

Introductory remarks

European Archives online: The ERIPO (European Research infrastructure on Integration Policy) project

By Marc Dierikx – Huygens Institute for the History of the Netherlands

One of the problems of the study of European integration has been the dispersion of the sources from which to reconstruct this diverging process: historic archives at the level of the various governments involved, at the European central level, and of the great number of actors involved, are scattered across the continent. Although the European Commission has published a selection of documents from this process, the selection offered has been scant and is by no measure systematical.

Modern government calls for transparency. This applies to the national level, but especially to the international or multinational level that is so much more difficult to fathom. The same can be said for modern diplomacy. If this is true for the researcher, it is even more true to the average citizen, dwarfed in the vast structures of the European Union.



[Citizens dwarfed: view taken inside the Council building in Brussels]

If we want to understand anything about the outcome of the integration process – and we hear the call for openness ever louder – then we need to know about what is behind this. And since the European Union is a political organization that was instigated at the governmental level, this means it is essential to the understanding of national politics, national policies, and the representation of national interests.

To try and address these issues, an international consortium consisting of Huygens / Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW), the Historical Archives of the European Union / EUI, the Centre

Virtuel de la Connaissance sur l'Europe (CVCE), the Department of Political Science, Law and International Studies of the University of Padua, the German Institut für Zeitgeschichte, the Belgian Royal Historical Commission, and the archives of the Belgian, French and Italian Foreign Affairs Ministries, filed a joint proposal with the European Commission in September to initiate a design study for a European Research infrastructure on Integration Policy. This project, called ERIPO, intends to construct a digital research infrastructure. The proposed project will, for the first time, correlate documents from archives across Europe and unite them in a single, open access, innovative virtual research environment. In doing so, ERIPO seeks to promote insight into what is perhaps the most important process in postwar European history, relevant to the social sciences and humanities research community as well as to the citizen. Addressing the divide between populist perceptions of 'Europe' and the knowledge of the actual process of integration as facilitated by the governments involved is one of the societal challenges of our time.

The innovative tools of the transnational e-infrastructure will promote the study of the European integration process. They will enable the development of completely new insights. The project will serve a number of disciplines, such as history, international relations, political science, sociology, economics. Linguistic research will also benefit.

The intention is to develop a working prototype of the e-infrastructure, built on digitized historical documents from two sets of case studies. On this basis we hope to develop a prototype that combines documents from six European countries with sources originating in EU institutions. The case studies will serve to build and test the analytical research tools for the infrastructure.

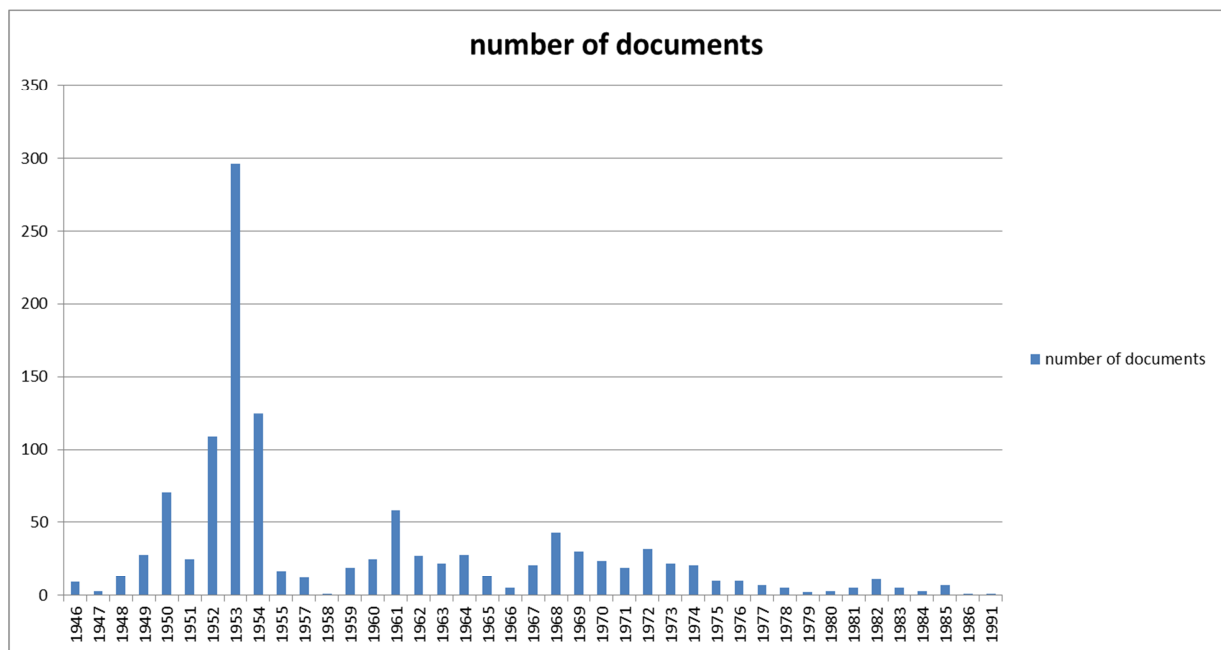
To give you some idea of the research possibilities that the proposed infrastructure can offer, let us look briefly at a few examples pertaining to discussions on European political cooperation (EPC) from the existing Dutch digital source publication on *Netherlands' (foreign) policy towards integration*. Present possibilities are only sketchy, as the actual technologies envisaged for ERIPO still have to be developed.

