

# **EU Think Tanks: Innovation, Independence and Impact**

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Dissertation submitted to the Hertie School of Governance  
within the Berlin Graduate School for Transnational Studies

Defended and published in fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree Doctor rerum politicarum (Dr. rer. pol.), Berlin 2019

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## **Summary**

Think tanks have become taken-for-granted actors in contemporary governance, both inside but also beyond nation-states. This dissertation tackles the research puzzles of innovativeness, independence and impact for policy institutes operating at EU level. It argues that EU think tanks such as Bruegel or Centre for European Policy Studies inhabit a transnational organizational field, clustered in Brussels but extended beyond. What is the novelty behind their organizational forms and practices? Which leeway of action do they have in practice, given their funding and human resource situations? And what is the significance of EU think tanks, of their networks and hybrid experts? Against the backdrop of existing studies, these questions are empirically explored in a multi-method research effort: a primary databases on 85 EU think tanks; in-depth data on 39 Brussels-based institutes' financial, human and symbolic resources; 80 semi-structured expert interviews with EU think tank leaders and core constituencies; network analysis based on biographical data from 2,080 EU think tank professionals; and standardized survey results from 671 randomly sampled European Commission officials asked how they use EU think tanks (24 percent response rate) are presented. EU think tanks, I show, are prime study sites for organizational institutionalist theory. After mapping the present field, its historical emergence and expansion is retraced to discover why and how transnational think tanks organize and behave as they do. At the crossroads of academia, politics, business and media, Brussels institutes' resource dependencies and think tankers' backgrounds are scrutinized, as are their sectoral and organizational ties, their roles and professional identity. In filling these empirical and knowledge gaps, conceptual and methodological frontiers of think tank research are pushed, namely on their originality, networks or socio-structural effects - reviving the research agenda on transnational think tanks, upgrading previous accounts of EU think tanks, aligning EU- with the latest advances in US scholarship, and linking the struggle of think tanks – as knowledge-intensive civil society actors in complex task environments – for survival, for legitimacy and impact to institutionalist perspectives.

## **Keywords**

Think tanks; European Union; organizational field; institutionalism; network analysis; institutional logics; non-profit management; knowledge society; global civil society

## Acknowledgements

This dissertation was enabled by a three year stipend funded by Hertie Foundation while I was part of the Berlin Graduate School for Transnational Studies (BTS), had an office space and taught at the Hertie School of Governance. It is an exciting place, and has been a great intellectual home to study think tanks and the European Union. I also received a Fritz Thyssen Foundation completion grant and a German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) travel grant for my field research trip to Brussels, where I was based as a Visiting Fellow with the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS). BTS courses and colloquia at Hertie School, WZB Berlin and Free University Berlin (including its Dahlem Research School skills workshops) were all very useful to me.

Beyond these institutions which helped me pay the rent and opened their doors - without their financial and symbolic support, this project would not be finished - a special thank you is due to many people who have helped me over the research years. First and foremost, my first adviser Helmut Anheier provided his support or guidance whenever needed, just the right amount of leaving me to do my own thing and raising the bar or setting deadlines. I learned a lot from his timely and insightful feedback, at times stunningly sharp on-the-spot assessments in our conversations, and benefitted from co-teaching courses on governance and non-profit management with him, too. Woody Powell, who kindly agreed to be my second adviser, also inspired my interest in institutional theory through his teaching, and enriched this research with advice. The Hertie School's assistants Zora Chan and Doroteja Enčeva or Verena Neumann of the PhD team and the school's library staff were super helpful on many occasions.

During my doctoral studies, I had the privilege to meet - and much fun with - a motley group of people. I drew from the energy, good conversations and support of officemates who became friends - Maurits Meijers, Zoe Williams - and workmates - Anael Labigne, Olga Kononykhina - as the Stifterverband hired me before finishing; of fellow BTS students - kudos to Gil Murciano, Sophie Eisentraut, Mathis Lohaus, Wiebke Wemheuer, Christian Freudlsperger, Sören Stapel and the others - and my Hertie School PhD comrades - Jan Jakub Chromiec, Janina Mangold, Sarah Förster, Arndt Leininger and Marlene Jugl shared and brightened my office, and I thoroughly enjoyed canteen or coffeeshop company of Aram Khaghaghordyan, Alexandra Ioan, Nikolas Scherer, Luis Mejia, Sebastian Seidel, Rajnar Hjalmarsson, Cristina Samper or Julian Zuber and the neighboring DIW's Michael Neumann, Andreas Thiemann and Songül Tolan, with whom I never shared an office but it often felt as if I would.



A big thank you goes to all my interview partners, from whom I learned a great deal, the hundreds of European Commission officials who took time to answer my survey. The openness and eloquence of CEPS' Steven Blockmans or Diego Valiante, who let me share his office there, its crew and the other think tank leaders I met in Brussels deeply impressed me. Workshops at Hebrew University of Jerusalem and University of Gothenburg helped me refine my ideas, a GESIS summer school on surveys my method skills. I also profited from passionate academics' digital lectures on network analysis, and Jan Fuhse's analogue Berlin Network for Network Research meetings. In university, I learned from students I had the chance to meet through teaching. At work, Holger Krimmer, Lydia Markowski, Jana Priemer, Magda Skurnóg, Inger Kühn and others all make my first "real" job as a project leader aside academia great fun.

On the private front, I value the friendship of Jan Thiele, Björn Siebke, Eva Sundermann, Yun Cao and Julia Lingenthal, who initially encouraged me to go for it, and keep at it. I thank my saxophone teacher Christian Raake for weekly inspirational distraction. Antonia Dvorak with her Kita Pünktchen & Paul team have been great. I am deeply grateful to my mum and dad, Martina and Mike, and my brother, Niklas, for always showing an interest in my plans and supporting me in countless ways; one was bearing with me that this dissertation would eventually come to a happy end.

Finally, and most importantly, my most heartfelt gratitude goes to my partner, Patricia Gallego Granados, who has not for a second stopped believing in me, kept me going through the highs and lows of newfound enthusiasm and routine stumbling blocks, had my back in choosing to work plenty of jobs and time aside my studies, and whose worldly wisdom, love, patience and sheer brilliance are a daily inspiration. I am the luckiest man in the world to have her and our daughter, Alma, who was born a couple of years into this dissertation; she already changed my life and outlook on it, teaching me that at the end of the day it is play which is the highest form of research, and why Einstein was also right that imagination is more important than knowledge.

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## List of Abbreviations

<b>1KA</b>	University of Ljubljana One Click Survey Software
<b>AIES</b>	Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy
<b>AISBL</b>	Association internationale sans but lucrative
<b>ALTER-EU</b>	Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation
<b>ASA</b>	American Sociological Association
<b>Atomium</b>	Atomium European Institute for Science, Media and Democracy
<b>BBC</b>	British Broadcasting Corporation
<b>BEPA</b>	Bureau of European Policy Advisers
<b>BNE</b>	Business for New Europe
<b>Bruegel</b>	Brussels European & Global Economic Laboratory
<b>BTTD</b>	Brussels Think Tank Dialogue
<b>CASE</b>	CASE Center for Social and Economic Research
<b>CEO</b>	Chief executive officer / Corporate Europe Observatory
<b>CEP</b>	Centre for European Policy
<b>CEPI</b>	Central European Policy Institute
<b>CEPII</b>	Centre d'Études Prospectives et d'Informations Internationales
<b>CEPR</b>	Centre for Economic Policy Research
<b>CEPS</b>	centre for European Policy Studies
<b>CER</b>	Centre for European Reform
<b>CF</b>	Cicero Foundation
<b>CFR</b>	Council on Foreign Relations
<b>CFSP</b>	Common Foreign and Security Policy
<b>CGD Europe</b>	Center for Global Development Europe
<b>Chatham House</b>	Chatham House - Royal Institute of International Affairs
<b>CIDOB</b>	Barcelona Centre for International Affairs
<b>Commission</b>	European Commission
<b>Confrontations</b>	Confrontations Europe
<b>Council</b>	Council of the European Union
<b>CRPE</b>	Romanian Center for European Policies
<b>CSO</b>	Civil society organization
<b>CV</b>	Curriculum vitae
<b>DG</b>	European Commission Directorate General
<b>DGAP</b>	German Council on Foreign Relations
<b>DIW</b>	German Institute for Economic Research
<b>E3G</b>	Third Generation Environmentalism
<b>EC</b>	European Communities
<b>ECB</b>	European Central Bank
<b>ECDPM</b>	European Centre for Development Policy Management
<b>ECF</b>	European Climate Foundation
<b>ECFR</b>	European Council on Foreign Relations
<b>ECIA</b>	European Centre for International Affairs
<b>ECIPE</b>	European Centre for International Political Economy
<b>ECOFIN</b>	Economic and Financial Affairs Council
<b>Ecologic</b>	Ecologic Institute
<b>EEAS</b>	European External Action Service
<b>EFD</b>	European Foundation for Democracy
<b>Egmont</b>	Egmont Royal Institute for International Relations

<b>EIAS</b>	European Institute for Asian Studies
<b>EIPA</b>	European Institute of Public Administration
<b>ELIAMEP</b>	Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy
<b>ELN</b>	European Leadership Network
<b>EMU</b>	Economic and Monetary Union
<b>ENEPRI</b>	European Network of Economic Policy Research Institutes
<b>EPC</b>	European Policy Centre
<b>EPIN</b>	European Policy Institutes Network
<b>EPSC</b>	European Political Strategy Centre
<b>ERF</b>	European Risk Forum
<b>ESI</b>	European Stability Initiative
<b>ETR</b>	European Transparency Register
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EUI</b>	European University Institute
<b>EUISS</b>	European Union Institute for Security Studies
<b>EuroMeSCo</b>	Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission
<b>Europeum</b>	Europeum Institute for European Policy
<b>EWI</b>	EastWest Institute
<b>FIIA</b>	Finnish Institute of International Affairs
<b>FoE</b>	Friends of Europe
<b>FONDAPOL</b>	Fondation Pour l'Innovation Politique
<b>FP7</b>	EU 7th Framework Program for Research & Technological Development
<b>FPC</b>	Foreign Policy Centre
<b>FRIDE</b>	Fundación para Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior
<b>FTE</b>	Full-time equivalent
<b>GESIS</b>	Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences
<b>GGI</b>	Global Governance Institute
<b>GMF</b>	German Marshall Fund of the United States
<b>GNI</b>	Gross national income
<b>GPPI</b>	Global Public Policy Institute
<b>GRIP</b>	Group for Research and Information on Peace and Security
<b>GSOEP</b>	German Socio-Economic Panel
<b>HCSS</b>	The Hague Center for Strategic Studies
<b>HIGJ</b>	The Hague Institute for Global Justice
<b>Horizon 2020</b>	EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation
<b>HR</b>	Human resources
<b>I</b>	Interview
<b>IAI</b>	Istituto Affari Internazionali
<b>ICCG</b>	International Center for Climate Governance
<b>ICG</b>	International Crisis Group
<b>IEA</b>	Institute of Economic Affairs
<b>IEEP</b>	Institute for European Environmental Policy
<b>IEP</b>	Institute for European Politics
<b>IFRI</b>	Institut Francais des Relations Internationales - Brussels Office
<b>IIEA</b>	Institute of International and European Affairs
<b>IIED</b>	International Institute for Environment and Development
<b>IISS</b>	International Institute for Strategic Studies
<b>INGO</b>	International non-governmental organization
<b>IO</b>	International organization



<b>IPCC</b>	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
<b>IPEMED</b>	Institut Prospective Économique du Monde Méditerranéen
<b>IR</b>	International relations
<b>ISD</b>	Institute for Strategic Dialogue
<b>ISP</b>	Institute of Public Affairs
<b>LIIA</b>	Latvian Institute of International Affairs
<b>Lisbon Council</b>	Lisbon Council for Economic Competitiveness and Social Renewal
<b>LSE</b>	London School of Economics
<b>Madariaga</b>	Madariaga College of Europe Foundation
<b>MAXQDA</b>	Qualitative Data Analysis Software
<b>MEP</b>	Member of the European Parliament
<b>MP</b>	Member of Parliament
<b>MSC</b>	Munich Security Conference
<b>N</b>	Sample size
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>Notre Europe</b>	Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute
<b>NPM</b>	New Public Management
<b>ODI</b>	Overseas Development Institute
<b>OIIP</b>	Austrian Institute for International Affairs
<b>OSE</b>	European Social Observatory
<b>OSEPI</b>	Open Society European Policy Institute
<b>OSF</b>	Open Society Foundations
<b>OSI</b>	Open Society Institute
<b>PDF</b>	Portable Document Format
<b>PISM</b>	Polish Institute of International Affairs
<b>PLS</b>	Think Tank Européen Pour la Solidarité
<b>S&amp;C</b>	Sport and Citizenship
<b>SC</b>	Strategic communications material
<b>SEF</b>	Development and Peace Foundation
<b>SIEPS</b>	Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies
<b>SIPRI</b>	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
<b>SNA</b>	Social network analysis
<b>STATA</b>	Software for Statistics and Data Science
<b>SWP</b>	German Institute for International and Security Affairs
<b>T&amp;E</b>	Transport & Environment
<b>TEPSA</b>	Trans European Policy Studies Association
<b>TNI</b>	Transnational Institute
<b>UCINET</b>	Social Network Analysis Software
<b>UIA</b>	Union of International Associations
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>WIIW</b>	Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies
<b>WiseEuropa</b>	WiseEuropa Institute
<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organization
<b>WZB</b>	Berlin Social Science Center
<b>ZiviZ</b>	Civil Society in Numbers within Stifterverband

## Chapter 1

# Transnational Think Tanks and the European Union: What are the Issues?

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### Introduction

Think tanks and their self-proclaimed experts are now established players not only in America, or European Union (EU) countries, but also beyond the nation state as well. “EU think tanks” - my shorthand for public policy institutes significantly or fully geared to EU policy or related global affairs - are a case in point. As I will argue and show in this book, they occupy an organizational field in its own right, marked by a common pursuit of transnational policy research, convening and advocacy activities.

Bruegel, Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), European Policy Centre (EPC)-these are now household names for most politicians, international bureaucrats, scholars, lobbyists and journalists in Brussels. Institutes in other EU cities also belong to this EU-wide think tank scene: examples are London’s Chatham House or Centre for European Reform (CER), Notre Europe in Paris and Berlin, the pan-European European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), or nationally rooted institutes with a Brussels branch like the German Institute for International Security Affairs (SWP), and US-origin Carnegie Europe, RAND Europe or the German Marshall Fund (GMF).

Each and every day, some EU think tank publishes a report or policy brief; hosts a workshop, webinar or policy lunch; stages a debate or podium discussion; meets the European Commission (hereinafter “Commission”) or testifies before the European Parliament; is quoted or interviewed in EU news outlets like EurActiv and Politico or national mass media; and is shared, liked and followed on social media platforms. Both generalist one-stop-shop and very specialized EU think tanks work on economic, environmental, social and foreign policy issues, in line with EU core competencies.

Clearly, there is a “there” there: a buzz of activity, a steady stream of policy research, cross-sectoral networking events, the catering of timely food for thought (and literal fingerfood, plus coffee), all of variable quality; transnational expertise is kept alive in a number of areas, critical debates are shaped or bounded, knowledge is produced or spread, relationships are maintained, new connections are made. Even a cursory check of EU think tanks’ strategic communication material - their websites, missions or annual reports - reveals how their rethoric is simultaneously couched in a

language of in-betweenness, of both scholarliness and political usefulness. Located at the crossroads of academia, politics, business, media and civil society, they routinely claim to bridge scientific and political spheres, often under the banner of reasonable public debate and evidence-based policy-making; they insist on independence from state or business agendas, yet stress their unique access in the shadow of power; they distance themselves from ivory tower research for research's sake, point to political relevance of intellectual contributions, yet keep invoking their scholarly credentials.

EU think tanks, like their nationally-focused counterparts, inhabit a productive tension field along interstices of the public, private and civil society sector. As knowledge-intensive network organizations in a complex task environment, they are subject to conflicting or contradictory institutional logics. They may blur boundaries, tear down barriers, straddle spheres and national borders. But depending on their exact funding and human resource mix and mesh of relations, we can expect, they will have varying leeway to act on their own, to survive and thrive in the EU sui generis polity.

Ex-London School of Economics (LSE) director Craig Calhoun notes how “the rise of think tanks created a buffer between academic social scientists and both broader publics and policy-makers”; this may “change demand for academic social science”; on this ground alone, he says, we must study “how this mediation works” (2009). EU think tanks were both moulded by - and helped shape - European integration history. Therefore, it is also surprising to which extent “the role of think tanks for the EU remains uncharted territory for political scientists” (Plehwe/Pautz 2014) to this day. Awareness of national think tank landscapes ventured well into the realm of “normal” political science and sociological inquiry. However, little is known about EU think tanks' scene, their rise in numbers and, probably, in importance over the last decades.

With this dissertation, I set out to contribute the first in-depth, multi-method organizational demography of EU think tanks in Brussels and beyond. To get started, this introductory chapter contextualizes this research: its wider relevance and guiding research puzzles and -questions are explained; a synopsis of the current state of think tank scholarship is provided; and, finally, the dissertation's structure and arguments are hinted at and the main empirical or theoretical themes spelled out, before the next chapter details the analytical framework of sensitizing concepts from the think tank- and adjacent literature strands and explains the methodological approach, choices and this dissertation's rather ambitious empirical data collection and analysis effort.

## Research puzzles: Innovation, independence, impact

Although greater nuance is of course possible, most research on think tanks revolves around three research puzzles: their degree of innovation, independence and impact. These three “I’s” at the heart of a growing body of theoretical and empirical literature on think tanks capture our fascinations and preoccupations with this research object. While analytically distinct, we will see they are often closely intertwined in practice. They also constitute a “red thread” followed in this dissertation’s results presentation. Table 1 lists related fundamental research questions at different levels of analysis, together with some core themes addressed in the course of this dissertation’s chapters.

Think tanks - whether their focus is on national or transnational governance - are a phenomenon most fruitfully studied by touching upon three levels of analysis: their organizational field, the institutes themselves, and individuals working for them. Much literature on the subject delimits the focus on the institutes as units of analysis. However, the aim here is a multi-level analysis, also commenting on forces shaping the overall community of EU think tanks, its relations to other societal sectors, and how their leaders or staff - the think tankers themselves - make sense of what they do. This approach enables us to gain valuable insights on key think tank research themes.

Of course, one underlying question will not be bypassed: What is a think tank? Where do EU think tanks come from, and how many exist nowadays across the EU? This definitional dilemma and the challenge of determining the empirical boundaries

**Table 1.** Think tank research puzzles, questions and themes by levels of analysis

Research puzzle (and levels of analysis)	Fundamental research questions	Related chapter themes
<b>Innovation</b> <i>Field level</i> <i>Organizational level</i> <i>Individual level</i>	<b>What is the novelty behind the (EU) think tank phenomenon?</b> <i>How have they come to occupy an organizational field over time?</i> <i>What are similar and unique organizational forms and practices?</i> <i>To what extent can think tankers be innovative within their work?</i>	<b>Comparative advantage</b> Field emergence, boundaries Isomorphism, differentiation Policy innovation, brokerage
<b>Independence</b> <i>Field level</i> <i>Organizational level</i> <i>Individual level</i>	<b>Which leeway of action do (EU) think tanks have in practice?</b> <i>Which symbolic, financial or human resources do they draw on?</i> <i>How are their funding profiles and sectoral networks structured?</i> <i>Have think tankers forged their own hybrid professional identity?</i>	<b>Relative autonomy</b> Social network embeddedness Budget mix, sectoral relations Conflicting institutional logics
<b>Impact</b> <i>Field level</i> <i>Organizational level</i> <i>Individual level</i>	<b>What is the significance of (EU) think tanks’ contributions?</b> <i>Which functions do their policy research and convening fulfil?</i> <i>What are their strategies for survival, influence or reputation?</i> <i>How do think tankers portray their work’s direction of impact?</i>	<b>Multi-dimensional influence</b> Demand, usage of their work Role enactment, legitimacy Shaping policies, governance

of EU think tanks' scene are addressed and first cross-sectional findings mapping the field's composition are presented in following chapters (notably in Chapter 2 and 4). The puzzle behind the "innovation" keyword relates to the historical emergence and institutionalization of a now taken-for-granted field of EU think tanks; their novel forms and practices developed over time, regarding their organizational label and design but also product- as well as process innovations; and how supply- as opposed to demand-driven they operate (notably in Chapter 5 and 9). Once the organizational population is determined, a crucial analytical task is to confront institutes' rethoric - boasts of innovative ideas or "out-of-the-box" thinking are common - with the possibility that their leeway for intellectual innovation is quite curtailed in practice.

The same applies to the perennial puzzle of think tanks' "independence": How are the institutes funded? And who precisely are their affiliated EU think tankers? In face of their ubiquitous legitimacy claims stressing organizational autonomy or non-partisanship, the analytical crux of the matter remains to assess this issue empirically, finding ways to map sectoral resource dependencies and their independence of mind. Studying to which extent EU think tanks manage to diversify their income sources or rely on endowment money (see Chapter 6), how they connect with each other and link up with neighboring sectors - their inter-organizational and inter-sectoral ties - is very important to make progress in understanding relational opportunity structures and constraints. Think tankers' educational and career credentials (see Chapter 7), leanings towards sectoral mindsets and self-concepts (see Chapter 9) will be critical.

Finally, the "impact" catchword captures the puzzle of whether and how think tanks matter: Put most simply, what do they do, how do they do it and to what effect? This will not be limited to if they make a difference for policy outcomes. Rather, it is shown how their multi-faceted impact includes roles they routinely enact for core constituencies, their wider socio-structural significance in the EU's multi-level polity. Aspects here are to what extent EU think tanks, in the aggregate, now institutionalize a transnational infrastructure of ideas and professionals with a non-national outlook; which success metrics think tankers facing severe performance uncertainty employ; and we will gauge how their work is actually being used in influential domains, say contributing to the informational basis of the European Commission (see Chapter 9).

I argue that these institutes make up an organizational field in its own right. But even if they now are taken-for-granted actors, their self-professed independence, innovation or impact ought not to be taken for granted by academics. It is worthwhile

to empirically explore the three research puzzles - relative autonomy, novelty and multi-dimensional impact - by drawing on multiple literatures and disciplinary lenses: a sociologist's instinct to critically analyze both the structures actors are embedded in and their - also mundane - practices; a political scientist's interest in power relations; and economists' feel for supply or demand forces, financial or reputational resources. The conceptual framework brought to bear on the study of EU think tanks is further detailed in the next chapter; it draws not only on the think tank literature but also on institutionalist literature on organizational fields' emergence and institutionalization. I "radiograph" the phenomenon at this disciplinary nexus by using multiple methods.

To make the paramount research puzzles amenable to empirical research, they are translated into more detailed subquestions pursued in the chapters: regarding EU think tanks' scale and scope, historical evolution, institute profiles and professional identities, financial and human resources, social networks - including not only inter-organizational personnel flows or formalized networks but also board interlocks or -memberships and think tankers' educational and sectoral career ties - and about their roles, performance indicators or -measurement, and usage (by Commission officials).

Throughout, the objective is to empirically explore - to conceptually understand and empirically map - the spectrum of EU think tanks' commonalities and variation, teasing out how they are alike (isomorphism) or unlike each other (diversity). The research goals are to revive the dormant research agenda of transnational think tanks, first called for by Diane Stone (2000a); to update the ageing counts of "EU-specific" institutes by Notre Europe's team (Boucher et al. 2004) and Commission practitioners (Missiroli/Ioannides 2012); to delve deeper into EU think tanks than existing accounts (Sherrington 2000, Ulrich 2004, Kelstrup 2016); to synchronize European with state-of-the-art US scholarship (Medvetz 2012, Rastrick 2018); to link core organizational institutionalist concepts (Greenwood et al. 2013) with research on the topic; in short: to catch up with empirical realities which - as is so often the case - are ahead of our academic studies, sense-making and knowledge about such transnational think tanks.

Before the remainder of this introductory chapter comments on the normative or wider societal relevance of studying transnational think tanks, and spells out this dissertation's contributions and delimitations against the backdrop of existing studies, the next section gives a stylized "need to know" synopsis of current state-of-the-art scholarship on European and more specifically EU-focused public policy institutes; it serves to clarify which empirical and literature- or knowledge gaps will be addressed.

## **What we do and do not know about EU think tanks**

Diane Stone deserves credit for shaping the research agenda on “transnational think tanks” early on. At the turn of the millennium, she sees a trend of “think tanks across nations...building regional and international networks” (2000a:34, 2000b, 2000c), calling for studies of “think tanks beyond nation-states” (2004). Philippa Sherrington first speculates about the “nature of EU think tanks” in an overview article pondering if they are “shaping the policy agenda” at EU level (2000:187). She usefully discerns “EU-oriented national think tank activity” and “exclusively EU-oriented Brussels-based think tanks”; in her view, the latter were “few, and could be squeezed out by national institutes” with increasing EU focus (2000:189); their wider EU level name recognition and presence, she reckons, is “perhaps simply explained by the deepening of EU competences, the increased impact of EU policy-making on member states, and thus a heightened awareness of all things European” (Sherrington 2000:173).

Even if think tanks’ proliferation was explosive across many EU countries over the past three decades - including EU think tanks’ numerical rise, we will see - they long dwelled an existence in the shadow as unknown or unnoticed animals in the organizational jungle of Brussels and member state capital cities’ policy-making. Then their prominence rose from the 1980s onward (Sherrington 2000, Stone 2000b). Even as cities like Brussels, London or Paris became “noisy policy bazaars...with an ample diversity of think tanks” (McGann/Johnson 2005:11) or were joined by global and transatlantic think tanks opening European branches (see McGann/Sabatini 2011 for a helpful cursory but, in my view, unfortunately empirically quite hasty first look), Kelstrup (2016) notes major political science textbooks ignored them into the 2010s.

Stephen Boucher, then based at Notre Europe, and his team have significantly advanced our empirical understanding of what they call “Euro-specific” and “Euro-oriented research centers”: the former primarily focus on European policy issues, the latter pursue them as only one identifiable research program alongside national work (Boucher et. al 2004:4). As of 2004, they identify 149 relevant “think tanks in the EU currently working on European issues”, of which 36 - a quarter - was “Euro-specific” and the remaining 113 “Euro-oriented” in a sense that some work on European issues could be detected; the authors see an “unfulfilled promise” when it comes to think tanks alleged “enlightening” function for policy-makers or the public. Boucher’s 140-page overview from 2004 remains the most detailed empirical outline of “Euro-specific” or EU think tanks to date. I seek to update and expand it over a decade later.

In parallel to Boucher's mapping effort, Heidi Ulrich's take on EU-level think tanks laments the "difficult issue of definition", settling for a functional conceptualization of "generating ideas, analysis and debate" (2004:52). Unconvincingly, in my view, it leads her to typologize the Commission's BEPA (formerly "cellule de perspectives") and all "university-based European research institutes" as so-called "EU think tanks" (2004:61). I advocate delimiting this shorthand only to what she calls the "handful of Brussels-based EU think tanks" or also "member-state EU-oriented" ones (2004:61).

Stella Ladi (2005) looks at national settings but stresses institutes' role in policy transfer. Based on what interviewed think tankers told her, Ulrich writes EU think tanks' main sources of influence are "authority based on expertise", "promotion of an independent, balanced view" and "legitimacy" by which she vaguely means "a strong track record of addressing EU policy issues" (2004:67); this is not further elaborated:

*"Until further empirical research is carried out, the extent to which EU think tanks influence EU policy remains uncertain...Thus, there is an increased need for academic researchers and interested policy-makers to investigate the topic of EU think tanks through generating their own ideas, analysis and debate. "* (Ulrich 2004:68)

Eight years later two Commission BEPA officials interviewed for this dissertation - Isabelle Ioannides and Antonio Missiroli, who went on to direct the EUISS - produced a 50-page overview "Berlaymont Paper" (2012) choosing "some 35-odd European think tanks...on basis of their notoriety, visibility and output, both in Brussels or at national level, as well as their engagement in more than just one policy field" (Ioannides/Missiroli 2012:7). While they criticize Boucher for contradicting his own criteria by sampling political party think tanks - which they, along with university centers, convincingly exclude - no own definitional criteria are made transparent. A "European peculiarity" is noted in that unlike American counterparts, EU think tanks have often "turned into more or less 'hybrid' constructs that tend to combine elements of...types" and more regularly organize transnational networks (2012:9-10). Quoting Ulrich, they conclude by reflecting about institutes' structural significance:

*"Taken as a whole, [EU] think tanks are becoming, especially through their networks and websites, the closest thing to a fledgling common European 'public sphere'...albeit within the realm of a selected (yet quintessentially open) sample of engaged, educated citizens... they shape both expectations and perceptions regarding EU policies, with increasing access to old and new media [...and] they also start representing a significant basin for the recruitment of policy-shapers proper. "* (Ioannides/Missiroli 2012:13)



EU think tanks' much commented-on network dimension so far has been mainly analyzed in case studies or typologies of formalized transnational think tank networks like Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA), Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission (EuroMeSCo) or CEPS-led European Network of Economic Policy Research Institutes (ENEPRI) and European Policy Institutes Network (EPIN). Urban Institute fellow Raymond Struyk discusses their purpose (2002a, also see Chapter 8).

Dieter Plehwe co-edited a volume on the history of the Friedrich von Hayek-founded Mont Pèlerin Society, retracing think tanks' roles in the "making of a neoliberal thought collective" (2009); he laments EU think tanks' persisting lack of funding transparency (2010) and sees the "social sciences under think tank pressure" (2014). Plehwe, who is based at the Berlin Social Science Center (WZB), finds that amidst institutes' rise in influence "social scientific research on think tanks...remains underdeveloped, and is not currently up to the task of adequately capturing...the think tank phenomenon"; in 2011, he started a "Think Tank Network Research" wiki and blog to spur studies of - so far neoliberal, free-market - think tank networks (2018). From a critical policy studies lens, Plehwe also described think tank networks at the "knowledge-interest nexus" for climate change (see also Peter et al. 2008), part of the free-market Stockholm Network or conservative New Direction Foundation (Plehwe 2010, Plehwe/Schlögl 2013a), of - quite bulky - "transnational expert-, consulting- and lobby/advocacy networks" (2011) or "social networks of influence in Europe" (2017).

Dorota Dakowska has researched roles of political party foundation networks (2009), excluded in my analysis of EU think tanks because they are party-affiliated. She assesses their contributions and impact as modest in terms of thinking up ideas. As Plehwe (2010) points out, EU funds for them are relatively meagre: for example, in 2010 the conservative Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, affiliated to the largest European People's Party, received €3.3 million and the Party of European Socialists-affiliated Foundation for European Progressive Studies €2.25 million (this compares to the German social democrat Friedrich Ebert Foundation's €128 million).

More recently, Marybel Perez (2014) studies "EU think tanks" - a category in which she, like Ulrich, includes BEPA, TEPSA and political party foundations - with what again amounts, in my definition, to an underspecified sample; for Perez, they must be Brussels-based (she counts only 22 EU think tank-alike entities), leading her to miss out on studying the field of EU think tanks that emerges beyond Brussels (her definition is "think tanks located in Brussels that are concerned with EU politics").

Perez usefully sees such organizations - or rather organizations within organizations - as “knowledge brokers” with an important platform or convening function. She picks up Ulrich’s (2004) idea and Ioannides and Missiroli’s “European peculiarity” (2012), and empirically shows how convening activity - seminars, workshops, conferences - reduces transaction costs for target publics, also in spreading the Commission’s ideas. EU think tanks’ intermediation in an era of disintermediation, so to speak, has also been analyzed in an article doubting if EU think tanks can be the “bridge between science, politics and the public sphere” (Dialer/Füricht-Fiegl 2014); next to mini case studies of CEPS, EPC and Friends of Europe (FoE) as allegedly the “oldest” Brussels institutes, two Master theses on them are also listed here (Nichelson 2009, Allio 2012).

Jesper Kelstrup’s PhD thesis (2014) and subsequent book (2016) touches upon 14 “EU level think tanks”, mostly in Brussels. His work is concerned with comparing national think tank scenes but also makes an important contribution to the emerging field of EU think tank studies by stressing how both Anglo-American- or continental think tank traditions play out at EU level, notably regarding funding patterns. He had “problems in gathering data on think tank funding systematically” (2014:91), and uses staff size as a proxy indicator for budget size (no breakdown is attempted). Kelstrup observes a “constrained development of advocacy think tanks at EU level”; this is explained with the absence of widely read EU media outlets and of a tradition of private funding as in US or UK liberal market economies (2014, 2016). While his country-comparative insights support “institutional propositions” in that funding availability matters for think tank types, he also sees a “governance proposition” confirmed in that - particularly so at the EU level - one can observe “development of network-centric think tanks”; Kelstrup shows how both consensual and adversarial political cultures affect the development of institutes across different polities (2016).

Finally, the comparative lens is developed further in Christopher Rastrick’s welcome book-length addition to the topical literature: his PhD thesis (2016) led to a monograph (2018) comparing (again just Brussels-based) “supranational think tanks” (he finds only 21, and again problematically includes formal think tank networks TEPSA, EPIN and the political party-affiliated European Ideas Network, European Liberal Forum and Foundation for European Progressive Studies) to Washington D.C. think tanks. As mentioned, I see political party foundations as a different object of study (comparisons are worthwhile), and look also beyond the “Brussels bubble”.

“Why have supranational and American think tanks pursued two markedly different developmental trajectories?”, Rastrick asks. His answer is that Brussels institutes “are afforded an inherent credibility” by EU institutions, whereas US think tanks must fight for credibility or funding from their core constituencies (2016, 2018). In this explanation, I fear, vastly different financial power - it can hardly be overstated - of (on average much “richer”) US think tanks and (significantly “poorer”) EU ones is left unaddressed. Rastrick bases his claims solely on interview research: it has three tables but lacks empirical scrutiny of financial resources or with non-interview data. Nevertheless, Rastrick importantly elevates EU think tanks’ field as an organizational field worthy of comparison in its own right to more established scenes like in the US. He also shows how think tanks’ polity setting affects how they “gauge impact” (2018).

Stephen Boucher and research leaders like Plehwe, Perez, Kelstrup or Rastrick have significantly advanced our ideas and knowledge of EU think tanks; they inhabit an organizational field which is, it can safely be said, not straightforward to study. In absence of comprehensive directories or sampling frames, despite difficulty assessing financial resources and the challenge of how to best depict their network dimension, these and other authors have collectively pointed the way for how we can study them. I build on the work of this small academic scene studying or touching upon the topic of EU think tanks and their (formal) networks, even if “links between theoretical and empirical contributions to the literature remain weak” in the field (Kelstrup 2014:36).

I was happy to see up-and-coming academics (also below a published threshold) making forays into EU think tank studies at a first-ever University of Gothenburg “Workshop on Think Tanks in Europe” (see program description 2017), where both established scholars such as Plehwe or Kelstrup and “newcomers” (such as myself) presented their latest research. One observable trend is how European think tank studies branch out to ever-more distance places and are taking up Medvetz’ relational perspective (explained in detail in the next chapter): it is applied to Belarus by Maria Bigday (Bigday/Kryzhanouski 2016), and to formal European think tank networks by Tatyana Bajenova (2017). A second set of trends, however, is persistence of national grids of analysis and popularity of discourse analysis in absence of structural work: there are papers on Polish think tanks “performing independence” (Katarzyna 2018), on Belgian political institutes (Pattyn et al. 2017), Czech (Cisar et al. forthcoming), Ukraine’s or Russia’s scene; Alexander Ruser studies “climate skeptic actors” (2018), and Hernando and Pautz are interested in austerity discourses (Hernando et al. 2018).

Beyond what is on the horizon of European think tank scholarship, the general and US literature on think tanks of course does not stand still: James McGann has written a timely account of how US think tanks' "fifth estate" is increasingly under attack (2016). He has since followed this up with a study on Indian, Chinese and Turkish think tanks (2018), and normatively asserts that "despite the challenges of European integration, or perhaps in response to it, there exists a clear need for European think tanks with a truly regional perspective...focused on...the issues confronting Europe" (2016:39). He laments that "there have been few significant scholarly projects on the specific topic of EU think tanks" after Boucher's initial count which, also in his view, "remains one of the more extensive discussions to date" (2016:37). Against the backdrop of what we do and do not know about public policy institutes active at EU level, it is such a significant scholarly project specifically on EU think tanks I set out to contribute, mapping their emergence, resources, networks and transnational agency.

### **Research relevance, contributions and delimitation**

This book empirically scrutinizes EU think tanks' profiles, relations, role performance and potential for trans-border, cross-sectoral, trans-disciplinary networking. I show that they institutionalize - even if individually they are often small organizations - a European infrastructure of transnational policy ideas as well as hybrid professionals, gauging if they shape the informational basis of EU governance where it truly matters, say by advising, or legitimizing, the Commission's daily work as EU executive body. In addition, my thesis also speaks to normative debates surrounding think tanks' role, following up on Boucher's and others' work as to how far their "promise" for policy innovation or -usefulness is fulfilled as the European project wades in troubled water.

#### *Problem statement*

We are living in turbulent times. The present state of our world and the EU feels both highly developed, in many ways; or present itself as a centrifugal unravelling of order. Globalization leads to unprecedented opportunities; it also fuels profound challenges. Public policy issues now regularly spill over borders with complex interdependencies. Globalization pressures intensify as governments' ability to manage alone slips away; we saw pronounced authority transfers from the national to EU level (Anheier 2013). "Wicked problems" (Churchman 1967) with no quick fixes abound. Therefore, transnational, trans-disciplinary expertise and cross-sector venues for lateral thinking seem more urgent than ever. Can EU think tanks offer such knowledge, break down silos?

Climate change - our decade is the hottest on record - is far from the only global issue, although it might be the greatest market failure the world has ever seen (Stern 2006). Economies recover from the 2008 financial crisis - the worst since the 1930s - but its ensuing social upheaval drives voters' discontents with globalization and democracy. Digitization upends business and media models, ushering in unprecedented inter-connectivity; it also facilitates spread of fake news, disinformation, election meddling. The challenges inherent in managing mass migration - almost 69 million people were forced from their homes (UNHR 2017) - or epidemic outbreaks are further examples.

In 2016, pollsters, pundits, academics and think tankers failed to predict both "Brexit", derailing historical developments towards an "ever closer Union", then Donald Trump's US presidency, with 60 million votes of 25 percent of eligible voters. "Fundamental pillars of the West and the liberal international order are weakening", Wolfgang Ischinger, Germany's ex-ambassador to the US, opines; the Munich Security Conference he chairs judges global security as "more volatile...than at any point since the Second World War" (2017). A new nuclear arms race may unfold (Schlosser 2018).

So beyond the research questions flowing from prior empirical and knowledge gaps on EU think tanks, we can also more generally ask for transnational think tanks: Which roles do such institutes play in our crisis-ridden world, say at EU level? Are they seen as bulwarks of democracy, venues of informed debate, as voices of reason? Do they plug into political debates for "speaking truth to power" (Wildavsky 1979)? Or, au contraire, have they become beholden to vested interests of states or businesses? Do they act as venues of political elitism, ideological warriors, lobbyists in disguise? In short: Are they part of the solution or of the problem, intendedly or unintendedly?

We are drawn to studying EU think tanks for this intriguing parallel of promise or peril. EU representative democracy needs good advice from trusted experts to help govern the most pressing problems facing its 512 million citizens and the globe, yet trust in experts erodes: "people in this country have had enough of experts", UK leave campaigner Michael Goven claimed, presuming to speak for the island's whole population. It is increasingly realized that technocratic experts' quest for efficiency indeed all too often cast aside distributional issues (Pisani-Ferry 2016a, 2016b). EU think tanks may well hold unique potential to help offset our governance problems. In fact, their organizational field may be indispensable to an effective, legitimate EU. But, depending on their funding situation and role enactment, such institutes could just as well be used as vehicles for corporate or political lobbying, be it direct or indirect.

