



Negotiating Bilateral Trade Agreements in the European Union

Commission Autonomy and Member State Control

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Abstract

Which issues does the Commission focus on in the negotiation of bilateral trade agreements? How (to what extent) autonomous is the Commission, which sources and causal mechanisms bring this autonomy to bear, and have these sources changed over time? Which is the most effective mechanism of control available to member states in the Council to rein in the Commission? These are the three interrelated questions addressed by this study. Concerning the first question, I find that the Commission focuses on integration issues. These are primarily found in the joint bodies established by the underlying agreements as well as the number of substantive issues mentioned therein. On question number two, I find that the Commission distinctly shapes BTAs slightly over 50 per-cent of the time. The primary source of Commission autonomy in the 1970s and 1980s was asymmetric information, i.e. the Commission having greater knowledge about all contingencies in the negotiations than the member states. More recently, Commission autonomy is better captured by its agenda-setting power, here defined as its ability to put before the Council an agreement that member states can vote only either up-or-down. With regard to question three I find that, initially, member states' credible threat of non-ratification provided the most effective backstop to the Commission running lose. Over time, member states have stepped up monitoring mechanisms to take control of negotiations earlier, making direct oversight the most important tool for Council control. I examine and expound this argument by adopting a Principal-Agent (PA) perspective and process-tracing methodology against the backdrop of six in-depth case studies se-lected in accordance with objective and replicable criteria, of which five are retained for the final analysis. In conclusion, I join the camp of scholars making the case for a signifi-cant independent causal influence of the Commission on European public policy out-comes..



Jury: Jury: László Bruszt (EUI), Eugénia da Conceição-Heldt (Univ. Dresden), Andreas Dür (Univ. Salzburg) (Co-Supervisor), Adrienne Héritier (Emeritus EUI) (Supervisor)

Bio Markus Gastinger is research assistant at the Chair of International Politics, Department of Political Science, at Dresden University of Technology. He studied International Economic & Business Studies (IEBS) and Business Administration (BA) at the University of Innsbruck (Austria), Tulane University (New Orleans, USA) and the University of Miguel Hernández (Elche, Spain). He followed on with an interdisciplinary Master in European Union Studies (EUS) at the "Salzburg Centre of European Union Studies" (Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence) and the Jagiellonian University (Krakow, Poland). After traineeships at the German "Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik" (Berlin) and the European Commission in Brussels, he entered the doctoral program of the European University Institute in 2010. In 2012, he was visiting researcher at the "Berlin Graduate School of Social Sciences" (BGSS) of Humboldt University.