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The Council of the EU in Times of Economic Crisis: A Policy Entrepreneur for the Internal Market

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Abstract

While many studies have focused on the European Commission and its potential to act as a policy entrepreneur, little research has been undertaken into how intergovernmental institutions as a whole are able to shape and advocate certain policies. This article fills that gap by analysing debates in the Council of the European Union on two major strategies: The Small Business Act for Europe and the Europe 2020 strategy. These debates were analysed using newspaper articles in the daily bulletins of Agence Europe, yielding 469 statements which were qualitatively evaluated by means of content analysis. The results demonstrate that the Council as a whole is able to act as a policy entrepreneur if certain conditions are met, namely a common interest and political goal among member states, a need for economic measures due to a crisis situation, and the possibility of shifting unpopular decisions to Brussels.

Keywords

European integration; EU institutions; Council of the EU; Economic crisis; Policy entrepreneur; Internal market

The global financial crisis, which severely affected the European Union (EU) and its member states, offered a window of opportunity at the EU level that made it possible to place certain topics on the political agenda and to advocate changes in various policy areas (Verdun 2015; Saurugger and Terpan 2015; Falkner 2017, 2016). Research has demonstrated that the European Commission has acted as a policy entrepreneur and has been successful in placing and adopting certain policies (Steinebach and Knill 2017; Schön-Quinlivan and Scipioni 2017; Pollack 1997; Laffan 1997; Copeland and James 2014). This is due, *inter alia*, to the fact that the Commission succeeded in increasing its power in the wake of the crisis. However, at the same time, member states became increasingly reluctant to transfer greater power to the EU level and intergovernmental institutions, such as the European Council and the Council of the EU (hereafter the Council), turned out to be major platforms to develop strategies in overcoming the crisis (Puetter 2012; Bickerton, Hodson and Puetter 2015). Consequently, important economic governance measures were to a large extent formalised in intergovernmental agreements (Fabbrini 2013; Dawson 2015). Individual or groups of member states (especially Germany, France, and the United Kingdom (UK)) were therefore also able to increase their power and advocate certain policies during the crisis (see Schild 2010; Tömmel and Verdun 2017; Bulmer and Paterson 2013).

Even though scholars have focused on the Commission and member states as potential policy entrepreneurs, little is known about whether intergovernmental institutions as a whole also have this potential. Therefore, this paper fills this gap by asking: are intergovernmental institutions as a whole able to shape and advocate certain policies and if so, under which conditions?

In order to answer this research question, the paper focuses on the Council debates while developing, debating and adopting two major EU strategies that were introduced as crisis management between 2008 and 2012, namely the Small Business Act (SBA) for Europe and the Europe 2020 strategy. Both strategies aimed to ensure growth in Europe in the long term. The Council debates have been analysed based on newspaper articles in the daily bulletins of Agence Europe, an international independent news agency that specialises in information on EU activities, legislative discussions and outcomes. A total of 767 daily bulletins were reviewed with a view to retrieving relevant articles on the Council debates (a total of 51). I subsequently analysed and qualitatively evaluated the identified 469 statements by means of content analysis and conducted a Krippendorff's alpha reliability test (Krippendorff 2013).

The results demonstrate that the Council as a whole is able to act as a policy entrepreneur if certain conditions are met. These conditions are a common interest and political goal among member states, a need for economic measures due to a crisis situation and the possibility of shifting unpopular decisions and responsibility for them to the EU institutions.

This study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it applies the concept of policy entrepreneur to entire intergovernmental institutions and their characteristics. Second, it provides comprehensive insights into crucial Council debates. Third, it identifies wider implications for overall EU policymaking.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. Based on the current policy entrepreneur literature dealing with the EU institutions, I discuss the changes in the EU institutional setting and the role of intergovernmental institutions in times of crisis. Next, I discuss what motivates intergovernmental institutions to act as policy entrepreneurs with a view to applying the concept of policy entrepreneur to the Council. This is followed by a discussion of methods and operationalisation. The results of the analysis of the Council debates and specific examples are presented in the subsequent section. Finally, the findings are explained and their implications discussed.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL INSTITUTIONS AND POLICY ENTREPRENEURS

