WELCOME

This is already the fifth Newsletter since we started with the first one in October 2012. Time is moving fast! Our research team is flourishing and we are currently looking for two new staff members. At the moment 14 PhD-students are working on their dissertation and 4 will defend their thesis in the course of 2015. In addition, we have our regular stream of publications. Two recent articles are briefly presented in this Newsletter. During the past two months we have worked hard to improve our public visibility, for example by developing a new website (ACIMAntwerp.eu) and creating pages on Facebook and LinkedIn. Regular updates on our work, activities and events will be posted on these pages (and on our Twitter-account @ACIM). Outreach to the broader public is one crucial objective for the coming years. A successful example was the INTEREURO outreach workshop on which we report elsewhere in the Newsletter.

Jan Beyers, Director of ACIM

JOIN OUR TEAM!

Following a recently obtained research grant from the European Research Council (ERC) we are looking for two talented and highly motivated researchers to join our team in October 2015. For full descriptions of the two vacancies click here.

One PhD student

You prepare a doctoral thesis in one of the following areas: the Europeanization of national interest groups from an organization theoretical perspective, the influence of interest groups in Belgian politics (federal and regional), the rescaling of interest representation, advisory and consultation regimes... We expect you to contribute to teaching (to a very limited extent) and to the overall research activities (such as lunch seminars or workshops) of ACIM.

One postdoctoral researcher

You offer substantive support to the ERC CoG project iBias by developing your own postdoctoral research project in one or more of the following domains: the Europeanization of national interest groups from an organization theoretical perspective, transnational advocacy towards international organizations, comparative interest group politics, stakeholder involvement in regulatory regimes, interest groups in Belgian politics, rescaling of interest representation...

Lunch seminars

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<td>It's What's Inside That Counts. How intra-group processes make or break interest group lobbying in the European Union.</td>
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<td>18/03</td>
<td>Johan Adriaensen</td>
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<td>Multidisciplinary workshop on judicial and regulatory politics with Prof. Christophe Hönnige (Leibniz Universität Hannover)</td>
<td>- Details will follow soon. Contact Josephine De Jaegere for more information.</td>
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<td>02/06</td>
<td>Morten J. Pedersen (University of Copenhagen)</td>
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INTEREURO OUTREACH CONFERENCE IN BRUSSELS

In December 2014, some first results of the INTEREURO-project were presented and discussed at a conference co-organized with the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS). Considering the large amount of participants and the fruitful discussions, the event was a great success.

The INTEREURO-project is a large cooperative research project on legislative lobbying in the EU. It is sponsored by the European Science Foundation and involves nine universities across Europe and the US. In the past three years about 30 researchers have been actively engaged in data collection and analysis for this project. The Antwerp team conducted more than 140 interviews with lobbyists in Brussels and coded over 3000 statements, made by policymakers and interest groups in different media outlets (see the project’s introductory video).

A token of gratitude

As a token of gratitude to the policy practitioners who participated in the project, an outreach event was organized to present some first results. Joost Berkhout (University of Amsterdam), for instance explained that the EU interest group population has remained rather stable in the past decade. Iskander De Bruycker (ACIM) presented evidence that providing technical information to policymakers is crucial in EU lobbying. Andreas Dür (University of Salzburg) explained, somewhat surprisingly, that NGOs are often more successful in lobbying compared to business interests. Each academic presentation was followed by a practitioner who critically discussed the findings and opened the floor for a stimulating open debate. “Unique about the event was the intensive and constructive exchange between academics and EU policy practitioners”, says Jan Beyers (ACIM).

Over 200 people registered for the event

The event was very well attended. Over 200 people registered. Marco Incerti (CEPS): “This attendance rate is exceptional, even for CEPS’ standards; probably because lobbying is such a hot topic.” For those who were not able to make it, the slides of the presentations and complementary papers can be downloaded from the INTEREURO website. There is also a short video which gives you a flavor of the event.
No Place Like Home? Explaining Venue Selection of Regional Offices in Brussels

Jan Beyers, Tom Donas and Bert Fraussen published a paper on territorial lobbying in the EU in the Journal of European Public Policy.

The article explains the varying intensity with which regional offices interact with various EU-level policy-making venues when seeking to influence EU policies. One of the main questions is whether subnational representatives target the European Commission, the European Parliament or the Member-state representations in Brussels.

The article complements an exchange-based perspective with political-institutional and contextual factors, such as regional political autonomy and the degree of preference alignment with key policy-making venues. To test their hypotheses, the authors rely on evidence collected through 33 face-to-face interviews with regional representations concerning their lobbying activities in four salient policy processes.

While most regional offices regularly interact with both national and supranational venues, the results show that the central government representation in Brussels is always, and irrespective of what is at stake, the most important contact point.

Finally, the authors also find that policy alignment shapes venue selection, indicating some evidence of strategic manoeuvring. For instance, if a region faces considerable dis-alignment with the EP or the central government, it will more likely approach the Commission. This fits into the image of the Commission as a potential ally for regional actors.


Domestic EU Coordination and Interest Group Mobilization in Three Member States

Peter Bursens, Jan Beyers and Tom Donas published a paper on domestic EU coordination in Regional and Federal Studies.

