I am delighted to present you Newsletter number six with some news from our research team. As one can see things are going very well. Colleagues are visiting conferences, enjoying research stays, and writing papers. In this Newsletter we briefly summarize seven research papers that were published in the past six months. All these papers were accepted by highly ranked social science journals. Significant is the stream of articles that were recently published by Dirk De Bievre and colleagues on judicialization and world trade politics. Also worth mentioning is the INTEREURO Special Issue published by the Journal of European Public Policy. We also welcome Vlad Gross as our new postdoc. Vlad, we hope and wish that you will have a great time in Antwerp! Finally, the newsletter gives only a snapshot of what we are doing. More updates can be found on our website (ACIMAntwerp.eu), Facebook, LinkedIn page and Twitter-account (@ACIM).

Jan Beyers, Director of ACIM
Midwest Political Science Association conference in Chicago

Jan Beyers and Inger Baller presented their work at the 74th MPSA conference in Chicago.

Freed from teaching obligations during the Easter Break at the university, we had some extra time to conduct research and two of us used this opportunity to communicate some recent research findings to fellow scholars at the annual Midwest Political Science Association (MPSA) conference in Chicago. Every year in April, this conference gathering over 5000 political scientists is held in the magnificent Palmer House. Our small ACIM delegation flew halfway across the globe to spend four days presenting our research, receiving feedback and learning about developments in the field. Jan Beyers presented, chaired and was discussant in panels on interest group involvement in politics, while Inger Baller presented her findings on co-operation between Members of the European Parliament. Besides formal sessions there was plenty of opportunity to (re-) connect with colleagues based at other universities during receptions and coffee breaks. In the spirit of 'work hard, play hard', there was also some time reserved to get a bird's-eye view on society from a skyscraper and to let the 'windy city' clear our minds.

Iskander De Bruycker at Aarhus University

Iskander De Bruycker spent three months at Aarhus University as a visiting scholar.

Aarhus is called the City of Smiles, not because its inhabitants are smiling all the time, but because there are many things to smile about in this amazing city: beautiful beaches, marvelous forests to explore, cozy restaurants, famous museums... Everything is within walking distance.

It is at the University of Aarhus that I resided as a visiting scholar during the summer months (June-September), at the Department of Statskundskab (I still can’t pronounce this word). The department is huge. It employs about 60 professors, working in very diverse areas of research. A senior colleague even claimed that it is the biggest political science department in Europe.

My stay was hosted by Anne Binderkrantz and Helene Pedersen. They helped me in developing ideas for a post-doctoral research project. I also got some invaluable feedback on a research paper on influence, that is part of my dissertation. While participating in the academic life, I noticed that a lot of high quality work is being done in Aarhus. More specifically, the political behavior section excels in methodology and quantitative analysis. Colleagues are very critical towards each other’s work, but always in a spirit of constructive criticism.

From October onward, I will start working as a post-doctoral research fellow for ACCESS Europe at the University of Amsterdam. A short summary of my PhD thesis will appear in the next edition of the ACIM newsletter.
Explaining lobbying patterns during WTO Ministerial Conferences

Comparative Political Studies published in its October issue 2015 an article written by four (former) ACIM-scholars: Marcel Hanegraaff, Caelesta Braun, Dirk De Bièvre and Jan Beyers.

The publication is the result of a research process that started in 2008 with the mapping of all non-state stakeholders attending the Ministerial Conferences of the WTO in the period 1995 through 2011. The article explains varying levels of transnational advocacy initiated by domestic organized interests. Theoretically, it integrates the constraining and enabling impact of the domestic context with factors related to global opportunity structures. Hypotheses are tested with advanced statistical tools (zero-inflated negative binomial model) and an original data set consisting of all national organized interests that attended the WTO Ministerial Conferences. Instead of viewing transnational advocacy as a reaction to a lack of domestic political attention and an attempt to compensate for domestic deprivation, the analyses actually show the opposite. Organized interests that originate from democratic, mostly wealthy countries, and that enjoy robust access to domestic resources, are much more responsive to shifts in the global policy agenda. More generally, the analysis of the factors that drive transnational advocacy point at the irrelevance to artificially juxtapose domestic and global explanations.