When focusing on the EU level, we find various actors and different degrees and levels of policy entrepreneur. To date, several scholars have examined the European Commission as a potential policy entrepreneur (Steinebach and Knill 2017; Schön-Quinlivan and Scipioni 2017; Pollack 1997; Laffan 1997; Copeland and James 2014; Bauer and Becker 2014). This can be traced back primarily to the fact that the Commission is a supranational institution with the right of initiative that has increased its impact on EU policymaking over the years. Especially in times when European beliefs and ideals are perceived as crucial and when supranational officials are regarded as more legitimate than domestic actors, the Commission has the potential to exert power and to push certain policies through (Moravcsik 1999: 280), resulting in its key role as a policy entrepreneur (Steinebach and Knill 2017; Schön-Quinlivan and Scipioni 2017; Copeland and James 2014). As the possibility of acting as a policy entrepreneur was often related to the Commission's function of proposing legislation, it comes as no surprise that there is little research when it comes to analysing intergovernmental institutions' potential to act as policy entrepreneurs.

This also has to do with the nature of intergovernmental institutions, where national interests are important and dependent on different discussions and time periods. For example, at the time of the economic crisis, member states increasingly avoided transferring more competencies to the EU level (Puetter 2012: 161-163) and policy-coordination became the common decision-making approach that has led to a new deliberative and consensus-seeking intergovernmentalism (Puetter 2012; Bickerton, Hodson and Puetter 2015). As supranational agreements were sometimes hard to agree upon since a

common consensus among the EU countries was lacking, new economic governance measures were often formalised through intergovernmental agreements (Puetter 2012; Fabbrini 2013; Bickerton, Hodson and Puetter 2015).

Research has pointed to a shift of power among the EU institutions after the onset of the financial crisis. While one study hints at the fact that the power of the Council formations and the presidency in agenda-setting decreased (Schwarzer 2012), most studies have analysed the increased power and political weight of the three large member states (Germany, France, and the UK) in advocating certain policies during the financial crisis, referring to this as political leadership (Tömmel and Verdun 2017; Schild 2010; Bulmer and Paterson 2013).

Moreover, studies have demonstrated that certain parts of intergovernmental institutions also have the potential to act as policy entrepreneurs (Pircher 2019; Juncos and Pomorska 2010). For example, officials in the Council Secretariat stressed their role in shaping policies and described their power as influential in the agenda-setting phase of the presidency. Their power was nevertheless dependent on the presidency in place (see also Pircher, 2019) and was more crucial in areas where the Commission lacked competencies (Juncos and Pomorska 2010: 19).

Research has demonstrated, for example, that the Council was also able to move certain policies forward in the area of security and defence by adopting the role of conflict manager (see Shepherd 2009). Furthermore, studies have demonstrated that the new institutional setting that was introduced during the economic crisis favoured intergovernmental institutions, such as the European Council and the Council (Tosun, Wetzel and Zapryanova 2014; Puetter 2012; Fabbrini 2013; Dinan, 2011; Bickerton, Hodson and Puetter 2015). This change in the institutional setting places intergovernmental institutions at the forefront, providing them with increased power and an enhanced potential to introduce and shape EU policies, and, in turn, with a greater potential to act as a policy entrepreneur.

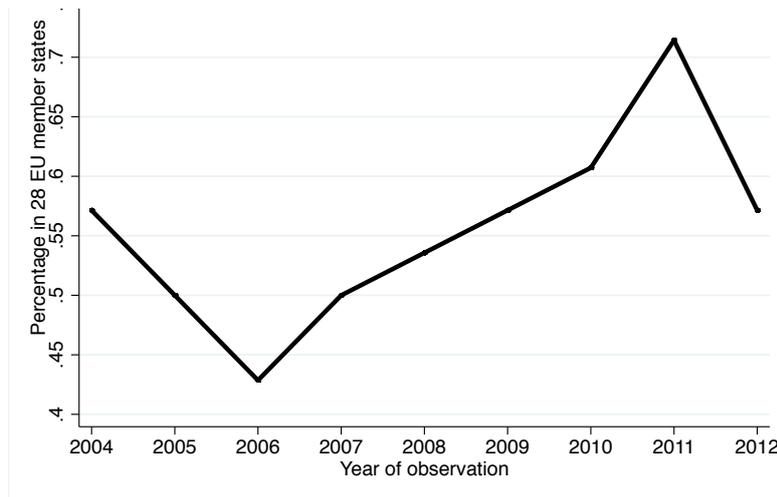
However, in order to answer the research question, one needs to clarify what kind of motivation the Council as one body may have to act as a policy entrepreneur. I therefore provide the following five main grounds: a common political or economic interest among member states, a need for economic governance measures, an economic need to implement unpopular policy actions, the possibility of shifting responsibility from the national to the EU level, and a common political agenda.

