WELCOME

I hope that all of you enjoyed a nice summer (with less rain and more sun than in Belgium) and were able to take a short or a longer break with your family and beloved ones. As I am writing this short intro to the fourth issue of our Newsletter, I feel somewhat excited and proud to be part of such a great and vibrant research team. It is amazing how many interesting events took place during the past six months and lie ahead in the second half of the year. This Newsletter gives only a flavor of what goes on. If you want to stay informed, please register via our website, our Twitter-account or Linkedin.

Jan Beyers, Director of ACIM

UPCOMING EVENTS

Workshop on Transnational advocacy, public opinion and the politicization of international organizations: Patterns and explanations.

The workshop, taking place at the ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops in Warsaw from 29 March to 2 April 2015, is organized by Lisa Dellmuth (Stockholm University) and Jan Beyers. Read the full outline of the workshop here.

The purpose is to gather scholars working on different aspects of the politicization of international policy-making, including: (1) the conceptualization, measurement, and mapping of patterns of politicization; (2) explanations of varying patterns of politicization; and (3) the consequences of politicization for contemporary modes of interest representation and citizens’ political attitudes and behavior. The deadline for submitting paper proposals is December 15, 2014.

Book Presentation ‘European Integration and Consensus Politics in the Low Countries’ (edited by Hans Vollaard, Jan Beyers & Patrick Dumont)

The book will be presented at a lunch conference, hosted by the Permanent Representation of Belgium to the EU, on 17 October 2014 from 12h30 to 14h30. The authors explore the relationship between European integration and the tradition of domestic consensus politics. The book provides a comprehensive overview of Europeanization in the three Low Countries as well as a better understanding of the varieties of consensus politics across and within these countries. The conference starts off with a welcome by Ambassador Dirk Wouters (Permanent Representative of Belgium to the EU), followed by the book presentation by Hans Vollaard (Leiden University) and a keynote speech on European politics and the Low Countries by Senator Steven Vanackere (former Belgian Minister of Foreign and European Affairs). The conference ends with a panel debate, moderated by Jan Beyers, some concluding remarks and drinks afterwards. Register here before 15 October!
Matthias Vileyn defended his dissertation!

In April 2014, Matthias Vileyn successfully defended his PhD, titled “Democratic Legitimacy in Federal Polities. A Comparative Analysis of Representation and Democratic Support” (Promotor Prof. Peter Bursens).

Democratic legitimacy is a hotly discussed topic in contemporary democracies. Especially federal systems that contain multiple levels of government and unite territorial entities with distinct socio-cultural constituencies face specific challenges with respect to democratic representation and legitimacy. My dissertation analyzed two main aspects of this debate: first, the extent to which the organization of democratic representation takes into account multiple levels of government and second, how socio-cultural diversity affects the amount of support for federal democratic arrangements.

My dissertation demonstrates that many federations established institutional channels through which constituent units are represented at the federal level, e.g. through a federal upper chamber or the composition of central government. The EU is not unique in this respect and resembles more established federal systems such as Belgium, Canada or Switzerland. A second important conclusion is that socio-cultural diversity does not undermine the legitimacy such federal arrangements enjoy. For heterogeneous polities, it appears that legitimacy is largely a function of the extent to which a federal polity has adopted a decentralized structure to cope with this heterogeneity. An important part of the dissertation was recently published as ‘Subfederale vertegenwoordiging in federale systemen: de rol van diversiteit en nationale trots’ in Res Publica.

I currently work as a research consultant at a leading executive search office in Belgium. My research experience has already proven to be an added value in the often complex and international searches for CEO’s and other key staff members big companies are looking for.

Cheers!

Jan Beyers and Caelesta Braun received the BVPA Publication Award 2014!

The authors were awarded for their article ‘Ties that Count: Explaining Interest Group Access to Policymakers’, published in the Journal of Public Policy.

The article analyzes the access societal interests gain to policymakers and goes beyond the dominant perspective which explains access as an exchange of resources in a dyadic relation between interest groups and policymakers. In contrast, the authors argue that the position an interest group occupies within a coalition and the relations it has outside its coalition substantially affect the likelihood of gaining access to policymakers.