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the address bar displaying 'resources.huysens.knaw.nl/europeseintegratie/index_html_en'. The page title is 'The Netherlands and European Integration, 1950-1986'. The main content area includes a navigation menu on the left with links like 'Home', 'Intro', 'Overview records', 'Simple search', 'Advanced search', 'Manual', and 'Reacties/contact'. Below the menu is a search bar labeled 'Search all resources'. The central part of the page features a black and white photograph of several men in suits signing a document at a table. Below the photo is the caption: 'Picture: Signing of the ECSC treaty, april 1951.' The text on the page explains that these digital sources provide insight into policy intentions and the evolution of Dutch policy towards European integration. It also mentions the period covered (1950 to 1986) and the accessibility of the sources, which are available in steps, from brief summaries to complete documents.

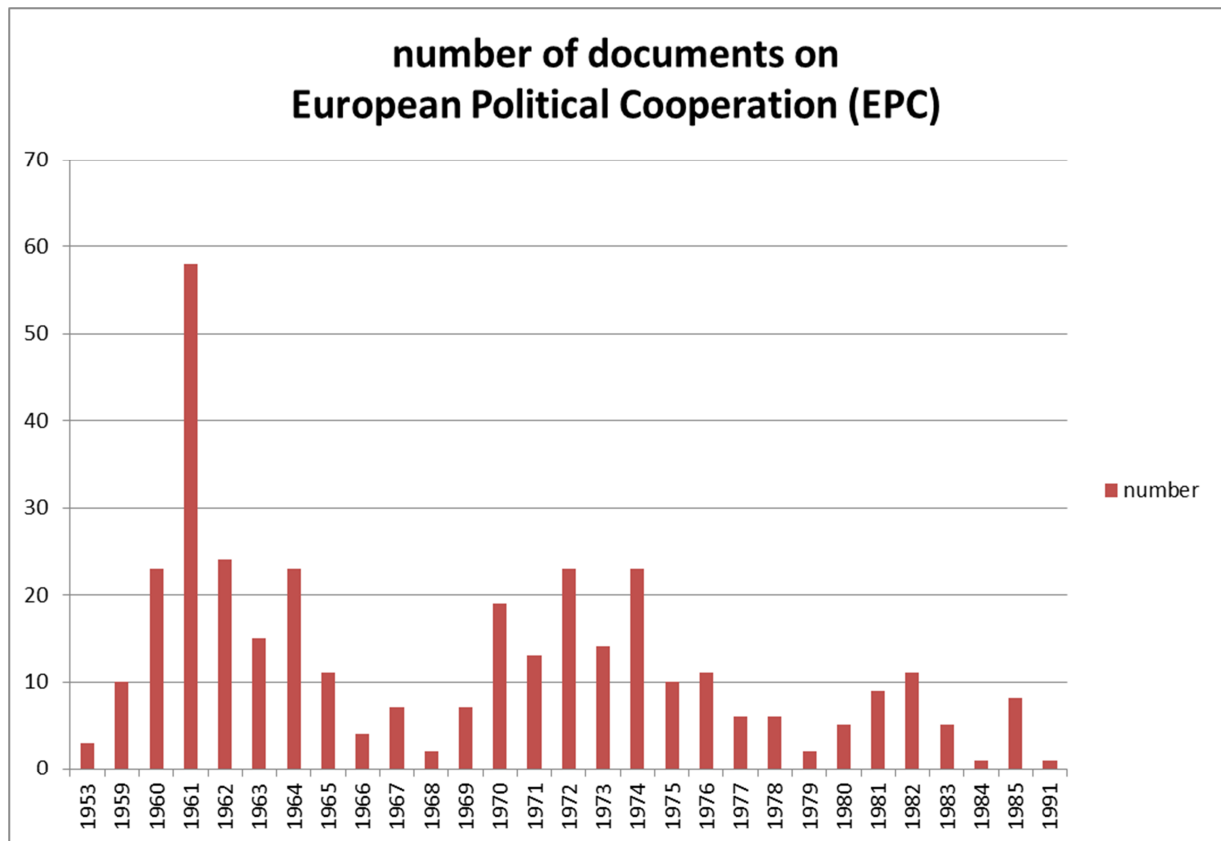
[Project home page: 7762 documents available online]