The 2008 economic crisis revealed weaknesses in the EU institutional framework regarding economic affairs (Verdun 2013: 53-59). Member states needed to respond to the crisis by introducing and implementing swift actions. At first, there was a trend to respond to the crisis individually, but given the developments in certain member states (for example Greece), joint EU agreements and responses became all the more urgent (Verdun 2015: 223). As Pircher (2018a) demonstrates, this led to a window of opportunity to push certain policies of market deregulation through. Therefore, the Council as a whole was able to implement ready-made plans as solutions to the financial crisis in 2008 (the 'garbage can model'). This demonstrates that under certain conditions and a certain type of common interest, the Council has the potential to act as a policy entrepreneur.

Especially if there is a need for economic governance measures (for example in the light of a global economic crisis, but also in general terms) the EU has the function to adopt and implement decisions that cannot be made efficiently at national level (Mair 2013: 131). Therefore, the EU often becomes a place where economic reforms succeed. These are reforms that governments and administrations want but cannot implement at national level, since these solutions are regarded as unacceptable by citizens and are rejected by voters (Mair 2013: 133). This means that national politicians can shift the responsibility and accountability for unpopular decisions to the EU and prevent voter discontent in their countries (Mair 2013: 129). Governments can thereby avoid national conflicts and 'hide behind or blame Brussels'.

In addition, as demonstrated in Figure 1, the years following to the financial crisis saw changes in European governments and an increase in the number of governments (EU 28) with a dominance or hegemony of right-wing parties (conservative and liberal parties) in favour of the same economic agenda. It is especially when member states with the same political interests and agenda are in power that it might be possible for such states to act as policy entrepreneurs. Furthermore, this might also suggest the direction of change towards greater harmonisation and deregulation.

Figure 1: Percentage of governments (EU 28) with a dominance or hegemony of right-wing parties between 2004 and 2012



Note: based on Schmidt-Index defined as (1) hegemony of right-wing (and centre) parties ($gov_left1 = 0\%$) and (2) dominance of right-wing (and centre) parties ($0 < gov_left1 \leq 33.33$)

DEFINING POLICY ENTREPRENEUR IN THE COUNCIL

In terms of Kingdon's (2011) definition, policy entrepreneurs have the potential to shape policy outcomes if they are willing to invest their resources in order to advocate certain policy objectives (Kingdon 2011: 116-144). For policy entrepreneurs to be successful they need to have a certain agenda, a political network, negotiating skills and a certain reputation (Kingdon 2011: 165; Capano 2009: 19-25). Policy entrepreneurs are, inter alia, often officials, politicians, lobbyists, academics, lawyers and bureaucrats that focus on the public good or on their own individual profit (Kingdon 2011: 122-180). However, the definition of policy entrepreneur can be broadened as suggested by Mintrom and Norman (2009: 650) since Kingdon's definition leaves room for interpretation. Research demonstrates that policy entrepreneurs can also be different actors (Bernhard and Wihlborg 2014: 290) and even entire institutions or supranational institutions at EU level (Pollack 1999: 6).

What most definitions have in common is that policy entrepreneurs introduce new policies into the process in order to provoke policy change to alter the status quo. This means that policy entrepreneurs are regarded as advocates or agents of policy change, striving for a significant change in the future (Mintrom and Norman 2009).

If we apply the concept of policy entrepreneur to the Council as an intergovernmental institution, five different types can be identified. First, this concept applies to experts in the Council who work 'behind the scenes', such as officials in the General Secretariat, experts and officials from each member state in the preparatory bodies (working groups and committees) and experts and national officials involved in work in the presidency that strive for policy change. Second, it applies to public servants who have the potential to alter policies due to their relevant position within the policy process (Roberts and King 1991; Carroll 2017). Third, it applies to politicians who are driven either by their own profit-seeking

motive or by the common good (McCaffrey and Salerno 2011; Dahl 1974). This applies to the various ministers in the Council and the presidency represented by national politicians. Fourth, this concept includes individual member states or a group of member states that encourage new innovative approaches and policies. Fifth, the definition involves an institutional approach where the Council as a whole strives for the alteration of policies. The latter is the primary focus of this study, as there is scant research on this topic in comparison to the other categories.

