



Power and *Gestalt* of Political Concepts:

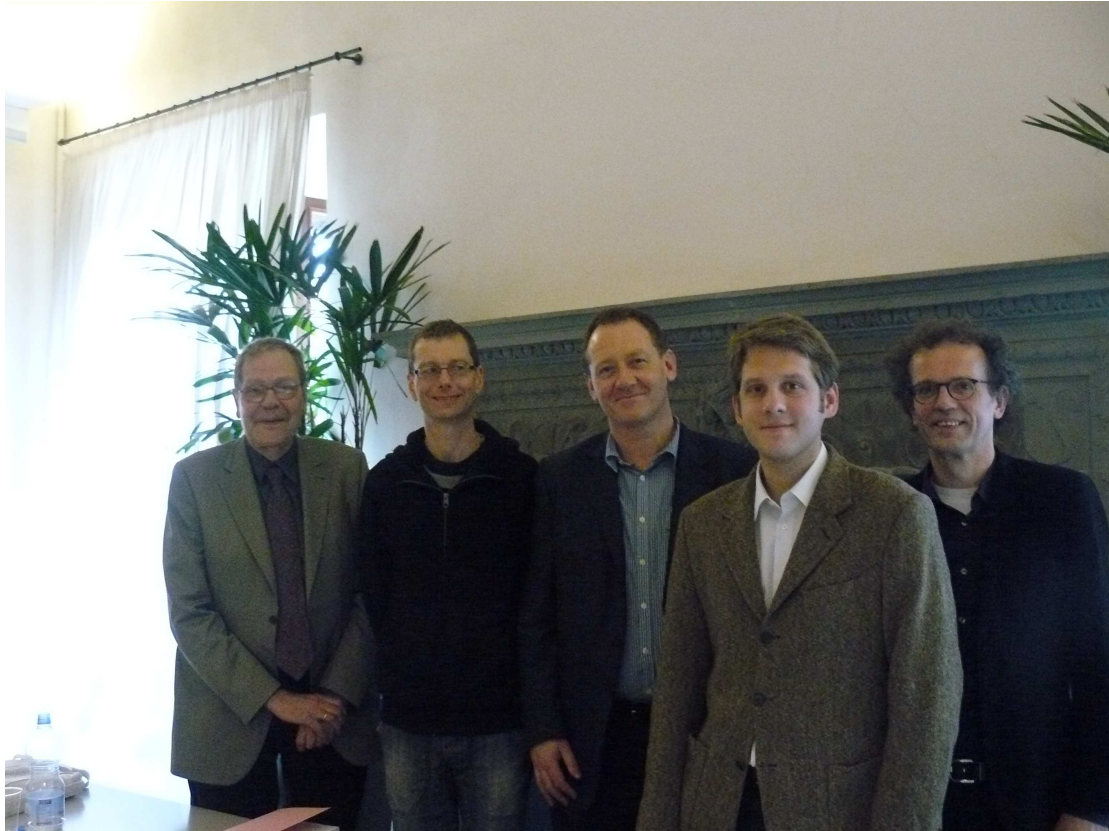
A Study of the Emergency, Nature and Self-Understanding of the European Union Polity

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Abstract

What is the nature of the European Union as a political entity? And how does it emerge? This dissertation addresses these two core questions in the study of the European Union through an approach that takes the efficacy of concepts in the socio-political world seriously. The point of departure of the work is the conceptualisation of the EU as a *polity*. Going beyond some of the more common conceptions of the ‘polity’, it **proposes** that the European Union polity should be understood as a configuration of agreements to collectively address common problems. The thesis then offers an analysis of three fields of common, agreed upon, activities that occurred from 1992 to 2005. These activities (‘policy fields’) are constitutive of the European Union polity and construct its boundedness: ‘Enlargement to the East’; ‘Immigration policy’; and ‘Europe as an actor in the world’. For each of these fields, the thesis investigates the context in which these policies emerged; through which normative ideas the problems at stake were identified; and which ways of addressing the problems were agreed upon. Thereby, the thesis advances a ‘concept-centred’ approach: Concepts are taken to be the resources out of which the agreements to address common problems are ‘formed’. Thus the concepts ‘form’ the European Union polity. More precisely, the thesis shows the ways in which five key concepts - Human rights, democracy, diversity, prosperity and security – are effective (‘their power’ or ‘efficacy’) and which gestalt (‘meaning’) they take in specific problematic situations during the examined period of polity-construction. Special attention is paid in the analysis to the relations – in particular tensions – between the different normative concepts, the compromises that they form and the re-configuration of the respective policy fields they bring about. The thesis concludes that the findings should be interpreted as *a self-understanding of the European Union*. This self-understanding encompasses the commitment to a set of evaluative ideas, the decision to take action in certain political domains and, not least, the self-identification as a new political actor and entity.



Short bio:

Volker Balli will take up a three-year research fellowship at the University of Trento. In his project, he will attempt to reconstruct the notion 'polity' from a combined conceptual and historical perspective, drawing on political science, political theory, cultural and historical sociology and conceptual history. Currently, he is a post-doctoral fellow at *BIGSSS* (University of Bremen), working on the relationship between 'Europeanisation' and wider conceptions of social and political change. Before coming to the EUI, he studied Europe and the European Union in London, Paris, Brugge and Dublin. He intends to continue on this path.