### *Research contribution and delimitation*

To scrutinize the structures, resources and roles EU think tanks play in our world, as noted I could build on pioneering empirical approaches of others (notably Boucher et al. 2004 and Medvetz 2012, who helpfully appends his coding schemes). I compiled the most comprehensive primary database of EU think tanks (the empirics are among the most detailed on a think tank field more generally, to the best of my knowledge): an original database on the main features and strategic communication material of 85 carefully identified EU-focused institutes across the EU-28 (100 variables) and in-depth financial and human resource information for 39 institutes present in Brussels (including CVs or biographical vignettes of N=2,080 think tank leaders, staff or board members). Desk-based archival research of their “digital traces” enabled social network analysis (SNA) visualizations as well as historical process-tracing of field evolution from the 1920s to 2010s. I used a two month CEPS visiting fellowship for ethnographic participant observation, beware of “going native”, and conducted 80 semi-structured expert interviews (audio-taped, typically in person) with EU think tankers, Commission officials, NGO leaders and EU news outlet editors-in-chief (N=573 pages of transcripts, 11,306 coded segments on 111 topics). Finally, this dissertation project also reports findings from a standardized, web-based survey of randomly sampled Commission staff (N=671 respondents, 24 percent response rate).

The thesis straddles a line between an inductive, question-led logic of discovery and, to a lesser extent, more deductive, literature- and data-informed standardization. Theoretical expectations (from the next chapter) are confronted with empirical data. Importantly, it is not assumed up front what the “essence” of think tanks is or is not. Their nature, functions and wider significance are not speculatively discussed from any one ready-made theoretical lens but empirically explored as truly open questions. The research effort is multi- or mixed-methods in that a qualitative spirit is adopted throughout but quantification is attempted wherever it helps answering the question at hand. To enhance validity of my findings, descriptive statistics and network charts are triangulated with quotes from coded interview material and analyzed documents.

As a result, I can offer an empirically nuanced portrayal of the EU think tanks analyzing the basic theoretical puzzles of their originality, autonomy and capacity for change. Paraphrasing Ralf Dahrendorf’s dictum, good description can already be a significant achievement. However, a delimitation of what this thesis is - and is not - is essential. It addresses what others and I see as a literature gap in the existing body

of knowledge on think tanks. First of all, I do not sidestep the definitional dilemma and tackle boundary specification head-on, with a working - and workable - definition of think tanks which is neither too imprecise nor essentialist. As the next chapter justifies, I opt to use the following working definition for the purpose at hand:

*“A think tank is a relatively autonomous not-for-profit organization regularly engaged in public policy-oriented research, convening, advice or advocacy (with at least some staff). EU think tanks are significantly or fully geared to EU policy or related global affairs.”*

Note that beyond this characterization no romanticized or cynical assumptions about their “true nature” is made. Real types are not forcibly sorted into ideal-typologies. I rather follow Thomas Medvetz’ topological approach (explained in Chapter 2) that what often best defines think tanks or their experts is an “ability to exist ‘in between’ types” at the crossroads of societal sectors (Medvetz 2012:19); where I depart from Medvetz’ conceptualization is that I do not see think tanks “not as organizations of... a discrete ‘type’ but as a constitutively blurry network of organizations” (2012:23); it precludes a priori that they can have relative autonomy (if not perfect independence). Like Medvetz, as an academic, I study think tanks to understand their field, not to judge quality of or denounce their work, nor to sing their praises (Medvetz 2012:42).

Second, a focus on the organizational field EU think tanks have come to inhabit transcends the usual country level of analysis, tackling the blind spot of transnational think tank activity in-depth for this specific scene. However, cross-sectional empirical mapping of EU-focused institutes comes at the cost of not covering EU member state domestic think tank landscapes, rather preparing the ground for future comparisons to national (say US) settings or other transnational (say UN-revolving) think tank fields. The thesis does not offer a full history of Bruegel, CEPS or lesser-known institutes - although their composition and critical junctures in their evolution will be analyzed from exactly the same grid of analysis - nor longitudinal data (with some exceptions).

Third, I study EU think tanks as structurally embedded agents, constrained by but also dynamically shaping their own institutional contexts or neighboring fields. I argue they are certainly influenced but not determined by any one think tank tradition, be it continental or Anglo-American (Kelstrup 2016, Stone/Denham 2004). I wish to advance think tank scholarship by moving beyond talk of “networks” as a metaphor (Börzel 2011) to more SNA data collection, visualization and interview triangulation. While this methodological frontier is systematically pushed within this dissertation, it still falls short when it comes to a more sophisticated SNA (beyond degree centrality).

Fourth, my study avoids the atomistic pitfall of overseeing to which extent think tanks are network-centric actors beyond their own walls, engaged in convening formats that are often much more than simple “add-ons” to in-house policy research. In fact, I argue, EU think tanks’ wider significance may lie precisely in their hybridly organized “net-working” rather than the occasional success of influencing EU policy. Instead of a narrow focus on direct policy impact - hitherto the “holy grail” among think tank scholars - it is argued we should study their multi-dimensional influence, including their more indirect, informal, subtle and socio-structural sources of power.

Having said this, I do not claim they are an obscure power elite, a center of politics, rulers of the universe. I do argue EU think tanks are central theaters, not just sideshows, of a territorial internationalization and functional privatization of expertise and cross-sectoral convening most conspicuously unfolding at EU-level, in Brussels. Thus, even in absence of “smoking gun” evidence of attributable legislation change, these often small institutes (say compared to the US) may change EU governance not only as “outside agents” by advising the EU institutions; but also by “spreading the message” for them, so to speak, by legitimizing others’ ideas and shaping discourses.

This book is an attempt to open up inter-disciplinary, multi-method entryways into studying transnational think tanks and knowledge-intensive organizations more generally. The guiding interest is socio-structural rather than in particular substantive issue areas, say economic- or foreign policy; no in-depth process-tracing or discourse analysis of how think tanks shape specific legislative domains or policy debates (a worthwhile alternative approach) is provided here. Neither does the author dive deep into knowledge utilization literature (Weiss 1977, 1979, 1992, Boswell 2008, 2009), sociology of intellectuals or of Bourdieu (Osborne 2004, Medvetz 2012). I hope to contribute an insightful, empirically packed study on EU think tanks to inform or inspire think tank scholars, organizational researchers, their leaders and practitioners. The next two chapters further elaborate sensitizing concepts, methods and data used.



## Chapter 2

# Sensitizing Concepts: Carving out a Space to Study (EU) Think Tanks

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### Introduction

The previous introductory chapter has already set the stage conceptually speaking by explaining that this dissertation focuses on the three basic “I’s” of think tank research - innovation, independence and impact - for a specific subset of EU-level think tanks. This chapter elaborates this analytical grid and conceptual approach used to study the history and present state of the organizational field of EU think tanks - its emergence and structuration, its current material or cultural foundations, its societal significance. Next to filling in knowledge gaps on this transnational think tank scene, we might also learn something from the empirical data this dissertation presents about field formation, organizational-level legitimacy struggles or hybrid professional identities.

In a first step, this chapter surveys origins and usage of the “think tank” label; it develops a working definition of EU think tanks, debating other authors’ attempts. In a next step, it is argued that for purposes of mapping institutes’ organizational field we can follow Medvetz’ topological rather than typological approach; it is modified regarding whether the policy institutes can be relatively autonomous actors, however, rather than just a constitutively blurry network of relationships, as Medvetz implies. The chapter then turns to think tank theories, explaining why they are prime sites for institutionalist analysis; it draws on sensitizing concepts from EU studies, literature on the emergence and isomorphic structuration of organizational labels and fields, on institutional logics, organizational hybridity as well as social network analysis studies.

### **Towards a consensual definition of (EU) think tanks?**

Let us briefly inspect etymological origins and evolving use of the “think tank” label. A most basic but perhaps not trivial observation is: the notion unites associations of some extent of reasoning with an open mind, an enclosed entity holding or transporting something, or heavily armed combat vehicles. Its roots go way back, most likely to ancient Greece, but references to organizational “think tanks” are relatively recent.

The term’s meaning stretches back to ancient Athens’ playwright Aristophanes. In his comedy “The Clouds” (423 before Christ), he portrays Socrates as director of a

“prontisterion” - this roughly translates to thoughtery, thinkery or thinking shop - made up of promising young men (Safire 2008:733, Whitaker 2006, Gilroy 2012:6). Although Plato saw this play as slander contributing to his teacher’s death sentence (Sommerstein 1973), his notion of good society led by philosopher kings also mixes a sense of wisdom and power. Thomas Clarkson may have coined the think tank collocation when he created the Society for the Abolition of the African Slave Trade, pairing “factual inquiry with moral argument” (Goodman 2010:3). However, well into the 1960s, it was simply also used to literally denote our central organ, the brain. As ex-US president Harry Truman turned eighty, in 1964, he hoped to live another decade, provided “the old think tank is working” (Safire 2008:733, Gilroy 2012:7).

In the US, seen as the cradle of policy institutes as we know them today, private industrialists turned philanthropists - Andrew Carnegie, Robert Brookings or the two pairs of brothers John and William Rockefeller, and Henry and Edsel Ford - invested heavily in research on public problems to avoid economic depression and wars from the 1900s to 1930s, when Franklin Roosevelt presidency’s New Deal reforms were moulded by his administration’s “brain trust” advisers (see also Rosen 1977). From the 1940s on - it is often assumed the label appears in the Second World War - “think tank” denotes military or defense-related research institutes such as the 1948-established RAND Corporation (Ahmad 2008:531, Rich 2004:13, Stone 2005:2).

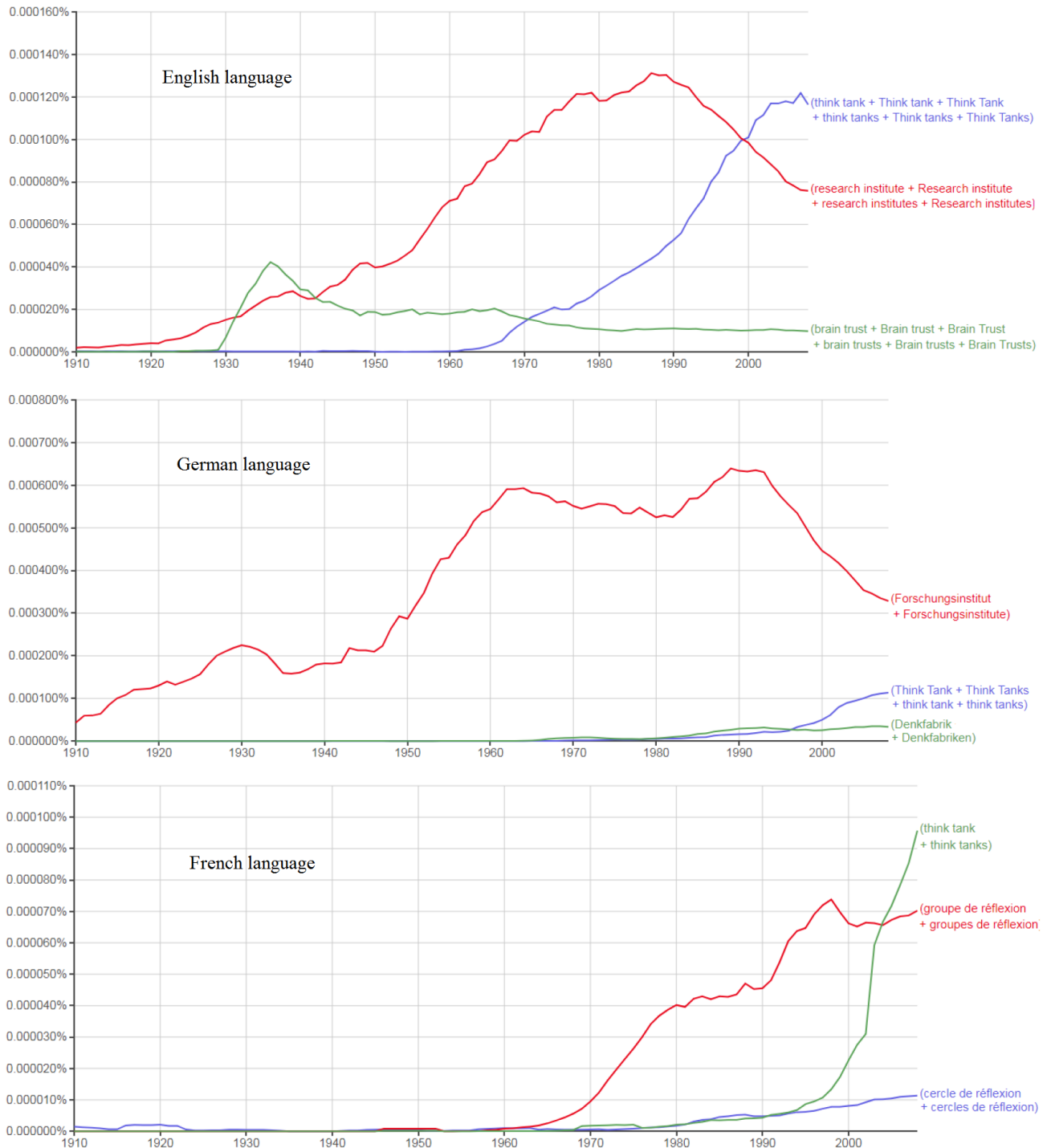
It became Cold War military jargon for strategic planning in a shielded room, but the “word ‘think tank’ was not yet secure in the popular lexicon” as John F. Kennedy set out to build his “ministry of talent” (Smith 1991a:130,125), drawing on Harvard University-associated “thinking factories” (Dialer/Füricht-Fiegl 2014:309). From the 1960s on, it became “the new political folk category” for structural changes in knowledge production. US media mentions went up; the New York Times, say, ran a series of articles on US think tanks in 1967 (Medvetz 2012:95, Reeves 1967).

From then on, the think tank label conquered the world, notably EU countries. Figure 1 illustrates how the Anglo-American term and local adaptations have entered published human knowledge in English, German and French over the last century. In English-language publications, as noted, use of the “brain trust” label peaks in the 1930s; use of “think tank” kicks in from the 1960s, overtaking “research institute” in the 2000s. In the German-speaking world, the equivalent “Forschungsinstitut” is used heavily up until the last few decades, when “Think Tank” and the German translation of thinking factory “Denkfabrik” increasingly entered the popular lexicon.

Finally, the English term “think tank” has also overtaken native language alternatives in French-speaking books and magazines, according to the data, since the mid-2010s.

**Figure 1.** Ngrams of “think tank” or English, German, French terms, 1910 to 2010

Note: Charts show word frequency in the retrodigitized GoogleBooks collection - so-called Ngrams - in English, German and French (for 2-grams like “think tank”, 1-gram “Denkfabrik” or related labels); y axis percentages are infinitesimal since they refer to the entire scanned text corpus in each language; search formula: with and without capitalization, including singular or plural form, smoothing option 3; data as of May 2018 (using <https://books.google.com/ngrams>, see also Brockman et al. 2010, 2012).



As we have seen, the expression “think tank” clearly predates today’s internet age. Beyond its ambiguous origins, the recent uptick of its English or continental European language usage hints at just how widespread the fashionable phrase - with its Anglo-American cultural connotations - has become (Gyngell 2008:2, Stone 2007a:265). Any Google search is further testimony to its popularity: as of 2015, the time of research, the company’s search engine algorithm produced 55 million hits, up from 25 million results reported in 2012 (Gilroy 2012:6) and nearly six million in 2008 (Safire 2008). Google Scholar finds nearly 200,000 results for “think tank” or 40,000 for “European think tank” in 2018 (all languages) - as the topic is increasingly studied by academics.

Before we tackle the tricky task to define what, in the first place, a think tank is - academic definitional attempts or approaches will be debated in the next subsection - let us acknowledge how it is now used to refer to a broad spectrum of activities: colleges are “making the classroom into a policy think tank” for government clients (Broughton 2011); amidst “crossing, blurring, shifting boundaries” (Bajenova 2017), academics and journalists set up “media think tanks” - LSE’s Polis or The Economist Intelligence Unit are examples; consultancies and businesses couch their innovation centers in “corporate think tank” rethoric (Poguntke 2014) - take McKinsey Global Institute or Deutsche Bank research; this holds true for national governments’ policy planning units and forward-thinking cells of international organizations (IOs) as well.

The European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), an EU agency, and current Commission’s European Political Strategy Centre (EPSC), known as Bureau of European Policy Advisers (BEPA) under its ex-president turned Goldman Sachs adviser José Manuel Barroso are cases in the EU. As we will see, non-affiliated, non-profit policy institutes - of interest here - have spread worldwide. They are a twentieth and - it remains to be seen whether also - a twenty-first century phenomenon whose looser institutional predecessors include Lewis Coser’s “men of ideas” in 18th century London coffeehouses, the Fabian Society, even French Rococo Salons (1965). What is a think tank? In short: it depends on who you ask. As I explain below, here:

*“A think tank is a relatively autonomous not-for-profit organization regularly engaged in public policy-oriented research, convening, advice or advocacy (with at least some staff). EU think tanks are significantly or fully geared to EU policy or related global affairs.”*

The term not only means different things in different times and contexts, as outlined, but it turns out that academic students of think tanks - and their practitioners - also use significantly differing definitions within their scholarly or rethorical pursuits. Of

course, definitions are never right or wrong, but more or less useful to study reality. We are interested here, as most think tank scholars are, in policy-oriented research and convening institutes - not in government, political party- or university-affiliated ones (also worthwhile to study); the specific research object is EU-focus think tanks.

No one agreed definition or consensual definitional criteria have emerged. This is true for think tanks in general, for their roles and functions, and for EU think tanks too. But working definitions matter a great deal: they determine the samples and thus results researchers obtain. After all, scholars “‘construct’ the world they study ...conceptual models they bring to their work influence the things they ‘find’” (Weiss 1992:37). Authors bemoan the term is contested, overworked, underspecified. Let us try to avoid both a universalistic pitfall of catch-all concepts and particularistic pitfall of overly narrow ones, to find a balance between minimalist or maximalist definition (see Kelstrup 2016:10, Stone 2007a:259, McGann/Johnson 2005:11, Rich 2004:11).

In my view, key issues at stake are: their organizational status, independence, and the frequently pre-judged and neglected network-centric nature of their work. On all these fronts, I think, we ought not to presume but to scrutinize empirical nuances. Table 2 below shows select other authors’ definitional attempts and criteria used. The devil is often in the details. I do not wish to make this discussion long-drawn and sterile, but do believe it is crucial to be “razor-sharp” about the criteria (not) included.

**Table 2.** Selected think tank definitions and definitional criteria used in the literature

Author	Working definition	Definitional criteria	Permanent	Independent	Non-profit	Research	Policy focus	Advocacy	Convening
Comfort (1995)	<i>“a group of people with specialized knowledge and great intellectual ability”</i>		-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sherrington (2000:174)	<i>“relatively independent organizations, engaged in research on a broad scope of interests”</i>		-	(!)	-	!	-	-	-
Stone (2005:3)	<i>“relatively autonomous organizations with a separate legal identity that engage in the analysis of policy issues”</i>		-	(!)	(!)	!	!	-	-
Rich (2004:11)	<i>“independent, non-interest-based, non-profit organizations that produce and principally rely on expertise or ideas to obtain support and influence the policy-making process”</i>		-	!	!	!	!	!	-
McGann (2016:7,10)	<i>“organizations that generate policy-oriented research and analysis on domestic and international issues that enable policy-makers and the public to make informed decisions about public policy issues...they are independent institutions structured as permanent bodies”</i>		!	!	-	!	!	-	-
Kelstrup (2016:12)	<i>“organizations which claim autonomy and attempt to influence public policy by mobilizing research”</i>		-	(!)	-	!	!	!	-
Gilroy (2018)	<i>“relatively autonomous not-for-profit organizations regularly engaged in public policy-oriented research, convening, advice or advocacy (with at least some staff)”</i>		!	(!)	!	!	!	(!)	!

First, a certain permanence and regularity of policy institute activity is consensual. Scholars typically exclude ad hoc commissions (McGann 2016:10) or purely “virtual think tanks” (Kraemer 2016) with no staff whatsoever, or inactive loose networks, and - plausibly, in my view - choose to focus on organized, private non-profit sector institutes which tend to offer “a wide variety of information, advocacy, and services” (Anheier/Salomon 1998:13). Thus, my definition includes the regularity of activities. It is true that definitions can never be perfectly applied to reality; it is also necessary to still define what we wish to capture when throwing out our conceptual fishing net.

From a structural-operational angle, a core commonality of think tanks - and the EU level is no exception, as we will see - is that they are non-profit distributing. In his article “revisiting the think tank phenomenon”, Hartwig Pautz argues the “not-for-profit criterion should be abandoned as a merely legal characteristic” (2011:421). I disagree - unless we specifically study consultancy or business innovation centers. Think tanks can and sometimes do make profits - if annual revenues exceed expenses - but they are usually reinvested, not pocketed by “owners” or paid out to shareholders.

Second, assuming unqualified “independence” in our definitions is not helpful. Doing so reifies them as financially self-reliant, politically non-partisan, intellectually unbound institutes. They may well be. But how much autonomy they have in practice is an empirical question which should not be definitionally answered a priori. After all, the money needs to come from somewhere. They likely depend on public sector, business or civil society organizations to varying degrees, begging the question if “he who pays the piper calls the tune” (see Chapter 6). Pautz’ “financial autonomy” notion acknowledges this; he reminds how think tanks can “claim political neutrality while often making no secret of their ideological standpoints” (2011:421,423).

Even if Rich’s definition of “true” think tanks still centers on independence, he argues political scientists must better grasp just to which extent “the firewall is gone” between expertise and US politics - he assumes one was there beforehand (2004:209). I would rather put it like this: think tanks themselves partake in a struggle and timeless relationship of knowledge and power. James McGann studies and advises think tank-alike entities as University of Pennsylvania’s director of the Think Tank and Civil Societies Program, known for its yearly “Global Go To Think Tank” ranking (2018), now a “tournament ritual” for think tank practitioners (see Chapter 5 and 9) which actively upvalues their symbolic status and fame, akin to a “celebration of heroes” (Goode 1978) or the Grammy Awards (Anand/Watson 2004). He has called think

tanks “idea factories charged with brainstorming solutions to everything” (2009:82) as a reputedly “vast reservoir of knowledge, information and associational energy...for public good” (2011:4), a sentence repeated in each subsequent edition of the ranking, with “a more positive than negative influence on the [US] policy process” (2002:16).

McGann’s latest definition (see Table 1) still blanketly presumes think tanks’ activity “enables policy-makers and the public to make informed decisions” (2016:7). Others also hope they are “empirically sourced and constructive in intent” (Hamre 2008:2), balance “exploration and exploitation” for radical innovations (Puhan 2008) and “bridge between knowledge and power in modern democracies” (UNDP 2003:6). Think tanks “promise ‘out of the box’ thinking...for any problem in which complexity and a lack of overview of causalities makes thinking outside conventional paths necessary, or attractive” (Brandstetter et al. 2010:12). At the same time, such accounts clearly run the risk of over-romanticizing the nature of think tanks (Yep/Ngok 2006).

Diane Stone (2007) has most pointedly shaken up scholars’ tendency to “buy” at face value, so to speak, the idea that think tanks always bridge research and policy, act in the public interest and think in the first place, what she calls the “three myths”. Her use of the definitional criterion “relatively autonomy” (2005, 2007), adopted here, captures this healthy empirical skepticism, even better than “relative independence” (Sherrington 2000:174). This formulation avoids the other extreme to cynically depict think tanks as generalized agents of evil: “by think tanks I mean the people who are paid to think by makers of tanks”, Naomi Klein (2007) half-jokingly, half-seriously told the American Sociological Association’s annual meeting that year. Already since ex-RAND staffer Herman Kahn’s scholarly first strike scenarios “On Thermonuclear War” (1960), criticized as a “tract on how to justify mass murder”, think tanks have also become associated with “thinking the unthinkable” (Safire 2008, Comfort 1995). If think tanks only think up ideas for war, or fuel an “uncivil war of ideas” (McGann 2005), their normative appeal becomes severely compromised if not entirely forfeited.

Scholars ought to resist temptations (and resulting definitional slack) to blindly accept institutes’ innovation, independence and impact, nor brand them as destructive. Organized as not-for-profit organizations, their historical origins are typically found in civil society, as one system of knowledge creation (Anheier 2010) - or circulation - in modern societies. They are institutional alternatives to traditional academia, short-term profit-seeking or hierarchical bureaucracy; but also, to a greater or lesser extent, shaped by academic, business or political resources and institutional logics (see below).

Two further controversial - if not always explicated - definitional criteria are institutes' engagement with or in-house research, and a focus on public policy issues or areas. Kelstrup cleverly captures how think tanks "claim autonomy...to influence public policy by mobilizing research" (2016:12). However, not all think tanks must - by definition - go to great lengths to spread policy research they produced or processed with the sole purpose of bringing about policy change in any given area. They can, optionally, and often do. Therefore, I also include optional "advocacy" in the definition. "Whether autonomous, political or demand-driven, think tanks are [also] institutions in modern societies where wars of ideas are fought out" beyond policy analysis and are "connecting constituencies" (Anheier 2010:338, Smith 1989). The last - definitionally much overlooked - aspect of their network-centric operations is why I suggest including "convening" activity as a quintessential definitional criterion.

I am confident that my think tank definition - justified in this brief synopsis - has potential to be adopted in other settings by those interested in studying policy institutes that are either "stand-alone" (relatively autonomous) or "quasi-autonomous" (actually quite dependent in practice). It captures most types or variants (see Table 3). But, as I see it, tank-alike entities that are legally tied and affiliated to a university, government, IO, political party, union or business represent separate objects of study.

**Table 3.** Overview of different think tank categories, types or variants

Category	Description	Types or Variants
<b>Stand-alone</b> <i>(relatively autonomous)</i>	Legally separate, typically not-for-profit public policy institute with significant independence of any one stakeholder group or sponsor; relative autonomy in determining its research agenda and its work; more or less diversified public, business or civil society sector funding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University without students</li> <li>• Contract research think tank</li> <li>• Advocacy/think-and-do tank</li> <li>• Platform/network think tank</li> </ul>
<b>Quasi-autonomous</b> <i>(quite dependent)</i>	Legally separate and autonomous at first sight but de facto controlled by interest groups, corporate sponsors or governments who tend to exert influence over activities or co-determine the research agenda.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quasi-governmental think tank</li> <li>• Corporate-sponsored think tank</li> <li>• Industry/business front group</li> <li>• Legacy-based/vanity think tank</li> </ul>
<b>Affiliated</b> <i>(legally dependent)</i>	Legally connected or otherwise affiliated think tank-alike entity, for instance to a university, business, union or government unit which fully funds and directly determines activities and the research agenda.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University-affiliated institute</li> <li>• Government unit/agency</li> <li>• Political party-linked foundation</li> <li>• For-profit/innovation center</li> </ul>

In my definition, Boucher's (2004) "Euro-specific" ones qualify as EU think tanks, but not all of his "Euro-oriented" ones would fulfil a threshold of being "significantly geared to EU policy or related global affairs"; after all, virtually all EU member state think tanks will nowadays unavoidably touch upon European issues at some point. Thus, we should be wary of Giovanni Sartori's "conceptual stretching" argument in this case (1970:1033), and remember it is a US-imported concept (Kelstrup 2016:29).



## **Mapping think tanks' field: From typology to topology**

The previous section disaggregated think tank definitional criteria applied to the EU level. If “‘think tank’ will always be a slippery term” (Stone 1996:17) among academics - decades after social scientists started to study them - remains to be seen. I disagree that the earlier “dilemma of definition” (Denham/Stone 2004:2) means we are free to proceed along the lines of “I know one when I see one” - we must debate criteria - but fully realize that empirically studying think tanks is a complicated affair. Indeed, operationalization and boundary specification is where many scholars diverge. As is the case for other organizational fields, even crystal-clear operational definitions will leave us wondering “How are we to make sense of this mixture of diversity and commonality?” (Anheier/Salomon 1998:28) when conceptualization meets empirics.

Political scientists often try to sort the variety of institutes into neat categories, preferably parsimonious, to tame the plethora of “breeds” populating the think tank world they study. Table 2 above lists the twelve major labels - or variants - I raked together from the existing literature. The first three “stand-alone” variants of relatively autonomous, legally separate not-for-profit institutes are most salient (Weaver 1989): first, scholarly think tanks - Brookings Institution or CEPS as an (of course smaller) “European Brookings” are the usual suspects here - are believed to be “universities without students” engaging in a scholastic pursuit of knowledge as an end in itself, so to speak as “ink tanks” (Stone 2007a:262) prizing intellectual freedom but politically middle-of-the-road (Gilroy 2012:11) and publicly funded in Europe (Kelstrup 2014:37); contract research think tanks - say RAND - are considered “knowledge-on-demand” producers pursuing contract research for third parties, often rigorous and made public; finally, advocacy think tanks - typical cases are the avowedly conservative Heritage Foundation or libertarian Cato Institute in the US as well as Open Europe in Europe - “avowedly engage in the partisan pursuit of politico-ideological goals...Ideas do not result from but motivate research” (Gilroy 2012:12, see Smith 1989:192, Rich 2004).

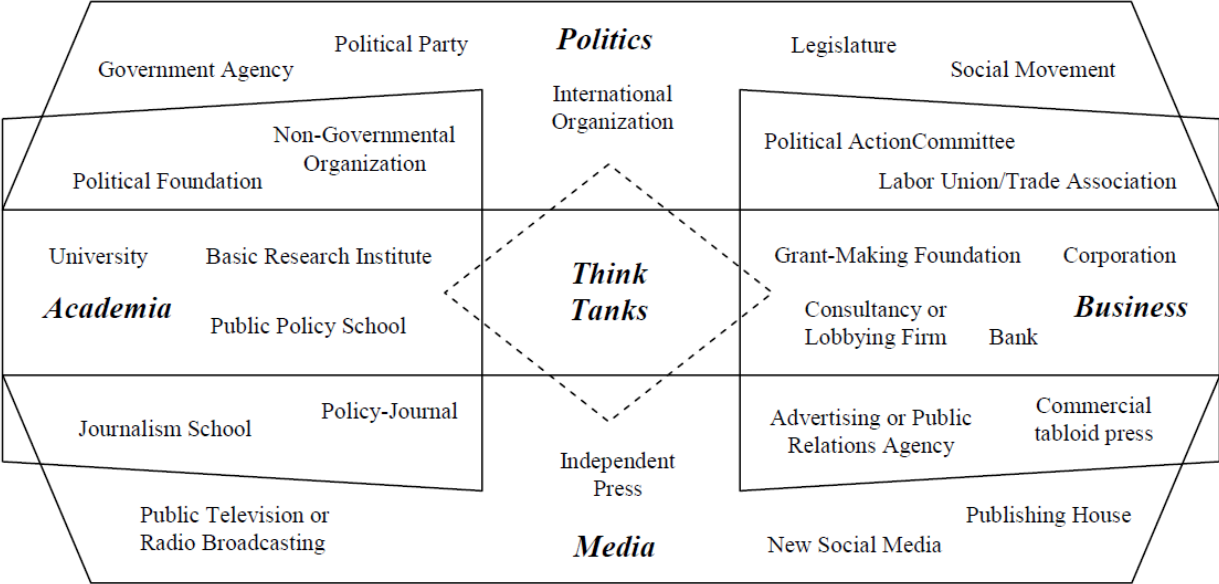
The problem with this three-tiered typology - no surprise - is that “real types” rarely resemble “ideal-types” pinpointedly. Martin Gehlen (2005) notes it does depict major phases in - mostly US - think tanks' historical development: from 19th century proto think tanks - London's Fabian Society is cited - to progressive era think tanks like the Institute for Government fused with Brookings Institution, post-Second World War or Cold War era contract-chasing institutes - RAND, Urban Institute - and growth of advocacy tanks since the 1970s (see Abelson 2000:217-223 or Medvetz 2012:55).

However, scholars studying other countries or think tanks at EU level then bump into the choice to forcibly squeeze institutes they encounter into a path-dependent typology, or to coin new labels for further boxing of “deviant” institutes in their studied setting, for example legacy-based “vanity think tanks” or “policy clubs” in North America (Abelson 2000:20, Denham/Stone 2004:221). Typologies can be useful heuristics. But in reality there is a continuum from more scholarly to advocacy-driven think tanks (Stone 2007a); they can emerge and engage in both consensual or adversarial settings (Kelstrup 2014:37); they can prioritize in-house knowledge production or network-centric convening, in various mixes; and - the crucial point - types overlap in practice.

The increasingly popular buzzword of a “think and do tank” is a case in point. Many think tanks belong to - or rather combine different characteristics of - more than one type, offer different constellations in different developmental stages and contexts. Moreover, Pautz (2011) rightly points out how students of think tanks continue to rely on typologies devised in the 1980s and 1990s which may not capture crucial changes in today’s think tanks’ activity and risk neglecting transnational or network dynamics. The boundaries of this “ambiguous category” (McGann/Weaver 2000:4) are blurring. We can see why moving from a typological to a topological approach is so attractive. Indeed, inspired by French critical sociology, Thomas Medvetz’ topological take on “Think Tanks in America” (2012) is a conceptual and methodological gamechanger.

While others still argue that “in order to be able to pinpoint the position of a think tank in a network, think tank typologies are needed” (Ruser 2018:60), Medvetz’ critique of seeing them only at the organizational level leads him to the other extreme:

**Figure 2.** Social topology of think tanks (expanded based on Medvetz 2008:6, 2012)



Applying the spirit and work of the sociologists Loïc Wacquant, Pierre Bourdieu and Gil Eyal to US think tanks, Medvetz proposes to drop any definitional or typological effort aimed at a clear-cut demarcation, including - exaggeratingly, in my view - the empirically open-ended, not prejudging - notion of “relative autonomy” (2008:1). Instead, he goes so far - perhaps for the sake of argument - as to conceptually deny them any status as a “novel or discrete ‘type’” of organization and says we can only grasp think tanks as a “constitutively blurry network of organizations” (2012:23), as occupants of a structurally intermediate “field-like space” (Medvetz 2008) situated in between the more entrenched social spheres - or “fields of power” in Bourdieu’s sense (a term he has used since the 1970s but elaborated in the 1980s, see Bourdieu 1986) - of academia, politics, business and the media (Medvetz 2012:35,75, see Chapter 9).

Figure 2 above shows how this helps map think tanks’ interstitial place in social space. In a nutshell, Medvetz argues, think tanks engage in a “delicate balancing act” (2012:18) by both drawing on and distancing themselves from neighboring realms’ material or symbolic resources “in a never-ending cycle of separation and attachment” (2012:45). In fact, they both invoke or disassociate themselves from their “opposing logics of academic, political, economic and media production” (2012:23). Thus, their “quadruple bind” (2012:132), or challenge to simultaneously be in four fields at once, makes them dwellers on a threshold “always at the margins of each one” (2012:177). I noticed but do not understand, frankly, why the third sector is missing here, and try to analytically consider that most think tanks are civil society organizations (CSOs).

To be completely clear on my position: I am a big fan of Medvetz’ monograph. It is persuasively and eloquently written. My own work is profoundly inspired by this relational perspective and his fresh methods of how to study think tanks empirically. But in a sense Medvetz is throwing the baby out with the bathwater, to put it bluntly, when he analytically robs think tanks of their “relatively autonomous” status a priori (2008), then wonders if definitional preoccupations are “futile semantics” (2012:23). But Medvetz shows “a typologic representation [is...] too static and too essentialist to capture the subtleties” (2012:115) of think tanks’ sectoral bonds and points out that many definitions have built in “essentialist conclusions about a think tank’s ultimate political or intellectual proclivities”, thus drawing academics into the very symbolic struggle behind think tanks as “ambiguous creatures” (2012:16) and an “ambiguous category” (McGann/Weaver 2002:4), this results in a bad case of what Gil Eyal and Larissa Buchholz call “problematic of allegiance” (2010) in sociology of intellectuals.

I fully agree that the “basic problem is that the central concept itself is fuzzy, mutable, and contentious” (Medvetz 2012:23); that, to paraphrase Bourdieu’s words cited on the first page of Mevetz’ monograph, think tanks frequently “frequent the borderland” and have a vital stake - consciously or without fully grasping it - in blurring frontiers; that their networked relations can induce legitimacy, inspire conformity, or conflicts. However, we should take seriously the empirical fact (see Chapter 4) that - unless we wish to study think tank-alike affiliated entities - the overwhelming majority of today’s think tanks tend to be organized as not-for profit organizations, as CSOs.

Clearly today’s sectoral boundaries are blurring. Think tanks are no exception, with own “meat in the game”. Yet, even if we accept, like Wacquant, that “social reality itself is inevitably ‘wooly’ and imprecise” (Bourdieu/Wacquant 1992, cited after Medvetz 2012:23), it does not mean we can resolve definitional predicaments by “assuming away” organizational distinctiveness or, even worse, leeway for action. To be fair, Medvetz’ stimulating, historically well-grounded argument on think tanks includes the twist that as US think tanks became “ever more enmeshed in relations of ‘antagonistic cooperation’ with one another, they have also developed certain field-like properties of their own” (2012:25). It is smart, and a pity, that he leaves it at that. But one can build on Medvetz’ approach from an organizational institutionalist lens.

Because in essence this means we can, in fact, bring in “relative autonomy” at a certain point in think tank scenes’ historical evolution without essentializing them. In other words, it is possible to get a sharper, deeper image of the “murky object” - of think tanks’ firmly established organizational field at the US, EU level, or elsewhere - by mapping them with a carefully considered, clear-cut operational definition whilst drawing on the historical sensitivities and analytical power of a topological approach. To express it still differently: of course the think tankers do not appear out of the blue as ready-made actors - fully unlike a professor, a politician, a lobbyist or a journalist - but think tanks’ boundaries are neither carved in stone, nor are they simply fully fluid.

If we look at Figure 2 a last time, a given think tank or its affiliated experts are placed at different corners within the dotted lines depicting the organizational field. And as the next section unpacks, I do not speak of a loose relational space but mean “organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life” in neo-institutionalist parlance (DiMaggio/Powell 1983:148). EU think tanks can now safely be analyzed as an established (which is not to say walled in, consensual or conflict-free) organizational field, transcending national governance architectures.

## **Think tank theory: Prime sites for institutionalist analysis**

I choose to study EU think tanks from no one set theory, but adopt an institutionalist lens and side with those who locate them in aside other not-for-profit organizations, empirically more or less autonomous from markets as well as states (Anheier 2010). An institutionalist lens consciously refrains from studying them solely from a vantage point of elite, critical or pluralist theoretical traditions. Let us briefly unpack these before pointing out why think tank fields are a prime site for institutionalist research.

### *The virtues and drawbacks of elite, critical or pluralist think tank theories*

Let us briefly unpack this: the power elite school in C. Wright Mill's tradition (1956), afraid that large organizations' leaders with similar worldviews wield undue authority, singles in on think tanks' politics (Domhoff 1990, Warleigh/Fairbrass 2003, Plehwe/Mirowski 2009, Kauppi/Madsen 2013) or funding dependencies. The industry front group or lobbying analogy is never far (Bloodgood 2011, Woll 2012). US interest group literature has devoted chapters to think tanks since the 1990s (Berry 1997, Cigler/Loomis 1998). Critical or interpretivist - also Gramsci-inspired - accounts see them as low on independence or innovation but high on impact (James 2000, Pautz 2011), as a part of hegemonic, advocacy or discourse coalitions (Hajer 1993, Fischer 2003, Johnstone 2005) or "second hand dealers in ideas" (Desai 1994, Blank 2003).

What is very valid here is a keen awareness that relatively autonomous actors can turn into vehicles for vested interests, may share elite values, staff or interlocking directorates (Domhoff/Dye 1978), or play symbolic rather than substantive or per se innovative roles as "ideational forces that are skilled in the art of persuasion, agenda-setting and advocacy" (Stone 2000a:153, see 1996:30, 2004:14). In a similar vein, Medvetz thinks "'power' of think tanks is greatest precisely when such organizations have no independent policy influence whatsoever - which is to say, when they are most deeply involved in the business of endorsing policy prescriptions determined strictly by political and economic interests" (2012:179). Demand-side determinism would leave little room for agency. EU think tanks are far from a homogenous lot. We risk confirmation bias in prematurely dismissing them as vehicles of singularly fixed business or politico-ideological interest-driven agendas, out to ruin democracy. Ideas and material conditions are "always bound together and not reducible one to the other" (Cox 1983:168). But let us not be cynical or demonize them (Braml 2004). However, a healthy portion of distanced scepticism to institutes is clearly warranted.