METHODS AND OPERATIONALISATION

In order to identify whether the Council has the potential to act as a policy entrepreneur, this paper focuses on Council debates on two relevant economic governance instruments, the Small Business Act (SBA) for Europe and the Europe 2020 strategy. There are a number of reasons for focusing on these two measures. First, for the purposes of the study it was important to analyse cases in which the Council was able to play a significant role in shaping the policies. In contrast to concrete legislative acts such as regulations or directives, these strategies offer the Council more room for manoeuvre since they involve both overall EU strategies and guidelines and concrete policy measures such as various forms of legislation. Second, it is important to include core areas where the EU, and thus the Council, have the most competencies. Third, the strategies were developed and adopted in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis, a period which led to a window of opportunity for certain policies to be advocated (see Pircher 2018a). Fourth, both strategies were debated in the Council over a relatively long period of time, namely 2008 to 2012.

The Council debates are examined primarily through an analysis of Agence Europe newspaper articles, an international independent news agency that specialises in information on EU activities and legislative discussions and outcomes. This approach does have its limitations as these articles constitute second-hand information. However, many other sources ultimately rely on Agence Europe when analysing policymaking and discussions in EU institutions. It is therefore a well-established medium. Moreover, as it is often not easy to gain a clear insight into the discussions of the Council because of a lack of transparency, this approach is suitable for the purpose of the study. Nevertheless, all relevant government documents and primary sources were also consulted, including the Council's conclusions, minutes and press releases. However, these types of documents generally represent the outcomes of the various debates and to a much lesser extent the controversial discussions. It is for this reason that this study focuses primarily on the Agence Europe newspaper articles.

For the purposes of the current study, all Agence Europe daily bulletins within the investigation period were analysed. A daily bulletin is a collection of newspaper articles published on a certain day. It consists of a large number of articles grouped into different EU policy areas, analysing and focusing on European events, debates and legislative outcomes. The first step was to collect and review all daily bulletins and their corresponding articles between June 2008 and May 2009 (in the case of the SBA) and between March 2010 and June 2012 (in the case of Europe 2020). This time frame covers the period from the transmission of the act to the Council until the adoption of the strategies and includes a total of 767 daily bulletins. Second, all relevant articles that dealt with the Council debates on the strategies were analysed via content analysis in ATLAS.ti (51 articles in 39 different daily bulletins).

The reported statements (469 in total) contained in these articles were coded and classified into three main categories: policy entrepreneur 0, 1 and 2. A reported statement is either an entire sentence or half of a sentence (for example a list of different policy demands). The category policy entrepreneur 0 includes statements that represent overall or general information on the debates. This constitutes primarily information on what topics were discussed or specific background information on the strategies or the legislative status quo. For example, the sentence '[t]he Competitiveness Council will debate progress with the action plan for implementing the Small Business Act (SBA), an initiative that

lists a hundred measures for promoting the growth and employment potential of European SMEs' (Agence Europe, 2009) is one statement coded as policy entrepreneur 0.

By contrast, policy entrepreneur 1 and 2 represent specific policy demands raised by the Council or by one or more member states during the debates. Each statement in this category represents one specific policy demand. This includes specific policy objectives, changes and adjustments to existing policy instruments, the inclusion of certain aspects or topics in existing legislation, proposals for new legislation and completely new competencies or changes in policy goals and hierarchy. Two indicators were considered for this classification of the degree of policy entrepreneur, specifically with a view to differentiating between policy entrepreneur 1 and 2. First, Hall's (1993) order change was utilised to assess the potential direction of future policy change of the policy demands. However, the statements reflect only the potential of policy change and not the actual outcome.

Second, in order to differentiate between the policy demands in the category policy entrepreneur 1 and 2, the policy demands were compared to the Commission's proposal on the strategies. In this respect, the category policy entrepreneur 1 represents statements in relation to which the Council plays an active role in shaping, advocating and realising the policy objectives and where the change consists of adjustments or additions to the already existing legislation. Policy demands categorised under policy entrepreneur 2 exceed the Commission's proposal and call for a greater change (change in techniques, settings or even policy goals) or completely new legislation that is not included in the proposal. To clarify this distinction, I provide examples while debating the SBA and adopting the Council conclusions on research areas. Whereas underlining 'the need to continue to support research and innovation and speed up national investment in pan-European research infrastructure in the context of the current economic crisis' (Agence Europe 2009) was classified as a statement belonging to policy entrepreneur 1, the fact that the Council 'will call on member states and the Commission to promote the use of existing financial instruments, particularly structural funds and European Investment Bank instrument for the construction, modernisation and maintenance of research infrastructure' was classified as policy entrepreneur 2 (Agence Europe 2009). Table 1 presents a summary of the different categories and indicators for classification.

