A lot has happened in our research group since September. A large ACIM delegation presented their work at the ECPR General Conference in Bordeaux. The first edition of the ACIM joint sessions took place in The Hague: a weekend of reading and discussing each other’s work followed by social activities. ACIM also congratulates two new doctors. Tom Donas and Bert Fraussen both successfully defended their PhD dissertations and can (and should) officially be called ‘doctor’ from now on. We are glad to welcome five new researchers and one visiting scholar, who will introduce themselves further in this newsletter. And finally, a recently attracted ERC research grant (see elsewhere in this newsletter) will allow us to hire new staff in the course of 2014 and 2015. You will find details on these vacancies on the ACIM-website in the coming months or follow us on Twitter (@ACIM) to stay updated!

UPCOMING EVENTS

Lunch seminars

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<td>18/02</td>
<td>Josephine De Jaegere &amp; Patricia Popelier</td>
<td>The Constitutional Court caught between its role as guardian of</td>
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<td>consensus democracy and deliberative expectations</td>
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<td>11/03</td>
<td>Jeroen Candel</td>
<td>Disentangling the consensus frame of food security: The case of the</td>
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<td>Jean-Frederic Morin</td>
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<td>André Lecours</td>
<td>About the federalization of Nepal: how are federal structures</td>
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<td>Doreen Atkinson</td>
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<td>tell us about the nature of political institutions?</td>
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PhD Defenses

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<td>04/04</td>
<td>Matthias Vileyn</td>
<td>Democratic Legitimacy in Federal Polities. A Comparative Analysis of</td>
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<td>22/04</td>
<td>Marcel Hanegraaff</td>
<td>All the world’s a stage: Interest group politics during transnational</td>
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Workshop

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<td>22, 23 &amp; 24 / 05</td>
<td>Dirk De Bièvre and Arlo Poletti</td>
<td>Workshop on judicial politics in international trade institutions in preparation of a World Trade Review special issue</td>
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In October 2013, Tom Donas successfully defended his PhD, titled “Territorial Lobbying in the EU: Explaining Strategies of Regional Offices in Brussels”.

For his PhD, Tom analysed the interaction between regional authorities and the European institutions by answering four research questions: 1) Which regional authorities mobilize in Brussels? 2) With whom do they cooperate? 3) On what issues do they become active? 4) Which venues do they approach to defend their interests? In order to address these topics, Tom mapped the population of regional representations, and conducted 127 telephone interviews and 33 face-to-face interviews with regional representatives in Brussels.

His dissertation showed that for territorial representations to become actively involved in EU policymaking, they need to be well equipped both in resources and autonomy, but they need – above all – to be embedded in and stimulated via formal and informal networks with private and public actors. Tom currently works as a data miner at a leading insurance company in Belgium. While many large companies harbor large quantities of information about their clients in order to maximize the client’s comfort and potential, these rich sources of information are not put to full use. Part of this is related to fragmented and incomplete data storage, another part is related to a lack of research skills. Tom contributes to the further establishment of the strategy, the methodology and the processes of data mining by developing market analyses concerning direct commercial strategies, customer segmentation, fraud detection, etc.

In January 2014, Bert Fraussen successfully defended his PhD, titled “The Lucky Few – Why some Interest Organizations Develop, Gain Access and are Influential”.

The interactions between organized interests and policymakers are often structured by procedures for consultation or advisory councils. From a democratic viewpoint, these processes should ensure that all segments of society get represented. However, the degree of government access enjoyed by interest groups differs considerably. If we consider the composition of the Strategic Advisory Councils to the Flemish government, many traditional neo-corporatist and formerly pillarized groups still occupy a rather central role, especially compared to associations of citizens, who often only gain limited access.

Nonetheless, policymakers frequently aim to facilitate the establishment and development of these citizen groups, as support from a well-organized constituency is considered beneficial to policy development and a government’s legitimacy. This “visible hand of the state” enables some interest organizations to survive, grow and professionalize, as was illustrated in the dissertation by the case study of BBL Flanders (Bond Beter Leefmilieu Vlaanderen, an umbrella group of environmental associations). As this group’s relations with the state intensified, through inclusion in ever more advisory councils and an increasing amount of government funding, its budget, staff size and membership increased considerably. Furthermore, by supporting organized interests that represent groups or causes that otherwise would remain unheard, public authorities can mitigate the dominance of economic groups and ensure that all segments of society, particularly less affluent groups, get organized and involved in policymaking.

At this moment, Bert is visiting fellow at the Australian National University. His future work will build upon key insights from his dissertation, including research on the development, strategies and influence of organized interests in the health policy domain.

Peter Bursens was granted a Jean Monnet chair ad personam

Professor Peter Bursens was awarded a Jean Monnet Chair by the European Commission.

From 2009 until 2012 Peter already held a Chair with a special focus on teaching EU negotiations. The new Chair ad personam (2013 – 2016) enables him to go beyond the organization of negotiation simulations. In the next three years other forms of skills teaching (such as debating and lobbying) and new target groups (such as government officials and interest group representatives) will be added.