Pluralist scholars depict think tanks as just one voice among many on a competitive “marketplace of ideas”; they are often inclined to throw such cautiousness overboard (McGann 1995, 2000, Ricci 1993, Weidenbaum 2011). McGann’s latest book defines think tanks as enabling “policy-makers and the public to make informed decisions about public policy issues” as “independent institutions” (2016:7,10). This is deeply problematic since, as noted above, their positive nature or function as “enlightening” knowledge transmitters is definitionally reified. It is tempting but not analytically conducive to conceptualize them as places in a genuinely civil society where wisdom (always) resides (Weiss 1977, Carothers 1999, Whitaker 2006). At their best, think tanks might be a home for the best and brightest, mix qualities of pragmatic policy wonks with those of competent “stiff staffers steeped in study” (Safire 2008:553), delivering on the promise of objective, innovative policy ideas amidst a diverse wider democratic plethora of CSOs (Eisfeld 2006). But let us not assume it up front.

What I find very helpful is pluralists’ analytical focus on think tanks’ operating environments - their varied, dynamic legal, funding, political, labor market, media, technological, ideational and cultural contexts (McGann/Weaver 2000:13). Supply-side focused pluralists place a heavy emphasis on entrepreneurial strategies to outlive and outcompete each other and find competitive advantage to add value for “clients” who literally buy into their ideas in the display window. However, let us not be blind to institutes’ networked or collaborative behavior beyond their atomistic agenda-setting efforts to get “policy-makers to pay serious consideration to issues” (Kingdon 1995:3, Princen 2011). EU think tanks inhabit - as Boucher (2004), McGann (2016) or Kelstrup (2016) point out - a political system in many ways different from the US context pluralists typically invoke: for instance, in lieu of a federal structure, there is less clear-cut division of powers between governance levels, less private philanthropy but relatively more public funding, a less polarized media sphere (Kelstrup 2014:33).

A problem of competitive metaphors (McGann 2016:37) is: neighboring realms tend to be black-boxed as external “environments”. But a think tank is no isolated island or self-referential system, genetically determined to adapt to environments like chameleons do (Cameron/Green 2004:90, Aldrich/Ruef 2006:33); it has no pre-programmed finality (2006:159); it can try to shape contexts via “institutional work in the transformation of an organizational field”; this is meant by the institutionalist notion “embedded agency” (Zietsma/Lawrence 2010:196). Medvetz shows how US think tanks “produced transformative effects” in all the neighboring fields (2012:21).

*Why think tanks are prime sites for organizational institutionalist analysis*

Viewing EU think tanks as dynamically constrained agents better fits the open-ended research questions here than seeing them as ruling class machineries or unproblematic political entrepreneurs always acting in the public interest. We can closely draw on a thinking tradition of organizational institutionalism which has the distinct advantage of “its singular refusal to accept reality at face value... without the accompanying baggage of cynicism” (Greenwood et al. 2013:32). “New” institutionalism (Meyer/Rowan 1977, Zucker 1977, Scott 1983, DiMaggio/Powell 1983) comes in many flavors.

All have in common that organizations are not merely driven by resource- or technically “rational needs” but also influenced by institutional “rules of the game”. Institutions - understood wildly different - are defined here not just as “rules, norms and ideologies in wider society” (Meyer/Scott 1983:84) but include “multifaceted, durable social structures, made up of symbolic elements, social activities and material resources” too (Scott 2001:49). I side with calls for an “expanded institutionalism”, aware that competitive and institutional forces coexist (DiMaggio/Powell 1991:189).

To illustrate, EU think tanks can be keenly aware how money needs to come from somewhere, yet assertively claim “independence”, in-keeping with “rationalized myths pervading modern society” or prevailing at EU level (Meyer/Rowan 1977:346). Their mundane activity as micro-level actors, we can expect, is shaped by macro-level institutional forces but can, in turn, “transform logics and alter identities” (Powell/Colyvas 2013:277). In a sense, Medvetz’ (2012) US-focused argument is challenged in this dissertation, which sees think tanks as prime sites for institutionalist research.

This research is highly relevant for knowledge-intensive, ambiguously hybrid actors which cannot easily evaluate “success metrics” (Battilana et al. 2012). It is not illegitimate to study EU think tanks as “distinct” entities and an organizational field, not necessary to reduce them to “constitutively blurry” actors (Medvetz 2012:23). Unlike technical organizations with clear, easy to measure outputs, for example think of dairy factories (successful by efficiently churning out profitable cheeses), think tanks are “institutional organizations”: like colleges or science-driven biotech firms, they engage in ambiguous practices (policy research or convening) where efficiency, quality and societal impact are notoriously tricky to determine. More than technical organizations, we can expect that EU think tanks heavily rely on social recognition: a think tank succeeds if everyone agrees it is a think tank and fails if not one believes it is a think tank - regardless of merit of its work (paraphrasing Meyer/Scott 1983:59).

Institutionalists stress “legitimacy does not come from efficacy but from presumption of efficacy” (Lagroye 1985:463). For impact, we can expect, EU think tanks “do not need to persuade people in all instances” as it may not be “the quality of the argument, but the quality or reputation of the person or institution which is decisive” (Zürn et al. 2012: 86), and the common conviction that they belong to an own field.

In the understanding of organizational fields adopted here - as a “constructed mesolevel social order” (Fligstein/McAdam 2012:9) - field stability (Medvetz’ “crystallization of a space of think tanks”, 2012:116) - is given once actors achieve self-reproduction over time. An organizational field is “a collection of organizations operating in the same domain, as identified by the similarity of services, products or functions, together with organizations that critically influence performance” of focal players (Scott/Meyer 1991:117, see DiMaggio/Powell 1983). EU think tanks, we can expect, are “subject to similar reputational or regulatory practices” (Powell 2007:3). Related notions are industry systems (Hirsch 2000) and inter-organizational networks which distribute scarce resources such as money and authority (Benson 1975).

The field concept captures EU think tanks forms’ and practices’ simultaneous variety, structural equivalence as well as their connectedness amongst each other. It is also compatible with exploring how non-profit institutes are really often “several organizations or organizational components in one...systems with various component parts” whose leaders must steer the ship amidst often conflicting - even contradictory - institutional pressures (Anheier 2000). Adapting Medvetz’ empirical work, I expect EU think tankers’ educational credentials and sectoral work experiences will best (if indirectly) capture how the staff and board members “tick”, are socialized, and thus subject to institutional imprinting. In a nutshell, “an institutional logic is the way a particular social world works” (Jackall 1988:112); a think tank’s sectoral sensitivities may lean towards detached scholarship - or it prizes being in the political thick of it.

Of course, there is a connection here to Bourdieu’s concepts, used by Medvetz: think tankers’ “habitus” will consist of “a set of layered mental and bodily schemas acquired through previous socialization experiences” that are “both generated by and generative of social structures” (cited after Medvetz 2012:153,154, see Bourdieu 1986, Adler-Nissen 2013, Swartz 2016). They share forms of cultural or social “capital” as a sum of “actual or potential resources...linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition... [Group membership leads to a] backing of collectivity-owned capital, a ‘credential’



which entitles them to credit” (Bourdieu 1986). A twist is one form can be converted to another: to illustrate, turning down forms of funding forfeits economic capital but may lend symbolic capital (a perception of independence from a sector or financier). Maximizing one form can damage another: a think tank’s scientific style can raise its academic capital but be “too professorial” for politicians, lowering its political capital. Think tanks’ symbolic resources are likely contested: for Bourdieu “belief categories, classification systems, primarily words and names, that construct the social world as much as they express it, are the main element in the political struggle” (1994:64).

Instead of applying Bourdieusian “lingo”, let us simply adopt a broad notion of resources which encompasses financial and human resources (money, people, skills) as well as reputational and symbolic resources (credentials, legitimacy and prestige). Think tanks do not just wield financial resources, accumulating economic or monetary capital. They also draw on human resources, building up human capital by “changing persons, so as to give them skills and capabilities that make them act in new ways” (Coleman 1991:304). Finally, their symbolic resources can lend them legitimacy, for instance via educational or professional credentials such as degrees by esteemed elite universities or symbolic capital from previous experience at powerful organizations. New practices are often “infused with value beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand” (Selznick 1957:17), to maintain appearances or validate organizations. This helps gain legitimacy, which can lead to resources, and better survival chances. The next subsections will further spell out why the study site of think tanks, to put it bluntly, is a fantastic theoretical or empirical playground for institutionalist scholars.

### **Sensitizing concepts from specialized literature strands**

So far, the author’s take on existing think tank literature and institutionalist approach to studying EU think tanks’ organizational field have been explained. Let us complete this conceptual space by locating EU think tanks within EU studies and international relations literature; we can also formulate theoretical expectations by drawing on the existing scholarship on the emergence or structuration of other organizational fields, and research strands on institutional logics or -hybridity and social network analysis.

#### *Situating EU think tanks within EU- and transnational studies*

EU think tanks can be studied as transnational actors participating in the EU’s polity or multi-level, multi-actor governance. Aware of the continued importance of nation-states, I view the EU “transnational architecture of complexity” (Hix/Hoyland 2011)

as a political system in its own right, much more than rational member states' inter-governmental club (Moravcsik 1998). The Commission is the executive body of the EU's polity, one of the most developed transnational governance bodies working at the nexus of politics and expertise (Commission 2013, Hooghe/Marks 2001, Hooghe 2011:8). It is empowered to represent Europe's interests as a whole, amidst what has been described as "state-organized unburdening of the state" (Offe 2009:555) whose role changes from "monopolist to manager of authority" (Genschl/Zangl 2008:6,17).

In the spirit of transnational studies (Risse 2013), by "EU level" I mean the transnational interactions of governments, societal actors and IOs" beyond domestic or classic interstate politics (Nye/Keohane 1971:334). Such transnational connections are a defining feature of contemporary Europe (Hurrelmann/deBardeleben 2011, see Jachtenfuchs 2001, Kohler-Koch/Rittberger 2006 on EU studies' "governance turn"). EU multi-level, multi-actor governance is filled with life through the participation of public, private and civil society actors in formal or informal policy-making processes addressing public problems (see Marks 1993:401, Hooghe et al. 1996, Piattoni 2003), more or less loosely coupled to the supranational, national or local level (Benz 2012, Enderlein et al. 2012). Think tanks can get in on the act - from Brussels or elsewhere.

To study EU think tanks this way transcends what can feel like a straightjacket of national grids of analysis, and Rastrick's sole focus on supranational action (2018). It shifts transnational think tank research away from "methodological nationalism" (Martins 1974:274, Amelina 2012, Zürn/Walter 2005:11) - "national organizations as a structuring principle of societal and political action can no longer serve as [only] orienting reference point for the social scientific observer" (Beck/Sznajder 2006:4) - but, in turn, avoids "methodological transnationalism", naturalizing the supranational.

It might also help to better connect the study of think tanks to international relations (IR) debates on transnational activism (dellaPorta/Tarrow 2004, Keck/Sikkink 1998), on non-state actors' "soft power" (Nye 2004) or "private authority" in world politics (Bieler et al. 2000, Hall/ Biersteker 2002); on the locus of "power" in global governance (Barnett/Duvall 2005, Guzzini 2005, Willke 2006, Baldwin 2013).

However, this dissertation is no isolated endeavor solely addressed to political scientists and sociologists studying think tanks, European integration, lobbying or IR. It is potentially also of interest to organizational researchers more generally, because it tries to tease out insights about the emergence of organizational fields, hybrid institutional logics, and non-profit organizations' multi-level network connections.

### *Theoretical expectations about organizational field emergence*

How did the think tank label gain a foothold at EU level? Why did the organizational category and its meanings become increasingly attractive? How did EU think tanks form an organizational field engaged in a common enterprise of transnational policy research and convening? Which phases or mechanisms of field structuration would we expect? To begin to answer those fundamental questions, we can draw on a rich literature on the emergence and isomorphic change of other organizational fields (for a recent overview of variants of sociological field theories, see Klutetz/Fligstein 2016).

As the dissertation's chapters will carve out in detail, EU think tanks inhabit an organizational field which arose relatively recently but long enough ago that we can retrace historical developments; we can interview their current professionals, digital traces and a paper trail are readily available. Yet the boundaries of this maturing field are far from set in stone; who belongs to the community is still very much in play. The following conceptual framework of how organizational fields emerge and evolve spells out theoretical expectations we can return to throughout the empirical chapters. In the influential view of Paul DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell, a field denotes the totality of "key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products" (1983:148). While we will most closely focus on EU think tanks as key suppliers, or focal players, their constituencies - EU institutions, foundations or corporate members - also participate in the field, its inter-organizational relations and meaning-making. The focal players "interact more frequently and fatefully with one another than with actors outside the field" (Scott 1991:56). They can be expected to increasingly look, talk and act alike.

Once fields emerge, DiMaggio and Powell argue in their seminal article, actors will not just compete for resources (stressed by pluralists and population ecologists) in pre-defined resource environments or turn into vehicles of vested interests (as elite theorists say); they also set their eyes on "political power and institutional legitimacy for social as well as economic fitness" to survive (1983:150, Carroll/Delacroix 1983). This means institutes likely do not only, or predominantly, follow logics of efficiency but engage in activity that is aligned with societally legitimated institutionalized rules and verbalized by using collectively legitimated vocabularies (Meyer/Rowan 1977). More precisely, legitimacy is defined as "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions" (Suchmann 1995:574).

As noted, financial-, human- and symbolic resources are closely linked, often convertible, and can be expected to co-evolve in fields. Moreover, we can expect that as EU think tanks and their professionals consciously or subconsciously strive to live up to environmental expectations, an “inexorable push towards homogenization” kicks in: they increasingly resemble each other (DiMaggio/Powell 1983:148, 150).

This “master hypothesis” of isomorphism (Hoffmann/Ventresca 2002) - that actors increasingly resemble each other in developing organizational fields - was a reaction to rational choice theorists’ and population ecologists’ prevalent focus on organizational variation and firms’ competitive advantages (Hannan/Freeman 1977). Institutionalists argue that “social choices are shaped...by institutional environments” and actors choose not among endless but narrowly defined sets of legitimate options (Hoffmann/Wooten 2013:130). Isomorphism helps to “understand the irrationality, frustration of power, and lack of innovation...so commonplace in organizational life” (DiMaggio/Powell 1983:157). We will see if such change applies to EU think tanks.

To do so, we can check how three isomorphic mechanisms (DiMaggio/Powell 1983) play out in their field: coercive pressures, formal or more subtle, stem from a desire for legitimacy in the face of political influence or societal expectations; mimetic (“copy-cat”) pressures would mean institutes with ambiguous goals or tasks model themselves after similar organizations in their field perceived to be successful; and normative pressures arise from a (rarely entirely successful) professionalization, think tankers’ collective struggle to define what it is they do, and how to do this best. Again, the idea is: their looks, outlooks, idioms and actions are more and more alike. We can expect think tanks to be highly susceptible to isomorphic pressures when professions or the state have a heavier hand (DiMaggio/Powell 1983), as at EU level.

Several organizational-level propositions have also been formulated which we can come back to in empirical chapters, to see how the data appears to fit the theory. They are closely related to the three “I’s” of innovation, independence and impact. For individual EU think tanks we would expect that: 1) The higher goal ambiguity (and performance uncertainty) of an EU think tank, the more it will model itself after think tanks it perceives to be more successful; 2) The greater an institute’s resource dependence, the more it will change isomorphically to resemble the actors or sector on which it depends for resources; 3) The more an EU think tank relies on academic credentials in its human resources, the more it will become like other EU think tanks in its structure, outlook and behavioral focus (see DiMaggio/Powell 1983:154-155).

However, an equally central argument on networks in DiMaggio and Powell's paper on "aggregate homogeneity in structure, culture and output" (1983:147), merely a "ritual citation" for many academics, was initially neglected (DiMaggio 1995:395). Yet, their theoretical take on the structuration of organizational fields stresses both structural equivalence (White et al. 1976) and connectedness (Laumann et al. 1978). It lends itself ideally to a bidirectional study of structure and agency, in line with the following dictum: "in the short run, actors make relations; in the long run, relations make actors" (Padgett/Powell 2012:26). To understand how such structure-agency interplay applies to EU think tanks, we must conceptualize fields "not as containers for the community of organizations, but instead as relational spaces that provide an organization with an opportunity to involve itself with other actors" (Wooten 2006).

How precisely does initial field emergence and subsequent structuration occur? This issue is central to understanding organizational change in modern society. Yet, more is known about how fields evolve, once they exist, than about how they emerge (Aldrich/Ruef 2006). We can expect there to be different developmental phases; and build on Stine Grodal's conceptualization of emergence as a categorization process (2007), developed in her PhD work on the field and label of nanotechnology. From early emergence to a phase of structuration to institutionalization, the idea goes, the mobilization of meanings, community participation and resources will co-evolve. For the US nanotech field, for example, label promotion for symbolic fitness led to other core constituencies' "buy-in" and attachment of financial resources to the label which, in turn, resulted in a concentration of skilled human resources (Grodal 2007).

Next to foundings and funding, label adoption and category awareness matter, a crystallizing "common meaning system" (Scott 2001) or "mutual awareness among participants...in a common enterprise" (DiMaggio/Powell 1983:148, 1991). This process can also turn contentious in "fields of struggle" (Bourdieu/Wacquant 1992): "groups will rush into a new social space, offer alternative cultural framings for how to organize that space, and try to use the external resources they can draw on to build unique coalitions with other groups to organize the space" (Kluttz/Fligstein 2016:44). "Label" is a term for categorizing persons or organizations on the basis of actual or perceived similarities (Grodal 2007); categorization is an act of meaning attribution (Vygotsky 1987); label connotations serve as a system of signs, as reference points for actors inside or communities outside an organizational field (Glynn/Abzug 2002).

Early on, we can expect, only limited groups will participate in constructing meaning around the think tank label at EU level, sensing political or funding opportunities. Aside from structural openings, we must look to think tank founders, given the well-documented roles of entrepreneurs in legitimizing fields (Hannan/Freeman 1977, DiMaggio/Powell 1991, Aldrich/Fiol 1994, Carroll/Swaminathan 2000) or in creating new professional identities (Hsu/Hannan 2005). Beyond demand, foundings often do not “begin with a problem but with a sensed opportunity and an interest in the idea” (Greenwood et al. 2002:72); high degrees of excitement mark the early days, as in the nanotechnology (Grodal 2007:157) or biotechnology field (Rabinow 1996). Feelings of exuberance when learning about new possibilities can lead to celebratory rhetoric (EU think tanks research to “enlighten policy-making” or “boost global governance”).

The structuration phase of the think tank field, I expect, will be marked by their attempts to elicit support of core communities, explaining the label; rising interaction among think tankers, also at conferences or in formal networks, as well as richer ties with other sectors; formation of a pecking order of perceived institutional worth or success, of central top dog incumbents or peripheral niche occupants, or challengers; information load will increase, with think tanks’ strategic communications as sites of “claims to power, legitimacy and reality” (Lindlof/Taylor 2011:232, Saldana 2013) explicitly or implicitly normalizing label connotations, and a mounting body of news media commentary, research articles as well as books published about the new field; finally mutual awareness of think tankers sets in - elite sponsorship is more common, prompting existing entities to rebrand and further founders to adopt the label - and a novel distinct professional identity might be in the making (see DiMaggio 1983:148).

In structuration, a state of “semiinstitutionalization” (Tolbert/Zucker 1996) is achieved. An often overlooked aspect of organizational fields is spatial proximity. It is often not the place or space per se but the quality of it that matters (Sydow 2002:1). But given the reputational, resource or labor force advantages of Brussels as a center of political power and US think tanks’ clustering in Washington D.C., the proposition about spatial proximity is: Most central EU think tanks will concentrate in Brussels, or powerful member states; transnationally distributed ones without a Brussels office or in small member states will be regarded as peripheral organizations in the field. Giddens’ social theory (1987, see Urry 1991 for an overview) stresses space-related concepts: locales as settings for interaction - say think tank city hubs, or conference meetings - and front regions (Brussels or capital cities) or back regions (other places).

With digitization, this significance of physical proximity may decline for think tanks: as with “distributed networks of practice” (Powell/Grodal 2007:58), like the open software movement (O’Mahoney 2002, Weber 2005), their sources of knowledge can be widely dispersed; they may design governance mechanisms to orchestrate these.

It is important to note that while miscommunications and misunderstandings about EU think tanks’ form or function are expected to decrease over time, multiple meanings can co-exist in fields; in fact, linguistic fluidity is expected to be beneficial for EU think tanks connecting with sectoral donors and audiences, say academics in search of a public societal contribution, European Commission officials interested in meeting venues outside bureaucratic silos, journalists in search of quotable insights or businesses looking for accessible expertise on policy changes and political access.

Studying court-based alternative dispute resolution, Morrill (2017) argues the key to “interstitial emergence” of this field next to the novel form or raised resources was championing of the idea by networks of actors in overlapping fields; the concept gained legitimacy because it resonated with various players across overlapping fields. There can be local interpretations or de-coupling of label usage among communities (March/Olsen 2006, Meyer/Rowan 1977), say if state policy units, corporate forward-thinking teams or INGOs start to call themselves “think tanks”, but the field is held together by a label understood by the participants and agreement about focal players.

We can expect EU think tanks engage in symbolic management (Aldrich/Ruef 2006) to ensure their category appears rationally effective and socially legitimate: early adopters enjoy first mover advantages; newcomers face a liability of newness, which will orient them towards adopting standard organizational forms and practices. They are expected to become codified into mythlike form as occupational specialities (EU think tanks’ “transnational policy research” and “multi-stakeholder convening”). We are likely to see creation of standards (Scott 1995), certification contests (Rao 1994) or other events with ceremonial value (Edelman 1964, 1988, Ruef 2000). It signals a field is mature enough for valuation systems, external assessment criteria (Meyer/Rowan 1977:359), approaching quality agreement and boundary agreement.

Despite organizations’ continuous efficiency claims, we can expect that “less efficient forms do persist” (DiMaggio/Powell 1983:156), just like Stone cautions us about taking for granted “three myths regarding policy research institutes” - that they bridge between science and politics, that they serve the public interest, and that they even think much in the first place (2007). Despite their claims to the contrary, think

tanks might very well survive despite not being innovative, independent or impactful. In fact, the decoupling hypothesis would be that goals are kept ambiguous and vague, or categorical ends are substituted for technical ends (Meyer/Rowan 1977): hospitals may treat, not cure patients. Think tanks may convene but not enlighten interlocutors.

When organizational fields manage to mature into an institutionalization phase, organizational labels, forms and practices achieve wide name recognition, taken-for-granted intelligibility. Against the backdrop of what can be described as an ongoing “reciprocal typification of habitualized action” (Berger/Luckmann 1966:54), they are institutionalized templates for action (Zucker 1977), an integral part of the landscape. Despite continued diversity in form and function, EU think tanks populating the field will display significant commonalities, cognitive legitimacy, and frequently interact. Exogenous shocks, say a financial crisis which dries up budgets from core sponsors, can shake up the field, or at least lead to a reconfigured relational opportunity space (see Coman 2018). The label can absorb further connotations, or institutes abandon it. But EU think tanks would be seen as natural participants in policy-making; the think tanker profession is objectified; and academics help normalize this reification. But lasting settlement can be shocked by sudden disruptions, as in all domains of life.

#### *Think tanks’ hybrid institutional logics and professional identities*

Material and broader symbolic practices shape field dynamics. The concept of “institutional logics” links how actors in fields perceive and behave in the world in line with supraorganizational meaning systems, or logics, which define prevailing meanings of institutions (Friedland/Alford 1991). Unlike earlier work (Meyer/Rowan 1977, Zucker 1977, DiMaggio/Powell 1983), it focuses less on field isomorphism but more on effects differentiated institutional logics have on individuals or organizations (Thornton/Ocasio 2013:100). In a nutshell, institutional logics are a “way a particular social world works” (Jackall 1988:112), say academia, the state, the market or media. Yet they often collide or become entangled. Struggles on which logic should govern fields erupt, say when US public universities commercialize (Upton/Warshaw 2017).

We can expect EU think tanks to be more or less moulded, enabled or limited by ready-made (often conflicting) institutional templates. “Institutional imprinting” captures the sort of osmosis process of gradual strategic or unconscious assimilation of conduct and mindsets. Hiring practices are one mechanism for “sedimentation” or layering of new organizational imprints over time (Marquis/Tilcsik 2013). Again, the



educational and professional backgrounds of think tank founders or professionals are therefore of great interest. Yet, their professional identity can become more than the mere sum of their respective sectoral experiences and explicit or subliminal loyalties: EU think tanks, as their field matures, might develop an own - possibly hybrid - logic.

Think tanks can either compartmentalize or blend various institutional logics, internally negotiated and externally bundled (Kraatz/Block 2008, Thornton/Ocasio 2013, Pache/Santos 2010), and might benefit from the “fact that single actions can be interpreted coherently from multiple perspectives simultaneously”, thus achieving multivocality or robust action (Padgett/Ansell 1993:1263) reminiscent of Medvetz’ seminal article on how US think tankers act out a “vaudeville act” using “languages of duty and difference” vis-à-vis neighboring spheres (2010) and his description of their tricky balancing act of “managed resemblance” to other sector logics (2012:44).

Departing from the idea that logics “sow the seeds for change to the extent that they embody contradictions” (Rao et al. 2003:801), literature on hybrid logics views “hybridization as a process in which plural logics and actor identities are in play” (Skelcher/Smith 2015:434) at all analysis levels: “society consists of...individuals competing and negotiating, organizations in conflict and coordination, institutions in contradiction and interdependency” (Thornton/Ocasio 2013:104). Actors respond to being torn between logics differently (Pache/Santos 2010). Intrusion of new logics can be disruptive for identity (Sanders/McClellan 2014), say if state-funded think tanks engage with businesses. Involved “in two or more games at the same time” (Kraatz/Block 2008:243), they either separate or blend them (Besharov/Smith 2014).

For example, in the first scenario of functional separation, EU think tanks torn between conflicting logics of scholarly research and political activism might leave researchers undisturbed but equip their boards with high-level decision-makers. In the second scenario of hybrid blending, they would expect everyone to both produce and disseminate “policy-relevant research”, blending ideas of thinking with tanking. This kind of integration (Binder 2007, Pratt/Foreman 2000) can result in “durable identities” (Kraatz/Block 2008:251), a “functional solidarity” (Jäger/Schröer 2013:5).

Are hybrid institutional logics a liability or an asset? This debate is undecided. It depends on the context: authors have shown how it can lead to contestation and conflict (Battilana/Dorado 2010, Zilber 2002), resembling states of “institutional war” (Hoffmann 1999:352), to peaceful coexistence of logics (McPherson/Sauder 2013) as well as enhanced survival prospects or innovativeness (Kraatz/Block 2008, Jay 2013).

In fact, the literatures on hybrid organizing (Battilana/Lee 2012) and open innovation (see West/Bogers 2017) point to benefits of a structurally hybrid composition and of nurturing new relations: innovation tends to happen at interstices, not at the center, of fields. By extension, think tanks' creativity or significance may, quite literally, lie in this potential for recombinatory innovation, in "making new connections, seeing new links between existing elements, and making up new mixes" (Anheier/Leat 2006:44).

### *Theoretical expectations from social network analysis scholarship*

"Networks" have had quite a career in sociology and political science (Börzel 2011:56). Like today's businesses, EU think tanks are expected to be network organizations, "no longer structured like medieval kingdoms, walled off or protected from hostile outside forces" (Powell 1990:301) but continually and reciprocally exchanging varied resources. Because their network dimension not only includes any formal think tank networks they set up but also the sea of informal relations beyond, we can fruitfully analyze them from a multiple-network lens (Padgett/Powell 2012:6).

Think tanks have been described as epistemic communities, "networks of professionals with recognized expertise and competencies in a particular domain and authoritative claims to policy-relevant knowledge" (Haas 1992:3, 2004, Stone 2008b, Balch 2009), even if "outsider" status does not capture the life (Cross 2012); as a part of policy- or governance networks (Benner et al. 2004, Blanco et al. 2011, Börzel 1997, 1998); and of course they frequently build their own formal networks too. Yet, "think tank networks" is often only used as a relational metaphor or unduly narrowed conceptually to participation in formal think tank-, policy- and governance networks.

Let us conceptualize EU-level think tanks' inter-organizational or cross-sectoral relations as comprising an entire set of multi-relational ties (see Kenis/Knoke 2002): financial ties, educational ties, professional ties or board member ties are all relevant. These EU think tank networks, mapped and visualized in this project, stand in for a source of resource dependence, of information, of institutional imprinting, of power. A diverse set of contacts and multiplex ties can endow individuals and organizations with significant informational, status and resource advantages (Powell/Grodal 2005). As noted for hybrid institutional logics above, this is a key insight in social theory (Simmel 1954, Merton 1957), network studies (Granovetter 1973, Burt 1995, Stark/Vedres 2010), and innovation research also points to benefits of broad tie portfolios:

“Innovation occurs at the boundaries between mindsets, not in the provincial territory of one knowledge or skill base” (Leonard-Barton 1995:62, Beckman/Haunschild 2002). In the biotech field, firms with ties to different kinds of organizations tend to be much more central in industry networks (Powell et al. 2004), those lacking them fail to keep up and are doomed to a more peripheral existence (Powell et al. 2005). We can use SNA and reputational interview and survey research to check if this also applies to EU think tanks, which operate in a similarly knowledge-intensive field.

Tie strength also matters: the advantage of more distant, less intensive “weak ties” lies in non-redundant information or novel ideas; the strength of closer, higher bandwidth “strong ties” lies in their dependability, trustworthiness as well as candor (Granovetter 1973, Nelson 1989, Rost 2011). And benefits also accrue from bridging otherwise little or unconnected “structural holes” (Burt 1995) or also “cultural holes” (Breiger/Pachucki 2010:207) in networks: “people who stand near the holes in a social structure are at a higher risk of having good ideas” (Burt 2004:349, 2005).

Knowledge is rarely “inert sacks of potatoes passing through passive networks-as-pipes”; the term “structural folds” captures situations of overlapping group affiliations (think tanks can act as “multiple insiders”, see Stark/Vedres 2010:1157). We can hypothesize: the nearer an EU think tank is situated near structural network holes or folds, the more opportunity for informational arbitrage and brokerage it has. It also “may be mistaken as the source of new ideas and information which, in fact, [it is] only passing on, and on this basis enjoy an elevated status” (Crossley 2010:13). In keeping with research in relational sociology (Crossley 2011, Fuhse/Mützel 2010), this research tries to quantitatively visualize and qualitatively elucidate the structures of EU think tank networks and gain a sense of their underlying meanings. Next to the other methods and data sources used for this dissertation project, the next chapter will also explain how SNA was used to study EU think tanks and their relationships.

## Chapter 3

# Methods and Data: Document-, Interview, Network- and Survey Research

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### Introduction

The previous introductory chapter has already set the stage conceptually speaking by thoroughly defining and carving out a space to study (EU) think tanks in some depth. This chapter makes transparent how this dissertation tries to obtain a sharper picture of the “murky object” (Medvetz 2008) of public policy institutes active at EU level, namely by employing a broad arsenal of methods from the social scientific toolbox. It makes key methodological choices and challenges transparent to interested readers so that they can look over the researchers’ shoulders, so to speak, or judge the quality of this research, for “only if transparently designed, implemented and analyzed is it possible to tell about reliability and validity” (Saldana 2013:10, Skukauskaite 2012).

Aside from speaking to theories on think tanks or organizations more generally, given how little we know about EU think tanks’ field, this study is first and foremost also a cross-sectional, multi-year empirical effort to record high-resolution snapshots of this “moving target”, metaphorically speaking. It presents the most detailed data to date on these actors: retracing their history, breaking down their funding, scrutinizing their workforce and boards, network connections, activities, identities and influence.

As noted in Chapter 2, EU think tanks inhabit an interdependent and complex social world and polity. So the aim is not to test a finite set of bivariate relationships, but to study patterns of commonalities or variation in a logic of discovery (Schmitter 2008:272, dellaPorta/Keating 2008:294), given existing empirical or knowledge gaps. Throughout, the analysis crosses individual, organizational or field levels of analysis. A pragmatic stance toward social scientific inquiry is taken, “choosing the right tool for the right job. Sometimes...a data matrix says it best; sometimes words; sometimes numbers do” (Saldana 2013:2). While employing multiple- or even mixed methods - triangulating different data sources - has become something of a buzzword, it is actually still rarely done in think tank research. I will attempt to frequently use descriptive data in conjunction with qualitative insights for a sense of confirmation through enhanced validity and a fuller understanding of concepts under investigation. The following sections detail all the data needs, -collection and -analysis procedures.

## **Screening the field: Sample and database construction**

How many EU-focused think tanks fitting the working definition exist across the EU? What are their self-declared organizational identities, financial and human resources? And who are the EU think tankers (in terms of educational and career backgrounds)? I empirically scrutinize these guiding questions by drawing on two large-N primary databases - which will be referred to as the “EU think tank-“ and “CV databases” - compiled during a first phase of data collection, which lasted from 2014 to early 2015. As the most detailed empirical evidence on EU think tanks, as far as I am aware, they help map the organizational field when - as in INGO research - “dearth of appropriate data for large-N studies” still limits our descriptive insights (Hermann et al. 2010:5).

Even equipped with a clear-cut yet not operationally overspecified definition of EU think tanks (see Chapter 2), I naturally faced a sampling challenge. Having chosen to follow the topological spirit rather than only look for proto-typical entities approximating some predefined ideal-type of a “true” EU think tank, the goal was a census sample of all “real types”, operative as of 2015, which fit the definition of “relatively autonomous not-for-profit organizations regularly engaged in public policy-oriented research, convening, advice or advocacy (with at least some staff)” either “significantly or fully geared to EU policy or related global affairs”. In absence of a comprehensive sampling frame, I proceeded as follows for boundary specification.

I first screened existing counts (Boucher et al. 2004, Ioannides/Missiroli 2012). Second, I drew up an enlarged “meta-list” of further potential candidates for inclusion by merging all think tank listings I could find, particularly those focusing on Europe. To illustrate, this included Daniel Florian’s “Think Tank Directory Europe” (2014), the “Global Go To Think Tank Index” at the time (McGann et al. 2015), the outdated National Institute for Research Advancement (NIRA) “World Think Tank Directory”, and listings by the Observatoire des Think Tanks, Prospect Magazine, Sourcewatch, Wikipedia, Anglo-American university libraries or career services, job search websites or European Transparency Register (ETR), among others, and systematically checked the first 35 Google search results pages for “EU think tank” and similar search terms. Third, I accessed relevant (non-affiliated) entities’ websites to assess definitional fit. In a back-and-forth process, identified entities’ public self-presentation was compared to definitional criteria; I also always clicked on their “Our partners” subsites to see if any further (not list-discovered but structurally equivalent) ones appeared. In short, a literature-informed, list-based and snowballing-enhanced sampling was performed.

I find N=85 EU think tanks across EU-28 countries (and choose to cover the UK too), N=39 of which are present in Brussels (see Chapter 4). Note that my census sample includes both “biggies” like Bruegel and “minor league” players (Wiarda 2008:103). All these were then treated with exactly the same analytical grid and rigour. I decided to collect detailed financial and human resource data only for the subset of Brussels institutes, which is quantitatively and qualitatively justified. Although a full spectrum of EU think tanks is ascertained, still the field’s boundary remains fuzzy at the edges.

In a next step, I methodically collected strategic communication (SC) documents (e.g. annual reports, brochures, websites’ “About Us”, “Our history” or “Our Team” sections for all 85 EU think tanks, financial statements for the 39 in Brussels). These will be referenced with their respective publication year in the text (so “SC 2015” in brackets reads “according to this think tank’s strategic communications from 2015”): Moreover, publicly available biographical information for Brussels institutes’ leaders, staff and board members (e.g. websites’ biographical vignettes, downloadable CVs or, where absent, think tankers’ professional social media profiles, notably on LinkedIn) were collected. It yielded N=372 documents, and biographical profiles for N=2,080 individuals (with altogether N=2,167 PDF documents with biographical “snippets”).

I then populated Microsoft Excel (2010) and MAXQDA (2014) databases with this PDF-format text corpus for coding across 100 variables on EU think tanks’ basic features. Coding is “a systematic way in which to condense extensive data sets into smaller analyzeable units through creation of categories and concepts derived from the data” (Lockyer 2004:137). This includes their missions, locations or legal status, plus many other traits. Beyond inductive coding, for comparability Medvetz’ (2012) educational or career coding schemes are deductively applied (as noted in Chapter 7).

A couple of methodological issues necessitate brief elaboration. First, perfect population coverage is unlikely, or cannot be guaranteed with absolute certainty. There is also a sampling success bias in that any cross-sectional lens leads us to look for “regularly engaged” (as in the definition) institutes, not failed start-ups. Second, EU think tanks’ websites and their personnel’s biographical information vary widely regarding the level of detail that their public digital traces provide. For instance, there is no “easy” US Internal Revenue Service (IRS) data to draw on at the EU level for funding transparency; website-listed biographical vignettes were sometimes patchy. My “workaround” was sheer determination in tracking down financial statements; and complementing professional social media profiles for cases of missing or patchy CVs.

## **Talking to the field: Semi-structured expert interviews**

How do EU think tankers do the things they do, make sense of the field they inhabit? How do they verbalize and explain their organizational and professional identities? And how do they cast and perform their roles, or seek to demonstrate their impact? Beware of not “going native” (O’Reilly 2009), as ethnographers rightly fear, I set out to study such questions through participant observation, and conducted 80 semi-structured expert interviews with EU think tank leaders, staff and other actors, during a two months CEPS visiting fellowship in Brussels from March to April 2014. As outlined below, a resulting 573-page interview transcript text corpus was then coded.

I found this immersion into the hotbed of think tank activity at EU level highly rewarding. I enjoyed experiencing social science as a profoundly human science, taking to heart the advice not to study “people as objects, and instead recognize them as fellows who can teach you something...which would not otherwise be available” (Saldana 2013:14) from solely desk-based research. In lieu of unstructured narrative or fully standardized interviews, detailed interview guidelines were developed (see Appendix 1) and pre-tested in mock interviews with colleagues. These were then always personalized based on participants’ position and CV background. I prepared by reading up on the lessons or best practices in sociological and political science literature on interviewing elites (Aberbach/Rockman 2002, Harvey 2011, Goldstein 2002) and experts (Bogner et al. 2009, Dorussen et al. 2005, Lilleker 2003, Littig 2008). EU think tankers are viewed as “experts” of themselves and their field, and the interviews as strategic communication - no positivistic “window to the truth” - for getting subjective views rather than merely “milking” participants for factual info.

Equipped with a desk at CEPS and recording device (Zoom H1), the following sampling techniques were combined: interviewing CEPS’ leadership (accessibility sampling), contacting Brussels-based think tank leaders (list-based census sampling), and asking participants who else would be relevant to talk to (snowball sampling), plus also speaking with non-think tankers (quota sampling). The contact mode was e-mail: a personalized PDF letter “Invitation to Participate” explaining details was attached and multiple follow-up calls made, if necessary. Other than expected, the non-response rate was very low. the logbook on 83 contacted individuals shows that 74 (89 percent) directly granted the author an interview; 6 (7 percent) redirected to a colleague; only 3 interviews (4 percent) did not materialize (Lisbon Council, Irish Institute of International and European Affairs and one Polish think tanker contacted).