Table 1: Operationalisation of the three degrees of policy entrepreneur

	Policy entrepreneur 0 (0)	Policy entrepreneur 1 (+)	Policy entrepreneur 2 (++)
Degree of policy entrepreneur	Statements represent overall or general information on debates and on legislative outcome.	Statements represent policy demands where Council took active role in shaping, advocating and realising policy objectives set in Commission's proposal.	Statements represent policy demands where the Council actively pushes through certain proposals, strategies or policies that exceed Commission's proposal.
Potential direction of future policy change	No potential policy change.	First order change: change and adjustment in policy instruments.	Second and third order change: change in techniques, settings or policy goals.

In order to measure the reliability of the data, coding was conducted twice (t1 conducted in March 2019 and t2 conducted in August 2019). Moreover, I used the Krippendorff's Alpha (KALPHA) reliability test, which considers both the observed and expected disagreement between two coders (observed disagreement = percentage of mismatches between two coders in values attributed to the same units; expected disagreement: probability that coders code a unit correctly merely by chance). The KALPHA test ranges between 0 and 1, where 0 is perfect disagreement and 1 is perfect agreement. The values

between the categories are rank-ordered, and hence ordinal in the current case. If we conduct this test in relation to the three different categories of policy entrepreneur (0, 1, 2) and their values at the two time periods (t1 and t2), the KALPHA ranges between 0.94 per cent and 0.99 per cent (see results of KALPHA in Appendix). This demonstrates that the results of the content analysis are highly reliable.

THE COUNCIL AS POLICY ENTREPRENEUR

The Small Business Act (SBA) for Europe

The SBA is an overarching EU framework based on ten principles that include specific policies and goals as well as concrete policy measures to improve the situation of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Europe. The main areas of focus for SMEs in the proposal are the promotion of entrepreneurship, reduction of the regulatory and administrative burden, improved access to funding and ensuring and enhancing access to markets, also at a global level (European Commission 2011). The SBA proposal was transmitted to the Council in June 2008. The Council agreed to prioritise the overarching SBA and certain objectives in the light of the economic slowdown in 2008 (Council of the EU 2008c). The problems posed by the financial crisis and the urgent need to take swift action to boost the economy were taken into account, and decision-makers began focusing on this area. This provided the potential for policy entrepreneurs to act.

An examination of the debates on the SBA within the Council makes it possible to analyse the Council's role in shaping the proposal. While analysing 218 daily bulletins of Agence Europe between 30 June 2008 and 29 May 2009, a total of five newspaper articles related to the Council debates on the SBA were identified. These articles included 57 concrete Council statements on the SBA. An analysis of the degree of policy entrepreneur in the statements reveals the interesting fact that 25 statements represent overall debates or outcomes (policy entrepreneur (PE) 0), nine statements represent the Council as an active player in shaping policies (PE 1), and 23 statements represent cases where the Council pushed certain proposals, strategies or policies through (PE 2) (see Figure 2). Surprisingly, most policy demands by the Council exceeded the Commission's proposal. All suggested policy demands in PE 2 were aimed at greater unification and harmonisation of the regulations within the EU Single Market than foreseen in the Commission's proposal. This clearly demonstrates that the Council played a more crucial role than hitherto realised and wielded more power during the adoption of the SBA than the Commission.

However, what were the main proposals and strategies that were introduced and adopted? The following section provides examples that answer this question.

