

Permanent Representations as a Source of Influence

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Research theme

The Permanent Representations of the Member States are pivotal players in the EU decision making process. At the intersection between the European and the national level they are at the centre of a huge information flow with sources both in the national capitals as well as in Brussels. Especially Coreper II and I, the meetings, that is, of the Permanent Representatives and their Deputies, are key. Every single legislative proposal on the Council agenda goes through their hands. They do not only fulfill a vertical bridging function between the working groups and the political level but they also ensure horizontal coherence between the different policy fields and the various pillars. Very often the extremely skilled negotiators of Coreper reach an agreement, which is successively rubberstamped by the ministerial level. Coreper sees it as a failure if it has not managed to forge a compromise and has to refer an issue for further discussion to the Council (Lewis 20002).

Although the centrality of the Permanent Representations and Coreper is generally recognized (Lewis 2002), little attention has been paid to their influence on the EU policymaking process. The proposed PhD project aims to get a better insight into this question by addressing the following issues:

- how did the Permanent Representations and Coreper develop over time;
- what are their formal and informal competencies;
- what is the institutional capacity of Permanent Representations in terms of size, number of staff, organizational structure, interaction mechanisms with their respective capital;
- what are the mechanisms that allow the members of Coreper to translate their informational surplus into influence? To which extent do they involve the Commission and EP in their game?
- -what are the mechanisms for the Council to induce Coreper to behave accordingly to their preferences?
- To which extent is the position and influence of Coreper affected by new players such as the Political and Security Committee (PSC) and the Economic and Finance Committee (EFC)?