All 80 interviews are listed in the chronological order conducted in Appendix 2, including the names and affiliations of persons I spoke with (at the time of research) and interview numbers used for in-text referencing: after each quote the brackets “(I1-Blockmans:8)” means “see transcript section 8 of the author’s first interview with Steven Blockmans”, who is research leader at CEPS. Regarding participant type, 57 think tankers (including 14 of CEPS), nine INGO or foundation leaders, six think tank- or other network coordinators, five EU institution officials as well as three EU news outlet editors-in-chief have been interviewed specifically for this dissertation.

All interviewees were chosen in sampled organizations based on job position: I spoke with the leadership-level of 31 (80 percent) of the 39 Brussels EU think tanks, mostly their directors or Brussels office heads, or research or communication leaders. 68 (85 percent) of the interviews were done face-to-face in Brussels, the rest via phone or video telephony. Two thirds of participants are men (68 percent), a third women, and most are highly educated: 32 (40 percent) held at least a PhD or doctoral degree. All interviews were audio-taped, after obtaining informed consent from interviewees: participants were fine being named (no anonymization), but “off the record” statements - each interviewee was informed of this possibility - are not transcribed, coded or cited.

Interviews typically took place in people’s offices or a meeting room setting. On average they lasted 41 minutes, ranging from 19 minimum to 79 minutes duration. 31 working days were spent interviewing on average 2,6 people a day (maximum 5). Most importantly, I am highly satisfied about quality and insights gained from this time-intensive exercise, yielding a total of 55 hours (3,310 minutes) of relevant talk. As an interviewer, I tried to actively listen; to cover but not slavishly follow prepared guidelines; to use two printed-out conversation stimuli where appropriate (a list of think tank formats, and a chart depicting the different phases of the policy process); to ask open questions, using follow-up prompts - or silence- to tease out more; to ask for a tour of the property and “hang around” study sites (Medvetz 2012:229), as far as possible, to capture a sense of the place and people studied; to take field notes after the interview on “moments of strangeness” (Saldana 2013:295) or what went well; to write a thank you note after each interview and offer participants to check transcripts to boost validity (most simply okayed, all appreciated and some commented on them).

I stopped interviewing after interview number 80, when theoretical saturation in a grounded theory sense (Strauss/Corbin 1998:136) was reached. In retrospective, no mindboggling new information came up - I could often predict people’s answers-



already twenty interviews before the last. Still, I opted for full verbatim transcription of the collected interview audio material. My reason for doing so was that I otherwise feared to fall prey to “shiny” quotes only (those confirming my hunches), and would miss out on being able to detect relevant general patterns beyond them. I consciously chose not to outsource transcription. “Often seen as a behind-the-scenes task, it is actually a powerful act of representing real speech” (Oliver et al. 2005:1273); I feel that “bathing” in the interview material in this way helped me relive the interviews as an active listener; transcription is a discovery heuristic, already a part of the analysis.

Having said this, it was also quite a task: 20 working days were invested, from end of 2014 into 2015, to transcribe recorded audio files to text by using MAXQDA. Following standard transcription rules (American Sociological Association 2015, Dresing/Pehl 2012), I moved from an initial 1:6 minute of speech-to-text ratio to nearly 1:2 in the process; it is arguably faster than available automatic voice detection tools at the time (factoring in revision time), and has helped me inductively refine my deductively developed coding tree. It comprises a total of 111 codes on various topics whose meaning was spelled out in a detailed codebook as well (see Appendix 3).

Using MAXQDA - which allows overlapping codes and direct audio retrieval - I coded the entire text corpus as a “splitter” rather than a “lumper” (Dey 1993:104) to gain a nuanced picture of what people said, how - also mundane - issues relate to bigger themes, patterns of similarity or difference. It yielded 11,306 coded segments (and 116 analytic memos). Good research may “rest in large part on the excellence of the coding” (Strauss 1987:27). However, coding also took another month of my time, including both the coded interviews as well as the strategic communications material.

### **Visualizing the field: Sectoral social network analysis**

The EU think tanker database, described above, includes biographical information on N=2,080 leaders, staff and board members of 39 Brussels EU think tanks - a database double the size of Medvetz (2012), whose inspiring book includes only one network chart. I coded their in total N=2,167 CVs, biographical vignettes or LinkedIn profiles, collected in early 2015, in MAXQDA in late 2015. This not only enabled me to map descriptive statistics on EU think tankers’ educational and occupational background for the first time; it also allowed me - using Microsoft Excel’s “transpose” command - to convert all their university, public-, for-profit- or non-profit organization affiliations

into network matrix format; and to visualize and analyze them using SNA software, namely UCINET (Borgatti et al. 2002) and integrated NetDraw tools (Borgatti 2002).

The basic idea was to go beyond Medvetz' single chart on personnel flows (2012:118), to use think tankers' educational formation and sectoral socialization as a proxy for their relative institutional imprinting; their career trajectories, I assume, leave lasting individual legacies of institutional logics, and hint at hiring patterns too. Beyond an interest in which organizations were the most popular former employers, I also wished to - literally - see how think tankers' affiliations are connected, if at all. SNA is ideally suited for this purpose: simply put, a network is a set of actors (nodes) who may have relations (ties) with one another (Hanneman/Riddle 2005). Pictured, it becomes "a set of points some of which are joined by lines" (Barnes 1954:43, see also Mitchell 1969, Fine/Kleinman 1983, Mayntz 1993). Of course, bearing in mind that "a social network...is much more than that. It is an evolving social world; a world of meanings, conventions, resources...and sedimented histories" (Crossley 2010:31).

To manually draw SNA charts would take long; computers can do it in seconds. There is "no one 'right way' to use space in a graph. But one can usually do much better than a random configuration" and "working with drawings can be a lot of fun, and a bit of an outlet for your creative side", which is true (Hannemann/Riddle 2005). To get a better sense how EU think tanks and their personnel are sectorally situated, I performed detailed descriptive and exploratory SNA in the course of 2016 and 2017: from visualizing their inter-organizational network centralities, personnel flows and board interlocks to other board memberships, academic, business or public sector ties. Drawing on strategic communication material - coded with the same scheme as the interviews - I make a foray into their language networks (how they label themselves). However, the SNA does not extend beyond one-or-two-mode charts and centralities.

### **Gauging usage: Survey of European Commission staff**

The last empirical component of the dissertation project asks not what think tanks do - but gauges if their work is actually being used, and how, by Commission officials. How regularly do Commission employees draw on EU think tanks' contributions, compared to other information sources? Why, for instrumental or symbolic reasons? Which formats - publications, events, or personal meetings - do they tend to turn to? And, finally, which EU think tanks have among the highest reputation in their DGs? To get at the usage side of the think tank phenomenon at EU level, I developed a web-

based, standardized survey questionnaire (see Appendix 4), implemented end of 2014 using the University of Ljubljana’s (2015) 1KA (translates to “one click survey”) tool after taking a 2014 GESIS Leibniz-Institute summer school on survey methodology.

The rationale for the web-survey mode was that it fits respondents’ internet-based work reality, saves costs (and hassle of delivery and return), is confidential - data resides on the university’s professionally secured European servers - and allows for dynamically customized questions. The strategy for ensuring sufficient responses was to find a good balance of productive questions but stick to 10 minutes pre-tested completion time, which was highlighted in invitation e-mails and - because this had worked well for interviewing - the attached PDF letter “Invitation to Participate”. The English-language survey, accessible via short URLs, was also extensively pre-tested and built to work across devices (laptops, PCs, tablets, smartphones of usual builds).

A methodological challenge was the construction of a proper sampling frame. Of the N=33,039 staff the EU institution employed that year (Commission 2014), I sought to survey policy-involved staff (international bureaucrats above administrative level) across all policy-relevant DGs (excluding HR, IT or other internal Commission support units and services). To identify all relevant Commission staff, I used the EU’s up-to-date “Who’s Who” directory (EU Publications Office 2014) listing 232 advisers, 1,334 directors or unit heads, and 4,219 policy or desk officers. Thus, the empirical target population comprises 5,785 persons then working in the Barroso Commission. I opted for stratified random sampling with the three job categories as strata, given my expectation that they might draw on think tanks systematically differently and to ensure each potential respondent has a known, non-zero chance to participate. Next, I produced random draws for each job stratum by using STATA (2014), to highlight which individuals would be included in a pool of prospective respondents to contact.

**Table 4.** European Commission survey sampling and obtained respondents (N=671)

<b>Job categories</b> (strata of stratified random sampling across 23 DGs)	<b>Target population</b> (derived from “Who’s Who” sampling frame)	<b>Contacted sample</b> (factoring in expected 25% response rate)	<b>Needed sample size</b> (for statistical inference at the 5 percent level)	<b>Obtained sample</b> (response rates are not adj. for unreachability)
Adviser/cabinet member	232	232	145	44 (19% response rate)
Director/head of unit	1,334	1,194	298	262 (22% response rate)
Policy/desk officer	4,219	1,409	352	365 (26% response rate)
<b>Total</b>	5,785	2,835	795	<b>671</b> (24% response rate)

The desired accuracy was the usual +/- 5 percent, and confidence level of 95 percent<sup>1</sup>. But people's first names were often not fully stated in the directory (sampling frame). I requested but did not obtain this full data by the Commission Secretariat-General. So "detective work" was necessary to construct (and verify) e-mail addresses: a time-intensive desk-research workaround was to ascertain sampled persons' first names, which then let me construct their e-mail addresses (firstname.lastname@ec.europa.eu). I used an e-mail verifying tool to check if they still work and could be reached there.

Personalized e-mail invitations were sent out from October 2014 on (that is before transition to Jean-Claude Juncker's Commission). A single reminder was sent. Due to a conscious lack of IP tracking (I assured everybody full anonymity), I do not know who did or did not respond. However, people across strata evenly participated: as Table 4 shows, 671 persons completed the survey (with 88 partially filled out cases). Given that I contacted 2,835 Commission staff, not all of whom were actually reached, the overall response rate is at least 24 percent. I find it a highly satisfactory outcome<sup>2</sup>.

Regarding data quality and representativity: first, nearly all respondents filled in the survey from PCs during working hours, which indicates they took it seriously; second, answering behavior shows both officials who say they do use EU think tanks in their work and those who do not took part, indicating absence of social desirability; third, respondents' composition in terms of DGs, gender or age closely approximates what I discerned about target population traits (Commission Statistical Bulletin 2014). Still, it is possible that more interested and less busy officials participated more often.

Of course, accuracy and applicability of results beyond EU think tanks' scene and main study site - Brussels as the "honey pot" - is open to discussion (see Chapter 10). I claim high internal validity of findings for this core setting, and feel that interview research truly helped to ground this research; but I did not travel across the EU beyond "Brussels' bubble" or systematically compare findings to other settings, so I am less confident how well they "travel" (external validity). I claim intra-coder reliability (but did not quantify inter-coder reliability) for how I coded and analyzed all data sources. In this chapter, I have tried to make transparent how I went about this multi-year, theoretically grounded but empirically geared research project. However, ultimately it remains a single-author contribution; I may be wrong on several fronts.

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<sup>1</sup> The formula used to determine necessary sample sizes, expecting 25 percent response rate, was this:  $n/N$  (job category) =  $X$  [# of them identified in the population] \*  $1,96^2 * 0,25$  /  $(0,05^2 * (X-1) + 1,96^2 * 0,25)$ .

<sup>2</sup> For example, a survey conducted by TNS Infratest at the time (GMF 2014) elicited 57 responses of 500 contacted Commission staff (11 percent response rate), with both more budget and follow-up calls.

## Chapter 4

# Mapping the Field: Where and How Do EU-focused Think Tanks Operate?

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### Introduction

This chapter presents first findings of the empirical organizational demography of the organizational field of EU think tanks, which turns out to be a field of exclusively not-for-profit organizations. It starts out contextualizing the organizational form's global and transnational spread. Then basic results from the EU think tank database of identified institutes falling under the definition used (as of 2015 in EU countries, see Chapter 2) are presented, mapping the field's numerical and spatial extent. The objective here is an up-to-date descriptive overview of think tanks active at EU level, exploring their number, geographical dispersion and spatial proximity to EU bodies in Brussels, which - as expected in Chapter 1 and 2 - is confirmed as the key city hub.

This not only helps fill the empirical gap on this subset of EU-g geared institutes in the think tank literature and EU studies. The transnational extent and nature of this organizational field - beyond early counts (Boucher et al. 2004) or Rastrick's (2018) more recent Brussels-centric account of only "supranational think tanks" - is also of theoretical interest; and creates a basis for the following chapters' in-depth analysis, because once field boundaries are specified (see Chapter 3), we can scrutinize and compare institutes' financial or human resources, behavior and significance in detail.

The chapter then explores how many of the covered institutes call themselves a "think tank", or other label variants, in a first foray into - in this case linguistic - SNA which is triangulated with qualitative insights from the conducted expert interviews. Next to their non-profit status signalling, symbolic resources from label dynamics are explored. The coded interview material also serves as a basis for the next subsections which explain the key finding of EU think tanks' clustering in Brussels and spread across the continent by teasing out the importance of a liaison function in the EU's multi-level governance. Finally, opportunities and challenges of operating at the EU level are sounded out from the perspectives of interviewed think tankers themselves. For instance, accessing EU funding cycles and transnational research synergies are salient reasons for being active in Brussels or geared to EU affairs in country capitals. On the basis of this field cross-section, the following chapter retraces its emergence.

## **Contextualizing modern think tanks' worldwide and transnational spread**

Transnational think tanks form a part of a growing, networked “global civil society” (Anheier et al. 1999, 2001:4, 2005, Anheier/Katz 2005), addressed by global studies (Anheier/Jürgensmeyer 2012). Their proliferation in the last half century parallels that of INGOs from under 200 in 1909 to over 20,000 by 2005, with much growth occurring since the 1970s (Union of International Associations, cited after Hermann et al. 2010 who note the number of INGOs active around the United Nations (UN) with consultative status rose from a few dozen in 1945 to over 3,000 by the 2010s, a situation similar to World Bank and other transnational fora, see Boli 2006). Think tanks' numbers in and across countries around the world has not gone unnoticed by pundits and academics alike; their transnational activity has received comparatively less - and less systematic - attention, but now several scholarly or practitioner counts and accounts touch upon EU-focused institutes (see literature synopsis in Chapter 2).

The organizational form of Anglo-American-inspired policy institutes has now spread worldwide in both scale and scope. According to James McGann, who uses a “maximalist” definition that - unlike here - counts in legally affiliated entities, there were at least 6,846 think tank-alike entities worldwide as of 2015; 1,931 (28 percent) in North America, but 1770 (26 percent) operated in Europe (McGann et al. 2016). His latest “Global Go To Think Tank” index finds 7,815 global think tank-alike actors as of 2017; Europe now outranks North America in terms of sheer numbers: 2,045 (26 percent) of all entities are active there, compared to 1,972 (25 percent) in North America; the US tops the list with 1,872 survey-identified actors (McGann et al. 2018).

As the introductory chapters outline, topical literature on think tanks is anchored - and most studies continue to be revolve around - the Anglo-Saxon or US context, where the organizational form is said to have emerged at the twentieth century's dawn. Several books describe development of the US “industry” (Smith 1991, Ricci 1993, McGann 1995, Weiss 1992, Rich 2004, Weidenbaum 2011, Medvetz 2012), which is further elucidated in several seminal articles (among which I would list Weaver 1989, Abelson 2004, Bertelli/Wenger 2009 and Medvetz 2008 and 2010, among others). Several monographs compare it to think tank scenes in the UK (Stone 1996), Canada (Abelson 2000, 2009) or Germany (Braml 2006) in useful national-level comparisons.

Country-comparative projects (McGann/Weaver 2000, Stone/Denham 2004) yielded chapters on Western European (Day 2000) or EU level institutes (Ulrich 2004) next to commentary on think tank traditions in other countries, continents and places.

Hartwig Pautz compares British and German think tanks' contributions (2010, 2011). John Campbell and Ove Pedersen study US, French, German or Danish think tanks aside political party foundations, ad hoc commissions or state research centers within nationally-rooted "knowledge regimes" (2014), inspiring Kelstrup's work contrasting UK, German, Danish and touching on EU think tanks (2014, 2016, see Chapter 1). There is plenty of more- or less -in-depth research on national think tank scenes: on the UK (Gaffney 1991, Cocket 1995, Denham/Garnett 1999, 2004); on France's "cerveaux de la guerre des idées" (Boucher/Royo 2009); Germany's "idea agencies" (Gellner 2005) or its "internationalizing" think tanks (Thunert 2000, 2004, 2006) and their relations to foundations (Merai et al. 2011); on Czech and Polish think tanks (Neunhöffer 2001, Stasiak 2014, Cadier/Sus 2017); or also other member states' fields.

Beyond this, in the wake of think tanks' global proliferation or establishment, the literature mushroomed to cover other political settings or continents, for instance: Central or Eastern Europe (Krastev 2001), transition countries (Stone 2005, Struyk 2000, Struyk et al. 2006), Australia (Hart/Vromen 2008, Mendes 2003, Marsh/Stone 2004), China (Zhu 2012), Taiwan, Hongkong or Japan (Yep/Ngok 2006, Köllner/Zhu 2018), Vietnam (Hashimoto 2006), India (Khan/Köllner 2018), or other Asian, Latin American and, much less so, African countries (Braun et al. 2004, Mendizabal 2018). Scholars also "zoom in" with historical case studies of select institutes, or explore their roles in specific policy domains, notably foreign policy (Higgot/Stone 1994, Parmar 2004, 2005, Abelson 2006, Gyngell 2008, Köllner 2011). A practice-informed literature by think tank practitioners grows beyond this: Open Society Foundations (OSF) launched a book with practical guidance to manage think tanks (Struyk 2006), a lesson-drawing report (Kucharczyk/Kazmierkiewicz 2007), and, in a recent book, Woodrow Wilson Center's Andrew Seele asks "What should think tanks do?" (2013).

By 2000, it is agreed, think tanks "were present in almost every country with more than a few million inhabitants and at least a modicum of intellectual freedom" (McGann/Weaver 2000:3). Their "dramatic proliferation, hybrid forms, and world-wide spread over the past decades" (Stone 2007b) is the quantitative justification for this dissertation; the theoretical interest is in transnational activity of EU think tanks (see Chapter 1) - as typically knowledge-intensive and network-centric organizations. In how far are these EU-focused institutes special in form, independent in outlook, and consequential in action? The next section sheds empirical light on numerical extent and geographical reach of this organizational field, preparing the ground for answers.

## **Mapping the field: Clustering of EU think tanks in Brussels and beyond**

How many EU-focused public policy institutes exist nowadays across EU countries? Where are they headquartered? In which city hubs do such EU think tanks cluster? This section presents a clear double-finding: while EU think tanks are geographically dispersed and found in sixteen of the EU-28 member states, Brussels - the EU's de facto capital - is by far the most densely populated city by this organizational form.

While the structure of some EU think tanks such as the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) is truly transnational, with offices scattered across several European cities, most EU-focused institutes are rooted in one city and therefore also remain nationally anchored. Overall, as of 2015 (time period of analysis) 85 EU-focused think tanks are identified here (stand-alone public policy institutes strongly or fully geared to EU policy or affairs, see Chapter 2 for all the definitional criteria). 39 (46 percent) - nearly half - of these sampled policy institutes are based or have an office in Brussels (see Table 5) as the single largest hotbed of EU think tank activity.

EU think tanks cluster in Brussels, as expected (see Chapter 2), not least given the EU institutions in town. However, a slight majority of 46 of them (54 percent) are located beyond the Belgian capital inside fifteen other EU countries, notably the UK (still an EU member at the time of research), Germany or also France (see Table 6). The EU think tank phenomenon is geographically concentrated in - but by no means limited to - the Belgian- and EU's de facto capital (see Figure 3 below). While 20 (51 percent) of Brussels EU think tanks are also headquartered there, the other half of 19 is headquartered elsewhere in the EU; several are rooted in a US parent institute.

Figure 4 details how many EU think tanks operate from Brussels or other EU cities. Given how EU think tanks are defined here (see Chapter 2), those nationally anchored institutes with an own Brussels branch are counted and henceforth mainly analyzed in their role as think tanks active at EU level, notwithstanding that their real headquarters are found at member state level. The assumption is that their EU focus comes into play most clearly in the Brussels office. Yet we have to bear in mind that the presented Brussels figure must be seen as "inflated" in a sense due to this choice.

London - an EU-28 city at the time of writing - hosts the second most EU think tanks with 13 (15 percent) of all 85 identified institutes, for example Chatham House as the oldest think tank sampled (dating back almost a century to 1920, although of course its EU focus and -department are more recent additions). Paris is home to the third-highest number of 5 (6 percent) of EU think tanks, for instance Notre Europe.



**Table 5.** List of Brussels-based EU-focused think tanks (N=39)

#	EU think tank	Abbreviation	Website	City	Country
1	Atomium - European Institute for Science, Media and Democracy	<b>Atomium</b>	www.eismd.eu	Brussels	Belgium
2	Bertelsmann Foundation - Brussels Office	<b>Bertelsmann Foundation</b>	www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de	Brussels	Belgium
3	Bruegel	<b>Bruegel</b>	www.bruegel.org	Brussels	Belgium
4	Carnegie Europe - Brussels Office	<b>Carnegie Europe</b>	www.carnegieeurope.eu	Brussels	Belgium
5	Centre for European Policy Studies	<b>CEPS</b>	www.ceps.eu	Brussels	Belgium
6	Confrontations Europe - Brussels Office	<b>Confrontations Europe</b>	www.confrontations.org	Brussels	Belgium
7	Corporate Europe Observatory	<b>CEO</b>	www.corporateeurope.org	Brussels	Belgium
8	E3G - Third Generation Environmentalism - Brussels Office	<b>E3G</b>	www.e3g.org	Brussels	Belgium
9	EastWest Institute - Brussels Office	<b>EWI</b>	www.eastwest.ngo	Brussels	Belgium
10	Ecologic Institute - Brussels Office	<b>Ecologic</b>	www.ecologic.eu	Brussels	Belgium
11	Egmont - Royal Institute for International Relations	<b>Egmont</b>	www.egmontinstitute.be	Brussels	Belgium
12	European Centre for Development Policy Management - Brussels Office	<b>ECDFM</b>	www.ecdfm.org	Brussels	Belgium
13	European Centre for International Affairs	<b>ECIA</b>	www.european-centre.org	Brussels	Belgium
14	European Centre for International Political Economy	<b>ECIPE</b>	www.ecipe.org	Brussels	Belgium
15	European Foundation for Democracy	<b>EFD</b>	www.europeandemocracy.org	Brussels	Belgium
16	European Institute for Asian Studies	<b>EIAS</b>	www.eias.org	Brussels	Belgium
17	European Institute of Public Administration - Brussels Office	<b>EIPA</b>	www.eipa.eu	Brussels	Belgium
18	European Policy Centre	<b>EPC</b>	www.epc.eu	Brussels	Belgium
19	European Risk Forum	<b>ERF</b>	www.riskforum.eu	Brussels	Belgium
20	European Social Observatory	<b>OSE</b>	www.ose.be	Brussels	Belgium
21	European Stability Initiative - Brussels Office	<b>ESI</b>	www.esiweb.org	Brussels	Belgium
22	FRIDE - Fundación para Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior - Brussels Office	<b>FRIDE</b>	www.fride.org	Brussels	Belgium
23	Friends of Europe	<b>FoE</b>	www.friendsofeurope.org	Brussels	Belgium
24	German Institute for International and Security Affairs - Brussels Office	<b>SWP</b>	www.swp-berlin.or	Brussels	Belgium
25	German Marshall Fund of the United States - Brussels Office	<b>GMF</b>	www.gmfus.org/offices/brussels	Brussels	Belgium
26	Global Governance Institute	<b>GGI</b>	www.globalgovernance.eu	Brussels	Belgium
27	Group for Research and Information on Peace and Security	<b>GRIP</b>	www.grip.org	Brussels	Belgium
28	Institut Francais des Relations Internationales - Brussels Office	<b>IFRI</b>	www.ifri.org	Brussels	Belgium
29	Institute for European Environmental Policy - Brussels Office	<b>IEEP</b>	www.ieep.eu	Brussels	Belgium
30	Institute of International and European Affairs - Brussels Office	<b>IIEA</b>	www.iiea.com/brussels-branch	Brussels	Belgium
31	International Crisis Group	<b>ICG</b>	www.crisisgroup.org	Brussels	Belgium
32	Lisbon Council for Economic Competitiveness and Social Renewal	<b>Lisbon Council</b>	www.lisboncouncil.net	Brussels	Belgium
33	Madariaga - College of Europe Foundation	<b>Madariaga</b>	www.madariaga.org	Brussels	Belgium
34	Open Europe - Brussels Office	<b>Open Europe</b>	www.openeurope.org.uk	Brussels	Belgium
35	Open Society European Policy Institute	<b>OSEPI</b>	www.osi-brussels.org	Brussels	Belgium
36	RAND Europe - Brussels Office	<b>RAND</b>	www.rand.org/randeurope	Brussels	Belgium
37	Sport and Citizenship - Brussels Office	<b>S&amp;C</b>	www.sportetcitoyennete.com	Brussels	Belgium
38	Think Tank Européen Pour la Solidarité	<b>PLS</b>	www.pourlasolidarite.eu	Brussels	Belgium
39	Transport & Environment	<b>T&amp;E</b>	www.transportenvironment.org	Brussels	Belgium

**Table 6.** List of EU think tanks based beyond Brussels in EU-28 countries (N=46)

#	EU think tank	Abbreviation	Website	City	Country
40	Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy	<b>AIES</b>	www.aies.at	Vienna	Austria
41	Austrian Institute for International Affairs	<b>OIIP</b>	www.oiip.ac.at	Vienna	Austria
42	Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies	<b>WIIW</b>	www.wiiw.ac.at	Vienna	Austria
43	Europeum Institute for European Policy	<b>Europeum</b>	www.europeum.org	Prague	Czech Republic
44	Finnish Institute of International Affairs	<b>FIIA</b>	www.fiaa.fi	Helsinki	Finland
45	Centre d'Études Prospectives et d'Informations Internationales	<b>CEPII</b>	www.cepii.fr	Paris	France
46	Europanova	<b>Europanova</b>	www.europanova.eu	Paris	France
47	Fondation Pour l'Innovation Politique	<b>FONDAPOL</b>	www.fondapol.org	Paris	France
48	Institut Prospective Économique du Monde Méditerranéen	<b>IPEMED</b>	www.ipemed.coop	Paris	France
49	Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute	<b>Notre Europe</b>	www.delorsinstitute.eu	Paris	France
50	Centre for European Policy	<b>CEP</b>	www.cep.eu	Freiburg	Germany
51	Development and Peace Foundation	<b>SEF</b>	www.sef-bonn.org	Bonn	Germany
52	European Council on Foreign Relations	<b>ECFR</b>	www.ecfr.eu	Berlin	Germany
53	German Council on Foreign Relations	<b>DGAP</b>	www.dgap.org	Berlin	Germany
54	Global Public Policy Institute	<b>GPPI</b>	www.gppi.net	Berlin	Germany
55	Institute for European Politics	<b>IEP</b>	www.iep-berlin.de	Berlin	Germany
56	Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy	<b>ELIAMEP</b>	www.eliamep.gr	Athens	Greece
57	International Center for Climate Governance	<b>ICCG</b>	www.iccgov.org	Venice	Italy
58	Istituto Affari Internazionali	<b>IAI</b>	www.iai.it	Rome	Italy
59	Latvian Institute of International Affairs	<b>LIIA</b>	www.liia.lv	Riga	Latvia
60	Cicero Foundation	<b>CF</b>	www.cicerofoundation.org	Maastricht	Netherlands
61	The Hague Center for Strategic Studies	<b>HCSS</b>	www.hcss.nl	The Hague	Netherlands
62	The Hague Institute for Global Justice	<b>HIGJ</b>	www.thehagueinstitutefor globaljustice.org	The Hague	Netherlands
63	Transnational Institute	<b>TNI</b>	www.tni.org	Amsterdam	Netherlands
64	CASE - Center for Social and Economic Research	<b>CASE</b>	www.case-research.eu	Warsaw	Poland
65	Institute of Public Affairs	<b>ISP</b>	www.isp.org.pl	Warsaw	Poland
66	Polish Institute of International Affairs	<b>PISM</b>	www.pism.pl	Warsaw	Poland
67	WiseEuropa Institute	<b>WiseEuropa</b>	www.wise-europa.eu	Warsaw	Poland
68	Romanian Center for European Policies	<b>CRPE</b>	www.crpe.ro	Bucharest	Romania
69	Central European Policy Institute	<b>CEPI</b>	www.cepolicy.org	Bratislava	Slovakia
70	CIDOB - Barcelona Centre for International Affairs	<b>CIDOB</b>	www.cidob.org	Barcelona	Spain
71	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute	<b>SIPRI</b>	www.sipri.org	Stockholm	Sweden
72	Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies	<b>SIEPS</b>	www.sieps.se	Stockholm	Sweden
73	Bruges Group	<b>Bruges Group</b>	www.brugesgroup.com	London	UK
74	Center for Global Development - Europe	<b>CGD</b>	www.cgdev.org/cgd-europe	London	UK
75	Centre for Economic Policy Research	<b>CEPR</b>	www.cepr.org	London	UK
76	Centre for European Reform	<b>CER</b>	www.cer.org.uk	London	UK
77	Chatham House - Royal Institute of International Affairs	<b>Chatham House</b>	www.chathamhouse.org	London	UK
78	Climate Strategies	<b>Climate Strategies</b>	www.climatestrategies.org	London	UK
79	European Leadership Network	<b>ELN</b>	www.europeanleadership network.org	London	UK
80	Foreign Policy Centre	<b>FPC</b>	www.fpc.org.uk	London	UK
81	Institute for Strategic Dialogue	<b>ISD</b>	www.strategicdialogue.org	London	UK
82	International Institute for Environment and Development	<b>IIED</b>	www.iied.org	London	UK
83	International Institute for Strategic Studies	<b>IISS</b>	www.iiss.org	London	UK
84	Overseas Development Institute	<b>ODI</b>	www.odi.org.uk	London	UK
85	Policy Network	<b>Policy Network</b>	www.policy-network.net	London	UK

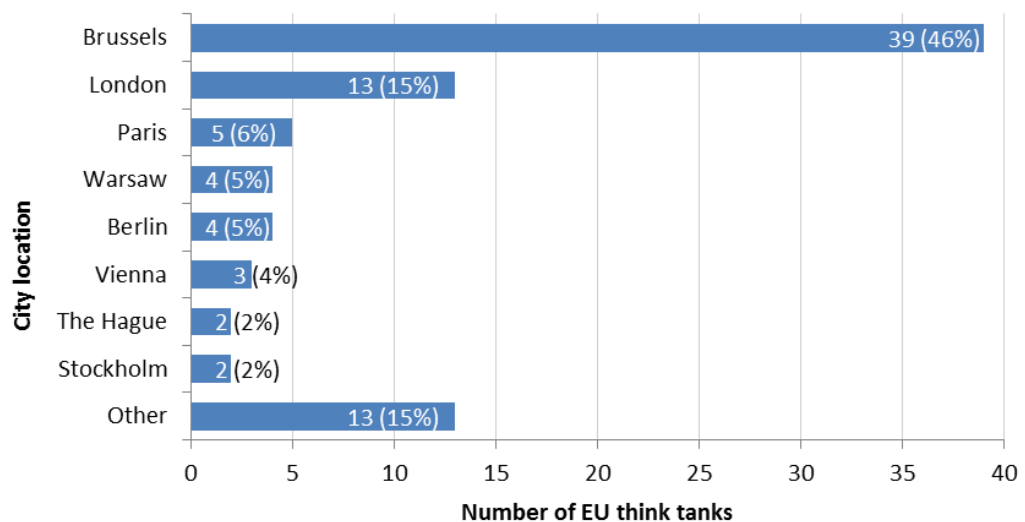
**Figure 3.** Map of EU think tanks' geographical dispersion across the EU-28 (N=85)

Note: Map created in Google Maps based on data of Google (2017) and GeoBasis-DE/BKG (2009).



**Figure 4.** City hubs where EU think tanks are clustered (N=85)

Note: the 'other' category includes 13 other EU cities with 1 EU think tank each (Amsterdam, Athens, Barcelona, Bonn, Bratislava, Bucharest, Freiburg, Helsinki, Maastricht, Prague, Riga, Rome, Venice).



**Table 7.** Countries where EU think tanks are clustered (N=85)

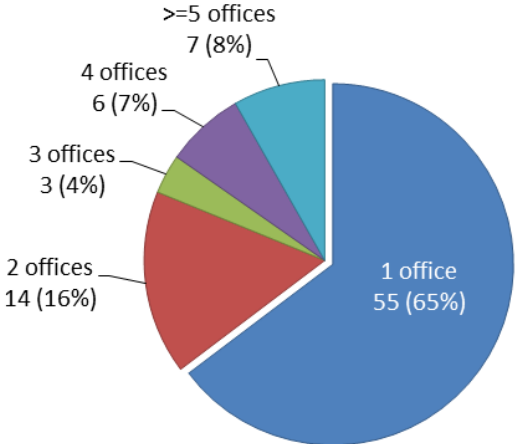
Note: ‘Other’ category is 1 Czech, Finnish, Greek, Latvian, Romanian, Slovakian and Spanish institute.

Rank	Country location	Number of EU think tanks	% of total
1	Belgium	39	46%
2	UK	13	15%
3	Germany	6	7%
4	France	5	6%
5	Netherlands	4	5%
6	Poland	4	5%
7	Austria	3	4%
8	Italy	2	2%
9	Sweden	2	2%
10	Other	7	8%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>100%</b>

While the German-origin institutes present in Brussels are counted as Brussels-based here, four further EU think tanks operate in Berlin too, such as ECFR. Warsaw boasts four EU policy institutes, such as the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM). Other sampled EU think tanks are dispersed across EU capitals including Vienna, The Hague or Stockholm, while single ones also operate from Amsterdam to Venice.

In the breakdown by country (see Table 7) we see a similar pattern except that Germany - in third spot after Belgium and the UK - hosts more institutes than France. As shown in Figure 5, two thirds (55, or 65 percent) of the 85 institutes operate only from one headquarter office. However, a third (30, or 35 percent) have - on average 2,5 - extra offices beyond a main operational base. This ranges from one extra office to pan-European or global think tanks: to illustrate, as explained in the next chapter ECFR spans seven EU cities (Berlin, London, Madrid, Paris, Rome, Sofia, Warsaw) “tuning in” to member states. Carnegie Europe is a center of a self-styled global actor also present in Beijing, Beirut, Brussels, Moscow, New Dehli and Washington D.C.

**Figure 5.** Number of EU think tank offices as of 2015 (N=85)



### “It’s a not-for-profit’s world”: Legal forms and countries of registration

How and in which countries of registration are the EU think tanks organized legally? The legal status could be obtained for all sampled institutes from their websites or annual reports. All 85 EU think tanks are not-for-profit organizations subject to the non-distribution constraint, setting them apart from public- or business organizations. This is not a trivial finding: non-profit status is no “must-have” definitional criterion, and yet all EU-focused public policy institutes choose to set up as a non-profit actor; presumably, this is already an important sign of their attempts to signal independence - operating as not-for-profit organizations does not mean they cannot make a profit; it does mean that they are subject to the non-distributional constraint, however - they cannot “pocket” or distribute net earnings among the persons overseeing the institute.

As Table 8 shows, a quarter (21) legally register in Belgium, unsurprisingly given Brussels as largest EU think tank city hub (two thirds of the 39 in the city are also officially registered in Belgium). The second most (17) are registered in the UK, followed by Germany (9), France (8), the Netherlands (7) and Poland (4). Three are registered in Austria, Sweden plus in the US, respectively. If we turn to their precise type of legal registration in these countries (see Figure 6), one quarter (21, i.e. not all 39 in Brussels) are registered under Belgian law, usually in form of an “association [internationale] sans but lucrative” (ASBLs or AISBLs) or their legal type, in the UK, is as a private company limited by guarantee as well as UK charity. The popular company-and-charity format, overseen by the UK’s Charity Commission, is chosen by Chatham House or Overseas Development Institute (ODI), for example. The third

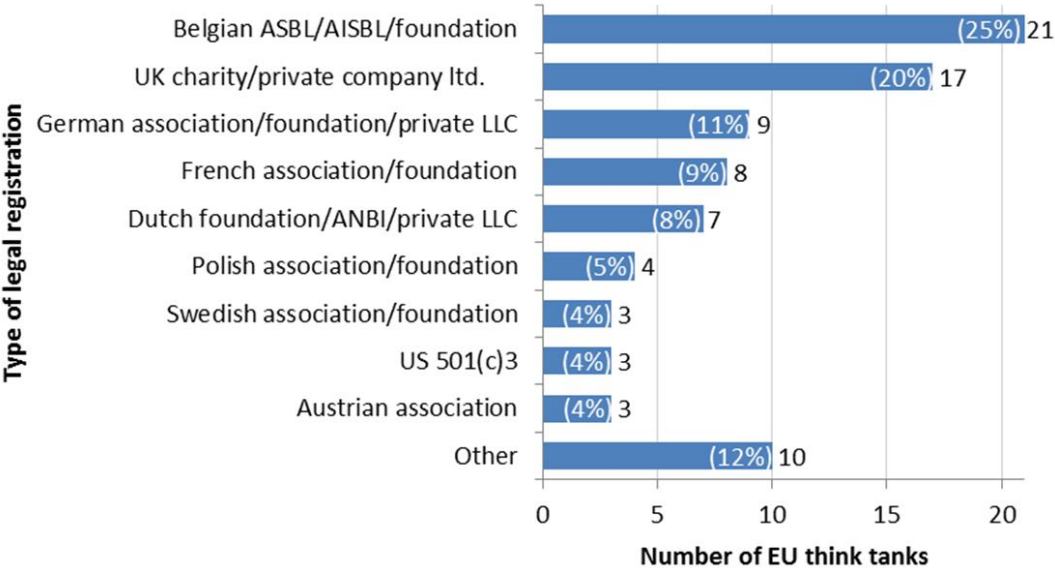
**Table 8.** EU think tank countries of legal registration (N=85)

Note: ‘other’ category includes 10 EU countries (Italy and Spain with 2 EU think tanks each; Czech Republic, Finland, Greece, Latvia, Romania and Slovakia with 1 EU think tank each).

Rank	Country of legal registration	Number of EU think tanks	% of total
1	Belgium	21	25%
2	UK	17	20%
3	Germany	9	11%
4	France	8	9%
5	Netherlands	7	8%
6	Poland	4	5%
7	Austria	3	4%
8	Sweden	3	4%
9	US	3	4%
10	Other	10	12%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Figure 6.** EU think tank type of legal registration (N=85)

Note: ‘other’ category incl. 10 other cases (2 Italian as well as Spanish associations, 1 Romanian, Latvian, Greek, Finnish, Czech and Slovak association or foundation).



most frequent type is as a German association (“eingetragener Verein” or e.V.), foundation or private limited liability company (LLC) under German civil law. For instance, SWP operates as independent foundation with a legal capacity under the German civil code; Ecologic Institute is a “gemeinnützige GmbH” (or gGmbH); as a final example, Bertelsmann Foundation is headquartered in Gütersloh, Germany, as an operating foundation but it also runs US, Spanish and Belgian subsidiaries as well.

French-registered EU think tanks are associations or foundations “reconnue d'utilité publique” under a 1901 law, enabling think tanks like Paris’ Institut Francais des Relations Internationales (IFRI) to offer its donors tax cuts (66 percent of payment on up to 20 percent of taxable revenue of income tax-paying individuals; 60 percent of payment of organizational donors on up to 5 percent of turnover, as of a 2003 law). Maastricht’s ECDPM and EIPA and The Hague-based think tanks, among others, are Dutch foundations or register as private limited liability companies (BV) and charitable institutions (ANBI) under Dutch tax- or succession law of 1956. Several EU think tanks are Polish, Swedish or Austrian associations and foundations.

Three EU think tanks in Brussels - Carnegie Europe, GMF, EastWest Institute (EWI) - are US-registered “501(c)3s” in the IRS’ internal revenue code. Washington D.C. presences of Bertelsmann Foundation, E3G or RAND Europe also file under its educational prong to grant donors tax deductibility of donations to the fullest extent possible under American law (Brody/Cordes 1999, Harvard Law Review 2002).

