ACIM
INSTITUTIONS AND MULTILEVEL POLITICS

WELCOME TO OUR NEWSLETTER

This is the first Newsletter of ACIM, the Antwerp Centre for Institutions and Multilevel Politics. We are a recently established research group at the Antwerp University. Our main focus of study is the impact of multi-level institutional configurations on changes in government and governance, policies and politics, and state-society relations. ACIM’s projects are linked to three research lines: the politics of multi-level government, the politics of interest representation, and regulatory and judicial politics. The ACIM Newsletter aims to keep all those who are interested in our work and our activities up to date. You find the information on recently defended PhDs, a presentation of new staff members, the latest news about ongoing projects, reports on past events as well as announcements. We will publish the ACIM Newsletter several times a year.

REGREGIONAL STRATEGIES IN THE EU

This summer Tom Donas finished the data-collection for the project ‘The politics of EU-level territorial lobbying,’ which is part of the larger Odysseus program (promotor Jan Beyers). In total, we identified 275 EU-level regional representatives of which 183 were interviewed in the course of 2012. One of our major findings is that although all European sub-national authorities are able to establish some presence in Brussels, there are substantial differences in the sense that resource-full regions are very active, have a broad policy portfolio and occupy a prominent position in European trans-regional networks. The Brussels’s presence of a substantial number of regional representation is so unstable that they are not able to monitor EU policies effectively. Instead of providing an opportunity for peripheral regions, our first results suggest that the most wealthy and prosperous regions get much better represented at the EU-level. Some first findings of this project will be published next year in Publius: Donas, T. and J. Beyers (2012). “How Regions Assemble in Brussels: The Organizational Form of Territorial Representation in the European Union.” Publius: The Journal of Federalism.

Other papers and publications related to this project will become available at our website.

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“the most wealthy and prosperous regions get much better represented at the EU-level.”

Lobbying activities regional representations undertake in Brussels, %, N=182
CAELESTA BRAUN TO AMSTERDAM

Postdoctoral researcher, Caelesta Braun takes up a new position at the Vu University Amsterdam. These are her impressions of her stay at ACIM. The Antwerp Center for Institutions and Multilevel politics (ACIM) is, among many other things, an excellent place for a researcher interested in interest group politics. The sheer concentration of interest group scholars proved to be a stimulating research environment. During my time at ACIM, I was part of a project on transnational lobbying (with Marcel Hanegraaff and Jan Beyers), I became a member of the pan-European Intereuro research project on European interest group politics (with Jan Beyers, Iskander De Bruycker, Dirk De Bièvre and many other colleagues in Europe and the US), started up a project with Bert Fraussen on interest group populations in Belgium and The Netherlands and, finally, I received a grant from The Research Foundation - Flanders (FWO) to develop a project on regulatory governance and stakeholder management in the area of financial regulation. Looking back, my schedule at ACIM was full of exciting research projects. Most of this is work in progress, on which I will continue working when I am at the Vu University Amsterdam. The good news is that this will allow me to maintain strong ties with my Antwerp colleagues. Yet, as always, partir est mourir un peu: I don’t think I’ll ever encounter an institution in my academic career with so many interest group scholars in offices next to my own. I will certainly cherish the memory of this fine research experience in the (near) future!

JANA DEFORCHE: PHD ON REGIONAL STRATEGIES

In May 2012 Jana Deforche defended her PhD dissertation entitled: ‘Regional strategies in a multi-level polity context. Flanders, Wallonia, Catalonia, Baden-Württemberg and Scotland in comparative perspective’. This PhD thesis deals with the interaction between the multi-level polity context (of European integration and (quasi) federalism) and regional strategic behaviour in the domestic political arena. More precisely, the focus is on the question if and how the European Integration process is taken into account in the regional strategy towards domestic state reform. For each region, the strategy in the most recent state reform is analyzed, with a focus on policy issues as well as on institutional aspects. The core question is answered by the theoretical framework of actor-centered institutionalism.
GLOBAL ADVOCACY AT INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES

For the research project on global advocacy, Marcel Hanegraaff, Niels Morsink, Bert Fraussen, and Iskander De Bruycker attended last year the Durban UN Climate Conference and the WTO Ministerial Conference in Geneva. There, they interviewed a large number of interest group representatives, negotiators and other delegates. These interviews tell us that advocacy at international diplomatic conferences takes many different forms. While lobbying itself is the most important reason to attend these conferences, many groups attend these venues for other purposes such as networking, monitoring, or learning. We also learn that international ministerial venues attract a high diversity of actors and not only those who are supportive of their own domestic governments. On the contrary, both supporters and opponent of domestic governments seem to be fairly equally represented. This suggests that international conferences attract a wide variety of contesting policy positions leading to quite similar advocacy clashes between interest groups as in the actual negotiations.

Activities of interest groups at WTO ministerials (N=110)

Interest groups agreement with government position at WTO WTO ministerial conferences (In percentages; N=76)


ACIM is a partner in two Policy Research Centers. Two PhD students will work for the Policy Research Centre for Foreign Affairs, International Entrepreneurship and Development Cooperation. Margaux Kerschot will examine the role of regions in EU external policies, while Niels Morsink will investigate the influence of regions in EU legislation. In addition, Frederic Maes will look at the way regions deal with the EU2020 Strategy for the Policy Research Centre - Governmental Organization. Both Centers are coordinated by the KU Leuven. Based on empirical research, these projects do not only aim to produce PhD dissertations and academic output but they will also deliver policy recommendations and training for the Flemish Government.
On March, 29 Peter J. Katzenstein became doctor honoris causa of the University of Antwerp. Peter J. Katzenstein is a professor at Cornell University. He was one of the pioneers in the development of International Political Economy as a sub-discipline of political science. His research and teaching lie at the intersection of the fields of international relations and comparative politics. His current research interests focus on the politics of civilizations. The day before Peter Katzenstein engaged with ACIM’s PhD students and gave a public lecture.

Strategic bedfellows or natural EU lovers?

In his PhD dissertation, Kris Van Beirendonckx explains the EU preferences of national politicians by digging into Belgian national politicians’ minds on a broad range of issues regarding the European Union’s political finality. As this group is generally considered to be both pro-European but at the same time disinterested, it presented a challenge whether it would be possible to explain for variation in these individual preferences. He used both sociological and rational approaches and drew explanatory variables from both national and European level, strategi and ideological considerations. Combining the data from a large-N survey with in-depth interviews, he tested his explanatory model on different dimensions of European integration. Demonstrating the significance of certain interests and norms, the contribution of this dissertation is situated in the revelation of how national politicians’ EU positions may remain stable for certain European principles while being very susceptible to changing contexts for other aspects.

How does the EU deal with China?

How does the European Union (EU) deals with emerging economies like China, Brasil and India? And who shapes EU trade policy towards these countries? In his Phd thesis Taking a Firm Stance: The Political Economy of Business Lobbying in EU Trade Policy towards China, Jappe Eckhardt studied the political involvement and influence of economic actors in European Union (EU) trade policy making, with a special emphasis on EU external trade policy making vis-à-vis China. By presenting a theoretical framework that is rooted in classical political economic, he investigated the trade preferences, the ability to overcome collective action problems and the political influence of European firms in the context of EU-China trade relations.
SUMMERSCHOOL ON INTEREST GROUPS IN KRISTIANSAND (JULY 17-26, 2012)