One of the first initiatives was announced initially by former Commissioner Günter Verheugen. He made certain proposals for lifting the EU out of the financial crisis. These included the revision of the directive on reduced value-added tax rates in order to foster entrepreneurship (Agence Europe 2008). As a consequence of the Council debates, the European Investment Bank decided to mobilise €30 billion in support of SMEs (Council of the EU 2008b). The introduction of favourable conditions for SMEs were broadened and formulated in the Council conclusions in December 2008 (Conseil de l'UE 2008). In another 'rapid response' to the crisis (as Hervé Novelli, acting president of the Competitiveness Council and former French Secretary of State for Trade, Crafts and SMEs, called it) an action plan including short- and medium-term measures was adopted in late 2008 (Council of the EU 2009, 2008a; Agence Europe 2008). The priorities of this action plan were improved SME access to finance, reduction of the administrative burden, the so-called 'think small first' principle (tests that assess the impact of planned legislation on SMEs) and the promotion of SME markets, including the area of procurement (Council of the EU 2008a). In addition, the plan stressed a timely implementation

of the service directive, the adoption of the European Private Company (EPC) statute, SME access to third-country markets and easier regulations on patent questions (Council of the EU 2008a: 8-9; Agence Europe 2009). While certain policy objectives were also included in the Commission's proposal and can be identified as policy entrepreneur 1, it was mainly regarding the revision of certain directives, the creation of new legislation, changes in the procurement regime and especially the striving for an EPC statute that the Council exceeded the initial proposals. Therefore, these attempts can be classified as policy entrepreneur 2, as they have the potential to alter policies and bring about policy change favouring the internal market. This means that the Council as a whole utilised the crisis as a window of opportunity, as defined by Kingdon (2011), and was able to place the SBA priorities on the highest political agenda (see also Pircher 2018a). Consequently, the SBA is an example where the Council as a whole acted as a policy entrepreneur, as there was a common economic and political interest, a need for swift economic action, and a common political goal due to the economic crisis. Moreover, the analysis reveals a sharp increase in the dominance of conservative and liberal parties in 2008 and 2009 (see Figure 1), demonstrating there was also a common political agenda involved. It appears that these factors smooth the way for a joint strategy.

EUROPE 2020

The objective of Europe 2020, the successor to the Lisbon strategy, is to extricate Europe from the financial and economic crisis. It therefore promotes three main areas, namely smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (European Commission 2010). Specific headline targets were set to be implemented in all member states by 2020. These headline targets relate to the areas of innovation, education, digital agenda, climate, energy, mobility, employment and the fight against poverty (European Commission 2010: 30).

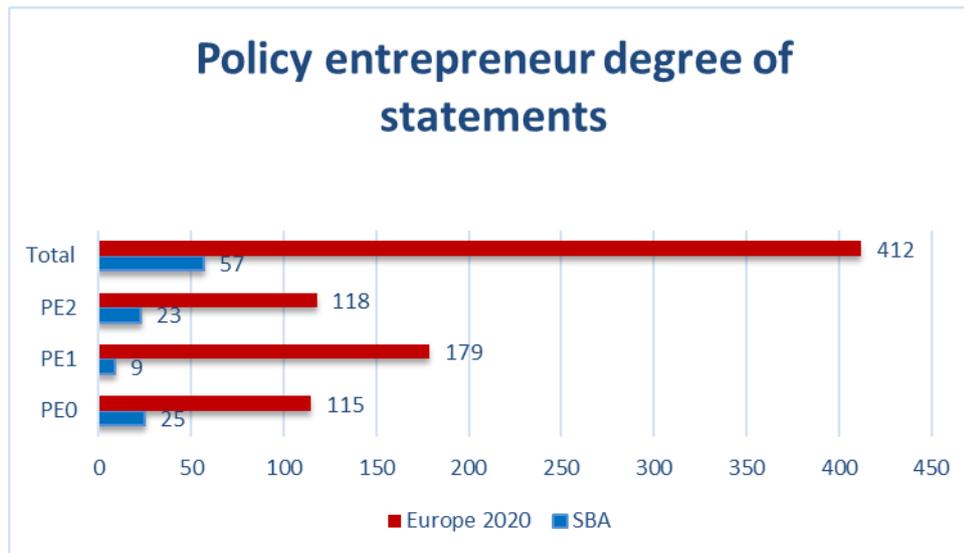
The analysis of the Council debates from 5 March 2010 to 22 June 2012 identified a total of 412 statements from the Council in the daily bulletins of Agence Europe. Of these 412 statements, 115 represent general statements (PE 0), 179 represent debates where the Council played an active role in shaping and realising policies (PE 1), and 118 represent statements where the Council actively advocated certain policies that exceeded the Commission's proposal (PE 2) (see Figure 2). In contrast to the SBA, individual member states, groups of member states and the presidency also had a strong interest in placing and advocating certain policies. In total, nine policy demands classified under policy entrepreneur 1 and 20 demands classified under policy entrepreneur 2 were advocated by individual member states or a group of member states. Concerning the presidency, five demands were classified under policy entrepreneur 1 and 20 under policy entrepreneur 2. The presidency took a leading role, especially in the initial phase of Europe 2020. However, the majority of policy demands were raised by the Council as a single institution.