## Zooming into “Brussels’ bubble”: Striking proximity to EU institutions

If we scrutinize just those sampled EU think tanks with a presence in Brussels, the overall finding beyond their conspicuous accumulation in the city - the front region of EU think tankdom, to use Giddens’ terminology - is a striking spatial proximity to EU institutions in town. Table 9 shows the 39 Brussels institutes’ average distance to Commission headquarters in Rue de la Loi’s x-shaped Berlaymont building is just 1.3 kilometers (or 0.8 miles). This ranges from ECDPM’s office a stonethrow away across Rue Archimède to those located in the International Press Center’s Residence Palace (Bertelsmann Foundation, GMF and Lisbon Council) opposite the Rue de la Loi all the way to peripheral locations (say of ESI) outside the city’s central bounds.

The average distances to the European External Action Service (EEAS) and Council’s Justus Lipsius headquarters - also located off Rond Point Schuman - or the European Parliament’s building at Place du Luxembourg in the EU quarter are only slightly larger. So next to diplomatic missions, business representations, lobbying outlets and INGOs’ liaison offices, EU think tanks are no exception in populating a radius of only a few square kilometers in Brussels, a city arguably “home to one of the highest concentrations of political power in the world” (CEO 2011:3). It applies especially to four square kilometers between Rue Royale and Rond Point Schuman.

Figure 7 depicts this cartographically for Brussels (the spatial dispersion of EU think tanks in London, Paris, Warsaw, Berlin is similarly one of striking proximity). To paraphrase several interviewees: geography is no coincidence. Spatial dynamics show Brussels players are not out to save rent but seek to be close to political action.

When compared to the US capital, Washington D.C. institutes have been shown to similarly cluster near the nation’s Capitol Building, albeit with larger average air-line distances of 2,9 kilometers (1,8 miles) to the halls of Congress (Gilroy 2012:20). Akin to Brussels EU think tanks’ outlined grouping around Rond Point Schuman and in the European Parliament’s vicinity, Medvetz shows that next to a few think tanks like Heritage Foundation right off Capitol Hill, academic think tanks like Carnegie or

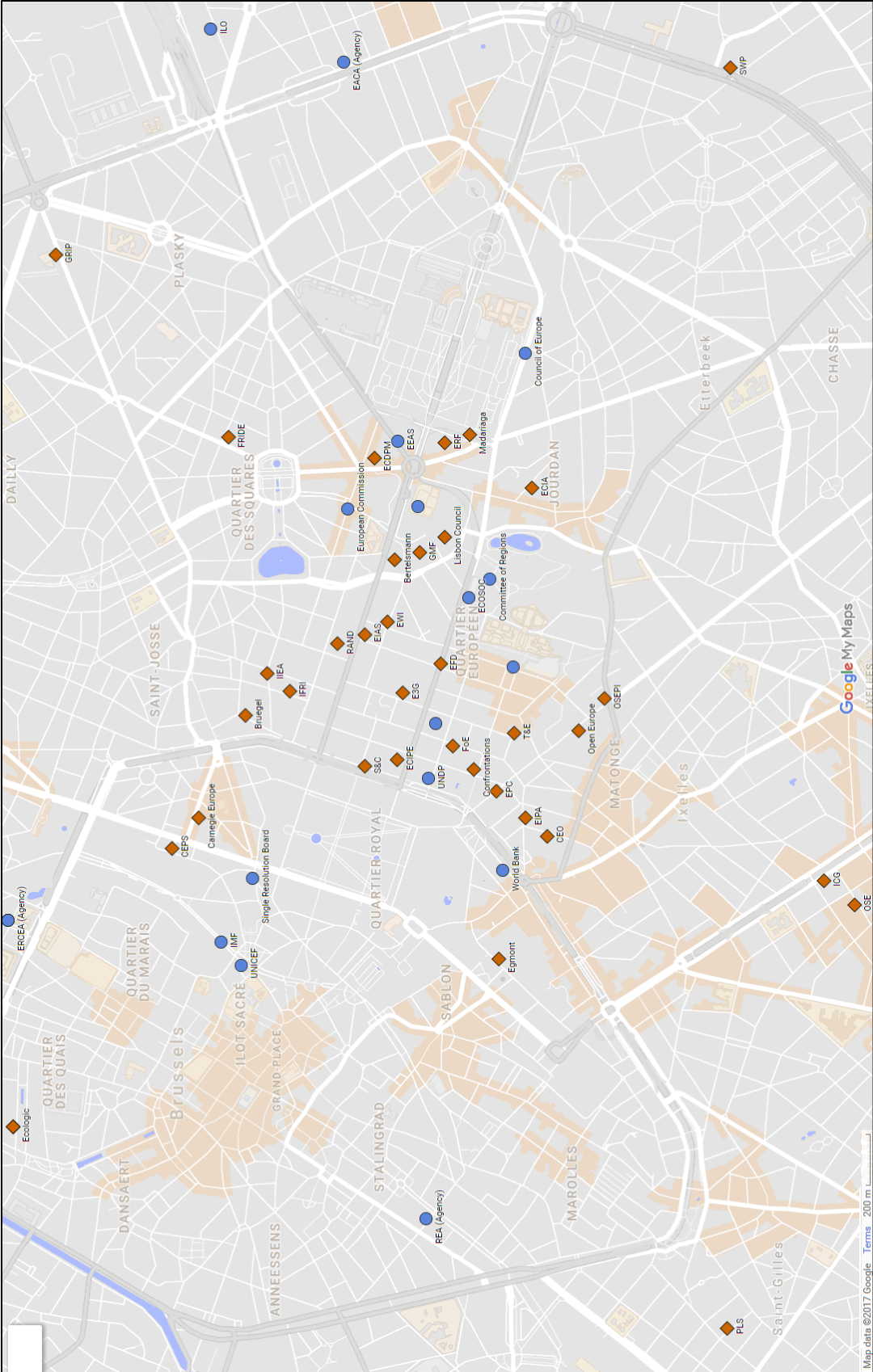
**Table 9.** Brussels EU think tanks’ distances from EU institutions (N=39)

EU institution	Average	Minimum	Maximum
European Commission	1,3 km (0,8 mi)	115 meters (0,1 mi): ECDPM	3,4 km (2,1 mi): PLS
European Parliament	1,9 km (1,2 mi)	262 meters (0,2 mi): T&E	2,7 km (1,7 mi): Atomium
Council of EU/ EEAS	1,8 km (1,1 mi)	138 meters (0,1 mi): Bertelsmann/GMF/Lisbon Council	3,3 km (2,1 mi): PLS



**Figure 7.** Spatial dispersion of EU think tanks in Brussels (N=39)

Note: map created in Google Maps based on cartographic data of Google (2017). There are three more Southern EU think tanks not depicted here: ESI (south of ICG or OSE in the Châtelain neighborhood) as well as Atomium (near Université Libre) and GGI (on the Vrije Universiteit campus) to the South.





Brookings Institution tend to operate on Dupont Circle's "Think Tank Row" while foreign policy think tanks hover around the US State Department's Foggy Bottom neighborhood and advocacy-oriented outfits such as the Cato Institute or American Enterprise Institute cluster near lobbying-intensive thoroughfare K Street (2012:118). Similar to this spatial agglomeration "inside the Beltway" of Washington D.C. (see Rich 2004:229, Wiarda 2008:96), EU think tanks are drawn to the "Brussels bubble".

Several Brussels EU think tanks are co-located in the same building complex, such as the three housed in the International Press Center Résidence Palace, together with journalists, EU news outlets, public relations firms and lobbyists. For example, GMF's Brussels director notes that the very fact that Bertelsmann Foundation, the Lisbon Council or EU news outlets like European Voice - now owned by Politico and Axel Springer - are in the same building induces frequent collegial contact, "not on a daily basis, but...we often speak at their events and vice versa" (I53-Lesser:35). The Mundo-b complex south of the EU quarter off Porte de Namur is also occupied by lobbying-critical EU think tank CEO, likeminded office-sharing social start-ups and a range of environment- or sustainability-oriented not-for-profit organizations such as the Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation (ALTER-EU), Friends of the Earth Europe and coalitions like the Climate Action Network Europe. The idea is that being based under a single roof boosts synergies or fosters fellowship.

Of course, these first descriptive insights from mapping these center-periphery properties of EU think tanks' transnationally spread but spatially clustered field are raising questions about why and how such institutes become active at the EU level. The remainder of this chapter sounds out how many of them opt to call themselves a "think tank" or use related label variants; then the double-sided result of parallel geographical dispersion and Brussels accumulation is explained by teasing out EU think tanks' central liaison function, opportunities or also constraints at the EU level.

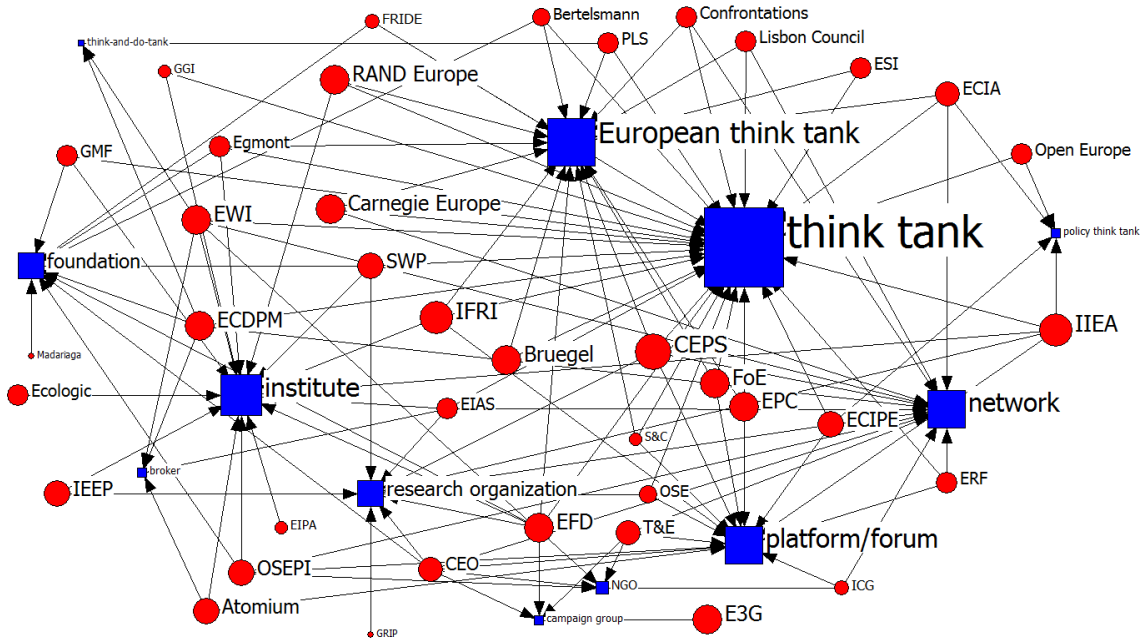
### **EU think tank label dynamics: Self-attribution, connotations and variants**

What is gained by existing as a "think tank" at the EU level? And, beyond institutes' portrayal of themselves or one another in this way, how do they understand this label? The next chapter will retrace how emergence of EU think tanks' organizational field was a categorization process as much as a series of foundings and resource openings. Let us examine the current vocabulary of its interviewed participants in some detail. We also see their self-concepts in their strategic communications materials - notably

mission statements, websites or brochures - coded within this project (see Chapter 3). Cross-sectional content analysis of such public communications material of Brussels EU think tanks reveals the “think tank” label, quantitatively speaking, to be the most widely used self-concept, employed by 28 (72 percent) of these 39 institutes. Its popularity, as well as that of other label variants, is gauged in Figure 8, visualizing linguistic prevalence of the most common self-descriptions in a first foray into social network analysis (SNA): lines (or ties) branch out from EU think tanks (red circles) to show which labels (blue squares) are used in their strategic communications.

**Figure 8.** Linguistic network of Brussels EU think tank label self-attribution (N=39)

Note: Based on Brussels institutes’ coded strategic communications material as of 2015; two-mode network, visualized in UCINET/Netdraw, node and label size shown by degree centrality.



This is a so-called two-mode network, depicting both organizations and labels in use. It also give us an intuitive overview of which labels are more central or peripheral, and if EU think tanks use several (or just one or a few) labels to describe themselves. The “think tank” label is the most central (biggest blue square); in SNA terminology we can say it has the highest degree centrality (simply the number of ties a node has). It is not prominent or could not be identified from the coded self-presentation material of 11 (28 percent) sampled Brussels EU think tanks, for instance E3G does not use it. The comparatively smaller the size of a node, the less linguistic network ties it has. In the chart’s upper left corner, we see that the “think and do tank” label variant was (as we will see strategically) used only by the three institutes ECDPM, EWI and PLS, at least at the time of research as of 2015. “European think tank” is the second most

common label in the organizational field, first evidence of an additional isomorphic trend to publicly emphasize the European (if not EU-) focus of their operations. Self-characterizations as a “network”, “platform” or as a “forum” are about as frequent as the label variant “institute”, and even more common than “research organization”.

When it comes to the adjectives beyond the label nouns, often used as prefixes, the most striking finding is how regularly the “not-for-profit” status is communicated: 32 (82 percent) of institutes in Brussels make prominent or frequent reference to this. As noted above, it can be safely assumed they do so to signal they are subject to the nondistribution constraint, stressed in economic theories of non-profit organizations (Hansmann 1988, see Powell/Steinberg 2006), implicitly invoking the legitimacy and public confidence afforded by this legal form of organizing a civil society initiative.

In fact, the prefix “independent” is explicitly used by 23 (59 percent) of Brussels EU think tanks; about a third of them additionally stress being “non-partisan”, acting in the “public interest” as well as being “policy-relevant” or “policy-oriented”. The “European think tank” Bruegel, for instance, alternates between all of these prefixes. Two thirds (67 percent) of all 85 sampled EU think tanks (in Brussels and beyond) developed catchy organizational slogans to succinctly communicate their identities. These mottos are similarly full of public assurances of unqualified “independence”, or stress a European, international or global organizational approach and outlook.

The main insight from this language-sensitive numerical approach is that in the current organizational field of EU think tanks, the think tank label is now widespread but has not yet become universalized among the institutes, at least in self-attributions. Qualitatively speaking, the conducted interviews with field participants help us better understand the differentiated use of the label in parallel to wide isomorphic adoption. Think tanks’ purported nature or license to operate, what they are and (should) do, is increasingly verbalized with a strikingly similar, collectively legitimated vocabulary.

At the same time, the organizational category is seen as quite ambiguous even by think tankers. The author typically started interviews with the icebreaker question “How would you define a ‘think tank’?”; the initial reaction was often laughter, or intrigued hesitation, followed by ad hoc improvisations of a definition or key criteria: “A think tank is...(laughter). Yeah, that’s a very good question”, the first interviewee reacts (I1-Blockmans:12); “Ha...it’s not easy!” (I5-Giuli:10) and “Oh my goodness!” (I27-Fischer:11), others exclaim. Some concede “I can’t give a precise definition” (I18-Baud:10), “I work for a think tank and still haven’t found an easy way to define

it when people ask me” (I11-Cleppe:10). However, other interviewees could produce elegant shorthand descriptions on the spot: “It’s a policy research institute, interested in analyzing and influencing policy”, as a CEPS senior research fellow puts it (I46-Emerson:10), echoed by Bruegel’s secretary general who offered a simple definition that “a think tank is a research organization which focuses on policy” (I19-Dann:18).

This label connotation of being concerned with current public policy problems and -research is very evident throughout the rest of the interview material as well: for Carnegie Europe’s director, the notion captures “an organization that uses academic research methods to do policy-relevant research, the results of which are aimed at policy-makers for the most part but also at the public, with the goal of improving policy-making and the public understanding of it, that’s how I would improvise this” (I59-Techau:11). It is “an organization which looks at the political and economic challenges of today”, CEPS’ head of corporate and external relations says, “but also challenges of tomorrow” (I32-Born-Sirkel:11); its director adds that often “research is geared towards policy recommendations” (I52-Gros:12). His EPC counterpart concretizes that “you aim, in some way, to influence the policy-making process. For EU-focused think tanks, that’s the interest in the EU and the policies associated with it”, even if “in Brussels there are a lot of models of think tanks” (I5-Zuleeg:10). To belong to the club, in this view, “real” think tanks engage in relevant policy research. This affords EU think tanks with symbolic legitimacy and potential political access.

Another much accentuated definitional criterion, according to the interviews, is the organization and, at a field level, institutionalization of cross-sectoral convening. In this vein, think tanks reputedly “bring the different stakeholders together that have an interest in a specific policy issue, and can organize a balanced debate” (I32-Born-Sirkel:14). They “always look for multi-stakeholder angles” (I5-Zuleeg:22), provide a “venue of exchange” (I10-Brozus:14) as a “point where dialogue can be organized on different themes” (I34-Stokkink:24), often literally in form of “a room - the tank - where you have people discussing policy issues” (I48-Alcidi:10). Through policy-focused research and convening, there is consensus, institutes can fulfil an important societal function of “bridging”, as “brokers”: “broker dialogues, broker knowledge, broker partnerships - that’s generally how we sum it up”, ECDPM’s director declares (I17-Engel:10); EWI’s Brussels office head says “getting people together, doing trust-building, delivering solutions” is regularly a main goal (I25-Mäder-Metcalf:10). “You hear it a lot”, the author’s office mate during his embedded CEPS research stay

admits, “being the platform between academia, policy-makers and practitioners. But the real think tank should do that” (I38-Valiante:21). “It could be called a ‘think-and-communicate-tank’”, ECIA’s research director muses, “but it’s not that sexy. Those are our jobs: to think critically, and to communicate that thought” as a “transmission belt from the cutting edge of research to dialogue with stakeholders” (I4-Teti:10, 36).

Another constantly invoked label connotation relates not just to what it is that EU think tanks do, but to how (and to which ends) they ought to appropriately do it: “independent and policy, these are the two words that matter” for the CEO of CEPS (I45-Lannoo:10). At the organizational level, this translates to assurances of working towards the public good: “Why are we on earth? For the European public interest” (I57-Pelkmans:36); for the “general interest” (I18-Baud:10); for the “public benefit” (I27-Fischer:11). Bruegel even considers itself a public good, in economic parlance. For its secretary general the question is “Are we independent enough to act in the public interest?”, recognizing that “whenever policy changes, somebody misses out... There is no policy magic bullet which will make everyone better off. But a public good generally works for as many of the public as it can” (I19-Dann:32).

A commonly cited element is that think tanks often make “all publications available for free for the public, anybody can help themselves” (I46-Emerson:10). However, the general thrust of the argument is that think tanking is unlike lobbying or consultancy work: even if influencing policy is the aim “that will never benefit us as an organization...We are not intending to...get something out for ourselves [but] to make society better off, to get to the best solution for society as a whole” (I32-Born-Sirkel:12), whereas “consultants are lenient towards the beneficiary” (I33-Allio:21). The reasoning is that “it falls under the hat of civil society, right?” (I37-Ioannides:20).

At the individual level, a mantra-like repetition of the trust-building catchword “independence” stands in for the perceived degree of individual intellectual freedom: “it always boils down to individuals. If you have a think tank in which reputation is not linked to individuals...it is not really a think tank” (I39-Valiante:61). “What makes them unique is the individuals who are inside a think tank. They are decisive for the quality of the work, effect of the work, and if it’s an organization that merits to be called a ‘think tank’”, in the opinion of the director of ECIPE (I22-Erixon:10).

This is echoed in the common conviction that in-house research capacity is a must-have criterion: “A think tank is not just a platform and you have many people chipping in. You need to have a permanent base of researchers” (I23-Pertusot:10);

“the bedrock should be the analytical background. Then you can use it and turn it and twist it in many ways. But that should be a defining element of think tanks” (I44-Grevi:20). The definitional attempt of IFRI’s Brussels office head brings all hitherto discussed label connotations together: “One criterion is it’s independent; the second is you do research in terms of policy-oriented publications and events; and the last one is that you are at the crossroads of different fields” (I23-Pertusot:10).

Notre Europe’s team of practitioners studying - thereby reifying - EU-focused and -oriented institutes discerned their following main declared mission priorities: improving policy-making; raising awareness among and involving citizens; supporting policy-makers; and promoting the general interest or European integration (Boucher et al. 2004:22). In our interview ten years later, based at European Climate Foundation, Boucher observes that while a “sense of pragmatism in the definition is what I see also today”, he continues to believe that “one has to be consistent, and not apply the label to just anything that thinks about policy-making” (I-26-Boucher:12).

“The most important thing for your research is to get around the definition of think tanks”, a CEPS fellow encouraged me as a budding academic scholar of them (I39-Valiante:55). GMF’s Brussels leader notes “if you would have asked someone thirty years ago, they would have given you a list of a half a dozen places that do think tank-like activity in a major capital. Today, it’s not boundless, but it’s a pretty wide spectrum” (I53-Lesser:13). “The problem is that this word is not protected”, a CEPS think tanker feels, adding with a touch of nostalgia “we used to know what it meant...because we had famous references in practice in the US” (I57:Pelkmans:13).

In a clear case of mimetic isomorphism, most of the eleven interviewed CEPS think tankers repeatedly cite Brookings Institution as both inspiration and ideal type:

*“Perfection doesn’t exist, but Brookings is a beautiful example where in principle you are independent - in money, in politics, from business - you are truly independent, you are free to determine your own agenda and...you are also perceived to be free...It’s not to call Hallelujah on Brookings...but they answer best to the criteria.”* (I57-Pelkmans:16)

CEPS “has been conceived as such in 1983, and has been working on that premise ever since...we try to distinguish ourselves by doing more of the thinking and less of the tanking” (I1-Blockmans:16). This rethoric about independent, objective analysis entails an implicit scepticism or even outright aversion of continental scholarly think tanks to advocacy think tanks, which are also associated more with the US, or UK: most EU think tanks “come from an academic tradition...in the Anglo-Saxon world,

they often or mostly don't have an academic background but are aimed at influencing policy-making", in Carnegie Europe director observes, "they are much closer to what constitutes a political organization than an academic organization" (I59-Techau:13).

"You don't really have the type of think tanks which are in Washington, D.C.", another think tanker notes (I33-Allio:59); in Europe, "Euro-sceptic ones are in London more than in Brussels" (I40-Santopinto:74); "EPC, CEPS or Bruegel, for instance, those are think tanks based in Brussels and they don't really have a national identity" (I23-Pertusot:48). Thus, self-attribution without living up to central connotations and the proliferation and increasing information load surrounding the think tank label are seen with suspicion, particularly in scholarly institutes: "Many organizations claim for themselves to be think tanks - but they are very different organizations!", a CEPS researcher exclaims (I61-Fujiwara:18). "I personally prefer a rather narrow definition ...I wouldn't include institutes that focus more on advocacy work into the category of think tanks", an SWP unit head says, although "this is disputed" (I10-Brozus:10).

CEO accepts being called a think tank but criticizes advocacy too: "CEO is often referred to as a think tank, which is fine...in practice, it's a container term used to describe a lot of different organizations. Some, surely here in Brussels, don't do much reflection or thinking at all" (I63-Hoedemans:14); to EIPA's Brussels representative, "think tanks become, in my humble view, not always thinking-straight-tanks" (I9-Guggenbühl:12). Such speech illustrates boundary work in action:

*"Because the expression 'think tank' has become so conspicuous - generally positive - all sorts of funny people are calling themselves 'think tanks'...I don't see any chance that [it] becomes a professionally protected profession. The branding of a think tank is a very informal matter...The market is a market of public perception."* (I46-Emerson:13-14)

Therefore, the organizational field's boundaries are not set in stone. Who is seen to be "really in the core business of EU think tank-dom" (I59-Techau:10) remains in play. Particularly over the past one to two decades, the think tank label's symbolic worth at EU level rose; we can note that a linguistic center-periphery sorting process led to a perceived pecking order of mainstay central actors (like CEPS, Bruegel or EPC) and peripheral players less associated with or challenging the label's main meanings (the Euro-sceptic Bruges Group or advocacy-focused Open Europe are two examples). Central actors comfortably continue to proudly call themselves European think tanks. They see more benefits in terms of "social fitness" than risks of reputational damage:

*“I would say it’s absolutely accepted. There’s no risk attached to that. Of course, you will always find the occasional grumpy person who doesn’t like think tanks or thinks the idea is preposterous. But it’s a very established category of organizations.” (I59-Techau:14)*

This is how Carnegie Europe’s director puts it. It is echoed by Bruegel’s interviewee: “I don’t think there is a risk in being called a European think tank” (I19-Dann:24). CEPS’ CEO also finds “it certainly doesn’t come with a negative smack in Europe”; previously “the name ‘think tank’ was hardly known...now it is common” at EU level, even “in France you will use the word...rather than ‘réservoir d'idées’...There is an appreciation of the role of think tanks” (I45-Lannoo:12). “When IFRI was founded in 1979”, its brochure notes, in Paris “think tanks were a foreign concept” (SC 2013).

As the label’s meanings became entrenched, in line with the expectations based on Grodal’s work on emergence as a categorization process (2007, see Chapter 2), we can observe three things in maturing organizational fields: label adoption by both existing and upstart organizations; label refinement or abandonment by some actors; and also label spill-overs into neighboring domains (capitalizing on its attractiveness). For example, PLS’ founder set it up in 2002 as an association, then adopted the label:

*“In my head was not the name of a ‘think tank’ at that moment, because this was still new as a concept...After about two years...we saw it’s really what we do, linked to our work between research and action. We are not stakeholders, we are not a research center, we are between both. So we decided to name ourselves a ‘think tank’.” (I34-Stokkink:14)*

OSE’s brochure describes it a research organization which “operates as a think tank, identifying issues as they emerge” (SC 2015). But its director “wouldn’t immediately or instinctively describe the OSE as a think tank...The line between a research center, a training center and a think tank...is not that clear” (I7-Vanhercke:12). Most recently founded institutes, however, say they used the label very consciously from the outset.

The small, category-reflective think tank PLS is also a case of label refinement: like ECDPM or EWI in Brussels (as well as ISD in London) it has since taken to call itself a “think and do tank”. This label variant is supposed to capture its motto of “comprendre pour agir - understand to act”, combining research with hands-on work. ECDPM’s head of communications is also “keen to speak of a ‘think and do tank’ because we don’t just do research, we try to link it to the policy process, and the ‘do’ part is also facilitation of meetings, we do bring a lot of people together informally” (I28-Julian:10). The development-focused institute’s director credits CGD’s leaders with inventing the refined label and remembers an Eureka moment upon hearing it:



*“I remember thinking ‘Ah!’...We don’t call ourselves a ‘think tank’, we can call ourselves a ‘think and do tank’. We try to distinguish between this tradition of think tanks where mostly thinking is done, bright solutions are formulated that they then expect everybody to adopt, and a ‘think and do tank’ where we do develop some bright solutions, but it’s always on the basis of being engaged in a policy process somewhere...respectful of the fact that it is stakeholders who decide the course of history, and not us.” (I17-Engel:10)*

In this case of meaning-making, the new label variant also captures non-partisanship: “‘Think tanks’ is really a word that comes from the US [...with] partisan think tanks” which is a reason “to say we’re not just a ‘think tank’, politically not from any party” but truly live up to “our slogan which is ‘linking policy and practice’” (I17-Engel:44). In one editor-in-chief’s sobering view, “some try to pretend to be think and do tanks, but it’s more like consultancies” (I70-Vincenti:10). For EWI, this is “an expression used by our CEO and founder...it means we are action-oriented and practical”, its Brussels leader explains, not only “writing papers or doing academic research” (I25-Mäder-Metcalf:10). The label variant’s meaning co-exists, but has not widely spread.

Most large institutes in Brussels prefer to hold on to the basic think tank term. Even if GMF is partly “also a grant-making organization”, its Brussels leader says, “we don’t do grant-making here, it’s almost all think tank activity” (I53-Lesser:10). Likewise, Bertelsmann Foundation is not called the “‘Bertelsmann Think Tank’, but obviously it has think tank elements”, its Brussels office head says (I27-Fischer:15). SWP has no problem depicting itself as “Europe’s largest think tank in the field of international politics” (SC 2014), but finds its scholarly credentials distinguish it: “I would not say it’s bad to call ourselves ‘think tank’ but...explain what the differences are and that we may be special or different compared to others” (I16-Lauenroth:12).

The only case of nascent label abandonment encountered is RAND Europe. It still occasionally calls itself “independent, multidisciplinary think tank” (SC 2018), and the overall organization boasts “it is generally acknowledged that the term...was first applied to the RAND Corporation in the 1960s. At the time, a ‘think tank’ was a research institute that came up with new ideas that could influence public policy”; yet for RAND this ideal-typical image has been dirtied: “‘think tanks’ are commonly thought of as organizations with specific political or ideological agendas” (SC 2018). Against the backdrop of this US experience, “around 2000, we consciously defined ourselves differently”, RAND Europe’s Brussels leader recalls, adding “we actually have a pretty sizeable group of external affairs people who do exactly that, think about the question ‘What is our place in the bigger landscape?’” (I35-Hoorens:18). To him, “it depends on whether you define it normatively or descriptively...alot of

think tanks have an ideological basis”, so that “we tend to stay away from the term” (I35:10). In order to keep its declared objectivity flying high, RAND Europe prefers to call itself a “not-for-profit research institute” (SC 2018), signalling its seriousness. Having said that, of course “RAND is all sorts of things today...it does not only think tank activity of the kind they thought they were doing when the place is younger and that terminology was coined”, GMF’s Brussels chief (himself an ex-RAND staffer) observes, “today they mainly do high-quality contract research. That’s very different from coming up with and producing ideas about the world” (I53-Lesser:13).

Finally, as mentioned the label also spilled over into neighboring fields, which has led to some confusion or caused a stir about unwarranted label misappropriation. Most notably, calling large INGOs “think tanks” has proven to be a divisive issue not only among think tanks but also for scholars participating in their boundary work: As mentioned, James McGann’s annual rankings of “go-to think tanks” (see Chapter 2) covers all kinds of think tank-alike entities, including Amnesty- and Transparency International. But “we are not a think tank, certainly the Brussels office”, the latter’s director stresses (I78-Dolan:11). The European Commission’s official charged with think tank outreach would also rather maintain a separation between such CSOs and EU think tanks: “This ranking also has NGOs. I don’t think Amnesty International is a think tank” (I37-Ioannides:74). As Greenpeace’s EU Unit director puts it “we are certainly not a think tank. We think (laughs), but primarily campaign” (I80-Riss:10).

The European Movement International’s Brussels secretary general reckons that most local or international NGOs refrain from using the label since “it comes with a certain requirement for what I would call scientific accuracy, scientific ethics that we don’t necessarily want to be bound by” (I76-Pinto:12). At the same time, an observation of an interviewee of European Peacebuilding Liaison Office is also vital:

*“What I find interesting is that certain organizations and individuals prefer to describe themselves as ‘think tanks’ rather than ‘NGOs’. I sense that the research and policy work they are doing is considered - or they consider it - more rigorous if they’re a think tank... It’s silly, but in a sense perhaps it’s true...The EEAS and Commission will have meetings with think tanks and meetings with NGOs, separately [...seeing] think tanks as the neutral people just providing analysis, whereas NGOs have an agenda.” (I74-Woollard:12-14)*

“NGOs are sort of in a think tanky world”, European Voice’s editor-in-chief notes, “and the think tanks come into an NGO world. They’re all trading in ideas, output, information...The purist streak in me says what matters is research”; the same could be said about de-coupled or superficial label use of other organizational communities

like party-affiliated political foundations (either national or at EU level), corporate- or political organizations' think tankish innovation-, policy- or forward-thinking units; ultimately, however, these rhetorical dynamics can be interpreted as evidence of the think tank label's ongoing dilemma of demarcation, isomorphism of meanings with ever-more widespread appeal: there is a "blurring of distinctions between academia, think tanks, journalists, policy-making, policy advice, political advice, spin doctors. The boundaries are so blurred that the think tank is a bit in the eyes of the beholder" (I54-King:20). As we will see, sectoral fluidity and organizational hybridity can be both a veritable challenge for think tankers, or also highly beneficial (see Chapter 6). Beyond the field's linguistic structures of current categorization in applying and using the think tank label, we can now turn to why and how they operate at EU level.

### **Operating at EU level: Opportunities and Challenges for EU think tanks**

We saw that the EU think tank phenomenon usually entails transnational expansion. Of course, their number of offices abroad appears meager when compared to global structures of many INGOs. Even Carnegie Europe's spread pales in comparison to Transparency International (now spread to over 100 countries), Oxfam International (90 countries), Amnesty International (70 countries) and Greenpeace (present in over 55 countries). Still, EU think tanks which can afford and strategically opt for cross-border operations - even if just a liaison office in Brussels next to the homebase - can use it to their advantage and play different roles for Europe's multi-level governance.

Just one such role is fulfilling a classical multi-level liaison function: ECIA's research director speaks of "acting as a conduit at various levels, Brussels, but also beyond that" (I4-Teti:26). In practice, this can range from mere hotdesking in a representation office in Brussels all the way to sourcing in and providing a platform for a think tanks' global expertise. For Maastricht's EIPA, the "Brussels office is more a representation office", its head in town notes, "for colleagues who are based in Brussels but gravitate...We are a faculty of a relatively loose canon, in a way, just like visiting professors" (I9-Guggenbühl:24). Carnegie Europe, present in Brussels since 2007, rather exemplifies a network approach of globally in-sourcing expertise:

*"We had the advantage that we had all of those other offices around the world we could use. We would bring experts in, Carnegie folks, and all the content they produced, and could actually punch above our weight from day one. Because we could bring a lot more content to the table than we could produce ourselves here in Brussels."* (I59-Techau:16)

E3G applies functional differentiation but works transnationally with a consciously strong overlap between its four offices. As its interviewed Brussels head explains:

*“There’s really not a formal split...we have a London-Berlin-Brussels [axis], although we work more per team, we could have a power team across offices...the London office is the biggest one, which means a lot of the research is done by them...we do more advocacy and coalition-building [in Brussels], because that’s where the resources are as well, and it’s easier for us to engage with the Commission and member states.” (I36-Dufour:16)*

Such cross-office communication of transnational think tanks is facilitated by often low-cost technological fixes such as internet telephony, video- and group chats. As ESI’s Brussels leader remarks: “We work decentralized, we are on Skype the whole day” (I12:48). EU think tankers liaising between EU capitals and Brussels typically see themselves as back-and-forth conveyor belts: to update national capitals about EU agendas; to bring member state views to the Brussels debate; or to channel momentum for EU proposals upstream by “playing the ball” via big member states.

Brussels institutes often prioritize key member states’ support in pushing for EU policy proposals, a strategy CEPS’ communications leader calls being “as capillary as possible” (I43-Incerti:40) within EU multi-level governance. In our informal conversations and interview, CEPS’ director Daniel Gros stressed that “sometimes it’s extremely important to go to member states. Some things are only decided in Berlin [...or] in Paris. But in many areas in member states” (I52:36). Think tanks’ target audiences are shaped by how EU policy-making works. For a time, Bertelsmann Foundation’s Brussels office pursued a - naturally resource-intensive - strategy of organizing “policy-maker debates all over Europe, in the capitals of the different member states, to create pressure on European institutions” (I27-Fischer:43). ESI’s Brussels representative also refers to and elaborates this take:

*“You think strategically....which member state supports your approach, and go to them to present a proposal...if there is a critical mass of EU members it can become reality...once the Commission presents a proposal...it’s of course better when four member states stand up in the Council working group and say ‘Yeah, we are absolutely in favor of it’. Then you have a real debate instead of 28 people scratching their head saying ‘Uhm, that’s the first time we hear about this, we have to think’.” (I12-Stiglmeier:34)*

Operating directly from or liaising with Brussels is the most manifest expression of operating at the EU level; it brings both benefits and constraints for EU think tanks. Naturally, being in Brussels has the advantage of proximity and potentially better access to the EU. Even so, work within EU multi-layered governance can be fragile:

absent a US style broad-based, well-endowed philanthropic scene, funding can easily turn precarious. Asked about underlying rationales for working in “Brussels’ bubble”, interviewees from different Brussels institutes listed advantages but also challenges.

When deciding where to base their operations or to open an EU liaison office, many EU think tanks report that “Brussels was an obvious choice” (I2-Koops:18) given the presence of EU institutions and several international organizations in town. “We are a European think tank, so having an office here made particular sense” for FRIDE, as its former director explains (I44-Grevi:14). Brussels also boasts roughly 200 political embassies or consulates - topping the 177 present in Washington D.C. - which adds to its appeal as “a great strategic position” of EU think tanks (I4-Teti:40). ICG even shifted its American headquarters to Brussels, “partly to demonstrate that [it] was genuinely international and not just Anglo-American in character” (SC2014).

Egmont – a Belgian counterpart to Chatham House, SWP or IFRI (see Chapter 5) - is clearly “benefitting from the role of Brussels in the global arena” (SC2014) and has ramped up its EU focus. “Being in Brussels, it’s logical to specialize in EU topics”, an Egmont research leader points out, since the location “allows us to punch above our weight, because we are simply so close to the [EU] institutions” (I42-Biscop:20). Being in Brussels, Egmont also gets to be part of Brussels Think Tank Dialogue (see Chapter 8), the annual forum on the state of the EU jointly organized with nine other Brussels think tanks (Bruegel, CEPS, Bertelsmann Foundation, Confrontations Europe, Egmont, EPC, FoE, IFRI, SWP and Madariaga). “It’s no closed group”, a Madariaga fellow says, but to be included “a think tank must be based in Brussels, can be national but must have a Brussels office” (I15-Giuli:54).

Of course, being based in Brussels does not mean that think tankers never spend time in national capitals. Several senior think tankers are “double-hatted” (I2-Koops:16) in the sense of also working as a university professor one day a week, say at Free University Brussels or in relatively close-by Amsterdam (I1-Blockmans:52).

Accessing EU funding cycles and transnational research synergies are another pull factor for being in Brussels, specifically if only research consortia are eligible to apply for EU grants of EU institutions or other IOs. Many institutes depend on EU funding (see Chapter 6), particularly as public and private sector budgets - national or foundation funds - shrunk after the global financial crisis 2008. “This space has been filled largely by Commission-funded work”, GMF’s Brussels head says, “multi-year programs for funding are an engine behind the sector” (I53:27, see Chapter 5).

FP7 (or 7th Framework Program for Research & Technological Development) from 2007 to 2013 had a budget of over €50 billion under the banner of “leadership in the global knowledge economy” (Commission 2007); Horizon 2020 - the subsequent Framework Program for Research and Innovation - from 2014 on is set to spend an unprecedented almost €80 billion by 2020 as a flagship initiative for an “Innovation Union” (Commission 2014). EU think tanks can also compete for grants under multi-annual framework programs and frequently manage to tap into this EU funding. However, there is one important caveat. In the words of GMF’s Ian Lesser: “By their nature, those [programs] are consortia. With some exceptions, most of that work is done by collections of institutions together, they bid for this together. It provides a strong incentive to collaborate” (I53:27), a case of coercive isomorphism to network.

To illustrate, FP7 activities - in EU parlance - need to have a demonstrable “European added value”; one aspect of this is transnationality: research projects had to be carried out by consortia with participants of different EU (or other) countries. Unlike in national markets for federal research funds - say in the US - as Lesser notes “it’s just the nature of the process in the EU that there needs to be a multi-national character to these bids, to get support. It’s viewed as attractive, as a good in its own right, so there is an incentive...to have consortia. That’s the tradition here” (I53:29).

