commission has taken the lead in the single European market initiative, in monetary integration, and in international environmental negotiations. Moreover, in recent years the EU presidency has seen new leadership arrangements emerge on its side. For example, the office of the High Representative has taken over part of the presidency's leadership tasks with respect to the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy. On the other hand, the informal Euro Council now has an elected chair. Tallberg's theoretical framework falls short of specifying the conditions under which these different leadership arrangements might be preferred.

Leadership and Negotiations in the European Union brings the debate on the nature of multilateral negotiations forward by advocating and systematically developing some outspoken and appealing propositions regarding the demand for and supply of leadership. At the same time, given the very strict structure of Tallberg's argument, most of the evidence is adduced to support his main theses; comparatively little space is left for considering rival accounts, likely challenges, or possible qualifications. These limitations are anything but insurmountable. Indeed, Tallberg's innovative institutionalist framework and his appealing case studies provide an invigorating invitation for scholars to examine additional cases and to further elaborate and refine the theory of leadership in multilateral negotiations.

References

- RAIFFA, HOWARD. (1982) *The Art and Science of Negotiation*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- SHELLING, THOMAS C. (1960) *The Strategy of Conflict*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- TALLBERG, JONAS. (2003) The Agenda-Shaping Powers of the EU Council Presidency. *Journal of European Public Policy* 10(1):1–19.
- TALLBERG, JONAS. (2004) The Power of the Presidency: Brokerage, Efficiency, and Distribution in EU Negotiations. *Journal of Common Market Studies* 42(5):999–1022.