As in the case of the SBA, several conditions were met which facilitated a common approach by the Council. The first ones are a common political and economic interest and a need for economic governance measures due to the crisis situation. When the European Council invited the Commission and the Council in 2008 to renew the Lisbon strategy (Council of the EU 2008b), attempts to identify further commitments in relation to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth soon came to a halt and stagnated. The reconsideration of the strategy can be traced back to three crucial events. First, as Copeland and James (2014: 7) demonstrate, increasing speculation about a possible Greek default triggered a relaunch of the strategy. Second, Herman Van Rompuy was elected president of the European Council in late 2009, and in his first speech he announced that the strategy was being made a priority (General Secretariat of the Council 2009). Third, José Manuel Barroso was elected Commission President, and he joined with Van Rompuy in prioritising the strategy. Therefore, the presidencies of both the European Council and the Commission played a crucial role in initiating Europe 2020. Moreover, the Council presidency soon adopted a leading role when the strategy was discussed

in the Council, and together all the presidencies advocated specific policies to promote competition and ensure growth in Europe. The draft conclusions of the Council finally consisted of common demands such as opening of the markets at a global level to boost competitiveness, national reform programmes that set national targets, and a governance architecture to implement the strategy at all levels (Council of the EU 2010a; Agence Europe 2010d). These attempts included policies that had already been proposed by the Commission, as well as certain elements that were more forcefully enhanced and formulated by the Council, which can be categorised as policy entrepreneur 2.

Even though 40 out of 118 policy demands classified under policy entrepreneur 2 were brought up by member states or the presidencies, the vast majority of policy demands was initiated by all member states together. This demonstrates the strong potential of the Council to act as one body, even in areas where national interests still play a crucial role. In the debates, Council representatives stated that agreements were found due to a broad consensus and a common interest to promote the 'European social model' (Agence Europe 2010q). However, as is evident from the various statements, all the demands under policy entrepreneur 2 promoted a strengthening of the internal market and greater harmonisation often via enhanced deregulation. Therefore, the European social model promoted by the Council can be questioned and demonstrates that social concerns played a marginal role (see also Woolfson and Sommers 2016; Pircher 2018a, 2018b; Crespy and Menz 2015; Bekker and Klosse 2014). Next to a common political and economic interest and a need to act due to the crisis, another important condition was met that enabled a common approach of the Council. This was a clear common political agenda that might once again traced back to an increase in conservative and liberal dominance in governments at that time (see Figure 1).

However, as is clear from Figure 1, the percentage of governments with such a dominance decreased in 2012 and the strategy was discussed more controversially in this year. Interestingly, the presidency assumed the role of a policy entrepreneur, especially in debates where a consensus could not be reached. In areas such as employment and poverty, for example, where several delegations criticised aspects of the strategy (Agence Europe 2010k), the trio presidency and Van Rompuy pushed for an agreement (Agence Europe 2010o). The post-2013 conclusions and demands in the areas of education, poverty and industrial policy are further examples where the trio presidency acted as a policy entrepreneur. Due to a lack of consensus in these areas (Agence Europe 2010c, 2010e, 2010f, 2010g, 2010h), the trio presidency formulated important conclusions that were incorporated into the strategy as Council conclusions and called for a rapid adoption (Council of the EU 2010; Agence Europe 2010a, 2010b, 2010d, 2010f). In the case of the individual member states, France and Germany in particular called for specific policy demands, such as the inclusion of agriculture in Europe 2020 (Agence Europe 2010d, 2010n), the formulation of a joint contribution on agricultural issues (Agence Europe 2010e, 2010p) and new proposals for a poverty indicator (Agence Europe 2010p, 2010q, 2010s). These policy demands are categorised under policy entrepreneur 2. However, as in the case of the SBA, the great majority of policy demands classified under policy entrepreneur 2 were again raised by the Council as a whole.