EU think tanks operate in markets for funding, attention and - ultimately - trust. Of course, “more collaboration, joint ventures [...and] project-financing”, as GGI’s director reflects, “also means that by definition what think tanks do will be more geared towards the needs of organizations and policy-makers that fund it” (I2-Koops:56). As “certain topics become more trendy because of policy developments, which may spur a reallocation of research funding at the EU level”, one CEPS unit head adds, “that will obviously determine part of the direction in which research will be conducted by the think tank itself” even if a board approved it (I1-Blockmans:22). We can immediately see that the potential risk of think tanks’ anticipatory obedience unequivocally links to the important general topic of their institutional independence. A remark of GMF’s Brussels director on the suspicion of bias is telling in this regard (this theme comes up again throughout the financial and human resources chapters):

*“There is a [semblance] of ‘We know what’s expected of us, what we are supposed to do, and therefore it’s what we’ll deliver’. Especially in Brussels, there is that proximity...The longer I stay [here], the more I become aware that presence of EU institutions distorts all sorts of markets: job markets, internship markets, think tank markets.” (I53-Lesser:42)*

Most of CEPS' 15 interviewed staff dislike being labelled "EU-funded", and prefer to talk about successful bidding for EU- or related grants. There is much discussion and many interviewees voice concerns that reliance on EU funds taints perceptions of independence. "We're very familiar with critiques...of think tanks as an industry", ECIA's research director says, "with the way in which you get drawn in precisely to those funding cycles" (I4-Teti:30). Several institutes go further and, by organizational policy, do not accept EU funds. "We do not want to get into the Brussels funding cycle", ECIPE's director declares; "people here get too financially dependent on the Commission or...chasing contracts from the European Parliament" (I22-Erixon:20).

However, absent a well-endowed, predictable funding basis, the alternatives to also competing for EU project funds are far from straightforward for EU think tanks. CEPS, for instance, has scaled up its corporate and other institutional sponsorship over the past years. This immediately raises other substantive and reputational issues: How does it influence the work CEPS is doing? And, beyond the question of (real or perceived) independence, is there a danger of mission drift if think tanks depend on a membership basis and progressively prioritize outputs to visibly justify added value to their membership rather than originally intended target audiences (see Chapter 6)?

"It is quite complex to do this job", a CEPS research fellow readily admits, "in an environment in which the political and commercial pressures are so strong that as soon as you see that CEPS can have an influence on policy-making, you see interests trying to push some topics around" (I39-Valiante:13). Thinking one step further, do think tanks ramping up corporate funding risk unintentionally becoming "submarines of private interests" (Boucher/Royo 2006), or even deliberate lobbyists in disguise?

Paradoxically, the effect of corporate funding on think tanks' public perception can go either way, depending on the institutional context. Bertelsmann Foundation, active in Germany, at EU level and also in the US is a telling example in this regard. The assessment of its then-Brussels director Thomas Fischer, is worth quoting in full:

*"To promote our self-understanding as a think tank is exposing us to a rather critical debate in Germany...questioning whether we are legitimated to work as a think tank. The suspicion [is] since we receive our money from the [Bertelsmann] company, we are promoting commercial interests of the company, not the public benefit. This is completely different from the think tank landscape in the US. There, think tanks get their democratic legitimacy via very strong competition between privately funded think tanks."* (I27:13,15)

In light of such starkly different institutional contexts, Bertelsmann Foundation - an advocate of 'social market economy' - is indeed frequently labelled as a vehicle for

neoliberal policies in Germany, whereas its Brussels office has tried to cast itself as provider of social policy expertise, “promoting Europeanization” (SC 2017).

For SWP, another Germany-anchored EU think tank, opening a Brussels office meant less pronounced name recognition: In Germany, one co-founder of the office explains, “we are what we call Platzhirsch - the number one - and everyone knows us ...But here we were one among others, and there were some especially non-Germans who had no idea of SWP” (I16-Lauenroth:34). Expanding to the Brussels market was part of the institute’s attempt to leave its comfort zone, she explains, “to modernize, internationalize also our own institute in Berlin by making our researchers learn how to also play this arena here” (ibid:34). SWP - funded by yearly German Bundestag-approved grants under a Federal Chancellery budget line - does not “cash in” on willing corporate funders (businesses make up a tenth of external funding, SC 2017).

“Because much of what SWP does is not of interest for business corporations”, its unit head for EU external relations believes, “SWP is located and will remain located in this sector between academia and politics” (I10-Brozus:14). SWP’s Brussels office head also expects “no sudden changes” regarding stability and predictability of its public funding; for him, “it is unimaginable that the government would switch down an institution [such as SWP] within a year or two” (I3-Reljic:26).

While the sampled institutes in Brussels and beyond do crystallize around an EU think tank organizational template, they occupy different - also funding - niches. This is particularly true for smaller institutes. “Once you have your niche, then grants follow”, as ESI’s Brussels representative is convinced (I12-Stiglmayer:18). Still, this might be highly contingent on the issue area of concentration. As the president of PLS points out, relatively few think tanks “work on social issues...It’s not as sexy to speak about poverty as to speak about the role of multinationals in the world. It’s not so sexy, and it’s not so profitable” (I34-Stokkink:48). In his view, few “people can offer you money to do a study on disabled people [but...] if you say multinationals do good work for the growth in Europe, then you can find money” (I34-Stokkink:48).

Compared to national- or EU think tanks outside Brussels, a much-cited benefit for Brussels-based EU think tankers is personal face-to-face contacts and the ability to seek regular, also informal networking opportunities with EU officials. As IFRI’s head of the Brussels office puts it: “I have contacts on a fairly high level, just because I’m here...[you have to] I’m not going to say love but at least not hate networking. Because this town is networking-oriented” (I23-Pertusot:28,46). Or, in



the words of one CEPS expert: “the rule of the game in Brussels is networking...you have to go around talk to people, make sure you are informed” (I51-Barslund:66). Making a “habit of liaising - informally also - with think tank colleagues, EU officials or MEPs”, as FRIDE’s head of the Brussels office points out, “gives you a certain edge in understanding lines of the debate, and therefore also in understanding how your research and analysis can be most useful” (I44-Grevi:18) and have impact.

EU think tankers claim to have more immediate, sensory, informal access to important EU level policy-makers than their colleagues based in national capitals. “It takes time to build up expertise and credibility”, Egmont’s interviewee says, “but then you’re just in the loop because you’re here...you just meet people informally, to have a coffee or even better a glass of wine” (I42-Biscop:20). Reminiscent of Berger and Luckman’s social constructivist argument (1967), over time, with recurrence and personal interaction, the “element of socialization” (I41-Missiroli:20) kicks in.

At some point, just being seen as belonging to the EU bubble becomes a meta-identity to bond over (see Chapter 9). GGI’s director finds “the policy-making scene in Brussels is a small family” (I2-Koops:54). Other interviewees feel similarly. For instance, as ECIA’s research director points out, “the Brussels-based community is ultimately relatively small, it’s a small world, people know each other” (I4-Teti:28). As a consequence, suggests ECIPE’s director, “if you challenge policy here, you are going to challenge individuals - and [Brussels] is a small city, which means you are going to challenge people you know or are friendly with” (I22-Erixon:20). Unlike with national capital city-based institutes, a Paris-based interview partner points out:

*“Because they [Brussels-based think tanks] are face-to-face on a daily basis – discussing, negotiating – they belong to the bubble. If you just take the Thalys [train from Paris] once a week, once a month or less, you come to Brussels as a representative of your ideas but you will not share in this time of discussion that is less formal.” (I29-de Marcilly:26)*

Participating in Brussels’ rich events cycle is “part of the game as well”, he adds (I29:14). Next to official meetings with EU officials, public events - sharing a panel, conversations before or after receptions - are another important communications channel for “seeing alot, knowing alot, connecting alot with those in power”, as EU Observer editor-in-chief Lisbeth Kirk phrases it (I75:36). With many “seminars per week...all of which have basically the same format - a panel of three to four people speaking on an important topic - to have a go over subjects”, a CEPS fellow says, “it is useful for updating information” (I46-Emerson:56). As a colleague of his sums up:

*“We work in a geographical location so close to EU institutions that it allows us to invite [their] members to our premises or, conversely, to go to their offices to discuss in private ...or in public meetings, or in corridors, or in the reception circuit. This is a constant...To also talk with them on social occasions, hear their worries, concerns or desires, which may not necessarily translate immediately into research or recommendations...but builds a more general understanding...of how this EU operates.” (I1-Blockmans:34)*

According to the analyzed conducted interviews, Brussels’ think tank event “circus” is utterly alive and kicking. This does not mean that each and every think tank event necessarily stems from extensive in-house research conducted in town. “The Brussels market is crowded in terms of events - but not in terms of research”, Egmont’s head of the EU foreign policy unit emphasizes; while “more and more branches of think tanks open in Brussels”, he continues, often “the headquarter is located elsewhere, few of them have research capacity here [...and] on any given topic, you usually have only a few Brussels-based people. So there is a lot of scope [for expansion]” (I42-Biscop:36). This assessment is shared by his CEPS counterpart in charge of the EU foreign policy unit there: “Here at EU level, organizing events, doing the rounds of receptions is a lot of tanking but not necessarily a lot of thinking” (I1-Blockmans:18).

The importance of being physically present and build relationships with high-ranking but also rank-and-file international bureaucrats from the EU, NATO or other international organizations in Brussels is also stressed by ECDPM’s then-director: “Our networks in the sub-top are very dense. Or what Anglo-Saxons call the meso-level...it’s about being so connected that people confide in you, take you seriously”, he argues, adding that in dealing with EU officials, ideally “you need to look them in the face and they need to look you in the face, to have that trust” (I17-Engel:14, 28).

However, think tankers acknowledge the importance of informality in the face of increasing accountability and transparency pressures towards think tanks at EU level (see Chapter 6). Seemingly secretive mingling or meeting with EU officials can make them prone to criticisms of being lobbying outfits, as Bertelsmann Foundation’s Brussels office leader at the time of research (he switched to a trade union) admits:

*“That’s the difficulty of our job: you have to be as transparent as possible, but at a certain point you’re simply forced, as a think tank - if you want to make a difference - to close doors to have an intimate conversation with policy-makers you want to address. You have to make sure the things you talk about are not leaving the room. It’s part of our credibility from a policy-maker’s perspective. So unfortunately, expectations of the public or policy-makers are not always identical...in European politics.” (I27-Fischer:45)*

Several interviewees mention that the notion of a “Brussels bubble” carries a certain aftertaste of self-centeredness, an alleged redundancy of people and ideas. For FoE’s policy director Shada Islam it is overly cliché: “it’s a Hackney term, it’s overused”, she argues, adding that - like anywhere else - “there are some relatively good people in Brussels and there are some relatively bad people in Brussels” and FoE tries to “go beyond the...bubble” in its convening (I20:36). Madariaga also prizes “speakers who don’t necessarily come from the think tank community”, to foster “dialogue between a think tank world and outside world” (I15-Giuli:38). For CEPS flagship conference, the Ideas Lab assembled since 2014 (see Chapter 5 and 9), staff is asked to “actively reach out beyond the Brussels bubble” in targeting the invitations (I1-Blockmans:46).

“I’m also having the vague suspicion that this is because we are all in Brussels and it’s a bit self-referential”, CEPS’ fellow Lorna Schrefler voices (I38:32), which is echoed in a comment by ECIA’s research director Andrea Teti: “it’s so focused on the EU, and if you’re lucky on NATO” (I4:40). Criticism of a Brussels’ bubble-like think tank- and general policy-making scene also extends to the type of professionals in town and their linguistic disposition, or habitus, of expressing themselves. On the other hand, for the organizational field it means a common enterprise has crystallized.

Tim King, European Voice’s editor-in-chief, expresses - not without self-irony - amazement for “the strange biosphere that is Brussels”, where his EU affairs outlet (now part of Politico) caters to a readership he describes as a “subset of people with an unhealthy interest in the EU already” (I54:44, 56). In Brussels “you are primarily dealing with people who are by training economists or lawyers or political scientists but not natural scientists”, Jorgo Riss, director of Greenpeace’s EU Unit, observes (I80:20). In particular, for OSEPI’s EU policy head Neil Campbell, “there is a hard core of the College of Europe, LSE, Sciences Po[-educated] nugget of expertise” (I69:26), referring to EU think tanks’ human resources isomorphism (see Chapter 7). Oftentimes, these “people are fully into the Brussels scene, have been working in the European Parliament or have done internships in the Commission” (I56-Wendel:24). A stereotypical profile is professionals who “did a bit of Brussels and Strasbourg” (I31-Thomas:30), command EU jargon, “use Brussels speak” or “speak Brussels”, as a senior CEPS veteran humorously puts it (I46-Emerson:28). EU lingo is offputting or unnerving for several interviewees: “I simply cannot perform this ‘Blablabla’ in Brussels”, one NGO leader complains (I30-Kavrakova:40), and - in the words of Euractiv’s editor-in-chief - “when you hear those guys [Commission officials] talk

across the street, you get lost...they don't know how to speak" (I70-Vincenti:40). Somewhat presciently, at least after the "Brexit" vote, a UK-based interviewee finds:

*"There is so much jargon in the EU institutions - more so than in UK politics - and I think there is this real causality between the UK's animosity towards Brussels precisely because it seems this distant thing...which nobody really understands."* (I31-Thomas:30)

In terms of actual working languages predominantly spoken in Brussels, interviewees agree - in the words of a Council of the EU official - "English is the lingua franca. There is a shift taking place: ten years ago, it would have been French all the way. And I think ten years from now, it will be English all the way" (I50-Schoemaker:47),

As the Council Secretariat's head librarian overseeing its Think Tank Review, a monthly gathering of publications on EU affairs from think tanks, elaborates, the report's harvesting of mainly English-language think tank outputs "isn't our bias, it's that think tanks tend to publish in the universal language of the internet...it's what we find, including French-speaking, French-based organizations like Notre Europe or IFRI, even they increasingly publish in both languages" (I50-Marzocchi:45). Next to the abstract "bridging" rethoric, they fulfil a literal role of national debate translation.

Robert Schuman Foundation's Brussels representative also views English and French as main working- and publishing languages (I29-de Marcilly:22), noting that it consciously affords French-to-English translations of website contents and flagship outputs such as a yearly "State of the Union" book to grow its audience. Working mainly in French, GRIP is an example of an EU think tank following a different modus operandi language-wise: At the time GRIP was created in 1979, its research director recalls, "French was still very important, even in the European institutions", yet nowadays "in the French world...we have less competition" (I40-Santopinto:12).

Beyond such language-wise audience fragmentation or non-English niches, the uptrend of English unmistakably continues; a point in case is that even the other-language native speakers "always talk bad English to each other in Brussels", as one German member of CEPS' leadership team laughingly remarks (I32-Born-Sirkel:10). Indeed, virtually all of the author's 80 conducted interviews could be held in English; only a single Brussels-based EU think tank president preferred to converse in French. Coding of the 85 sampled EU think tanks' website languages shows virtually all (99 percent) make a version of their website available in English (except Europanova). 16 have French (19 percent), 12 German (14 percent), 6 Spanish (7 percent), 4

Chinese (7 percent) and 25 other (19 percent) language-websites. Carnegie Europe stresses multi-lingual identity via “websites in Arabic, Chinese, English” (SC 2014).

Overall, a clear pattern emerges from the conducted interviews about how EU think tankers perceive the intensity of competition at EU level. In a nutshell: a broader pluralism of competition for ideas in Brussels than in member state capitals, but - chiefly due to funding constraints - this competition is experienced as severely limited in comparison to the American think tank landscape. Given the “importance of Brussels as a clearing house of foreign policy in Europe”, Carnegie Europe’s leader says, “we found the scene was underpopulated and underdeveloped” (I59-Techau:22). For SWP’s Berlin-based head of EU external relations, in Brussels “the pluralism of ideas and input is much broader than it is in Berlin” although “still not comparable to the US” (I10-Brozus:36). Bruegel’s secretary general judges the US scene similarly:

*“In the think tank scene in Washington D.C., you see a number of highly sophisticated, highly organized, well-funded organizations that cover the political spectrum, all kinds of philosophies, religious backgrounds, and those who like us at Bruegel are non-doctrinal, non-political. What you see is an environment in which there is a competition for ideas, a robust and exiting debate. You don’t see a same environment in Brussels.”* (I19-Dann:60)

He goes on to expand on the EU level’s funding context and shortfalls, notably the absence of a similar history of private philanthropy for think tanks: Europeans “tend to think that the state has a bigger role in doing the things that think tanks do”, he says, so “if you have money to give away, you are going to give it away to kittens, puppies, not 55-year-old economists, because they’re not as cute (laughs)” (I19:60). Institutes like Bruegel - predictably funded, thus arguably best-placed - tend to show themselves unafraid and espouse competition in an Anglo-Saxon spirit: “we would welcome more competition in the think tank world at a European level” (I19:60).

In the experience of those directing small EU think tanks, like GGI’s Joachim Koops, it feels ever harder “to get your voice heard in an increasing ocean of voices” (I2:40). CEPS as one of the biggest generalist EU think tanks is not exempt from the simultaneous trends of intensified “competition for getting getting things on the agenda, competition for resources...even for people”, a CEPS fellow feels (see Chapter 8), “it’s quite competitive in Brussels, but still in a constructive way...it’s probably healthy competition. We could always use more money” (I51-Barslund:58). Beyond EU think tank competition among themselves, the Brussels scene is heavily saturated with lobbyists battling for policy change or -drift. A difficulty for think tankers in Brussels, IFRI’s liaison office head Vivien Pertusot thinks, is also that

“you have 15,000 lobbyists in Brussels...far more influential than any think tanker”, for one thing because they are far better-equipped resource-wise and since in his experience “Brussels is not a political town [...it] is run by regulatory debates, process debates, it’s not the big ideas you debate. Those ideas are debated in national capitals, not really in Brussels. It is changing a bit, but slowly” (I23:28).

EUISS director agrees that “the debate in Brussels is completely different, isolated and insulated from member state debates, in the capitals” (I41-Missiroli:40). Yet, as an NGO leader foresightedly predicts in the interview, the EU level “political process will change in a way that it is not anymore about technical details, it will be about pro-Europe or not pro-Europe” (I65-Adolf:41). It is precisely in this direction of impact that CEPS is reorienting itself as exchange platform for the “big questions” with its Ideas Lab conference, tellingly titled “Does Europe matter?” (2014), “More or less Europe?” (2015) and “Is the EU fit for purpose?” (2016, see Chapter 5 and 9).

An editor-in-chief laments from her journalistic viewpoint: “what we are missing - it’s good that we have generalist think tanks - is real political think tanks”, noting that while there are “brilliant” UK examples - she notes CER - “I haven’t found that they have really made an imprint” on shaping debates at EU level (I70-Vincenti:16). The choice for think tanks, then, is whether to participate in fundamental debates about the EU’s very existence and direction - its economic governance or monetary policies, say - in a generalist fashion or to specialize catering to very specific niches.

In essence - to use Isaiah Berlin’s seminal distinction (1953) - this decision boils down to becoming more of a fox (that is broad-minded thinkers handling a plethora of nuanced topics amidst profound uncertainty) or more of a hedgehog (focused experts sure of knowing a great deal about one area of specialization, often from the standpoint of a strict moral or ideological compass). This is captured in a remark of EUISS’ director who is pointing to this difficult dilemma at the crossroads:

*“What is left is either generalist think tanks that act more like a forum of public debate in Brussels, with a risk of being part of the Brussels village, [as] the Beltway in Washington. ...Or, if you become very specialized, you have a say only on say five or ten percent of EU policy, and you cannot sell yourself as an EU-centered think tank. You only follow energy policy, only trade policy. There are a couple of think tanks of this kind. You hardly come across them in the broader debate; they are heavily specialized.”* (I41-Missiroli:40).

But how have these 85 continent-wide EU-focused public policy institutes emerged in the first place? Which enabling constellations and rationales led to their foundings and field expansion? The next chapter is an analytical attempt to retrace this in depth.

## Chapter 5

# EU Think Tanks: Emergence and Expansion of an Organizational Field

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### Introduction

This chapter adds historical depth to the previous chapter's mapping of transnational EU think tanks' organizational field centered in Brussels but also extending beyond. After sketching the quantitative proliferation of EU-focused public policy institutes over time, EU think tanks' organizational origins and successive field development is historically retraced, based on coded documentary- and extensive interview material (see Chapter 3). We may learn important insights about emergence and structuration of - particularly knowledge-intensive, complex- organizational fields more generally (see Chapter 2), although the main goal here is to contribute an in-depth analytical account of how think tank activity geared towards the EU level emerged and evolved, and to gain a fuller sense or understanding of this phenomenon than previous studies.

While the following chapters on EU think tanks' current financial-, human- and symbolic resources will have a pronounced structural focus, the main interest here is also in the supply-side agency of today's institutes' founders as well as initial funders - in their professional backgrounds, resource constellations or founding motivations, switching back and forth between individual, organizational and field analysis levels. It is not only argued but empirically retraced and demonstrated that EU think tanks have come to make up a networked but distinct and nowadays taken-for-granted field.

Of the three "I's" of think tank research - innovation, independence, impact (see Chapter 1) - the chapter most closely centers around the first puzzle, the novelty and simultaneous striking diversity and increasing isomorphic similarity of the EU-focused institutes' organizational forms and practices (further studied in Chapter 9). However, the centrality of the independence (financing) and impact (mission) themes and their basic dynamics will also become clearer: namely the field's successive center-periphery structuration toward pro-EU focal players like CEPS or Bruegel and Eurosceptic challenger institutes like Open Europe; the field's navigation between an academic-scholarly, political-activist or more hybrid amalgamated institutional logic; organizations' hovering between a public- or elite orientation, content- or convening focus, specialist or generalist outlook, and atomistic or networked theories of change.

Whereas the chapter's beginnings document and qualitatively retrace an important side story - EU think tanks' rise - to the history of European integration, in one sense, its latter part leading up to this day and age allow for a sense of where the field might be heading in the near or middle-term future, as the historical European project finds itself on nowadays increasingly shaky grounds (see problem statement in Chapter 1). Of course, readers more interested in the field's current empirical structures or action might decide to skim or skip this more historically informed chapter; however, as the saying goes, gaining an insight into the past helps us to better understand the present and assess or actively shape future developments, in this case of institutes' trajectory.

It must be noted that the findings have been carved out and the story assembled with the benefit of hindsight, and counterfactual reasoning is encouraged to ponder if and how the policy institutes' evolution at EU level could have played out differently had other factors been in place and other decisions taken at specific critical junctures. Naturally the "end result" of today's taken-for-grantedness and institutionalization of this think tank scene is historically contingent and it has no pre-programmed finality. While most studies of EU think tanks - after more (or less) thought about definition - quickly proceed to take the think tank label and form as the object of study as a given, one of the benefit of this chapter's laborious reconstruction of the institutes' histories is that such retrospective reification of the research phenomenon is, in part, avoided.

Still, of course there is an organizational "success bias" in the sense that only 85 sampled institutes as of 2015 which survive to this day (with a few exceptions) are prominently included in this desk- and field-based researched historical analysis. As a reminder, not only actors calling themselves a "think tank" are included in the analysis but all qualifying as EU-focus public policy institutes according to the used definition (see Chapter 2 for definitional criteria and Chapter 3 for methods or data); neither is the label uncritically seen as self-evident (see discussion of label dynamics in Chapter 4). However, no systematic in-depth study of "failed institutes'" mortality is offered, and no systematic comparison to other organizational fields' history can be made due to space limitations. Instead, the chapter's chronological and conceptual logic of organization revolves around retracing the existing (at the time of research) institutes' founding events, their collective field's evolution phases from emergence to subsequent structuration to semi- as well as full-fledged current institutionalization. Although links back to the theoretical sensitizing concepts are made (see Chapter 2), at times the chapter remains a rather descriptive basis future research might build on.



## Historical proliferation: EU think tanks sprung up from the 1920 to 2010s

When and why were today's EU think tanks historically created? Against the US backdrop - where the crystallization of the think tank landscape has been ongoing for over a century (Gilroy 2012, Rich 2004, Medvetz 2012) - the emergence followed by a structuration of the field of EU think tanks unfolded only over the last half century. EU think tanks find themselves in a range of institutional settings but, as will be retraced through the following sections' chronologically ordered "case studies light", have now come to make up one "set of organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life" subject to similar market, reputational, transparency or accountability pressures (DiMaggio/Powell 1983:149, see Chapter 2).

**Figure 9.** Quantitative proliferation of EU think tanks from 1920 to 2016 (N=85)

Note: The data is based on EU think tanks' self-declared founding years.

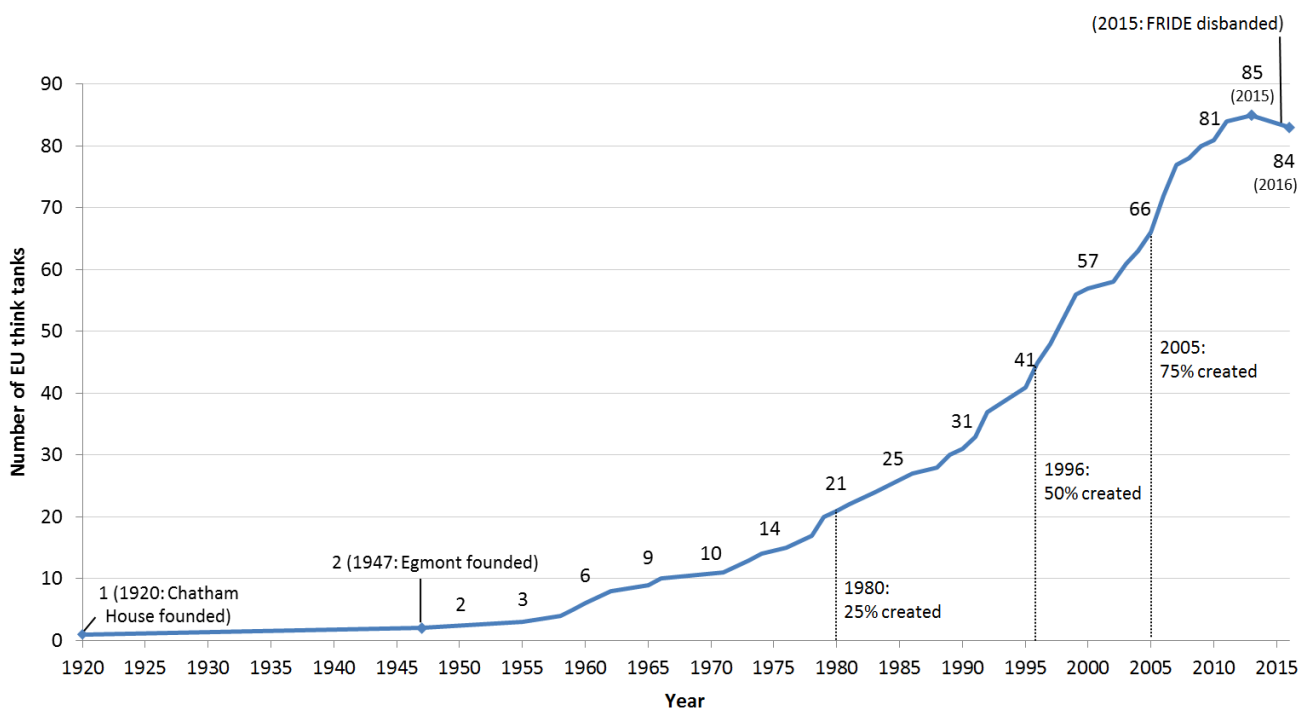
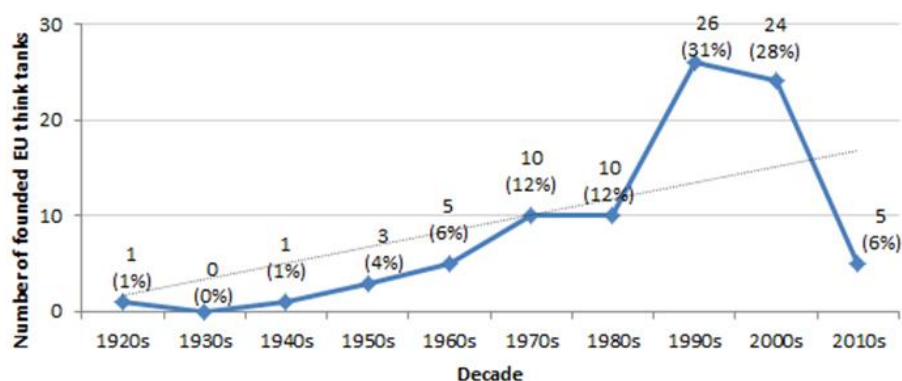


Figure 9 depicts the numerical mushrooming of EU think tanks from 1920 to today. The key finding here is that the number of EU-focused think tanks has conspicuously grown during the 20th century. This indicates a formation of transnational think tank field - in parallel to a general growth of national think tanks in Europe and beyond. Table 10 gives a detailed breakdown of EU think tanks' founding decades and years. Chatham House, founded in 1920 in London, is the oldest sampled think tank in the database, followed by Egmont, even if the nationally anchored "royal" international affairs institutes' EU-focus was of course added only decades later in post-war years.

**Figure 10.** Founding intensity of EU think tanks across decades over the last century



**Table 10.** EU think tank founding decades and years from the 1920s to 2010s (N=85)

Decade	Cumulative number	Cumulative %	Year	EU think tank
1920s	1	1%	1920	Chatham House
1930s	1	1%	-	-
1940s	2	2%	1947	Egmont
1950s	3	4%	1955	DGAP
	4	5%	1958	IISS
	5	6%	1959	IEP
1960s	6	7%	1960	ODI
	7	8%	1961	FIIA
	8	9%	1962	SWP
	9	11%	1965	IAI
	10	12%	1966	SIPRI
	1970s	11	13%	1971
12		14%	1972	GMF
13		15%	1973	WIIW
14		16%	1974	TNI
15		18%	1976	IIEP
17		20%	1978	OIIP, CEPII
20		24%	1979	CIDOB , GRIP, IFRI
1980s	21	25%	1980	EWI
	22	26%	1981	EIPA
	24	28%	1983	CEPR, CEPS
	25	29%	1984	OSE
	27	32%	1986	SEF, ECDPM
	28	33%	1988	ELIAMEP
	30	35%	1989	Bruges Group, EIAS
	1990s	31	36%	1990
33		39%	1991	CASE, IIEA
37		44%	1992	CF, Confrontations, LIIA, RAND Europe
41		48%	1995	Ecologic Institute, ISP, ICG, SIEPS
45		53%	1996	AIES, ISD, Notre Europe, PISM
48		56%	1997	CEO, EPC, OSEPI
52		61%	1998	CER, Europeum, FPC, Madariaga
56		66%	1999	ESI, FRIDE, FoE, Policy Network
2000s	57	67%	2000	Bertelsmann Foundation (Brussels Office)
	58	68%	2002	PLS
	61	72%	2003	Europanova, GPPI, Lisbon Council
	63	74%	2004	E3G, FONDAPOL
	66	78%	2005	Bruegel, EFD, Open Europe
	72	85%	2006	Atomium, CEP, CS, WiseEuropa, ECIPE, IPEMED
	77	91%	2007	Carnegie Europe, ECFR, ERF, S&C, HCSS
	78	92%	2008	ECIA
80	94%	2009	ICCG, CRPE	
2010s	81	95%	2010	GGI
	84	99%	2011	CGD Europe, ELN, HIGJ
	85	100%	2013	CEPI

It took four decades, from Chatham House's founding as an institutional predecessor until the late 1960s, for ten Europe-focused institutes to come into being; by 1980, a quarter (21) of all 85 sample-identified institutes had been created. From the early 1980s to mid-1990s, the organizational population again doubled in size: by 1996, over half (45) the sampled think tanks had been established. The 1990s is the period with the highest founding rate of EU-level think tanks, in the Cold War's aftermath. By the new millennium, in 2000, two thirds (57) of institutes had been founded. EU think tank start-ups continued unabated in the 2000s, but this impressive growth curve seems to be slightly levelling off by the early- to mid-2010s (see Figure 10).

As of 2015, there were 85 EU think tanks meeting the definitional criteria of policy institutes significantly or fully geared to EU policy or related global affairs (see Chapter 4 for the list of their names, abbreviations used and basic properties). Their average organizational age is 26 years; as we have seen, well over half were created during two turbulent decades, the "heyday" 1990s (31 percent) and 2000s (28 percent). FRIDE disbanded end of 2015 for economic reasons (see Chapter 4). So in the author's count-estimate there are at least 84 operative EU think tanks as of 2015.

How do these numbers compare to Notre Europe's pioneering but now well over a decade old count of EU think tanks (Boucher et al. 2004) inspiring this study? Of Boucher's database of 149 EU think tank-alike actors across the EU-25, a quarter (36 or 24 percent) are classified as "Euro-specific" think tanks (dealing primarily with European matters, thus EU think tanks in the definitional sense here) while the vast majority (113 or 76 percent) were only "Euro-oriented" (Europe as one distinct research program alongside other national areas of focus) (Boucher et al. 2004:4, 17). The authors also identify 10 "EU/Brussels-based think tanks" but caution "these figures do not tell everything" (Boucher et al. 2004:16). Still, they importantly show that EU think tanks' phenomenon extends beyond Brussels, that EU think tanks are not only in Brussels (Kelstrup 2016) or "supranational think tanks" (Rastrick 2018).

What stands out in comparison (see Chapter 4): most countries saw a modest rise in the number of organizations that can be described as EU think tanks over the last decade; the Brussels scene is nowadays the most densely populated. Comparing this cross-section with earlier counts confirms an impressive transnational expansion. In the next sections, the chapter will analytically retell a "story behind proliferation", qualitatively retracing the crystallization of a growing field of EU think tank practice, from institutes' birth and baby steps, coming of age to what their future might hold.

## **1920s-1960s: Chatham House starts a full century ago and finds imitators**

Let us turn to tracing the emergence of the EU think tank landscape and its focal and more peripheral players in detail. Chatham House's origins date back a full century. Conceived of at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, its creation as the British Institute of International Affairs in 1920 was led by British delegate Lionel Curtis; in parallel, its US "sister institute" - the Council on Foreign Relations - was formed (SC 2017). In 1923, Chatham House acquired its namesake London prime ministerial lodgings at 10 St. Jame's Square; by 1927, it had devised its now famous Chatham House Rule:

*"When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed."* (SC 2017)

This early innovation (since refined to the formulation above) enabled think tankers, their guests and panelists to invoke a middle ground between speaking officially "on the record" and "off the record". It is still widely used by think tanks, governments or businesses around the world (SC 2017). As we will see, digitization has brought further adjustments as of late (see Chapter 9). Chatham House is not the first-ever think tank; it is the sampled, nowadays EU-focused institute with the earliest roots.

In fact, British think tank-alike predecessors date back to the 19th century. The UK's self-described "oldest political think tank" Fabian Society emerged in 1884. Moreover, Carnegie Europe, while only founded in 2007, is of course a spin-off from the oldest international affairs think tank in the US: its parent organization Carnegie Endowment for International Peace was entrusted by the Andrew Carnegie in 1910 to "hasten the abolition of international war, the foulest blot upon our civilization" (SC 2017) under an "aegis of scientific 'knowledge for practice' rather than partisan politics" (Bertelli/Wenger 2008:229; Gilroy 2012:27). Shortly after, in 1916, Brookings Institution started its US work as Institute for Government Research, and became an archetype a number of later-founded EU think tanks would try to emulate.

Chatham House, in the 1920s, combined serving as a forum of frank debate on foreign affairs with in-house economic research. For instance, John Maynard Keynes led its study group anticipating Britain's decision to abandon the gold standard in the early 1930s. This dual function as both a place of expertise and safe space for "track 2" or "track 1.5" diplomacy" (with direct involvement of official actors) - also giving a stage to world leaders visiting London, including Mahatma Gandhi in 1931 - and the symbolic resources and authority this awarded earned the insitute an early reputation.

In war years up to 1945, most Chatham House staff migrated to Oxford, continuing to counsel the British Foreign Office, opening doors of its facilities to allied officers and refugee academics (SC 2017). Post-Second World War, a number of Chatham House staffers joined IOs like the UN or IMF. That year, as Chatham House turned to studying the simmering onset of the Cold War, it inspired the creation of a scholarly counterpart: Egmont. As its interviewee explains its unsteady early history, the institute's founding is a clear case of early cross-national "copy-cat" isomorphism:

*"Egmont was set up in 1947 on the model of Chatham House...It was for a while well-reputed but then became a bit of a sleeping beauty and was not really a research institute for a long time. There was always a journal, a library and conferences, but no actual research. That part was revamped in the 1990s."* (I42-Biscop:18)

It is only from the 1950s onwards that think tanks' role in championing and boosting the European dream and -project as part of wider civil society becomes more salient. In Germany, after German businessmen and politicians' talks on starting a German think tank with experts of Chatham House in London, DGAP or German Council on Foreign Relations was created in 1955 (SC 2017). Initially Frankfurt-headquartered, DGAP launched its flagship yearbook "Internationale Politik", relocating to Bonn. A joint conference on European cooperation and Western defense at the time by DGAP and Chatham House is an early example of EU think tanks' cross-border cooperation.

The 1950 Schuman declaration floated a concept of a European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), created in 1952, which ultimately led to today's EU; against the backdrop of yet another devastating war, the idea was to pacify historic rivals France and Germany by rendering war "not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible" (EU 2017). Places like College of Europe started as venues to train or socialize the future generations of European leaders (Brugmans 1950, see Bekemans et al. 1999).

The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) sprung up in London a mile from Chatham House in 1958, an alternative forum for heads of state, foreign or defense ministers and diplomats to debate geopolitical strategies and "discuss policy in private as well as in public" (SC 2017). The Institute for European Politics (IEP) came to life in 1959 amidst Union of European Federalists and European Movement International activity in Germany. Its "founding fathers and mothers thought it would be important to dedicate time and effort to the population of Europe" with CSOs, its secretary general explains, so backing IEP was part of a broader "investment at that time to establish organizations at the European level" across Europe (I76-Pinto:14).

In the 1960s, more international affairs think tanks mushroomed. By the decade's beginning, European heads of state had complemented the ECSC with the European Economic Community (EEC) and European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom). The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) formed in 1960 "to inspire and inform policy and practice" to reduce poverty in developing countries (SC 2017). It deviated from the then prevailing think tank model of a general concern with foreign affairs, which was still busily replicated beyond the UK. For example, Finland obtained a Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA) in 1961. In Germany, as ex-chancellor Helmut Schmidt recalls, "the idea of a foreign and security policy think tank still had to gain traction" (SWP 2012:14). Divided between Atlanticism and Gaullism, there continued to be significant think tank label uncertainty in Germany.

Still, in 1962 a German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) started, largely due to "never-tiring argumentative work" of Klaus Ritter, Fritz Erler or Richard von Weizäcker before the latter became federal president (SWP 2012:14). Ritter worked in the German Federal Intelligence Service (BND) and, on a sabbatical leave in the US, was captivated by setups like RAND Corporation. He took a stand that "think tanks are very interesting institutions, [Germany] should have something like this", both "for contacts between officials - politicians and people in the state apparatus - in a non-official setting, plus the idea of having an independent research capacity...for subjects of political relevance", a clear case of an early enthusiast (I10-Brozus:12). Enlisting other backers like von Weizäcker, the German Chancellory and Bundestag were convinced to fund a foundation which morphed into what "is now Europe's largest foreign policy or security think tank" with in-house staff (SC 2017).

For its first four decades, SWP was based in Ebenhausen near Munich, at a deliberate distance from the then-political center Bonn, with a mission "of providing independent research-based policy advice" (SC 2017). In his history of SWP, long-time executive director Albrecht Zunker (2007) details its origins; he argues SWP's early work on East-West relations was driven by an interest, also from the US side, "to have an institution in Germany that could be used for what today we would call 'track 2' diplomatic efforts" (I10-Brozus:12). Thus, we see that next to institutes' transnational spread, isomorphic imitation was also definitely transatlantic in nature. The US think tank tradition served as inspiration or blueprint for European institutes. Demand for data-driven, practical-political research on the Cold War's military arms race led Swedish prime minister Tage Erlander to propose a peace research institute.

In 1966, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) was born as an independent foundation on the basis of Swedish Parliament support (SC 2017). Italy obtained its version of a Europe-g geared foreign policy think tank in 1965 with the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), founded on initiative of Altiero Spinelli, the “unrelenting federalist” (EC 2017). Its statutes aim at a “promotion of European integration and to increase the prospects for all countries to move towards some form of supranational organization” (SC 2014), precisely at a time when tensions about the European project’s path arose and France grew sceptical of its supranational power. Notwithstanding, the 1967 Merger Treaty unified the European Communities (EC).