It is important to mention beforehand that the Dutch project was carried out on a selective basis and brings together only those documents that touch upon the political level, i.e. documents written by, or directly for, those who held political office in The Hague.

If we operate the advanced search option and look for the theme of ‘political cooperation’ we will thus find 1183 records, which suggest that the most intense discussion on these issues, at least in Dutch government circles, took place in first half of the 1950s.



Refining the search by adding the acronym ‘EPC’ (European Political Cooperation in the stricter sense of the term) reduces the number of documents found to 319 records:



We now see that this particular discussion was concentrated in the first half of the 1960s and first half of the 1970s:

- 1960s: the discussions on the institutionalization of conferences of the heads of state and government as a core institution of the EEC, in connection with the Fouchet Plan, which in The Hague became increasingly linked to the Dutch preference of first expanding the community with Britain
- 1970s: the issue of expansion of the common market, and particularly the British membership and its impact on the community

Now, to find out who was actually involved (particularly, in this case, in the Netherlands' government) the digital environment in which these documents have been collected and annotated makes it possible to trace and list those individuals who were involved, over time, in the process of policy making. Generally, we see that 221 people were 'involved' according to Dutch sources – but what is 'involved' exactly? One of the results shows what we might expect: namely that Ministers and senior politicians were involved at the Cabinet level.

But if we discount Cabinet meetings – at which only a minority of Ministers actively participated in the discussions on foreign and European policy – it is possible to shift the focus to those in politics and in the Dutch civil service who played an actual role in formulating and executing policy. This subgroup is made up of 152 people. This is still a sizeable number. Who were these people? In a traditional research tract this would take *many* hours of carefully sifting through the results of archival finds and tracing the

capacity under which people were involved. Yet in a digital environment this work will already have been undertaken for the user by the research team that compiled the project. This means we ‘know’ who was involved and in which capacity. Let us focus on the top-25 people who played a direct role as ‘actors’ in Dutch policy formation.



[Graph: Top-25 of Dutch politicians and civil servants involved. Politicians in black; civil servants in red]

We then see that, taken over the whole period that was covered in the project, 1950-1986, we come across the fact that no more than eight civil servants played more than a cursory role in policy formation in the field of European Political Cooperation (EPC).

This number appears far lower than one would expect and gives rise to all sorts of follow-up questions: Where are the other civil servants and why are they largely absent from the process of policy making thus analyzed? Who are the people thus featured and what was their sphere of influence? Why have they remained ‘under the radar’? Is EPC typical of the process of foreign and European policy making in Holland? Does the Dutch process deviate from practices in partner countries – and if so, to what extent? Do we find the same people involved in these other areas of integration policy, or not? Did civil servants specialize in certain topics; did they take a lead in policy formulation? With whom were they in contact in their partner countries? Do the same people meet time and again over various topics? And when do new topics emerge anyhow? Who puts them forward, and why?

In the envisaged European project, such (national) findings could be compared to those in other nations and at the European level. This might tell us all sorts of interesting things about political, bureaucratic, administrative and civil service cultures – and of their effects on policy.

It might also give us insight into who sets the agenda for certain topics and discussions within the field of European cooperation, and how do such discussions reflect national interests? These are questions that we shall be able to answer in ERIPO.

We shall also be able to track differences in the style of policy making in various countries, and ask ourselves whether this had an effect on policy as such?

And ERIPO will even go further than this: when fully fledged, we will not only be able to track changes in policy making, but also in the actual style of diplomacy: how do diplomatic language and diplomatic customs evolve over time, and what can this tell us about the connections between diplomacy, the civil service, and wider social and political developments in society?

To end with a word on the valorization of the project: ERIPO hopes to enhance the transparency of the intergovernmental process of European integration, relevant to the research community *and* to the European citizen. We therefore plan to expand the project after the initial two year exploratory phase into a permanent activity of the European Commission.