The chair will support simulation exercises both within the political science programs of the department and outside the academic context, in university colleges and governmental advisory bodies. In addition, ACIM plans a workshop on the assessment of skills teaching in EU studies. One of the other major events that will be supported by the Chair will be the organization of EuroSim 2016: Antwerp will host 200 students from 20 European and US based universities for a four day simulation on European decision-making.
Jan Beyers was awarded an ERC Consolidator Grant

Early December, ACIM got some very exciting news as professor Jan Beyers was awarded a prestigious research grant, the ERC Consolidator Grant, from the European Research Council for a project on interest group politics called iBias.

Why is this ERC grant such great news for ACIM?

The large grant will enable the further deepening and strengthening of the research team and adds some exciting new projects. What is great about the iBias project is that it allows to build cumulatively on two excellent PhD-projects – the dissertation of Bert Fraussen and Marcel Hanegraaff’s work – that were just finished. Moreover, it fits squarely in ACIM’s research line on interest representation and the politics of multi-level governance.

What is the project about?

The basic aim of the project – Understanding Contemporary Interest Group Politics: Mobilization and Strategies in Multi-Layered Systems (iBias) – is to address an unsettled political science problem, namely how does the shifting of policy-making competencies to higher levels of government affect the opportunities of societal interests to seek representation.

On the one hand, the Madisonian view entails that shifting competencies upwards is a healthy antidote to the powers of specific interests that may dominate smaller polities. Multi-levelness may also provide political opportunities as it enables actors to make strategic venue shifts when they are unable to attract the necessary attention at one venue. On the other hand, shifting policymaking upwards may seriously restrict the opportunities for diffuse interests, undermine encompassing forms of interest representation, and increase the barriers for local groups to gain attention. Instead of creating opportunities for all, multi-layered systems may decrease opportunities and reproduce or reinforce representational bias.

The main goal of the project is to integrate theoretically, methodologically and empirically these different aspects of interest group politics, by taking explicitly into account the nature of multi-layered systems.

The INTEREURO Workshop in Bochum

Late October 2013 professor Dirk De Bièvre, Frederik Heylen and Iskander De Bruycker represented ACIM at the INTEREURO workshop, organized at the Bochum Ruhr University. Next to discussing the progress of this ESF-funded research project on EU lobbying, the participants discussed some interesting and promising papers.

The INTEREURO project headed off in October 2011. Since then a lot of progress has been made. The overall goal of INTEREURO is to study interest group activities in the EU together with nine teams across Europe and the US. At the conference each team gave an overview of its activities. All the teams made significant progress. The Antwerp team now conducted over 140 interviews with EU lobbyists and is finishing up their media study. Other teams conducted interviews with national lobby groups, Commission and Council officials.

‘The Antwerp team now conducted over 140 interviews with EU lobbyists’

Jan Beyers in Australia

During last year’s Fall (October 20 till December 20) Professor Jan Beyers spent two months at the Australian National University, Centre for European Studies in Canberra.

Being Down Under and far away from almost everything was a great experience in terms of having time to do research, writing papers, reading a lot and, also important, having some fun.

I was invited by Darren Halpin with whom we will develop closer collaboration in the coming years. Significant for Darren’s research is the organizational-centered focus on how organized interests interact with their institutional and political environment. This is also a key perspective in some ongoing projects (see Bert Fraussen’s PhD) and upcoming projects such as the ERC CoG project iBias (see previous page). One of the major aims with these projects is to tie parts of our empirical work deeper into the broader field of organizational sociology as this literature provides the necessary conceptual tools to grasp how variation in organizational form affects the potential for political representation. During my time at ANU I revised a number of papers, started to write some new papers and spent considerable time in familiarizing myself with some more sophisticated methods in social network analysis, such as exponential random graph modelling in R.

And for those who start worrying about my mental health after reading this last sentence; don’t worry, I had a great time, enjoyed the warm weather and sun (while Belgium was cold and dark) and had some nice trips to Alice Springs, Kings Canyon, Uluru and Sydney.
Since September 2013 I have been working as a research-assistant for the INTEREURO project. I hold a Master’s degree in Political Science (research) from Leiden University and a Master degree in EU International Relations and Diplomacy Studies from the College of Europe in Bruges. After my graduation, I did a traineeship at the European External Action Service in Brussels. I worked for the division that deals with the United States and Canada.

Since October, I am working on the project ‘Explaining variation of regional authorities’ influence in EU legislation and identifying best practices’. To explain why regions are successful in lobbying the EU, I will quantify influence using expert interviews and preference attainment.

Subsequently, the differences in influence will be explained by the strategies used to influence the policymaking process, the characteristics of the region (e.g. amount of personnel at the regional representation) and the characteristics of the issue (e.g. degree of polarization). The goal is to identify ‘best practices’ that make a difference in the influence of regions in the EU. My research interests are European Union politics, regionalism and federalism, external relations of the EU, international relations and transatlantic relations.