### **1970s-1980s: Transatlanticism, birth of CEPS and Eurosceptic think tanks**

As Europe became more ambitious or daring, the 1970s saw global affairs as well as environmental think tanks emerge next to national foreign policy institutes. Ten new EU think tanks began this decade - as many as had been created since 1920. The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) set up shop in 1971 and soon moved to London. First in charge of the “policy and action” institute for sustainable development was British economist-environmentalist Barbara Ward (SC 2017). Her co-authored book “Only One Earth” (Ward/Dubos 1972) popularized the term at Stockholm’s UN conference that year, which led to the UN Environment Program (UNEP). IIED thus joined ODI’s niche as a pragmatic, pro-poor think tank.

In 1972, German chancellor Brandt spoke at Harvard University, connecting to George Marshall’s 1946 speech, to announce a German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) as a transatlantic “permanent memorial to Marshall Plan assistance” (SC 2017). Through a gift of 150 million German marks, Brandt notes in his political memoirs, he was after “more than just a friendly word of remembrance” (1978:308).

But it was young academic Guido Goldman, who led Harvard’s West European studies, laying the groundwork “for this innovative act of German public diplomacy” (Siegel 2012:4). He orchestrated negotiations behind the German grant, and became GMF’s first acting president in Washington D.C., where it shared office space with Carnegie Endowment before moving into a former German embassy as headquarters. Its small start-up team consisted of just four full-time and two support staff but - with its early focus on grant-making rather than research - it spent over \$7 million on 100 projects by 1977 (Siegel 2012:9). Only in 1980 did GMF open a permanent base on the other side of the Atlantic - in Bonn. The Brussels office was also a later addition.

In Austria, the Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies (WIIW) opened its doors in 1973 aiming at macroeconomic research on Central and Eastern Europe. The Transnational Institute (TNI) results from a 1974 US Institute for Policy Studies spin-off at the anti-Vietnam war movement's peak; it became a stand-alone center with an "activist academic streak" in Amsterdam only by the 1990s, initially helping US scholar-advocate Susan George in networking Paris' progressive intellectuals - including Jean Peaul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Foucault - and philanthropists (SC 2017). George's book "How the Other Half Dies: Real Reasons for World Hunger" (1976) sets out her critical take on corporate and state power as an early example of TNI's concern to build grassroots social movements (SC 2017). A clear siding with Latin American or African liberation movements is a unique distinguishing feature, given most think tanks' prevailing elite orientation. TNI took part in a campaign to isolate Pinochet's military dictatorship; in 1976, its director Orlando Letelier was assassinated by Chilean secret police. It also sheltered a CIA whistleblower who exposed US government complicity in torture and crime in Latin America (SC 2017).

Chatham House, by then, had set up a Europe program to study "benefits and implications of [EEC] enlargement, including Britain's accession"; its Anglo-Soviet roundtable, held in 1975, is another early case of two-track diplomacy (SC 2017). Initially Bonn-based Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP), backed by European Cultural Foundation, opened in 1976 to push "environmentally sustainable Europe" (SC 2017). Anticipating the EC's growing power in environmental policy, its founders saw a need for "independent thinking and active engagement by civil society...if this process was not to be dominated by governments or formal European institutions"; the idea behind IEEP was "to play a a role in this new world, with the freedom to pick themes and topics" (SC 2017). IEEP leader Konrad von Moltke saw to it that it was not perceived as just a German institute. "To be truly European", he reasoned, "it was necessary to have a presence in several EC countries" (SC 2017); he led IEEP to expand to Paris in 1978, to London in 1980, and initiated a monthly bulletin in French and later English called "The Environment in Europe" to reach policy-makers. In its first years, IEEP's London office was a joint venture with IIED.

On initiative of Austria's chancellor Bruno Kreisky - thus top-down initiative - the Austrian Institute for International Affairs (OIIP) complemented Vienna-based WIIW's economic specialization with a foreign policy focus in 1978. It sought to "offer Austrian and European stakeholders, public authorities, businesses and society



applicable recommendations and policy options” as “a meeting point and a venue for critical thinking” (SC 2017). The Centre d’Etudes Prospectives et d’Informations Internationales (CEPII) was created the same year by France’s then prime minister Raymond Barre in Paris, who felt that in a globalizing world France and Europe needed “new tools and new expertise” on economic affairs or international trade. Its mission “to gather information and develop prospective studies” on global economy (SC 2017) was pursued by developing databases, models, research series or journals.

On the foreign policy front, the Institut Français des Relations Internationales (IFRI) came into being in Paris in 1979. Its founding is a case of what we might call political intrapreneurship: Thierry de Montbrial had been charged with creating an IR thinking unit - Centre d’Analyse et de Prévision - inside France’s foreign ministry three years earlier. Prime minister Barre, the enabler behind CEPII, and his ministers supported de Montbrial’s vision of a “principal institution for independent research and debate” on European or world affairs in France, founded “on a model of Anglo-Saxon think tanks” (SC 2017). In fact, as one of its first steps, IFRI took over issuing the oldest French foreign affairs journal *Politique Etrangère* whose origins date back to a 1936 Carnegie Endowment initiative with French universities. But at the time, by and large “think tanks were still a foreign concept” in France (SC 2017). IFRI’s corporate brochure cites founder de Montbrial’s early conception in his own words, illustrating the emerging field’s still quite contested label dynamics (see Chapter 4):

*“The very principle of think tanks sets them apart from other organizations in similar fields, such as economic intelligence...or lobbying. Although they can be complementary, these fields remain different. Therefore, organizations dedicated to ideological constructs or propaganda should never be considered think tanks.”* (SC 2017)

As a reminder of the vital necessity of openness rather than suppressed or shrinking spaces for civil society, it was only after Spain’s shift to democracy after decades of Franco’s totalitarian rule that Josep Ribera i Pinyol founded the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB) 1979, Spain’s first think tank, using its newly gained freedoms to analyze foreign affairs as “an agent...for growing internationalization of the city, of Catalonia, of Spain” (SC 2017). Located in Barcelona’s Raval district in two nearby historic buildings off La Rambla, Ribera, who continued to shape CIDOB’s fate as its director for multiple decades (namely until 2008), saw it as a vehicle to “energize the democratic fabric with respect to international cooperation” (1999). But it would still take several years, until 1986, that Spain would join the EU.

Back in Brussels, a Group for Research and Information on Peace and Security (GRIP) was founded in 1979 “to enlighten the population and decision-makers on complex issues in order to ease international tensions and promote arms reduction” (SC 2017). In the beginning, GRIP’s interviewed research leader explains, “it was linked to the social opposition to weapons of mass destruction that - in the 1980s - were to be placed in Europe”; mobilizing against basing tactical nuclear warheads in Europe, not prime ministers but “young students started - inside of this movement - creating GRIP”; it was officially incorporated by school teacher Bernard Adam (I40-Santopinto:28). GRIP’s interview partner finds its grassroots origins, initially aimed at bringing “scientific arguments to the pacifist movement”, distinguish it from other Brussels institutes “created by personalities, high ex-civil servants, ex-diplomats, politicians...coming from the power system” (I40-Santopinto:28, 34). While GRIP became “well-known for...reports on the arms race” in the 1980s (SC 2017), “similar projects...without a ‘father’ who is a big diplomat, ex-entrepreneur” failed (I40:34).

A think tank-alike club worthy of note, the Kangaroo Group, also started 1979 - the first year of direct elections to the European Parliament - for “European unity around the pursuit of common projects”, from free movement to security (SC 2017). As its co-founder and secretary general Karl von Wogau, then freshly-elected MEP, explains, the initial grouping was fairly informal but elite-oriented in its composition:

*“We had every month a very small group of five or six people from the [EC] institutions - one or two from the Parliament, one from the Commission, one from the Council and somebody from the business community - and we met in a small restaurant, the Gigotin restaurant in Rue Stevin [a stone’s throw from the Commission’s Berlaymont].” (I58:26)*

At first, a common denominator was to realize a Europe without internal borders, as an alternative to calls for a European constitution that were gaining popularity. In fact, von Wogau recalls, a goal was to counteract federalist thought “as a parallel development to the Spinelli Group [...which] wanted to have a European constitution, and we said you have to develop Europe step by step, and first...the internal market” (I58:24). Altiero Spinelli’s group was known as Crocodile Club because members met at a Strasbourg restaurant, Au Crocodile. The Kangaroo Group still needed “a sexy name”, von Wogau explains, so “we chose the Kangaroo because [it] makes big jumps, although it only has a little punch” (I58:24), something he likens to the EU today. An elite-initiated, rather informal grouping, Kangaroo Group still exists but is no stand-alone EU think tank in the definitional sense applied here, thus not sampled.

The 1980s, like the Cold War decade before it, saw the creation of ten institutes (12 percent) of those sampled as EU think tanks, as Greece, then Spain and Portugal joined the EU. The increasingly transnational field grew but was only partly linked. Still, more European organizational blueprints were now at hand. In 1980, John Mroz founded EastWest Institute (EWI), not confined to theoretically studying how Cold War superpower rivalry could be reduced. The goal was to “bridge the gulf between the US [and] the Soviet Union” with practical back channel diplomacy - both track 2- and tack 1.5 - for dialogue, finding common ground and, it was hoped, building trust to prevent escalation between blocks (SC 2014). Mroz made hundreds of trips to the Soviet Union in the 1980s. EWI hosted a first ever military-to-military dialogue of NATO and Warsaw Pact states. The result of these think tank-enabled negotiations, an agreement, required each side to alert the other of its troop movements (SC 2017).

In parallel to the geopolitical stakes, Anglo-Saxon institutes expanded research capabilities in the still nascent niche of international economics. Chatham House created one of the first modern programs in the field in 1981, the forerunner of its global economy and finance department these days. Carl Kaysen, a founding trustee of GMF, found “economic issues will be the neuralgic problems of [Western] alliance in the 1980s, as defense issues were in the 1970s” (Siegel 2012:12). GMF - then largely a grant-maker - stepped up to the challenge with its largest-ever grant: a five-year, \$4 million investment in an Institute for International Economics. It asked Fred Bergsten, a US Treasury staffer and ex-National Security Council adviser to Henry Kissinger, to launch and lead it. Peter Peterson, CEO of Lehman Brothers and ex-US secretary of commerce, came on board as both instrumental philanthropist and chair.

The project not only survived. It grew into one of today’s premier international economics think tank renamed Peterson Institute for International Economics in 2006 in honor of its founding chairman (Siegel 2012:12, SC 2005). In a review of its first decade, Duke University economics professor and former Ford Foundation official Craufurd Goodwin calls the spin-off a “spectacular success”; he sees GMF’s initiative as “one of the most far-sighted and timely actions taken by an American foundation” after the Second World War (SC 2005), interestingly enabled by the gift of Germany. GMF’s transatlantic leadership development activity, notably the Marshall Memorial Fellowship, a GMF flagship program to this day, was also innovative in fostering soft power when the exclusively military paradigm was still pervasive (SC 2017).

Closer to Brussels, think tanks' role in empowering elites included capacity building, orientation and training for EC bureaucrats: in 1981 the European Institute for Public Administration (EIPA) started in Maastricht as a result of the first European Council held in the city. With member state and Commission support, it set out to help EC officials navigate unfamiliar waters of decision-making as a "place where people who deal with European affairs learn in a multicultural environment" in problem- or practice-oriented teaching modules (SC 2014). Next to comparative research, from the outset EIPA's self-image was that of a service-provider "answering to questions of civil servants" or, as its current director says, of „listening to...clients" (SC 2014).

In Brussels, the emergence of the Centre for European Policy Research (CEPS) marks a watershed in the history of the think tank landscape in the city and continent. Established in 1983 with British historian Peter Ludlow serving as founding director, it is the first generalist EU think tank fully focused on European affairs. Ludlow joined CEPS from European University Institute (EUI) in Florence and, as academic-turned-think-tanker, became one of "Brussels' ultimate insiders" (Kirk 2004). CEPS was inspired by the Brookings Institution: its founding narrative invokes the US think tank as a blueprint or ideal to imitate, yet CEPS leaders and experts interviewed all emphasized the stark differences between the US and EU level environments.

"Brookings is operating in the US. That, you cannot imitate literally", a senior research fellow stresses (I57-Pelkmans:26). Asked about its creation, CEPS' director Daniel Gros, a German economist, sums up the difficulty of replicating a sort of "Brookings in Brussels": "The model was Brookings. But since we do not have [its] financial background...it did not succeed (laughs). The ambition remains, but given the environment in Europe, it will not be achieved" (I52:14). Still, the isomorphic blueprint "was clearly Brookings Institution", CEO Karel Lannoo echoes (I45:13); as a long-time research fellow recalls, for CEPS' first decade Brookings' leaders "were in our board. They came, they flew over...and we were in their board. Relations - at the top at least - were very good" (I57-Pelkmans:26). It is a case of how interlocking directorates of think tanks (see Chapter 8) can be a channel for mimetic isomorphism. CEPS set its eye on private money - corporate or foundations - as one funding source:

*"When we were set up in 1983...the only pan-European organizations were the large American multinationals: IBM, Chrysler at the time - things are changing. And American foundations: Rockefeller Foundation, Ford Foundation..All European foundations funded national, language-linked projects. So obviously, the only source you had was to go to the pan-European interests. And as it were, it was businesses."* (I13-Egenhofer:22)

While “economic policy was one of the original focus areas” (I48-Alcidi:18), CEPS’ ambition to tackle all major European policy areas was unique at that time. Its “birth” represents one of the most momentous arrivals on the EU think tank scene to date.

Also founded in 1983, the Centre for Economic Policy Research (CEPR) in London introduced what was then a novel organizational model: while it did muster staff in a physical office to initiate, fund and coordinate applied economics research, as a self-styled “thinknet” it is the earliest case of a platform think tank in the sample. Richard Portes’ idea was that “at a time when European economics had relatively few ‘centers of excellence’ with international reach but many excellent researchers, widely dispersed, with few opportunities for interaction”, CEPR - as a pluralist, non-partisan thinknet - could augment its in-house expertise with a distributed network of economists across national boundaries “affiliated with but not employed by CEPR” (SC 2017). Initially funded by members stemming primarily from London’s financial sector, CEPR is an early experiment in crowdsourcing think tank content production.

The European Social Observatory (OSE) was established in 1984 in Brussels to specialize in “research, information and training” on social or employment policies at European- and member state-level by drawing on the relevant social stakeholders: public authorities, universities, trade unions and welfare organizations (SC 2017, I7-Vanhercke:22). A European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) set out in Maastricht the same year to “broker effective partnerships” of European institutions with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) developing world countries (SC 2017). As ECDPM was also tasked with training public officials - from so-called third world countries - it was discussed if it could become part of its neighbor EIPA. But with Dutch foreign ministry capital funding, an autonomous deed of formation was signed (SC 2017). Former Dutch US ambassador J.H. Lubbers headed it; Dieter Frisch, a Commission Director-General for Development who went on to co-found Transparency International with World Banker Peter Eigen, became part of its board, raising not only symbolic resources via political proximity but also funding chances.

In Germany, Brandt, who had been West German chancellor and a Nobel peace prize laureate by that time, founded the Development and Peace Foundation (SEF) 1984 in West Germany’s capital Bonn. Brandt was an avid advocate of redefining North-South relations, chairing the North-South Commission whose so-called Brandt report envisioned a “One World” partnership “uniting a long view and world view” (“Weitsicht mit Weltsicht”) to better link global East-West and North-South issues

(SC 2017). He rallied support for institutionalizing a cross-party international forum linking peace and development topics from a prominent circle of founding members: a German state minister president pledged financial support, personalities like Ralf Dahrendorf, politician Kurt Biedenkopf and peace researcher Dieter Senghaas joined the initiative. Brandt led SEF's executive committee until he died in 1991, imagining a "'world domestic policy' that extends not just beyond the parish pump, but also far beyond national borders" (SC 2017). Thus, it pioneered a truly transnational outlook.

After Schengen rules prepared the ground for open borders without passport controls and a Commission 1985 whitepaper on internal market completion, the 1986 Single European Act was signed to resolve national differences on trade; Europe symbolically started using a European flag in those days. The Act was a step in the direction of EC relaunch advocated by groupings like Kangaroo Group (Sherrington 2000); it broadened European Parliament and Commission competences, notably in environmental protection. GMF had helped to put the growing problem of acid rain and air pollution on the European agenda: a report it sponsored pioneered "a new kind of comparative research publication for policy-makers and practitioners" by contrasting lessons from European and North American policies on air pollution; not without parallels to the present period, it concluded that the early 1980s saw the US forego a "historic leadership position in...air pollution control" as most European nations were adopting stricter emission legislation (Siegel 2012:14). This is just one topical example of how EU think tanks, next to other actors, helped shape an agenda.

By 1985, GMF had granted over \$37 million in well over 2500 grants, yet was financially approaching the limit of the initial German gift. Despite fear that christian democrat chancellor Helmut Kohl would not renew it as Brandt, a social democrat, started GMF's "living memorial" to Marshall Plan assistance, Kohl's administration did announce a second gift of \$40 million to Ronald Reagan (Siegel 2012:15). Once again Guido Goldman's efforts were crucial at this juncture: "He was on a first-name basis with most German cabinet ministers" and got Kohl's government on board (Siegel 2012:15); GMF was able to raise its endowment. For Goldman, the second "renewal was absolutely vital...We would have been very small otherwise"; good investment decisions and interest rates also helped (Siegel 2012: 15, Rayasam 2012).

Although Germany, France and the Commission - in its opinion on Greece's bid for membership (1976) - saw "serious problems", it joined the European club in 1981 amidst growing fear for Southern Europe's Cold War democratic stability.

Greece's first and only sampled EU think tank - a Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) - can trace its origins to "informal meetings in the mid-1980s among academics, diplomats and journalists" (SC 2017). In 1988, it was instituted in Athens as a "forum for public debate", policy research and training (SC 2017) - three functions EU think tanks had come accustomed to declaring by then.

Back in Brussels, CEPS' 1988 study on Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) helped shape the so-called Delors Report published in 1989; this can be interpreted as an important moment of think tank influence (Sherrington 2000, Delors 1989, see Chapter 9). The 1989-created European Institute for Asian Studies (EIAS) was first to fully focus on Europe's relations with countries in the world's largest, most densely populated continent. While offering a novel regional focus, it did so with a then established model mixing "academic and hands-on expertise" (SC 2017). This model embraces a multi-stakeholder vantage point claiming to be inclusive of relevant "segments of society" - be it European officials, not-for-profit or corporate representatives, academics, diplomats or engaged citizens - in hopes of kick-starting "people-to-people dialogue" to break sectoral silos viewed as problematic (SC 2017).

Juxtaposing CEPS as big generalist think tank and EIAS as a small specialist institute here makes clear that a trend of increasingly responsive think tank models is adopted or imitated transversally by organizations of very distinct types and sizes. However, not all EU think tanks would fit this mould: the arrival of Bruges Group in London and Europe's think tank scene in 1989 signifies the advent of - in this case conservative Eurosceptic - advocacy think tanks. Economist Lord Ralph Harris had led the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) until 1988 when - inspired by Thatcher's 1988 Bruges speech in which she exclaimed "We have not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain, only to see them re-imposed at a European level" (Thatcher Archive 2017) - he set up Bruges Group to unify Eurosceptic voices against then Commission president Delors' vision of more centralized European project (SC 2017). Like IEA, Bruges group cast itself as "waging war of ideas" (Blundell 2007).

A short backflash is in order: in 1945 Antony Fisher met Friedrich Hayek at LSE to criticize what he saw as a terrible "advance of socialism and collectivism in Britain"; Hayek's advice to him anticipated the advent of UK advocacy think tanks: "Those carrying out intellectual work must have a considerable impact, through newspapers, radio and television, on thinking of the average individual", he found, advising Fisher against a political career; instead, more intellectuals in the sense of a

“gatekeeper of ideas” were needed - not necessarily smart thinkers but able to speak and write in an accessible, timely manner (Blundell 2007:56-57). This is of course reminiscent of John Maynard Keynes’ now rather famous 1936 saying - in his view:

*“The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist.”* (Keynes 1936:383)

After a lucrative detour bringing US-style chicken factory farming to the UK, Fisher set up IEA in 1955, acting on Hayek’s advice, which - it claims - became a “much-copied model of free-market think tanks” in nowadays over 70 countries (SC 2017). The Brussels head of Open Europe - an EU advocacy think tank which, as we will see below, corresponds to precisely this design - points out that “in Britain IEA was very influential in preparing the shift...as Thatcher came to power” (I11-Cleppe:14). Dieter Plehwe, a leading scholar on neoliberal think tanks, goes even further and has called IEA “the arguably most influential think tank in British history” (2011:172).

Europe experienced a world historical turning point 1989, which the fall of the Berlin Wall 9 November that year epitomizes more than any other event. Despite being places to engage in forward-looking, future-gearred research, few think tanks foresaw the German reunification or ensuing conflicts in Southeastern Europe. Only TNI expressly claims that Mary Kaldor, a fellow at the time, “predicted the fall of the wall quite a few years before it happened”; after the event, in 1990, TNI was also among the think tanks hosting historic encounters “between democracy activists in Eastern Europe with Western activists from the peace, feminist, environmental and labor movements” (SC 2017). GMF had already begun assisting Central and Eastern European democracy movements with small grants before the wall came down; when it fell, it opened an office in East Berlin as one of the first US organizations, “in part to facilitate programs in...Eastern Europe”, and relatively rapidly moved all German GMF operations from Bonn to the reunified capital Berlin in 1992 (SC 2017). “East Germans received the office very well”, Heike MacKerron, a GMF program officer at the time who later directed its Berlin branch, witnessed; she recalls the early days:

*“[With] tension between East and West, few West German companies or foundations moved directly into the East...People were curious about the US...had been misinformed for so many years. People simply walked into our office to ask questions, saying how nice it was that we were there. It was quite moving.”* (cited after Siegel 2012:22)



## **1990s: The “heydays” for continental and Anglo-American new entrants**

In the 1990s, testimony to EU think tanks’ first international “seals of approval”, or perceived “license to operate” and - however small - world political contributions, after the Soviet Union’s dissolution, Germany’s government decided to bestow its order of merit on EWI’s founder-leader Mroz for his role in reunification (SC 2017). GRIP, broadening its scope of research to security and disarmament, was designated a UN “Peace Messenger” in 1990 for “precious contributions on peace promotion” (SC 2017). Such honors, which they publicly communicated, grant symbolic capital.

At the Brussels level, Transport & Environment (T&E) was created in 1990 “to research, debate and campaign...for cleaner, safer transport” (SC 2017) at a European level where policies affecting transport-induced health- or environmental damage - say on vehicle emission limits or infrastructure funding - were increasingly decided. Its leitmotif sustainable development envisions transport policies minimizing harm “while maximizing efficiency of resources...without forgetting to guarantee safety and sufficient access for all” (SC 2017). With many NGO members, T&E can also be seen as pioneering a federation-type umbrella think tank structure at the EU level.

In Poland, the Center for Social and Economic Research (CASE) was “founded on the idea that research-based policy-making is vital for economic welfare” in Warsaw in 1991 by economists involved in Poland’s economic transformation (SC 2017). Combining in-house staff with a network of fellows, CASE swiftly became involved in conceiving reforms in the areas of growth, trade or fiscal policy, amongst others, and assisted other post-communist states. CASE historically financed itself mixing Commission, UN or World Bank contracts with OSI-, Ford Foundation- and corporate funding. Next to pan-European networking with think tankers and partners, CASE bet on the importance of having own “full-time employees, as the quality of a think tank must be measured by that quality of its staff” (SC 2017). By 1998, it began to expand across the post-communist realm with a network of daughter institutes, including in Ukraine, Belarus (operating from Poland), Georgia or Russia, further developing the idea of think tanks as transnational human resource pipelines.

In Ireland, the Institute for International and European Affairs (IIEA) opened in Dublin in 1991. One impetus to institutionalize “an independent forum in Ireland and center for research on European affairs” was the country’s preceding EC presidency - a regular focal event for EU think tank incubation - after the Iron Curtain collapsed, “a task absorbing a great deal of time and human resources” (SC 2017). Interestingly,

while IIEA declared the by then conventionalized innovation rethoric to be “catalyst for new thinking, new solutions and policy options”, it also reasoned this could be a “significant competitive advantage” for private- as much as public sector members; thus, an additional goal was to offer - in the institute’s own words - “a unique forum in Ireland for corporate networking” (SC 2017). IIEA focused its energies on events - breakfast briefings, roundtable discussions, luncheons or workshops - which put a premium on paying members’ alleged “unparalleled access to highest-level speakers, decision-makers and thought-leaders at the national, EU and global level” (SC 2017). Thus, in this sense IIEA is not unlike several later Brussels-based platform institutes.

The World Wide Web, hitherto only open to governments or academia, went live to the world in 1991. A decade later it would be EU think tanks’ primary public window to showcase, document and archive their activities. On the political front, the European Council drafted a Treaty on EU, with German chancellor Kohl and French president Mitterand as key architects. This Maastricht Treaty was signed in 1992 in its namesake city by the EC’s twelve member states’ leaders who decided to forge ahead with European integration: not only did it institute the EU’s three pillars - justice and home affairs, police and judicial cooperation and a common foreign and security policy (CFSP) - but also paved the way for a common currency, the euro.

In the wake of both European euphoria and looming problems, a thinknet-style “pro-EU and pro-Atlantic think tank”, Cicero Foundation (CF), launched in 1992 in Maastricht as “a broad, global forum to discuss [such] issues of central importance to European integration” (SC 2017). It is a minor operation to this day. But with its thinknet setup, CF stresses “views expressed in its papers do not necessarily express [its] opinion, but are considered interesting and thought-provoking enough to be published”, prizing expert independence over organizational stances on policies. From 1994 on, CF’s added Paris bureau granted nearly two hundred scholarships for PhD candidates from post-communist- or EU candidate countries to join its seminars (SC 2017), fulfilling - at smaller scale - an elite supporting role like GMF or others.

With EU competences expanding, EU think tanks’ appreciation of Brussels as the beating heart of European affairs grew. For some an office there now made sense: Maastricht-based EIPA opened a Brussels liaison office in 1992 (I9-Guggenbühl:23). Other EU think tanks could or did not yet want to afford this, or sought to otherwise improve upon their locations: for example, first Altiero Spinelli-directed IAI moved to “an elegant eighteenth century Baroque building in the heart of Rome” (SC 2017).

In France's capital, Philippe Herzog, an MEP and later adviser to the Commissioner for internal market and financial services Michel Barnier, co-founded and chaired the board of "European think tank, network [and] general interest lobby" Confrontations Europe (Confrontations) in 1992 to convene stakeholders or put forth "joint proposals to foster economic and social development in Europe" (SC 2017).

According to the Maastricht Treaty, each member states and the European Parliament had to agree to enlargement, for which the 1993 Copenhagen summit spelled out criteria. Latvia, only joining the EU after a 2003 referendum, was able to gear up its international expertise already in 1992 by forming Latvian Institute of International Affairs (LIIA) in Riga, thanks to Swedish grants and skills transfer from its think tank counterpart, Swedish Institute of International Affairs (SC 2017).

The US-origin RAND Corporation entered the EU scene in 1992 in a case of "glocalizing" its US-proven business model. A small but stand-alone office was first based at Delft University of Technology, initially hosting ten researchers. It went by the name of European-American Center for Policy Analysis, and moved fast to hire local staff - for efficiency reasons (understanding of the EU's political scene) and, it turns out, as much for symbolic capital (to be perceived as European center). Like its US mother ship, the EU branch is tasked "to improve policy- and decision-making through research and analysis" with its trademark mix of empirical, inter-disciplinary research or applied analysis; a name change, several office moves and projects later, RAND Europe - deliberately fusing "RAND's tested methods and quality standards with distinctively European approaches and insights" - would come to dwarf other EU think tanks in terms of sheer size (SC 2015). Let us briefly consider its US roots:

Project RAND - the name a contraction of the term research and development - was initiated right after the Second World War in 1945 by the US airforce, operating out of the Douglas Aircraft plant at Santa Monica's municipal airport in California. Its first report (Project RAND 1946) anticipated use of manmade satellites. The Ford Foundation was instrumental in financing the baby steps of the new venture. As can be seen from its second annual report, breaking out of disciplinary silos and transcending pure military research was indeed organizational priority from the start, thus RAND Europe's arrival also stands for approaches of recombinatory innovation:

*"The complexity of problems, and the rapid, if uneven advances in the various fields call for coordination, balance, and cross-fertilization of effort. Coming from the laboratories of industry, the seminars of universities, and the offices of administration, RAND staff is very conscious of this need for teamwork."* (Project RAND 1947, cited after Ware 2008:8)

As RAND Europe's interviewee portrays US defense-related antecedents, the early model "was literally to put a bunch of smart people - mathematicians, economists - out on the beach...to think up whacky things"; to him, then the term "think tank" applied very well in the physical sense of "a 'tank', a group of people in a room, in a building, to 'think', to research" (I35-Hoorens:16). By 1948, RAND - employing 200 staff with expertise in a wide range of academic disciplines - incorporated a separate \$1 million budget not-for-profit institute "to connect military planning with research and development" (SC 2015). In a PhD thesis on RAND Corporation in the Cold War, Jardini (1996) shows its role soon "went far beyond assistance to military decision-makers". With preparatory or breakthrough inputs used in America's space program, advances in systems analysis, game- or network theory and digital computing, RAND claims to have shaped Cold War thinking and our information age (SC 2015).

Jim Thomson, a nuclear physicist turned US bureaucrat turned think tanker, was RAND's president and led its internationalization 1989 to 2011; he recalls "talks about a European base before the Berlin Wall fell" (SC 2015). Discussions with the German, UK and French governments led nowhere, so an opening in the Netherlands truly helped RAND Europe - then still the Delft University of Technology-based - to establish a foothold (SC 2015). In RAND's public history, Thomson recounts that:

*"One Dutch project was about building a railway line to take trucks off the road. Our researchers asked 'Well, why do you want to do that?', and found the real concern was reducing road pollution. We then showed there are many ways to do that besides building a big rail line...It was a great early example of the classic RAND method."* (SC 2015)

In a way, RAND Europe's evolution in the 1990s repeated the American experience of growing and diversifying quickly. Richard Fallon who led RAND Europe from 1996 until 2000 "was hired to change the business model", he explains, towards "a self-sustaining research operation focused on client projects...We grew in three ways: diversifying in Holland, finding clients in other countries, and serving the European Commission...once [it] had accepted we were a European organization" (SC 2015). This finding goes to show that symbolic resources can translate into financial capital.

To further emphasize "Europeanness", RAND Europe built a local talent base by buying specialist consultancies in Amsterdam, Berlin, and later on Cambridge; until the end of the 1990s, as its history brochure points out, RAND Europe "steadily expanded to cover a kaleidoscope of topics" in issue areas affecting the lives of many Europeans, such as defense, innovation, criminal justice and health policy (SC 2015).

By the mid-1990s, the EU welcomed Austria, Finland and Sweden as members. The Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies (SIEPS) set up as an independent governmental institute in central Stockholm. Created with the liaison function (see Chapter 4) in mind - to “connect academic analysis and policy-making at Swedish and European levels” - the new member state’s EU think tank simultaneously applied “results of European research in the Swedish debate, as well as distributing Swedish research abroad” (SC 2107). In Poland, then no EU member but integral part of the Visegrad group, the Institute of Public Affairs - called Instytut Spraw Publicznych (ISP) - began “to support modernization reforms [as] a forum for debate” (SC 2017).

In reunified Germany, in 1995 IEEP closed its then twenty year-old office in Bonn to continue its work from London, but inspired two German environment- and sustainability-focused “successors” that year: the Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy, and the Ecologic Institute. Started by Andreas Kraemer near ex-frontier post Checkpoint Charlie in Berlin’s House of Democracy, then a “melting pot for civil society organizations from East and West”, its founding capital came from grants by German and French environment ministries or the Commission (SC 2017). Its professionals, mostly Germans, had wilfully varied backgrounds - for practice-oriented project teams in fields of “transdisciplinary, politically relevant research...for decision-makers confronted with complex challenges” (SC 2017) - and this emphasis on diversity, complexity reduction and transnational, transdisciplinary orientation knowledge had become a recurring theme of self-justification as the field entered a structuration phase. IEEP’s official take on “research excellence” was this:

*“When is research considered excellent? In Germany...when a publication is top-ranked in an official peer reviewed process... social relevance plays, at most, a minor role...Our work aims to generate results that are socially and politically relevant, to find solutions to challenges...problem-solving power is precisely what makes it excellent.”* (SC 2016)

Also in 1995, Chicago non-profit leader Craig Kennedy became GMF’s president, a position he used to convert it from grant-maker into global think tank (SC 2013). GMF’s ex-Berlin office head MacKerron praises Kennedy’s leadership’s openness: “He came to Germany and listened”, she recalls, “he would simply ask people ‘What should we be doing?’” (SC 2015), akin to Steve Jobs’ later motto that one ought not to hire smart people to tell them what to do but to have them tell you what to do. “One thing I heard”, Kennedy remembers, “was you have to be in Brussels, the EU will be the core of the transatlantic relationship” in the near future (Siegel 2012: 21).

Now firmly headquartered in Brussels, International Crisis Group (ICG) is another sampled case which grew large but started out very small in hindsight: it launched in 1995 with just a handful of people in London (SC 2015). Its emergence was sparked, or so its founding legend goes, when Mort Abramowitz, then Carnegie Endowment president, and Mark Malloch Brown, a World Banker who later became UN deputy secretary general, were seated next to each other on a 1993 flight out of Sarajevo (SC 2010) - it would turn out to be a consequential happenstance elite-to-elite encounter.

Besieged during the Bosnian war which would end in Serb army-organized genocide, the city's fate begged the question of what the international community should do. Stirred by the unfolding horrors, the two men hatched the idea of "an independent organization that could serve as the world's eyes and ears on the ground in countries in conflict while pressing for immediate action" wheresoever it mattered (SC 2017). Using his first-rate contacts, Abramowitz won over George Soros to jump-start ICG with Open Society Institute seed money and to act as first chairman. Finland's president-elect and later Nobel peace prize laureate Martti Ahtisaari and Australia's foreign minister Gareth Evans pledged multi-year funding too (SC 2010). Medecins Sans Frontières co-founder and French foreign minister Bernard Kouchner signed up as a board member, among others. With this mobilization of core enablers, US-American engineer and seasoned aid worker Fred Cuny envisaged a "think and do tank" for "assessment, advice and advocacy" but he was killed in Chechnya - another victim after ICG's official launch in 1995 and could not direct its operations.

Retiring US Senate majority leader George Mitchell became ICG chairman, and Nicholas Hinton, who ran Save the Children UK for ten years (increasing its operating budget seven-fold), came onboard as first ICG president (SC 2010). But while the board approved a significant start-up budget of \$2,5 million, "it is easy to forget just how experimental the whole enterprise felt in the early years", one of its first staffers admits, "none of us knew whether a small, independent organization... could produce the sort of material that could help reshape foreign policy" (SC 2010):

*"It's fair to say there was a certain gap between ambition and day-to-day reality at the beginning: the founding prospectus made great claims about how ICG would mobilize the world in response to man-made crises...The reality was three people - later five - in a slightly quaint two-room office near Victoria Station in London."* (SC 2010)

But a year later already in 1996, ICG was able to dispatch a first field team to Bosnia - thanks to a \$1 million George Soros grant to monitor the Dayton Peace Accords -

and won attention with a report on the indeed dangerously flawed elections there (ICG 1996). In 1997, ICG president Hinton died after a heart attack while visiting the Balkans team. This “tragedy plunged ICG into an organizational crisis” (SC 2010). To avert a leadership vacuum, Abramowitz stepped in as interim president until the board appointed then Medecins Sans Frontières secretary general Alain Destexhe as next president. Choosing a European national as president was no coincidence but meant to counter a spreading feeling and reputational risk that ICG was US-biased: “At one point ICG became very influenced by US policy”, in one interviewee’s view, “even people at ICG were complaining ‘I write a report, I get something completely different back after all the editing, which I can’t support anymore as my research’”, adding that she thinks “they then overcame this phase” (I12-Stiglmeier:22). In fact, in another move to restore ICG’s perception the board closed the London office and made Brussels its new headquarters, “to demonstrate ICG is genuinely international, not just Anglo-American” (SC 2010). Through the late 1990s, it employed roughly 20 staff with the annual budgets hovering around \$2 million in this period (SC 2010).

Destexhe resigned his ICG post for a political career - a loss of momentum that “could easily have marked beginnings of the end” (SC 2017) - ICG’s “existence [had been] touch-and-go at several points” (SC 2010). But board and staff engagement, and a \$1 million one-off Commission project in 1999 enabled it to stay afloat. ICG is therefore a sampled case how an EU-focused think tank label is strategically adopted. Its experts or field analysts regularly “serve in countries without benefits that foreign diplomats get; they just get on with it in a style of ‘Have laptop, will travel’; many are underpaid”, ICG acknowledges in retrospect, but “they continue to sign up year after year, because they think the work is important” and like the mission (SC 2010).

In 1996 the Paris-based EU think tank Notre Europe (French for “our Europe”) now known as Jacques Delors Institute was founded by its namesake first president. Thanks to European Commission seed funding, Notre Europe started - with initially under €400,000 in yearly operating revenues - as generalist or legacy-based institute “inspired by the action and ideas” of its high-profile founding leader (SC 2017). Its work was both in French and English, gravitating around many EU issues (SC 2017).

In 1996, one year after the country’s EU accession, the Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy (AIES) in Vienna was launched to address European affairs as well as security policies “as a research institute and think tank” (SC 2017), a wording which goes to show the persisting label uncertainty or difficulty to decide.

Aside Vienna's OIIP, which had also cultivated a foreign policy specialization, AIES landed funding from the Austrian defense-, foreign- and science ministries, among other sources, and cooperated with European networks and think tanks like Egmont. As a "sort of semi-governmental institute...funded by the [Belgian] foreign ministry", Egmont revamped its long-dormant research capacity to help the ministry prepare for the 1996 Inter-Governmental Conference that led to the Amsterdam Treaty in 1999; "and then that was kept on", Egmont's research leader reports, at this point "they created what is now known as the European affairs program, dealing with intra-EU topics" (I42-Biscop:12, 18). While the Euro-Atlantic construct had been the compass of Belgian foreign policy in the Cold War, the growing EU became its central pillar (SC 2017); consequently, "our audience is not so much the Belgian Brussels but the European and international Brussels...EU and NATO...the whole diplomatic corps circling around it, the other think tanks and academia" (I42-Biscop:16). Marc Otte, Egmont's director general, adds that a "strategic location in the capital of Europe has been an essential attraction for actual and potential partners" (SC 2017).

But EU think tanks branched out into other European capitals as well. Further - or future - EU think tanks were also being created beyond the EU's outer perimeter: In Poland, the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM) came into being by act of parliament in 1996, joining ranks of CASE and ISP in Warsaw. In a sense PISM is a spin-off from the Polish ministry of foreign affair's unit for international studies. As self-standing "analytic institution", it was meant to offer foreign policy expertise to Polish public servants, also in the lead-up to the country's Warsaw-Pact-to-NATO transition (SC 2017). Poland would become a proper EU member only a decade later.

The London-based Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) can trace its roots as a self-styled "think and do tank" formed by IR experts to 1996, when it began to "build a soft power strategy" to counter violent extremism as a "primary security threat" (SC 2017). Mixing analysis of Islamist terrorist- or Western neo-Nazi ideologies with government advisory work on radicalization prevention, ISD's organizational pathos was that "despite trillions of dollars spent on military hard power by our governments, extremists are winning...Soft power is all about the battle of ideas" (SC 2017). Thus, the thinking went, grassroots groups opposing militant networks like the 1988-founded Islamist Al-Quaeda needed to be actively empowered (SC 2017).

