WELCOME
This is ACIM-Newsletter number 8. Again, we had no problem to fill six pages with research news and activities. Two recent developments stand out. First, we were awarded with a Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence. Second, in the next four years we will be part of a prestigious Horison 2020 PhD network PLATO on the EU’s post-crisis legitimacy that will be led by ARENA (Oslo, Norway). In the past month we had three successful PhD-defences, a short overview of each dissertation can be found in this edition. We also welcome back Iskander de Bruycker who was granted an FWO postdoctoral fellowship. Finally, this newsletter briefly reports on how the first results of the Belgian Comparative Interest Group survey were reported on in the Flemish news media.

Jan Beyers

ACTORE
ACIM has been rewarded a Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence by the European Commission. In collaboration with the Antwerp research groups ‘Public Administration and Management’ and ‘Law and Governance’, ACIM will implement a diverse set of research, teaching and outreach activities on the broad theme of the Organization of Rulemaking and Multi-level Governance in Europe. The coming three years the ACTORE Centre of Excellence will host a series of PhD masterclasses and workshops, organize lectures and debates for academic and general audiences. ACTORE will also invite and fund external PhD- students for a research visit in Antwerp.

PLATO
As of January 2017, ACIM will participate in the new Oslo-lead European Initial Training Network PLATO, under the promotorship of Dirk De Bièvre, and the co-promotorship of Jan Beyers and Peter Bursens. PLATO is a PhD network on the EU’s post-crisis legitimacy, funded by the EU Horizon 2020 program, led by the Oslo-based ARENA Centre for European Studies, and coordinated by Prof. Chris Lord. As one of the 9 academic partners, ACIM will create 2 PhD positions. One on the role and legitimacy of agencies in the EU, under the supervision of Jan Beyers and Peter Bursens, and one on reasons for the different degrees of delegation to supranational or intergovernmental agencies within the structure of EU economic governance, under the supervision of Dirk De Bièvre.

For more information on the call for PhD students, consult the ARENA website.

Lunch seminars and events

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ACIM CONGRATULATES

Dr. Matti van Hecke successfully defended his dissertation!

Do subnational authorities (SNAs) have influence on EU policymaking? While over the past decades regional governments throughout Europe have experienced an increase in political responsibility over the implementation of public policies, their formal involvement in shaping these policies has remained limited at the EU-level. To avoid the risk of becoming policy-takers without being policymakers, regional authorities have mobilized directly in the EU’s capital to represent their interests. Today, over 300 regional representations are based in Brussels. In his PhD, Matti Van Hecke researches under which conditions regional lobbying also leads to more influence. Matti’s research was funded by the Flemish Government in the framework of the Policy Research Centre Foreign Affairs, International Entrepreneurship and Development Cooperation, a joint venture of ACIM, KULeuven and Vlerick.

The results of his research nuance some outdated, yet popular, ideas about regional interest representation. While in studies explaining EU policy outcomes regional and local authorities are often treated as somewhat of an ugly duck, Matti Van Hecke shows that regions represent a substantial part of the stakeholder community trying to influence policies. These policies do not only include the EU’s regional policy, but also agriculture, research and innovation, environment and transport policies. How the preferences of SNAs and other stakeholders are aligned varies on an issue-by-issue basis. Regional authorities do not have natural friends or foes when seeking favorable policy outcomes. Instead, with whom they align depends largely on the policy issue at stake.

“In contrast to popular belief, strong regions like Flanders, Scotland, Catalonia and Bavaria do not necessarily have more influence on EU policymaking than others.”

This contradicts earlier beliefs that conflicts between SNAs and central governments are the raison d’être of a regional presence in Brussels. Whether SNAs are successful in attaining their preferences does not depend on their size or power. In contrast to popular belief, strong regions like Flanders, Scotland, Catalonia and Bavaria do not necessarily have more influence on EU policymaking than others. Instead, whether regions can influence EU policy depends on the coalition strategies they use. Lobbying via coalitions that are large in size and nationally diverse systematically leads to more favorable policy outcomes.

In the light of these results, SNAs are conceptually and empirically not that different from interest groups. Both have a stake in public policy, have limited possibilities to represent their interests and therefore lobby policymakers. They operate in the same policy environments, encourage each other to mobilize, make coalitions together and have similar determinants of influence. Therefore, his PhD validates and calls for more synergies between the literature on regional mobilization and interest groups.

We wish Matti Van Hecke, who stays for one extra year at ACIM as a postdoc, all the best with his future career!