Figure 2: Actual degree of policy entrepreneur in debating Europe 2020 and the SBA

CONCLUSION

This paper posed the question whether intergovernmental institutions as a whole have the potential to act as policy entrepreneurs and if so, under which conditions. I first explained the design of intergovernmental institutions and demonstrated how their role and impact were enhanced in wake of the economic crisis. On the one hand, to a large extent member states resisted further supranationalisation and the transfer of additional competencies to the EU level (Puetter 2012; Bickerton, Hodson and Puetter 2015). The response to the economic crisis was, in the first instance, a national one (Verdun 2015: 231) and individual member states and certain institutions adopted the role of policy entrepreneur (Tömmel and Verdun 2017). On the other hand, the developments in some EU countries (for example Greece) put pressure on the EU institutions to take swift action. Member states continued to pursue integration and the adoption of common solutions was seen as an adequate response to the economic crisis. Consequently, policy coordination became more crucial and intergovernmental institutions, such as the Council, became increasingly important (Puetter 2012; Bickerton, Hodson and Puetter 2015). This provided more scope for the Council to act as a policy entrepreneur.

This study has analysed Council debates on two main economic strategies: The Small Business Act for Europe and Europe 2020. It was based on 51 relevant newspaper articles in the daily bulletins of Agence Europe. This was followed by an analysis and qualitative evaluation of the identified 469 statements in those articles by means of a content analysis and a Krippendorff's Alpha reliability test (Krippendorff 2013).

The statements were classified into three main categories (policy entrepreneur 0, 1 and 2) based on the specific policy demands of the Council contained in the articles and on the potential policy change based on Hall's (1993) order change (see Table 1). Of the 469 statements, 140 - which is 29.9% - represent overall or general information on the debates or the legislative outcomes. The great majority of 70.1% - a total of 329 statements - represent policy demands where the Council acted as a policy entrepreneur. Of those 329 statements, 188 (40.1%) represent policy demands based on the Commission's proposal and the realisation of the policy objectives, while 141 (30%) represent policy demands where the Council exceeded the Commission's proposal (see Figure 2). Those proposals were advocated in order to strengthen the internal market. Even though 29 statements under policy entrepreneur 1 and 2 were advocated by individual member states or a group of member states and

25 statements under the same classifications were advocated by the trio presidency, the vast majority of policy demands were raised by the Council as one body.

The results demonstrate that the Council as a whole is highly capable of acting as one policy entrepreneur if certain conditions are met, namely a common political or economic interest and a common political agenda among member states, a need for economic measures in a crisis situation, and the possibility of shifting unpopular decisions and responsibility for such decisions to Brussels. These conditions are decoupled from politics at national level and depoliticise the arena of intergovernmental institutions, at least within the internal market. EU economic policies remain largely unaffected by national political developments. Therefore, the core of the EU project remains very stable and crises can be even a justification to strengthen it. However, this study is limited to the internal market only. Very different outcomes might be observed in more contested areas such as justice and home affairs. This would be an interesting topic for future research.

As the policy demands discussed in this paper related to the strengthening of the internal market, further research could combine an analysis of majorities within the EU institutions and their potential to push through certain policies in the light of national political developments (the rise of the radical right and Eurosceptic parties). It is likely that such an investigation of the constraining and enabling conditions of advocating EU policies and European integration as a whole would yield interesting results.

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APPENDIX: KRIPPENDORFF'S ALPHA RELIABILITY ESTIMATE

krippalpha T1_Degree_p0 T2_Degree_p0, method(ordinal)

Krippendorff's Alpha reliability coefficient
Variable/Coders T1_Degree_p0 T2_Degree_p0
Method ordinal
Units 34
Raters 2
alpha .95185323

krippalpha T1_Degree_p1 T2_Degree_p1, method(ordinal)

Krippendorff's Alpha reliability coefficient
Variable/Coders T1_Degree_p1 T2_Degree_p1
Method ordinal
Units 34
Raters 2
alpha .96082409

krippalpha T1_Degree_p2 T2_Degree_p2, method(ordinal)

Krippendorff's Alpha reliability coefficient
Variable/Coders T1_Degree_p2 T2_Degree_p2
Method ordinal
Units 34
Raters 2
alpha .94040577

krippalpha T1_Statements T2_Statements, method(ordinal)

Krippendorff's Alpha reliability coefficient
Variable/Coders T1_Statements T2_Statements
Method ordinal
Units 34
Raters 2
alpha .99180809