The empirical focus is on the Dutch interest group system for which the authors examine how coalitions among groups and the network position of interest groups within and between such coalitions shape access. The analysis, based on data collected among 107 Dutch interest groups and 28 policymakers, leads to the conclusion that network positions count differently for elected and non-elected officials, and that network ties that bridge different coalitions add significant explanatory leverage to resource-based explanations of access. The main contribution of the article is that it shows that coalition formation and strategic networking are necessary conditions for gaining access to policymakers.
Marcel Hanegraaff defended his dissertation and obtained a postdoc in Amsterdam!

In April 2014, Marcel Hanegraaff successfully defended his PhD, titled “All the World’s a Stage: Interest Group Politics at WTO an UNFCCC Negotiation Conferences” (Promotors Prof. Jan Beyers and Prof. Dirk De Bièvre).

My dissertation focused on mobilization patterns and lobbying behavior of transnational advocates in the context of global climate change and trade governance. The project has been a great success, resulting in three peer-reviewed articles and five other papers currently under review or almost submitted. My most recent paper was accepted for Global Environmental Politics: ‘Transnational Advocacy Over Time: Business and NGO Mobilization at UN Climate Summits, 1997-2011’.

At the end of September I will exploit new territory and start in Amsterdam as a postdoctoral researcher and lecturer at the University of Amsterdam (UVA). I will continue research on transnational advocacy at the UVA and remain involved in several projects currently running at ACIM.

In addition, I will be working on a project that focuses on advocacy in the European Union. In this project we aim to replicate to a large extent the research I did on transnational advocacy, yet now in the context of the EU. I would like to thank all my colleagues at ACIM for their support over the past years. ACIM’s professional, competitive, and constructive working environment has really inspired me in my work and helped me to develop as a researcher.

I really look forward to continue our collaboration for many years to come.

All the best.

Marcel

Bert Fraussen moves to the Australian National University!

Bert is currently enjoying his last months at the University of Antwerp. At the end of September he will be moving to Canberra, where he will work as postdoctoral researcher at the College of Arts and Social Sciences of the Australian National University (ANU).

For about five years I have been lucky to be part of ACIM, whose professional, positive and stimulating working environment I truly appreciated. During this period, I completed my PhD (supervised by professor Jan Beyers) which focused on the development, access and influence of interest groups in Belgium. Next to my PhD research, I was involved in projects that focused on lobbying at the EU and international level, while in the last year I also was guest lecturer for the Master Seminar on Interest Groups.

At ANU, I will be working on a project that zooms in on the transformation of interest group politics, directed by Professor Darren Halpin. We will examine issues related to the organizational design, development and policy agenda of interest groups, as well as the impact of changing communication technologies, such as social media. The project also entails some comparative work in close collaboration with colleagues in the United States and in Europe.

Obviously, I will also keep a close eye on the activities of ACIM while being Down Under. In that regard, I look forward to contributing to some of the future research projects that will focus on the organization of interest groups and their interaction with policymakers.

Cheers!

Bert

ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops in Salamanca

In April, four ACIM researchers attended the ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops in Salamanca.

Salamanca is known as the city of gold, because of the golden glow that shimmers upon its magnificent sandstone structures at dawn. An ideal location to organize the ECPR Joint Sessions, the queen of the political science conferences, where participants from all over the world gather to present and discuss their research ideas.

ACIM was well represented, with four of its enthusiastic researchers: Kirsten Lucas, Iskander De Bruycker, Matti Van Hecke & Marcel Hanegraaff. Fortunately, all papers were well received and got ample comments for further improvement.

Apart from the hard work, there was also some time for leisure. In search for the ‘lucky frog’, we scrupulously examined the university’s wall (see picture). It is said that once finding this frog, academic success is certain.

Coincidentally, the frog went missing during our visit...

7th Pan-European Conference on the European Union in The Hague

In June, a large ACIM delegation presented and discussed their work at the 7th Pan-European Conference on the European Union, organized by the ECPR Standing Group on the EU.