Marcia Bandilli

I hold a Master Degree from the University of Tirana (Albania) in Political Theory with a Golden Medal Award for excellent results achieved. I have been actively working in the civil society sector in Albania, in different youth NGOs and think-tanks. The second day was reserved for social activities. We started the day with a visit to the Escher museum. The guide gave us a tour in the historic palace, mentioning all aspects of the love life of former Dutch rulers, and showed us Escher’s works. We ended the Joint Sessions with a boat tour through the waters of The Hague. Admiring the view while enjoying all different kinds of sparkling wine. ACIM members are now not only experts in the field of multi-level politics and institutions, we now know everything about Prosecco, Cava, and other types of ‘vin moussant’!

The last two years I was working in the Communication Department of the University of Tirana, where I also taught.

From October 2013 I am enrolled as a PhD Student at the University of Antwerp, being awarded an Erasmus Mundus Scholarship.

My research interests include: Europeanization, EU Policies, Europe 2020 Strategy and EU Enlargement. My research project is about mapping different frames of cross-border cooperation in the EU, focusing on the Belgian case.

Since September 2013 I have been working as a research-assistant for the INTEREURO project. I hold a Master’s degree in Comparative and European politics from the University of Antwerp. During the past few months I conducted a final round of expert-interviews in Brussels, bringing the counter to a staggering 143 interviews in total. For the remainder of my time on this project, I will be assisting with data-management.

At the same time, I have been working together with Prof. Dirk De Bie to develop a new research project on the changing role of the emerging countries in the international economic institutions. This project will be submitted for an FWO fellowship in February.

In the near future I will work on a new INTEREURO survey project. I will be involved in the testing phase of the survey.

Frederik Heylen
ACIM WELCOMES

Aydin Yildirim

I started my academic career in the US where I attended the University of Houston, gaining a BA in Political Science with high honours. I went on to complete a MSc in Politics at the University of Edinburgh in the UK.

My primary research interests lie in judicial politics where I aim to understand state behaviors in response to the judicial developments occurring in international organizations. During my MSc I examined the behavior of the developing states in the World Trade Organization and analyzed their compliance record in regards to the Dispute Settlement Mechanism of the WTO.

After completing my degree in Edinburgh, I started my PhD here at the Antwerp Center for Institutions and Multilevel Politics.

I am currently working under Prof. Dirk De Bièvre and Dr. Arlo Poletti and my doctoral project investigates the responses of the US and the EU to litigation brought in the WTO. I aim to understand under what conditions states comply with or violate their WTO commitments.

Khrystyna Fogel

I am a PhD student at the Faculty of International Relations of the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv in Ukraine, where I obtained a Master’s degree. I started my PhD studies in November 2011. The topic of my research is the political aspects of the development of the EU’s migration policy.

It is a great opportunity to continue my PhD studies at the University of Antwerp. The main goal is to investigate the EU’s migration policy and its cooperation with Ukraine. As an example, I investigate migration flows from Poland to the UK and Germany, which as a consequence provoke the same processes from Ukraine to Poland.

Doing research had a huge influence on my development and my understanding of political science. To implement positive changes in any political arena it is necessary to use political theory. I never miss a chance to gain experience, to meet new people, and discover new things.

Jeroen Candel

From mid-February to mid-June I will join ACIM as a visiting PhD student. Since February 2012 I work as a PhD at the Public Administration and Policy Group of Wageningen University, a renowned university of life sciences in The Netherlands. Before I started in Wageningen, I studied Public Administration and Organizational Science at Utrecht University.

In my research I focus on the controversies that surround the issue of food security, and how EU policy-makers deal with these controversies. Food security is not only a complex but also a much contested policy problem, about which many different ideas exist.

During my stay in Antwerp, I plan to develop a theoretical framework for an article about how Commission officials deal with these kind of controversies when designing policies. Because of ACIM’s expertise in EU decision-making and interest group theories, I believe this is the perfect place to do so.

Meanwhile, I hope to be able to gather data by starting an interview round at the Commission in Brussels.

ACIM SAYS GOODBYE

Helene Marie Fisker

I am a PhD student at the Department of Political Science, Aarhus University (Denmark) and I have been visiting the ACIM research group from the 15th of August to the 15th of November 2013.

I have enjoyed my stay in Antwerp a lot. The members of the ACIM group immediately made me feel very welcome, and I really like the city and the Belgian mentality.

First and foremost, my stay has given me some valuable inputs to my PhD project. The project investigates how the Danish interest group population has developed over time and which factors can explain the development. It has been very interesting for me to discuss the project with the members of the ACIM research group as many of them work with similar research questions. I have presented one of the papers I am currently working on at a lunch seminar, and I got some very good comments both to the theoretical setup and to the empirical analysis. This has given me new ideas both to the paper and also about how to proceed further with my project.

It has also been very interesting to learn more about what the members of the research group are working on. In September I joined the “ACIM Joint Sessions” in The Hague where members of the group presented their work. This was a nice trip with a very well organized academic and social program.

All in all, I am very happy that I have had the opportunity to visit Antwerp and I hope to see all of my ACIM colleagues again at future conferences or maybe even in Aarhus.