

Panel 6: The Evolving Institutional Balance in the European Union

Organizers:

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Description

The institutional balance in the European Union (EU) is constantly changing. The formal and the informal institutions governing the interactions among the various EU bodies are increasingly put under strain by the entrance of 12 new member states since 2004. External shocks, like the current financial crisis and the disruptions to the gas supply in Europe in January 2009, further call into question the established ways of functioning of the EU organizations and the rules governing their interactions. Furthermore, the Reform Treaty and the public and political debates spurred by its ratification have challenged the fundamental distribution of power and competences between the national and supranational level in Europe. The institutions of the multi-level European polity are in flux.

Examples of the challenges to the current institutional set-up abound. The internal structure of the Commission faces collapse in view of the growing number of Commissioners. The law enforcement system in the EU is confronted with the impossible task of scrutinizing the implementation of more than 2000 directives in 27 countries. The need for a quick and co-ordinated response to the banking crisis has undermined the Council Presidency with the French and the Czech governments organizing in parallel inter-governmental summits. Proposals about institutional reforms are similarly plentiful. The Reform Treaty, if ratified, will increase the use of qualified-majority voting and the involvement of the European Parliament in the legislative process. Recently, the French President Nicolas Sarkozy has proposed an 'economic government' of the Eurozone.

The academic community has taken an active role in reform debates. Recent studies have brought a better understanding of the functioning and importance of informal institutions in the EU and have generated a number of theoretical models of the effects of different institutional configurations. Nevertheless, numerous empirical and theoretical questions about the actual changes in the institutional landscape of the EU and the effect of reforms remain insufficiently addressed. We propose therefore, to discuss the European Union's changing institutional architecture from a broad variety of perspectives.

The type of papers (and topics) you would expect to be submitted for your panel

We invited papers that study theoretically and empirically the evolving institutional balance in the EU. We interpreted institutions broadly as to include formal and informal organizations, rules, routines and established ways of doing things. We were particularly interested in papers that:

- describe and explain the evolving interactions among the EU institutions;
- study single organizations and their change over time;
- investigate developments in particular policy sectors;
- analyze the shifting balance of power between the different levels of governance (European, national, regional, local).

Links with a sub-theme of the NIG research programme

The proposed panel is most directly linked with sub-theme 2 'The Future of the Nation State' and more specifically with the goal of this sub-theme to study 'The evolution of EU institutions and of international bodies such as the UN, World Bank and OECD'. The future of the European nation state is intrinsically connected to the future of the EU and the institutional shape the EU will take. The distribution of power and competences between the national and the supranational level are far from settled and the proposed panel will collect papers that tackle empirically and theoretically this problem.

In addition, the proposed panel is related to sub-theme 1 'Citizens and governance' because many of the changes in the institutional set-up of the EU address the way citizen preferences are expressed, aggregated, and accommodated across governance levels.