**ACIM CONGRATULATES**

**It’s now Dr. Margaux Kersschot!**

Margaux successfully defended her dissertation titled ‘Lost in in Aggregation: Domestic public and private economic actors in EU Trade Negotiations’. The dissertation explores the role of multi-level interactions between both public and private actors. More specifically, focus is put on actors at the micro-level: firms and regional authorities. The dissertation was conducted under the auspices of Flemish Government in the framework of the Policy Research Centre Foreign Affairs, International Entrepreneurship and Development Cooperation, a joint venture of ACIM, KULeuven and Vlerick.

First, the formal competencies of regions in a country’s trade policy making structure has an effect on the role they can play, but does not tell the whole story. As regions may not be contacted much by the private sector, they lack bottom up information to define a regional position. National and even European authorities too face problems in obtaining certain bottom up information. Policymakers need the knowledge from firms in order to understand the technical details of the negotiations. Further research was thus needed on how and why private actors communicate to public authorities, or why they fail to do so.

Second, Margaux investigated individual firms’ motivations for trade policy lobbying. The large firms in highly concentrated sectors target the European level first, and the national level in second instance. On exceptional occasions, they lobby at the regional level, when countervailing lobbying takes place. These firms are active members of EU associations. They prefer working through these associations, and engage additionally in a direct lobbying strategy to reinforce the association’s actions; or to defend their own position in case it differs from the association’s goals. The smaller firms or firms in less concentrated sectors are not lobbying on trade negotiations. This may entail consequences in the way associations can represent these firms. Unaware and unable or unwilling to communicate, their interests remain unknown to policymakers. Both on the public as on the private side information and actors get lost in the process of aggregating interests.

Margaux got universal praise for the clarity and originality of her research approach, from the members of the jury, her supervisors Bart Kerremans (KU Leuven) and Dirk De Bièvre (Universiteit Antwerpen), as well as those present at the defense.

Currently, Margaux works at Adoc Talent Management in Paris. It is a firm specializing in career management of recently graduated doctors and PhDs. Congratulations Margaux, and all the best!

“Information and actors get lost in the process of aggregating interests”

**Frédéric Maes became a doctor!**

Frédéric Maes successfully defended his PhD dissertation on ‘The impact of Europe 2020 on Regional Governance Structures’. Frédéric’s project was sponsored by the Flemish Policy Research Centre on Governmental Organization. Combining Europeanization and Governance literatures, Frédéric looks into the determinants of the types of governance structures sub-national authorities set up to cope with the Europe 2020 program.

He applies social network analysis on data from Flanders, Catalonia and Scotland in the policy domains of energy, education and social inclusion. He implements a comparative design to conclude that the administrative capacity devoted to follow-up the Europe 2020 reform program is a major factor in explaining a lead-organization governance structure, which is assumed to be an effective strategy.

ACIM wishes Frédéric success in his new job at the Port of Antwerp!
Iskander De Bruycker has been awarded a postdoctoral research fellowship from the Research Fund Flanders!

We are very proud to announce that Iskander De Bruycker has been awarded a prestigious postdoctoral research fellowship from the Research Fund Flanders (FWO-V) to work on his research project “Lobbying for the people: Interest groups and public pressure in EU legislative politics”. We are honored that Iskander will develop this project in our research group, starting from October 1 onwards.

Here a short summary of the project:

Opinion leaders often criticize EU lobbying as a ‘disease for democracy’ and detrimental to the public interest. The lobbying scandals that make it to the news headlines typically involve business lobbyists that influence or bribe corrupted policymakers in smoky backrooms. The public image of EU lobbying is very negative. This negative image, however, might not be an accurate depiction of what lobbying and interest group politics in Brussels entails. In some instances, interest groups – such as business groups, NGOs and labor unions – may serve as key transmission belts between the public and EU policymakers.

These organizations can make EU policymakers more responsive by informing them about how much support a specific policy issue enjoys among citizens.

The role of interest groups in elucidating public pressure to policymakers remains largely neglected in both responsiveness and interest group studies. Clarifying this role will precisely be the focus of my postdoctoral project. The main research question I aim to answer is: To what extent and under which conditions are EU policy outcomes responsive to public pressures articulated by interest groups?

Empirically, the project departs from a stratified sample of policy proposals put forward by the European Commission. For each proposal, I will identify – by triangulating multiple data-sources – the entire set of stakeholders that sought to influence the legislative outcome and the information about public pressure they voiced.

