

# **Why sharing? Polity narratives in major treaty negotiations leading to EU solidarity and conditionality**

*Donati Niccolò (Università degli Studi di Milano)*

In recent years, a growing literature on EU solidarity has investigated public opinion attitudes towards cross-national redistribution and EU social policy. However, elite behaviors regarding EU solidarity have received less attention. Why, during some critical junctures, are decision-makers in the Council able to overcome 'national egoisms' and value conflicts to create solidaristic instruments? We know how structural factors and public discourse may contribute to a solidaristic outcome, especially in relation to the recent NGEU negotiations (Ferrera et al. 2021; De La Porte and Jensen 2021), but polity narratives deployed during the negotiations are less investigated. Based on the polity approach (Ferrera, Kriesi, and Schelkle 2024), this study proposes a new explanation of how political actors within the Council interact with structural-level polity constraints and opportunities to broker the creation of EU solidarity instruments, and why the outcome is sometimes conditional solidarity.

The research will focus on the two intergovernmental conferences (ICGs) that crucially established the structure of today's EU budget and most of the instruments that operate cross-national redistribution: the 1985 ICG leading to the Single Market and the 1991 ICG(s) leading to the Maastricht Treaty and the EMU. The inquiry will be based on a content analysis of the recently disclosed ICG documents of the Secrétariat Général du Conseil de l'UE, which contain the verbatim debates of the two ICGs. The analysis will also include epistemic reports made by supranational actors such as the Commission and by national actors close to national governments. The focus will be on both the state-level interest constellation and the policy and polity narratives used to overcome material and ideal interest contrasts.

Apart from highlighting which discursive strategies worked, our findings show two different paths towards solidarity: solidarity is more likely to emerge when uncertainty about the outcome creates a context conducive to mutual assistance; when the winners and losers constellation is more evident, existing asymmetries in interests and values tend to lead to conditional solidarity.