Special issue on Judicial Politics in International Trade Relations

Dirk De Bièvre and Arlo Poletti edited a special issue of the World Trade Review on ‘Judicial Politics in International Trade Relations’, containing contributions on the origins of the WTO dispute settlement system (Elsig & Eckhardt), the evolution (Bezuijen) and the effect of judicialization in Preferential Trade Agreements (PTAs) (Hicks & Kim), as well as on the relationship between PTAs and the WTO (Mavroidis).

In their own piece (with Chatagnier), they develop a formal explanation for how the credible threat to resort to and the actual use of WTO litigation influences multilateral trade negotiations. Contrary to conventional wisdom, increased enforcement does not necessarily make actors shy away from further cooperation, but can open up a bargaining window in which both the potential complainant and the potential defendant find common ground for negotiated agreement in the shadow of WTO law. In a recent article (with Hanegraaff) in the British Journal of Politics and International Relations, the authors highlight another effect of the judicialization of the world trading regime on interest mobilization. The WTO created pressures for the EU to implement significant institutional innovations to ease access for private parties and generate an influx of information to strengthen offensive market access actions. This reform directly affected firms’ incentives to mobilize, creating incentives for specialized lobbying. They show how these two processes ultimately led to a re-organization of trade policy lobbying in the EU and compelled business associations to become increasingly receptive to the demands of special interests.


ACIM PUBLISHES

INTEREURO special issue on legislative lobbying in context

Three ACIM-members were strongly involved in a special issue published by the Journal of European Public Policy, titled ‘Legislative lobbying in context: the policy and polity determinants of interest group politics in the European Union’.

Jan Beyers, Iskander De Bruycker and Inger Baller contributed with one article: The alignment of parties and interest groups in EU legislative politics. Jan Beyers acted as guest editor of the special issue (with Caelesta Braun and Heike Klüver). The special issue presents an innovative analysis of interest group lobbying in the European Union by drawing on an unprecedented and comprehensive large-N research design to study the effect of policy-related and institutional factors on interest group mobilization, strategies and influence. The volume brings together articles from different modules that are part of a larger European Collaborative Research Project, INTEREURO, carried out by research teams in nine different countries under the auspices of the European Science Foundation. The volume analyses lobbying strategies, framing and influence processes for a set of 125 EU legislative proposals, in an effort to better understand the involvement of interest organizations in European decision-making process. The authors draw on sophisticated and innovative policy-driven samples of interest group mobilization, which allows them to account systematically for how policy-specific and institutional context factors shape mobilization, lobbying strategies and influence of interest groups on European public policy debates. In this way the volume makes an important contribution to the study of interest groups in the EU and represents the breadth of positions taken in the current literature.


The Effects of Active Learning Environments: How Simulations Trigger Affective Learning

One of ACIMs side projects deals with measuring learning effects of EU studies programs.

A pilot project on the effect of participation in EU simulations has delivered some interesting findings. Proponents of simulations point out that students will better understand EU decision-making when they combine theoretical knowledge about negotiation theory with knowledge about how the EU works and with the experience of negotiating as if they were EU actors. We examined these pedagogical claims by assessing the organization of EuroSim, a four day comprehensive simulation of EU decision-making organised by the Trans-Atlantic Consortium for European Union Studies & Simulations (TACEUSS) as an active learning environment. In addition, using data from pre- and post-simulation surveys among participants, we showed that through participation in simulations students gained skills in the areas of affective learning, such as the ability for self-assessment, as suggested by the constructivist literature. These first results will be further examined in a new 4-year project. Co-supervised by educational science scholars a doctoral student will examine the effect of simulations on students’ interest and motivation in a quasi-experimental design, using data from several in-house and international simulations.

For the next two years I will be working on the ERC-funded project iBias, as well as other research projects underway at ACIM. I’m very excited about joining the research team, starting October. Before moving to Belgium I completed my PhD at Sciences Po in Paris on interest group lobbying success in the EU Commission policy-making process. My study focused on the role of policymakers and the policy context in interest group lobbying success. The empirical results relied on a survey of Commission officials and two case studies in financial and consumer protection regulation.

After studying political science at the Central European University (CEU) in Budapest, I graduated with a degree in EU studies from Leiden University in The Netherlands. In addition to lobbying research, I am also very interested in studies on corruption, social networks and behavioral science.

Whenever there’s a chance, I enjoy playing the electric guitar and have a passion for all things related to astronomy and space exploration.