In this article the authors take issue with the literature on domestic EU coordination. They argue that many conclusions so far are based upon analyses of vertical and horizontal administrative networks which prepare instructions for EU level negotiators.

Based on a data-set with systematic measures of domestic policy coordination of EU trade policy in three member states (Belgium, the Netherlands and France), the article shows that reality is much more nuanced. Instead of only looking at public authorities (administrations or executive agencies) and the formal coordination network, this paper also looks at the informal political-administrative network.

More specifically, the authors examine how interest groups mobilize and target domestic venues in order to shape the policy position national governments defend at the EU-level.

This approach delivers interesting new insights. One of these is that despite strong devolution in Belgium, its intergovernmental coordination shows a considerable level of network centralization, even when compared to unitary countries such as France and the Netherlands, meaning that there are large differences between the three states with respect to the direct and indirect connectedness of the actors involved.

Peter Bursens, Jan Beyers and Tom Donas (2014) Domestic EU coordination and interest group mobilization in three member states: Looking beyond the formal mechanisms, Regional and Federal Studies, 24(3): 363-381.
ECPR GENERAL CONFERENCE IN GLASGOW

In September, a large ACIM delegation attended the ECPR General Conference in Glasgow.

The European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) held its annual General Conference at the University of Glasgow on September the 3rd 2014 where almost 2,000 researchers around the globe came together. ACIM was well-represented at the conference with 11 participants; chairing, presenting, and attending various panels throughout.

The majority of ACIM researchers presented at one of the panels in the section on interest group politics. Outside the interest groups circles, ACIM participants also attended and presented in panels on regional level politics, legislatures and representation, judicial politics and political economy. The variety of research interests mirrored our participation in a diverse range of panels, which resulted in multiple knowledge exchange opportunities between researchers. In addition to scholarly exchange, we enjoyed a reception at the world renowned Kelvingrove Art Gallery.

The city of Glasgow was also able to impress us with its breathtaking architecture and historical sites. While receiving highly constructive feedback from our peers throughout the conference, we also had a chance to enjoy the city, spend quality time with each other, and network with many brilliant researchers in our own fields and beyond. All in all, ACIM learned, lived, and enjoyed Glasgow to its fullest extent.

‘BELGIUM : THE STATE OF THE FEDERATION’ CONFERENCE IN BRUSSELS

In December, a small ACIM delegation attended the third edition of the conference on ‘Belgium: the state of the federation’ organized by the two Belgian political science associations: Vereniging voor Politieke Wetenschappen (VPW) and Association belge francophone de science politique (ABSP).

Frederik Heylen and Jan Beyers presented a paper on the interest group population in Belgium. Former ACIM-member Bert Fraussen who is currently a postdoctoral researcher at the Australian National University is also involved in this project. Josephine De Jaegere presented her research on the Belgian Constitutional Court.

Interestingly, the event itself showed some similarities with the state of the Belgian federation. At first sight, Francophone and Flemish researchers were neatly divided into two language groups, unaware of one German-speaking researcher standing alone. However, as the conference proceeded, all participants seemed to realize that their research interests were not that different, which resulted in fruitful cross-language-border discussions.
ACIM ON THE MOVE

ACIM JOINT SESSIONS IN MECHELEN

On 23-24 October 2014, the research group organized its Annual ACIM Joint Sessions. The idea behind this event is that the staff – for 48 hours – secludes itself from their daily non-research-related concerns and worries to focus on their work and especially that of their colleagues.

This year’s destination was the fascinating, yet often overlooked, town of Mechelen, located right in between Antwerp and Brussels. The first day of our stay included paper presentations and academic discussions. We got acquainted with each other’s research and provided it with comments and suggestions. The causes of a variety of political phenomena, such as the practice of outside lobbying, interpersonal parliamentary cooperation in the EP and compliance with WTO dispute settlements, featured in the discussions and were analyzed into detail. Furthermore, young researchers were guided by their seniors through the world of publishing in internationally ranked ISI journals.

Another important aspect of the ACIM Joint Sessions is team-building. This year we submerged ourselves into the local tradition of beer brewing by paying a visit to the historical brewery ‘Het Anker’, famous for its ‘Gouden Carolus’. Last, but certainly not least, ACIM took up the challenge of climbing the 538 steps of Mechelen’s Sint-Romboutstoren. Our efforts were rewarded with a 360° panoramic view that included both Antwerp’s cathedral, as well as Brussel’s Atomium.

ACIM WELCOMES

Data Manager Peter Aspeslagh

As the new data manager I am responsible for the way ACIM’s research data is structured and connected. In addition, I assist the team in its external communication, for instance through managing the new website ACIMAntwerp.eu. After studying political sciences and contemporary history, I assisted the University of Leuven department of political sciences in converting their various datasets into an integrated application.

Among others we combined a database of the composition of Belgian governments with a file covering all parliamentary mandates. We further connected this database with data on parliamentary votes and executive branches of hundreds of political, social, financial and religious organizations. Over the past two years I have also been involved in the way a mainstream political party manages its member data and external communication.

When I’m not at my desk I like travelling around the globe, writing and reading. I also have a passion for cartography and Berlin.