Some relevant publications:


Arlo Poletti moved to the University of Bologna

We congratulate Arlo Poletti with his new job at the University of Bologna, where he is now a Fixed-term Senior Researcher in the Department of Political and Social Sciences (as of September 2016).
On litigation at the WTO
Yildirim, A. (Forthcoming), Domestic political implications of global value chains: Explaining EU responses to litigation at the World Trade Organization. *Comparative European Politics.*

On EU-VS lobbying styles

A recent ACIM-paper published in the *Journal of Public Policy*, authored by Marcel Hanegraaf, Arlo Poletti and Jan Beyers, analyses the varying lobbying styles of European and American interest groups. Although there is consensus in the literature that policymaking in the US and Europe generates different lobbying styles, the causes of these differences are not well understood and have been seldom systematically analysed. Two explanations for these distinct American and European lobbying styles have been developed so far. The first posits that a lobbying style reflects a different political culture. The second explanation attributes distinct lobbying styles to variation in the institutional context in which lobbyists operate. Most studies that analyzed lobbying within the US and Europe and assessed the relative importance of these arguments are problematic because both explanations are consistent with observed differences in lobbying style. This recent article is unique as it circumvents problems of observational equivalence by focusing on European and American lobbyists who are active in a similar institutional venue, i.e. international diplomatic conferences. Relying on evidence collected at WTO Ministerial Conferences and UN Climate Summits, we test the relevance of alternative explanations for the variation in lobbying styles between European and American lobbyists. Our results give robust support to the institutional argument.

On inside & outside lobbying

In this article Marcel Hanegraaf, Iskander De Bruycker and Jan Beyers seek to explain the use of inside and outside lobbying by organised interests at global diplomatic conferences. At first sight, the lobbying at these venues is puzzling as it does not seem to be a very fruitful way to acquire influence. The use of outside strategies especially is perplexing because most aspects of international negotiations fall outside of the purview of national constituencies. It is argued in this article, however, that the presence of outside lobbying is not so puzzling if lobbying is seen both as a way to attain influence and as a way to pursue organisational maintenance goals. Empirically, the article draws on interview data with 232 interest group representatives that participated at either the 2012 session of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference in Geneva, or the 2011 (Durban) and 2012 (Doha) United Nations Climate Conferences. The analysis demonstrates that organisational needs, and especially the competition actors face in obtaining resources, significantly affects the relative focus of organised interests on inside and outside lobbying.

On judicial politics in the WTO
ACIM IN THE MEDIA

The first results of the Belgian CIG-survey!

We are proud to announce that after more than 120 days of fieldwork, the Belgian Interest Group Survey has been successfully concluded. Close to 1700 organizational representatives were invited to participate and an exceptionally high response rate of 41 percent was obtained. As a token of our appreciation, we donated 693 (€1 for each completed survey) to Make-A-Wish Belgium. This effort was part of the Comparative Interest Group Survey project, sponsored by the Research Foundation Flanders, the European Research Council and the Slovenian Research Agency (for more information see www.cigsurvey.eu).

The first results of this survey are discussed in a report, that was distributed among our respondents. The main finding from the preliminary analysis is that one in four Dutch and French speaking interest organizations and one in five federal organizations think it is “likely” or “very likely” that their organization will cease to exist in the coming five years. This remarkable finding has been picked up by various Flemish newspapers, including the De Standaard, Gazet van Antwerpen and Het Belang van Limburg.

In ‘live to fight another day?, The Mortality Anxiety of Organized Interest: Government patronage in times of Austerity’, a paper presented at the ECPR General Conference, Beyers, Heylen and Fraussen try to explain this fear of disbandment. Our main finding is that high levels of competition and heavy reliance on government patronage in times of austerity are the most important explaining factors.

ACIM REPORTS

Policy influencing not most important reason to attend global conferences

This month ACIM presented a research report of a recently conducted study among transnational advocates at international conferences, more specifically at the Conference of Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Ministerial Conference (MC) of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The study focuses on how policymakers and non-state actors interact at the international level and how interest groups seek to exert influence. More than 560 representatives of interest organizations from 66 different countries and 255 policymakers hailing from 70 countries participated in the study. It was financed by a prestigious grant of the European Research Council (ERC) awarded to Jan Beyers (ERC-2013-CoG 616702-iBias).

Why would non-state actors attend global conferences such as the international climate and trade negotiations? The results are shown below and it appears that networking with like-minded organizations and communicating with the general public is by far the most important motivation. Interestingly, seeking to talk to negotiators or monitoring national delegations are much less important. This indicates that policy influencing and addressing policymakers directly is not the only or most important reason for organizations to attend global diplomatic international conferences.

More findings can be found in the report, which is available on our website.

Figure: Most important reasons to attend international conferences
(UNFCCC: N=442, WTO: N=120)