The Hague is famously known as the ‘Royal City by the Sea’. It offers a welcoming environment, enriching history, monuments in a modern skyline and a historic city center. In the beginning of June, Iskander De Bruycker, Sarah Arras, Inger Baller, Marsida Bandilli, Kirsten Lucas and the most recent ACIM-doctor Marcel Hanegraaff travelled to The Hague, not to meet with the Dutch government, but to present papers and exchange views with other researchers.

At interesting panels on governance, parties, citizens and interest representation in the EU, they presented seven papers which were followed by useful comments and discussions. The experience was made more enjoyable because of the various informal talks with other researchers in the field, resulting in new ideas and inspiration for further research. Next to the academic program, we also had time to explore the city, including the beach of Scheveningen, and enjoy the sunny weather and lovely Indonesian cuisine.
ACIM ON THE MOVE

Summer School on Interest Group Politics in Amsterdam

In July, Sarah Arras and Frederik Heylen attended the 5th Summer School organized by the ECPR Standing Group on Interest Groups in Amsterdam.

This year, the summer school focused on political advocacy in multi-level governance systems, more specifically on mobilization, venue-selection, advocacy strategies and political influence in the European Union. During this one-week summer school, the participants received an intensive introduction to the study of interest group politics. The students also presented their PhD projects and received the opportunity to exchange research ideas during several discussion workshops and individual feedback sessions with internationally renowned scholars.

During a one-day excursion to The Hague, there was also room for a more practical view on political advocacy. Three interactive lectures from a former EU public affairs consultant, a policy officer from the Transparency Unit of the European Commission and a lobbyist working for an EU-level business association provided some interesting insights with respect to everyday life in Brussels’ EU quarter.

Prof. Dirk De Bièvre on sabbatical leave

Prof. Dirk De Bièvre will be on sabbatical leave from 14 September 2014 until 15 September 2015.

The Research Foundation Flanders (FWO) and the Research Fund of the University of Antwerp (BOF UA) have granted him the request to be exempted from teaching and faculty obligations so as to devote an entire year to research and writing. To this end, the FWO and the BOF UA provide the Faculty with funds to appoint replacements for the 4 courses he normally teaches.

During this time, Dirk will devote his time to editing a special issue of the World Trade Review, as well as finalizing a manuscript for ECPR Press, together with FWO postdoc Arlo Poletti. He will also give the finishing touch to a Palgrave Textbook on EU Trade Policy, co-authored with Sieglinde Gstöhl.

Now that interview data gathering in the INTEREURO project on interest groups in EU legislative politics has been finished, Dirk will also contribute to co-authoring some research papers and a book by the Antwerp team on strategies of interest groups.

Together with the normal ‘revise and resubmits’ and some time to catch up with reading within and beyond the discipline, the sabbatical year is sure to be filled well with activity.

While mostly Dirk will be working at home or at his office in Antwerp, he will also enjoy several short research stays at the Department of Government of the London School of Economics and Political Science, as a guest of Mathias Koenig-Archibugi, as well as at the World Trade Institute at the university of Bern, as a guest of Manfred Elsig, acting director of the Institute, with whom he is working on a bid for an EU Horizon 2020 proposal on the EU’s role in a just global economic order.

ACIM wishes Dirk good luck and a fruitful research sabbatical!
On democratic legitimacy in multilevel systems

Dave Sinardet (Free University Brussels) and Peter Bursens published an article titled ‘Democratic legitimacy in multilevel political systems: The role of politicization at the polity-wide level in the EU and Belgium’ in Acta Politica.

The authors argue that while there is a fierce academic debate on the democratic deficit of the EU polity, the Belgian political system has hardly been analyzed from this perspective, despite the fact that some of the characteristics considered as problematic in the case of the EU can also be found in Belgium. The article discusses whether diagnosis and remedies with respect to the EU are also applicable to the Belgian system.

The authors focus on the possibility of democratically legitimizing multilevel polities through the politicization of the polity-wide level, addressing the strategy of electoral engineering and party system reform, and spill-over effects towards mass media and public sphere issues. They conclude that some proposals for the EU level can be theoretically transferred to the Belgian federation and can contribute to our understanding of the specific issues of democratic legitimacy that multilevel systems have to deal with.