In July, the ECPR standing group on interest groups organized a summer school on interest groups. Niels Morisink (PhD student at ACIM) reports. A beautiful environment, a dedicated group of students and interactive classes were the ingredients that made the Kristiansand summer school a great success. The summer school was located in the inspiring campus of Agder University outside of the calm city of Kristiansand. Kristiansand is an idyllic town in the south of Norway. The warm and welcoming deputy-mayor informed us about the unemployment rate of 2.5%. The campus was surrounded by mountainous forest and some of the most enthralling lakes. When in restive or in pensive mood a refreshing swim in one of these lakes would get the inspiration flowing. The seeds of this inspiration were sowed during the eight days of intensive courses centred around how to measure influence. Some of the leading scholars in the field came to share their ideas on the subject. Acknowledging the high level of the well-prepared students, they granted us ample opportunities to intervene. This led to outstanding discussions on power and influence between erudite and eloquent students. However, we did not remain in the world of abstract theory, but received a thorough guided tour into the technicalities of quantitative text analysis and policy evaluation. Overall during this eight-day course I learned more than I could have learned during one year of literature review. It instilled in me a profound and deep-rooted motivation to continue the endeavour of writing this PhD.

BRINGING EU TREATIES HOME. GOVERNMENTAL STRATEGIES IN TREATY RATIFICATIONS IN DENMARK AND THE NETHERLANDS COMPARED

In February Marjolein Meijer defended her dissertation Bringing EU treaties home. The dissertation explains governmental behaviour during the domestic ratification of European Union treaties in Denmark and the Netherlands and is based upon a comparative research, focusing on one of the most important aspects in national democracies: the interaction between governments and parliaments. The main conclusion is that governments consciously and strategically strive for successful ratification, by excluding opponents is, although governments are limited in their options by institutional rules and the agenda-setting power of the opposition.

UPCOMING EVENTS

23/10 Hans Diels: “Transnational corporate lobbying and international regulatory policy coordination”
06/11 Iskander De Brucyker: “Framing as an advocacy strategy in the European Union”
18/12 Mattias Vileyn: “Who has a say? Federal and sub-federal representation in the EU and other federal polities”
was a leap forward in structuring my arguments and getting very useful comments. In terms of empirical work I have been able to take the advantage of Antwerp’s closeness to Brussels to conduct interviews with EU member state delegates at the different permanent representations. Being part of the ACIM research group has been an inspiring and overall great experience and it has facilitated progress in my work.

New intern: Douwe Truijens joined ACIM in October

With a Bachelor’s degree in political science, I am currently enrolled in a 2-year research master of the Graduate School of Social Sciences at the University of Amsterdam. This program offers a track in comparative politics, in which I am specializing in multilevel governance and policy-making processes in the European Union. In this field of research, I am especially interested in empirical and theoretical questions on new modes of (European) governance – experimentalist governance in particular – as well as questions concerning the assessment of impact and the democratic legitimacy of such policy-making processes.

With the main focus of ACIM fully resonating these issues, an internship here provides a perfect opportunity for me to put my interests and knowledge into practice. The INTEREURO project aims to provide insight in the strategies and role of interest groups in the policy-making process, hence forming a new piece of the puzzle of European policy-making. I look forward to contributing to this project and to discover and expose these different aspects of interest groups in the EU.

New PhD researcher: Inger Baller joined ACIM in September.

I am Inger Baller. Before I joined ACIM in September, I completed the Research Master in Social Sciences at the University of Amsterdam and I conducted my Bachelor in Political Science at the same university. In the Research Master I have specialized in comparative politics and quantitative research methods. My research interests focus on political behavior and institutions, in particular political parties, political systems and electoral behavior. Both my Bachelor’s and Master’s thesis were about the support for Populist Radical Right-Wing Parties. However, the research I am planning to conduct in the upcoming years focuses on an entirely different subject: representation in the multilevel European party system. I am interested in the lack of awareness among voters of the existence of parliamentary groups in the European Parliament. Furthermore, I am interested in the cooperation within those groups of MEPs originating from the same country, but from a different national party. Is there a disciplining effect? What are the consequences for the representation of voters? I think my research fits well within ACIM and I hope I can learn and contribute a lot.