On regional offices in Brussels

Jan Beyers and Tom Donas recently published an article in European Union Politics titled ‘Inter-regional networks in Brussels: Analyzing the information exchanges among regional offices’.

Their study analyzes what triggers the information exchange among the regional offices in Brussels. To answer this question, they developed a framework based on network theory and present the first large-N quantitative study on European Union-level inter-regional networks. The results show that information exchanges take place predominantly among regions from the same member state.

Furthermore, the likelihood of regular information exchanges between two regional offices depends on the resources invested in regional representation, the joint involvement in inter-regional associations, and geographical proximity. In contrast to the author’s expectations, their findings refute the hypotheses that more regional autonomy and more experience in Brussels increase the propensity toward cross-border inter-regional networking, a practice that might potentially contribute to the fragmentation of member state representation.


On EU responses in trade disputes

Arlo Poletti and Dirk De Bièvre published an article in the Journal of European Public Policy titled ‘Political mobilization, veto players and WTO litigation: explaining EU responses in trade disputes’.

The authors provide an explanation for the ways in which the EU responds to being challenged in WTO dispute settlement. On the side of the explanandum, they draw a distinction between dispute escalation and dispute outcome. On the side of the explanans, they focus on the number of veto players as well as the degree of mobilization by political actors, and show how these can explain the different types of responses of the EU as a defendant in WTO dispute settlement cases.

While the degree of political mobilization can account for whether or not a dispute involving the EU escalates, the number of veto players can explain whether or not the EU brings its policies in line with the complainants’ demands. They illustrate the plausibility of the argument through an in-depth analysis of four instances in which the EU acted as defendant in a WTO dispute: the ban of hormone treated beef, export subsidies on sugar, bananas III, and butter.

The article is a first theoretical pilot study in the framework of a project funded by the UA research fund in which Arlo Poletti, Dirk De Bièvre, and Aydin Yildirim engage in a more comprehensive study of which political factors may well determine EU and US responses to other states’ challenges in WTO dispute settlement. The project combines statistical analysis with QCA and controlled case comparisons.

Workshop on ‘Judicial Politics in International Trade Institutions’

On 27 and 28 May 2014, Dirk De Bièvre and Arlo Poletti organized an Antwerp workshop on ‘Judicial Politics in International Trade Institutions’ in preparation of a special issue of the World Trade Review.

The contributions for this special issue bring forward the literature on the origin, evolution, and effects of judicial institutions in the multilateral World Trade Organization (WTO) and in Preferential Trade Agreements (PTAs). The workshop brought together a group of highly expert scholars that are set to contribute to a special issue of the WTR.

Manfred Elsig and Jappe Eckhardt from the World Trade Institute in Bern contribute on the origin and the institutional design of the WTO dispute settlement system. Jeanine Bezuijen (Amsterdam) analyses the evolution over time of dispute settlement mechanisms in international trade agreements. Sooyeon Kim (Singapore) together with her co-author Raymond Hicks (Princeton), contributes on the trade effects of dispute settlement provisions. Petros Mavroidis (European University Institute and Columbia Law School) writes on the relationship between the WTO and PTAs. And finally, Arlo Poletti, Dirk De Bièvre and Tyson Chatagnier (Trento) show how ongoing negotiations in the WTO are affected by litigation in WTO dispute settlement.

Contributions will be ready for external review end of August and, if reviewed positively, should be forthcoming in the World Trade Review in one of its next issues.

Next to the WTR special issue, Arlo Poletti and Dirk De Bièvre also signed a contract with ECPR Press for the publication of a book entitled ‘Judicial Politics and Cooperation in the World Trade Organization’ to be submitted by the end of June 2015.

Farewell dinner for Marcel and Bert

The ACIM team from left to right: Iskander De Bruycker, Evelien Willems, Margaux Kersschot, Inger Baller, Frederik Heylen, Peter Bursens, Tine Destrooper, Dirk De Bièvre, Bert Fraussen, Marcel Hanegraaff, Sarah Arras, Kirsten Lucas & Jan Beyers (Missing: Aydin Yildirim, Frederic Maes, Marsida Bandilli & Matti Van Hecke)