By 1996, over half of the EU think tanks had been created (53 percent). The next twenty years would see further launches continue unabated in an expanded field.



The European Policy Centre (EPC) emerged to occupy a niche of platform think tanks in Brussels in 1997. It was founded by British lawyer Stanley Crossick who worked at Belmont law firm, with Dutch diplomat, ex-EUI leader Max Kohnstamm and The Guardian journalist John Palmer. Crossick, a “father of lobbying in Brussels at the EU level”, took the view that “to contribute to macro changes, it was important that this idea of American think tanks proliferated in the Brussels scene. So he decoupled some of his activities to fund...Belmont European Policy Centre”, EPC’s precursor (I33-Allio:19). EPC’s first office was above what is still Kitty O’Shea’s pub opposite the Commission’s Berlaymont building, soon becoming its “canteen” (SC 2017). Welshman Hywel Ceri Jones, Commission official behind the Erasmus program who had been promoted Director General for employment and social policy, would chair its executive board (SC 2017). The center’s interviewed director recalls:

*“EPC, when it started, came out of a different organization. It was not a think tank, it was...a lobby-advocacy-public-relations group [Belmont European Policy Centre]. There was a conscious choice made to turn EPC into a think tank. At this point... foundations got involved...The idea, and this was also something coming from the foundation side, was it had to be multi-stakeholder. While we would happily take money from corporates, it couldn’t be that we become a corporate interest representation” (I5-Zuleeg:25)*

EPC “has come a long way since its early beginnings above the Kitty O’Shea’s pub in the heart of the European quarter”, its current president, the former Belgian prime minister and Council of the EU leader Herman van Rompuy agrees: at the time the EU “was a lot smaller, the single currency had yet to become a reality and the global ascendancy of liberal democracy seemed to be imminent and permanent” (SC 2017).

But while academics assessed prospects of “centuries of boredom at the end of history” (Fukuyama 1989), EPC sought to practically push European integration by helping “movers and shakers of Brussels make sound decisions” along the lines of Jean Monnet’s axiom “thought cannot be divorced from action” (SC 2017). Close to unfolding events, it issued the publication “Making Sense of the Amsterdam Treaty” (EPC 1997) “just seven days after the final treaty text began circulating” (SC 2107). At the dawn of our digital age, with the internet becoming a part of mass culture and many businesses and not-for-profit organizations slowly but surely going online, the EPC launched its own website in 1997 as the “first think tank in Brussels to do so” (SC 2017); CEPII in Paris already set up a website in 1996 (SC 2008). With EPC’s mission of “acting as a catalyst for new thinking and solutions”, its regular breakfast briefings with high-ranking EU officials were soon rather well-attended (SC 2017).

Next to EPC's written outputs, policy dialogues "where key figures in government, industry, civil society and EU institutions take the floor" became the platform think tank's trademark role (SC 2017). While its publications seek to "make difficult and sometimes esoteric aspects of EU policy...accessible to wide audiences of generalists and specialists", EPC boasts in its marketing materials, it is aware that its "convening power is an important part of what makes EPC a valuable resource" (SC 2017).

By the mid-1990s, activist EU think tank TNI had build closer ties to "the anti-globalization and anti-militarist wings of new social movements" in other continents; as early as 1997 it feared the US was "eager to launch a new war on Iraq" (SC 2017). It also grappled with what it saw as undue corporate influence at the European level - either through direct lobbying or pseudo-expertise by industry-backed front groups. One example of the latter is the so-called Advancement of Sound Science Coalition, which decisively disputed academic studies linking second-hand smoke with cancer. Created by public relations firm APCO Worldwide in 1993, it expanded to the UK (helped by the IEA) and Europe as European Science & Environment Forum when it turned out the seeming grassroots coalition was a lobbyist-led front paid by tobacco giant Philip Morris to denigrate such peer-reviewed work as "junk science" (see Monbiot 2006 on the "denial industry" using think tank-alike outlets as vehicles).

TNI helped start the nascent activist think tank Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO) in Amsterdam in 1997 "to expose and challenge the privileged access and influence enjoyed by corporations and their lobby groups in EU policy-making" (SC 2015). "Quite early on in our work we identified that think tanks were being used as instruments in lobbying campaigns", CEO co-founder and leader Olivier Hoedeman explains (I63:18). Like the documentary "The Brussels Business: Who runs the EU?" (2012) in which he prominently features, Hoedeman cites the European Roundtable of Industrialists - an advocacy forum of Europe's major captains of industry - and its influence on European Commission infrastructure projects or transport policies then:

*"The European Roundtable of Industrialists was lobbying for Trans-European Networks... They established something called the European Center for Infrastructure Studies...it was described as a think tank but was clearly just an organizational structure serving a clear role in their project to have all these motorways and large infrastructure projects rolled out across Europe...Also in debates around WTO you had think tanks being established by industry, to promote their side of the story. And later on...in the climate debate."* (I63:18)

As expected, as the growing field enters its structuration phase, the labelling issue of who is (not) counted within its boundaries is increasingly contested (see Chapter 4).

In the style of Henry Kissinger's asking "Who do I call if I want to call Europe?", the European Roundtable for Industrialists' Swedish founder Pehr Gyllenhammar, long-time CEO of Volvo and as it so happens board member of Kissinger Associates then, asked "Who to call to speak to the European industry?". Its interviewed secretary general Brian Ager confirms that the forum's initial company leaders pushed "for transport infrastructures (high-speed trains, motorways), a single currency" (I72:16). "Think of the nature of it", he says when asked about added value to firms' sectoral lobbying, "you've got fifty plus leaders of more or less the biggest multinational European companies. If they come together to say 'We have an issue here' or 'Why don't we try this formula', it has a lot of weight...if you do it sector by sector, it doesn't have the same weight" (I72:34). I do not classify the forum as EU think tank.

Its critic CEO, a think tank rejecting public-, political party- or corporate funds, financed its research with grants by left-leaning trusts or grant-making foundations, say the small Marisla Foundation or Soros' large Open Society Foundations next to donations (SC 2017). Its team's investigative journalism-alike ethos resulted in the book "Europe Inc." (Hoedeman et al. 2000), arguing that risk of a "corporate capture of EU decision-making" is real; as an activist institute, it grew convinced this needed to be exposed and "rolled back...to truly address global problems like poverty, climate change, social injustice, hunger and environmental destruction (SC 2017).

The Open Society European Policy Institute (OSEPI) launched in Brussels in 1997 as a European-level liaison branch of Soros' Open Society Initiative for Europe with the goal "to contribute to more vibrant and legitimate democracies in the EU by supporting activists and civil society organizations confronting European challenges" (SC 2017). Unlike the institute it has developed into, OSEPI "was initially set up...as a service office", says its interviewed policy director, and until well into the 2010s "it was more about being an old-fashioned telephone operator. So you had a call coming in, you plug them into the right socket, that person into that socket, it would just be about making the connection" between network and other actors (I69-Campbell:22).

But this representative or literal linking function - not unlike callcenter work - came with own flaws: it was "not very effective because the person you are plugging in might speak a different language than the person you are plugging into", OSEPI's interviewee says, meaning not "different English [but] different understandings of technical details of what you are talking about. You need to have the person doing the plugging actually filtering and understanding both sides" (I69-Campbell:22).

This is why a decade later, under new leadership of Heather Grabbe, a former Chatham House expert and Commission adviser, OSEPI would transform into a proper EU think tank, Grabbe's Anglo-Saxon think tank career had also included a stint as deputy director of the London-based Centre for European Reform (CER). It started near the UK parliament's seat Westminster Palace in 1998 by Nick Butler, employee and soon after BP policy vice president (then the world's third largest oil company), and David Miliband, head of the policy unit of incoming prime minister Tony Blair. Both founders had previously been research fellows with London-based think tanks: Butler at Chatham House and Miliband at the Institute for Public Policy Research.

Funded by corporate donations, CER's "pro-European but not uncritical" mission was "a mutually beneficial relationship between the EU and UK" (SC 2017). As a "new labor think tank", reports and mostly invitation-only, off-the-record events debated "European integration as largely beneficial" for the UK - by no means a self-evident stance in the island country even before the turn of the millennium - while taking the view "that in many respects the Union does not work well" and promoting a vision of a globally engaged, "open, outward-looking and effective EU" (SC 2017).

Tony Blair-inspired "ideas for a fairer world" and pro-EU ethos were also the heart of Foreign Policy Centre (FPC), a "progressive foreign affairs think tank" created the same year in London by British labor party MP and then foreign secretary Robin Cook to develop "innovative policy ideas which promote practical solutions to global challenges" (SC 2017). FPC saw "a reformed EU as a critically important multilateral tool to help address key cross-border and global challenges"; its declared aim was to counter the EU- and foreign policy debates' alleged elitist streak - to "talk in a language people understand" - which led The Guardian to endorse it for making "foreign policy feel less like the preserve of an elite and more the topic of national conversation" (SC 2017). As with other think tanks' claims of being a public forum - but unlike CER's more closed-doors, Chatham House rules approach to EU affairs - FPC sought to engage all people "interested in foreign policy, whether from political life, media, private sector, voluntary organizations, students or the public" (SC 2017).

In the Czech Republic, then still no EU member state, the Europeum Institute for European Policy (Europeum) set up shop in Prague in 1998 to help prepare the ground for the country's reorientation and eventual 2004 EU accession (SC 2017). Launched as a civic association by Charles University Prague lecturers in European studies, the aim was to provide a platform for a growing team of Czech in-house and

associate experts researching European integration; initially supported by its alma mater's social science faculty and Czech ministry of foreign affairs, Commission funds later enabled it to evolve into a think tank with program, project, publishing and training activities. Next to PISM's enlargement focus, Europeum joined a niche geared to European integration of third countries and joined international networks.

Madariaga - College of Europe Foundation was incubated in 1998 by alumni of the European elite institution with campuses in the medieval Belgian town Bruges and Polish city Natolin (near Warsaw). Its namesake is the Spanish writer, historian and diplomat Salvador de Madariaga who co-founded the university (SC 2014). "I understand the name...might sound confusing", Madariaga's Marco Giuli who switched to EPC shortly after our interview says, "however...we inherited this name" (I15:14). Madariaga became a stand-alone rather than university-affiliated EU think tank at the time of research, declaredly engaged in "promoting original thinking on the role of the EU in an era of global change, engaging citizens in debate" (SC 2017).

The Fundación para Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE) began in 1999 in Madrid as a self-described "European think tank for global action" under patronage of Diego Hidalgo as founding president and main donor (SC 2015). Hidalgo, a Harvard University-educated former World Banker, had just completed a fellowship at his alma mater's Center for European Studies as well as books on "The Future of Spain" (1996) and on "Europe, Globalization and Monetary Union" (1998). Hidalgo, who was also Club of Rome board member, involved in the Spanish media group owning El País and Foreign Policy's Spanish edition, envisioned FRIDE to innovate regarding Europe's role in the international arena: its cosmopolitan feel and vision was an EU that "plays a more effective role in supporting multilateralism, democratic values, security and sustainable development" (SC 2017). Next to philanthropic gifts, FRIDE's fundraising aimed at private foundation or public sector money. It built up its regional- and European foreign policy expertise and, in its early years, FRIDE also assisted the 2001 launch of the Club of Madrid, now "the world's largest forum of former democratic presidents and prime ministers" (SC 2017), inkeeping with other think tanks' backchannel diplomacy role and elite networking.

In London, the "international think tank and political network" Policy Network set up in 1999 a mere five-minute walk from Westminster Palace to span "national borders across Europe and the wider world...promoting the best progressive thinking on major social and political challenges of the 21st century" (SC 2017). Its thinking

was close to Blair's "new labor" brand of politics: former British secretary of state Peter Mandelson signed up as its president after resigning over a home loan affair and before becoming Commissioner for trade; alluding to think tanks' collecting tank role for ex-politicians, his move "is not a way back into government, it is part of the alternative to government", Mandelson said to journalists, "when you have been absorbed as a minister you need other things to fill your life. Policy Network is one of those things...so that policy is strengthened in practice" (cited after Ahmed 2001). Other high-level British politicians stepped up as the platform think tank's co-chairs. Funded by donations, business sponsorship, foundation- or Commission grants, the core activity next to publications, events or consultancy was hosting the Progressive Governance Network, a worldwide gathering of centre-left heads of state, ministers and thinkers started in 1999 under the auspices of US president Clinton, UK prime minister Blair and German chancellor Schröder together with the Dutch and Italian governments. Acting as a secretariat for this conference, the "network-building side of Policy Network seeks to form intellectual consensus" via such political fellowship to facilitate networking, "international exchange...and political reflection" (SC 2017).

Friends of Europe (FoE) was conceived of as "a think tank for EU debate that spans the spectrum of European political opinion" (SC 2017) in Brussels in 1999 by Financial Times journalist Giles Merrit (as chairman), former Commission official Geert Cami (as director) and former Commission vice-president Etienne Davignon (as president). With a mission "to support a reformed EU", the FoE founders first assembled a high-calibre pan-European board and issued a 40-page call-for-action report on an "EU that Works: A Blueprint for Reform" (FoE 1999). As per FoE's strategic communication, the intention from the outset was to shake up Brussels' entrenched ways of policy-making by being multi-stakeholder and transnational: "At a time when the think tank scene was very Anglo-Saxon", the thinking went, FoE was to be "a new pan-European, politically independent platform for fresh thinking and analysis", an "unusual think tank in that we do not fit the mould of a group of researchers in a closed environment" (SC 2017). FoE's interviewee describes its start:

*"It was a fresh moment in the EU. A lot of think tanks were set up at that time...there was rising awareness of this missing link, between the policy world and the world of practice. The idea...was to engage with European policy-makers and broaden the debate..There was a feeling of the disconnect between policy and the real world, policy and citizens, policy and business. So the think tanks were very much trying to be multi-stakeholder, and to bring together different views, different ideas, different interests."* (I20:12)

In the interview she added that in FoE's case - and the Anglo-Saxon think tank world more broadly - "you see that many journalists switched...to being analysts and policy people" joining or starting think tanks, in her view "a very easy conversion to make" (I20-Islam:30, see Chapter 8). Tellingly, one of FoE's early milestones was a first-ever 28-nation satellite TV debate in 2003 on what would become the Lisbon Treaty. FoE is a good example of how the field's function rhetoric - the ability to verbalize the added value of their innovation, independence and impact - becomes increasingly perfected: conceiving of innovation as "mindset, behavior and action", FoE believes "real solutions come from transforming mindsets through confrontation of ideas and breaking down silos between politicians, businesses and civil society", and, it insists, by design it does "not to push any specific political or business interest" (SC 2017).

European Stability Initiative (ESI) emerged from 1999 meetings in Sarajevo by "a group of friends with no money...ESI's eight founding members were a group of young people who had worked in different organizations in and on the Balkans: OSCE, World Bank, Office of the High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina (OHR), European Commission and various European ministries" (SC 2017). In their first-hand impressions, when "the international community intervened heavily in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we saw that often it was not on the basis of really profound research or knowledge of the situation in the country", ESI's interviewed Brussels chief Alexandra Stiglmeier, a senior analyst involved in the founding who had previously worked as a TIME magazine journalist and as Commission speechwriter, recalls, "so we felt a need for empirical research to inform policy-making" (I12:10).

To get things off the ground, Gerald Knaus and Marcus Cox - one ESI's Oxford-educated Austrian founding chair, the other Australian international lawyer - quit their OHR jobs to work pro bono on ESI as a new outside institution "to analyze international policy in the Balkans...and advance [their] integration into the EU" (SC 2017). "We were thinking it would be good to have a think tank looking at what the international community does, criticizes it, provides a foundation for better policies", Stiglmeier explains (I12:20). At the time, ICG was active on the Balkans too; this inspired ESI's creation; in fact, Knaus "had worked for them before...so of course there were lessons learned" although the founders "wanted to fix negative things" such as ICG's perceived US bias (I12:22, see above). Looking for a headquarter, "Berlin, a creative, dynamic and bankrupt city...seemed the right place for a young think tank with high ambitions and few resources", so ESI set up there (SC 2017).

ESI's approach to target group orientation, cutting through complexity and adjusting to demand is worth noting. It set itself apart with a product portfolio that took serious people's - and politicians' - changed media habits: in its reports, it put a premium on "clear concepts, crisp style, an avoidance of jargon and a clear storyline" and - by invoking terminology from the world of film - tried to always draw a "story board", with "leading characters" and "gripping narratives" (SC 2017). From there, the step to visual formats - ESI retold research in "picture stories" - and actual filmmaking was not far: in 2003 ESI co-produced a BBC documentary on the "Bosnian Story", financed by the UK development ministry, followed by one on Kosovo (SC 2017).

As the EU's enlargement or Turkish membership negotiations gained steam, ESI continued to co-produce and publicly screen films on South East Europe - aired on German or Austrian television and aptly titled ("Moldova: Lost in Transition", "Montenegro: Wild Beauty" or "Istanbul: Truth, Fear and Hope") - with the financial support of ERSTE Foundation, Austria's biggest savings bank foundation (SC 2017). Stiglmeier experienced how ESI "started with the Western Balkans, in 1999. Soon enlargement became an issue, so we started dealing with enlargement. Then Turkey started negotiations...so we expanded to Turkey in 2004" with an office in Istanbul; behind ESI's topical and geographical expansion was a rationale of "trying to expand based on what you have...That is how you carve out niches...Because once you have your niche, then grants follow" (I12:18) - a strategy that has worked out well for ESI.

### **2000s: Bruegel's breakthrough within the crystallizing "Brussels bubble"**

In the 2000s, 24 new EU think tanks were established (close to a third - 28 percent - of all sampled), nearly as many as during the 1990s; the founding of EU think tanks in Brussels but also across the EU did not come to a halt. By the end of the 2000s, there were already 80 EU think tanks up and running within an institutionalized field marked by widespread if not uncontested label agreement but limited funding niches.

At the beginning of the new millennium, in 2000, hitherto only Germany-based Bertelsmann Foundation added a Brussels office to its Berlin presence and 1989-built campus-style German headquarters in Gütersloh (opposite the Bertelsmann Group's). The publishing group's creator Carl Bertelsmann, with a touch of "noblesse oblige", held a "belief that wealth entails responsibility"; its post-war founder Reinhard Mohn - in his thinking, books and lectures - agreed that any company's civic participation is a precondition of long-term "Success Through Partnership" (1988). In a rarer case



of European large-scale think tank philanthropy, Mohn transferred 69 percent of his media company shares in 1993 - his majority interest - to the foundation “dedicated to European unity and transatlantic cooperation” in his will (see Lewis 1993). With dividends of these holdings, Bertelsmann Foundation - as a private operating foundation - could start and carry out its own projects, “serving the common good” in a sense of pursuing Mohn’s “belief that competition and civic engagement are key factors driving social progress” for Europe (SC 2017). Since its inception, it invested some €1.35 billion in non-profit work in fields as diverse as health and education, EU affairs or corporate citizenship, bankrolled with income from holdings (SC 2017).

Mostly preoccupied with German domestic policy and gaining visibility in the 1990s, the think tank’s activities occasionally drew fierce public criticisms too: the Centre for Higher Education it co-created with the German Rectors’ Conference in the mid-1990s to make German higher education competitive earned it a reputation - perhaps undeservedly - of pursuing a neoliberal agenda in some left-of-center circles. Bertelsmann Foundation began to seriously pursue European integration from the early 2000s onwards, most vocally urging for faster EU decision-making procedures. Its decision to move “one project manager and one secretary” to Brussels in 2000 can be seen against the backdrop of the EU’s pending enlargement, as Thomas Fischer - the interviewed head of the then already six-person Brussels branch - contextualizes:

*“Our decision to open this tiny little office was driven by [future] EU enlargement from 15 to 25 [countries]...Our idea was to create a transmission belt...to support new member states and their governments in getting socialized with decision-making procedures in the EU. This was a key task of our office in Brussels for four years [until 2004].” (I27:22)*

Thereafter, as Fischer tells it, “we slightly changed our agenda but remained a single-issue office” (I27:24) focused on European CFSP by the mid-2000s; as we will see, it would take a worldwide financial crisis for the foundation’s board to endorse an internationalization strategy transforming its specialized Brussels office into a think tank representing and, to a certain extent, mirroring the headquarter’s broader focus.

DGAP in Berlin also set up working groups on EU- and transatlantic relations - as ex-German foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher assumed its presidency - and started issuing a quarterly English edition of its “Internationale Politik” journal. And ICG was similarly bent on internationalizing: it opened a Washington D.C. office in 2000, expanded beyond the Balkans or Central Africa and - with extra Soros funding - “more than quintupled in staff size and budget” up to the mid-2000s (SC 2010).

In 2001, a Treaty of Nice was signed to reform the EU's institutional structure so as to prepare for eastward expansion. Besides aligning more European Parliament seats and less Commissioners, negotiations exposed deep Franco-German divides on the voting system. Little was known about what happened behind the scenes at EU summits; arguably one man - Peter Ludlow, who retired as CEPS' founding director in 2001 - "has for many decades been sole chronicler", churning out "chunky reports of 40-50 pages full of relevant details or anecdotes" on the councils (Kirk 2004).

To surprise of EU think tankers and observers, Irish referendum voters initially rejected the Treaty of Nice, then backed it in another vote (so it took effect in 2003). When Al-Qaeda terrorists flew hijacked airliners into New York City's twin towers and Washington D.C.'s Pentagon September 11, 2001, killing nearly 3,000 victims, the EU stood by the US and intensified cooperation to fight terrorism as US and British armies went to war on Afghanistan's Al-Qaeda and Taliban one month later. But "there was great disagreement on both sides of the Atlantic [how] to move forward" when GMF opened its fourth office, the Brussels branch, in late 2001 as Germany's Bundestag gave a new 15 million Deutschmarks gift (Siegel 2012:24).

On the ecological front, in 2001 the historically connected IEEP and Ecologic Institute opened and initially shared an office in Brussels. So did IEEP, as its "interests grew beyond environmental policy to cover agriculture, fisheries, climate and energy, regional development" or other related fields (SC 2017). IIED, which in turn has historically shared London headquarters with IIEP, set up a climate program. Several IIEP analysts went on to become lead authors of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, SC 2017). TNI began a Carbon Trade Watch project even as it often felt "critiquing cap and trade schemes was seen as heretical" (SC 2017).

Belgian economist Denis Stokkink started a new "European think and do tank" for "promoting solidarity and sustainability in Europe", Pour la Solidarité, in 2002: A cross-sectoral dialogue, his reasoning was, would go a long way in "strengthening EU social cohesion...in fields of disability, social protection, health, personal services or poverty" (SC 2017). Stokkink, with a background working at Belgium's ministry of employment during its 2001 EU presidency, explains his own founding impetus (as noted in Chapter 4, however, PLS did not label itself a think tank from the start):

*"We do not have hundreds of civil servants who can work on an EU presidency as in Germany, Britain or France, so I was looking for an organization [...to] help us define a strategy. I didn't find one. I said 'Well it's a need! Why not create a structure?'" (I34:14)*

OSE was an EU think tank already active in this field, but “more nearly affiliated [to trade unions] compared to what I wanted to do”, Stokkink says, so he busied himself writing PLS’ business plan “for about a year...attentive to the fact that we cannot depend on political, economic organizations - but also not on funding” (I34:22).

In 2002, the euro replaced the currencies of twelve of the fifteen EU members. When Hans Marten turned EPC manager, the think tank landed strategic partnerships with the King Baudouin Foundation and, from 2005 on, Compagnia di San Paolo. It also issued a timely 60-page assessment of the EU polity’s draft constitutional treaty (too ambitious for French or Dutch referendum voters) on the eve of the Convention on the Future of Europe’s final plenary session (EPC 2003), at a time when more and more EU think tanks commented on such matters in their semi-institutionalized field. Of course, EU think tanks were not the only organizations establishing Brussels offices as EU competences grew: INGOs were increasingly present with liaison- or advocacy offices at EU level - Oxfam’s EU Advocacy Office, say, started in 2002 (I64-Alonso:11); foundations intensified transnational cooperation - the Network of European Foundations pioneered a pan-European support structure in the same year (I68-Sailler:10); and networks of European think tanks, hitherto often rudimentary or informal, were created as cooperation hubs most notably in Brussels (see Chapter 8), a further indicator of field interaction and of self-awareness of a common enterprise.

The EU geared up its internal capability for lateral thinking in the early 2000s: what became known as European Political Strategy Centre (EPSC) of Jean-Claude Juncker’s Commission originated in a forward studies unit in Delors’ Commission. Romano Prodi Commission’s “cellule de perspectives of 2000...was an internal think tank to the president”, reporting and liaising with experts on economics, social or foreign affairs while its successor under Barroso’s Commission, Bureau of European Policy Advisers (BEPA), was “a strategic policy unit that works with think tanks, not itself a think tank”, as BEPA’s interviewee tasked with think tank outreach clarifies, a “different animal...adapted to the mandate of the president” (I37-Ioannides:46).

As the EU was shoring up CFSP, Paris-based EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) set up in 2002 as an autonomous EU agency to “foster a common security culture” (SC 2017, Council of the EU 2001). EUISS’ interviewed director Antonio Missiroli joined straight from the Commission’s BEPA where together with Isabelle Ioannides he had edited the Berlaymont Paper empirically mapping “European think tanks and the EU” (2012, see Chapter 1 and 2). As an EU agency EUISS does not fit

the stand-alone think tank definitional criterion, as he readily concedes (it is not sampled here), even if Missiroli's predecessor in the job, Alvaro de Vasconcelos, spoke of it as "the EU's strategic think tank" (I41:10, I37-Ioannides:74). Originally EUISS emerged "from a different world...born inside" the Western European Union, a Cold War-created now defunct military alliance. "At that time, limits on freedom of expression were even higher", Missiroli acknowledges, and it was even "necessary to get security clearance from member states to get a job at the EUISS" (I41:16).

In 2003, Lisbon Council for Economic Competitiveness and Social Renewal (Lisbon Council) was established in Brussels. It set out to fill the European Council's Lisbon strategy with intellectual life as a self-labelled think tank merging "the ivory tower and the popular demos" (SC 2015). Its vaguely put goal to involve "political leaders and the public...in a constructive exchange about economic and social challenges of the 21st century" more concretely meant pushing the lofty EU project - later known as Europe 2020 strategy - to become "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world" (Council of the EU 2000). The think tank's founding president is Paul Hofheinz, an American ex-Wall Street Journal director; its co-founders are Dutch businessman Tjark de Lange and German-Swedish native Ann Mettler, who previously led World Economic Forum's European program (SC 2017).

The watchdog think tank CEO criticizes Lisbon Council as a "corporate-funded think tank designed to push for greater neoliberal reform", alleging that despite its "dependence on corporate funding and a radical free-market political agenda, it has had some success in depicting itself as a genuine think tank and can be found quoted in the media as a source of independent expertise" (CEO 2011:20); Lisbon Council defends itself against such accusations, stressing that it is "supported by a diversified funding base" (SC 2015), a claim that is problematic, as we will see (in Chapter 6). Its 2003 budget barely amounted to €50,000. Lisbon Council's fundraising surpassed the symbolic €1 million threshold only a decade later in 2013; as a "platform for the digital age" it is indeed accepts funding by European multinationals like Philips or Telefonica and large US tech firms including Apple, Google, IBM, Salesforce.com and Uber next to the EU funding in form of Horizon 2020 research grants (SC 2015). Possibly to increase symbolic capital - signaling belonging to EU think tanks' club - it has since staged a series of yearly so-called European "Founding Father Lectures" as a debate platform for Commissioners and other stakeholders with lecturing at events dedicated to Robert Schuman, Ludwig Erhard and Jean Monnet (SC 2017).

A Paris-based EU think tank Europanova was started in 2003 by Guillaume Klossa, a business studies graduate of HEC Paris and LSE with private sector experience who later advised France's EU presidency, as a "center of reflection and European action" (SC 2017). Its goal of supporting a "new generation of leaders, engaged talent and opinion-makers" to reinforce the European project and -identity most tangibly led to a "40 under 40" European Young Leaders program, which - in partnership with FoE - aims to unite some of "the continent's most promising talents" six days every year; since 2006 Europanova partners with Notre Europe and European Movement France to publish annual European civil society reports for the European Council (SC 2017).

On the foreign policy front, next to the war in Afghanistan Iraq became a focal point: based on the assertion that Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein hid weapons of mass destruction - in retrospect not supported even by underlying intelligence at the time - US president Bush and UK prime minister Blair forged ahead to invade the country with a so-called "coalition of the willing". This second Persian Gulf War, part of the "global war on terror" Bush announced after the 2001 New York City terror attacks, caused serious rifts in transatlantic relations, NATO and the EU internally: Germany and France opposed it but Spain, Italy (and soon-to-be EU states Poland or Romania) sided with the invaders, splitting the UN Security Council. It also proved a divisive issue in both the US- and EU think tank communities: there were vigorous arguments about distinguishing "old and new Europe" (West- versus Central or Eastern Europe) as the US-led coalition fought its way to "squandered victory" - winning a battle but not really the war - in a "bungled effort to bring democracy to Iraq" (Diamond 2006).

British House of Commons leader Robin Cook resigned 2003 in vocal protest against the invasion but remained FPC's president. He died of a heart attack in 2005 but FPC proceeded to "set up an independent, cross-party commission in 2007 tasked with producing a blueprint for Britain's future involvement in Iraq"; as a first for a British think tank, the launch of FPC's over 100 page-long Iraq Commission Report was televised in a special program on the British Channel 4 (SC 2017, FPC 2007).

Although ICG "advocated neither for nor against going to war", it did "analyze pros and cons of different arguments proposed", and experienced a "heated internal debate over Iraq"; an interesting way to look at this is that "by 2003 ICG's influence had become something worth fighting for", it "had in fact become a foreign policy actor in its own right" with then over 90 staff covering some 40 crises or conflicts (SC 2010). Chris Patten became ICG's co-chair upon leaving his Commissioner post.

As part of CFSP, the EU took on peacekeeping operations in the Balkans. The UN, which failed to prevent Rwanda's 1994 genocide and protect Srebrenica's victims during the 1995 Bosnian war, also turned a more active in peacekeeper in the 2000s. The then secretary general Kofi Annan appointed a Panel on UN Peace Operations in 2000 for organizational learning from these momentous mistakes, shortly after the Canadian-based International Development Research Centre had released a book - addressed to him - on "Critical Choices: The UN, Networks and the Future of Global Governance" in connection with Brookings Institution's Global Public Policy Project (Reinicke et al. 2000) led by Wolfgang Reinicke, a German Brookings scholar.

As founding dean of Central European University's public policy school, Reinicke's interest was in global public policy - "not world government, but a mixed approach to global management in which states, corporations, NGOs, IOs and coalitions cooperate" - enabling "governing without government" (Reinicke 1998). Against this backdrop, he set up a Berlin-based Global Public Policy Institute (GPPI) in 2003 together with two younger Germans in his team, Thorsten Benner and Jan Martin Witte (both of whom had worked at UNDP). "Having experienced the lively think tank culture in the US" the founding trio sought to imitate and "bring some of that culture and vibrant policy debate to Germany and Europe" (SC 2017).

Yet in the European context GPPI had to start off from an "almost non-existent financial base, with no social venture capital at its back and a need to build a market for itself in Germany and beyond" (SC 2017). Its envisaged clients included the UN, Commission and national governments with a mission to "improve global governance through research, policy advice and debate" on analytical or ethical issues (SC 2017). Convinced that "effective and accountable governance requires individuals who are creative, thoughtful and unafraid to work across boundaries", GPPI's founding team envisaged cross-sectoral work and "deliberately opted for careful organic growth...to sustain informal culture" after the motto bigger is not necessarily better (SC 2017). To reach scale and structural impact, as EU think tanks before it, GPPI tried to build a "growing global network" of non-resident fellows or an "alumni circle" (SC 2017).

In 2004, the EU experienced its largest single expansion to date. Eight former Eastern bloc (ex-Soviet Union or Visegrád Group) states - Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia - together with Cyprus and Malta joined, making it a political-economic Union 25 members strong. The euro currency was established as the second largest reserve currency worldwide.

EU-25 countries signed a treaty on a “European constitution” to streamline decision-making in 2004, but French and Dutch voters rejected it in 2005. EU leaders declared a period of reflection on “the Europe of the future”, the Commission a “Plan D” for more democracy, dialogue and debate with (newcomer and old) EU citizens. Islamist terrorism, already a distressing menace on the world stage, now hit closer to home: hundreds were killed, thousands injured in Al-Qaeda’s 2004 Madrid train bombings days before Spain’s general election and London’s 2005 public transit suicide attacks.

Fondation Pour L’Innovation Politique (FONDAPOL) started 2004 in Paris as “a French think tank for European integration and free economy” (SC 2017). Jérôme Monod, a co-founder of France’s center-right Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) with president Jacques Chirac whom he advised, was its founding president. He saw to it that the funding model captured public sector, corporate and individual support but no political party money. His view was that an “aging population and increasing weight given to environmental issues and globalization [...hasten] the emergence of a new world order”; fittingly, geopolitical expert Franck Debié signed on as director. “Our work would miss its purpose if it were limited to observation”, FONDAPOL says, “unlike a university research center” the goal is practical proposals (SC 2017).

In the face of the literal worsening of the global climate, E3G - a shorthand for Third Generation Environmentalism - set out in 2004 as a “climate think tank [for...] global transition to low carbon economy”, working on climate diplomacy and energy policy at pan-European offices in London, Brussels and Berlin (later China and US). Foundations played a large financing role - notably the European Climate Foundation whose Brussels offices at Rue de la Science E3G shares together “with several other grantees on the same floor” (I36-Dufour:42). E3G’s interviewed Brussels office head points to its UK founders’ public and civil society sector experience (I36-Dufour:26): founding director Nick Mabey advised Blair’s cabinet as an ex-World Wildlife Fund (WWF) climate economist; Tom Burk, the first chairman, was environmental adviser to the UK government and oil and gas giant BP; the first CEO John Ashton was also “quite a good name”, career diplomat and soon-to-be UK climate change ambassador. “They tried to complement that skillset” by hiring expert energy consultants (I36:26).

E3G claims to have “played a key role in diplomatic efforts [behind] Russia ratifying Kyoto Protocol” to limit global warming and cut greenhouse gas emissions, which came into force under EU leadership - but without US participation - in 2005. In the E3G founding team’s experience, “main obstacles to sustainable development

lie not in a lack of analysis or available resources, but in the silo-based nature of institutions and decision-makers”; its coalition-based theory of change aims at new approaches for “how to deliver transformational policy change...to align politics and policy in an extremely polarized discussion, and hold policy-makers to account” (SC 2017). As a “European organization with a global outlook and reach”, E3G penned a “Europe in the World” analysis in 2006 to push for a more outward-looking EU, and later initiated a first UN Security Council debate on climate security (SC 2017).

By the mid-2000s, 63 EU think tanks (74 percent of the 85 sampled) existed, as several new ones continued to launch each year, so that as noted their total number reached 80 (94 percent of those sampled) by the end of this decade. However, many think tanks operating at EU level were small or fledgling operations. That is why Bruegel’s 2005 arrival to the EU think tank scene - mustering serious governmental and private-sector financing - proved to be transformative in the organizational field.

As an interviewed journalist puts it, Bruegel’s founding is a “significant step in [field] development”, as it had “serious thinkers...and serious money” (I54-King:26). Jean Pisani-Ferry was the prime mover behind Bruegel’s launch and its first director. An avid pro-European, he helped edit “One Market, One Money” (Commission 1990) with CEPS director Gros - arguably “the most famous report on the monetary union” (I57-Pelkmans:16) - and advised the French finance minister next to directing CEPII in Paris all during the 1990s. Immediately before kick-starting the “unlikely start-up Bruegel” from 2002 on, Pisani-Ferry led France’s economic analysis council; as he said at Bruegel’s tenth anniversary, “the story of its birth is worth telling” (SC 2015). According to his recollection, he conceived a European Center for International Economy (Bruegel’s initial working title) over a 2002 lunch with Nicolas Véron, an ex-Rothschild banker working with Lycos France, in whom he found a kindred spirit:

*“He and I had separately developed an interest in the role of economic think tanks...We had both learned good ideas are the scarcest of all policy ingredients, and both observed that in Europe, the dialogue between researchers, practitioners and policy-makers lacked intensity and relevance...Together we came up with the idea of an economic policy research organization that would emulate the best US think tanks...Most likely it would not succeed. But we felt that it had to be tried.”* (Pisani-Ferry, cited after SC 2015)

Envisioning a European equivalent of Washington D.C.’s think tanks specialized in economics, such as the GMF-initiated Peterson Institute for International Economics, Pisani-Ferry floated his entrepreneurial inclination in the French treasury; he knew the finance minister, who encouraged him, back at his time leading CEPII (SC 2015).



A backer at Germany's finance ministry was Caio Koch-Weser, state secretary there after his almost three-decade career at World Bank; "nostalgic of the brown-bag lunch seminars at the bank and the stimulating intellectual atmosphere" in the US capital, Pisani-Ferry recalls, he espoused the nascent think tank's concept too - thus, in this light, Bruegel was "born out of an unusual openness to new ideas and extraordinary coincidence of minds in the French and German treasuries" (SC 2015).

By 2003, it was officially touted as a Franco-German initiative in chancellor Schröder and president Chirac's joint declaration commemorating four decades Elysée Treaty: So "that Europe can make its full contribution to international debates on economic, financial and trade policy", the declaration's item 30 read, "France and Germany have decided to launch a European initiative for...a European Centre for International Economy devoted to these objectives" and located in Brussels (cited after SC 2014). So instead of a liability of newnewss, Bruegel managed to start with significant symbolic resources, which relatively quickly translated into financial ones: By 2004, ten additional countries pledged financial support, which as a "quid pro quo of UK membership" was made contingent on also enlisting paying corporate partners and on the EU think tank's evaluated effectiveness after its first two years (SC 2014).

Former European Central Bank (ECB) president and Bruegel chair Jean-Claude Trichet retrospectively sees any stress innate to this model as a blessing in disguise: "the only way to survive was to succeed - fast", he reminisces, for at times "necessity is the mother of invention" (SC 2016). The EU state-led deal is not without its critics. One interviewed veteran expert of CEPS - which also busily studied the international economy then - spoke his mind that "the German-French axis...heavily subsidized" Bruegel "by highly distortive means", given that existing institutes did not benefit from similarly generous support (I57-Pelkmans:18). On the other hand, he concedes that Bruegel's ambition "might never have come into being...in the Brussels environment" in absence of US-style think tank philanthropy (I57-Pelkmans:20).

Surprisingly Bruegel's founding succeeded without one ingredient: a catchy name. "We all wanted to avoid four-letter acronyms so common in Brussels which provide guarantee of anonymity", Pisani-Ferry recalls, "but in spite of creative sessions...we were unable to come up with a proper name"; Mario Monti, former Commissioner for competition and later Italy's prime minister, reportedly solved that dilemma in 24 hours: a day after being told, "he came back with an idea: a pun on 'BRUssels European & Global Economic Laboratory'. Bruegel had found its name"

(SC 2015). The shorthand was chosen also “for its evocative potential and resonance of artistic work of Pieter Bruegel” who, the idea goes, similarly drew his inspiration from a “keen observation of the life of ordinary people and daily economic activity” (SC 2014). Despite high-level endorsements: when Bruegel was formally founded in late 2005 “we were not a well-known think tank then”, interviewed secretary general Matt Dann who came on board during the organization’s beginnings in 2006 reflects:

*“The great thing about working in a small organization, whether it’s a think tank or a start-up, is you have the opportunity to do a number of things that perhaps are outside of your comfort zone, for which you have no experience. Because simply resources dictate you have to take responsibility for two to three areas. I’ve really enjoyed that.” (I19:48)*

André Sapir, who had been a senior research fellow at CEPS and co-authored with the think tank leaders Gros and Pisani-Ferry in and after the 1980s, wrote Bruegel’s first report, on “Globalization and the Reform of European Social Models” (2005); it was debated at a 2005 informal ECOFIN meeting, thanks to Bruegel’s good contacts, and made ample references back to a 2003 so-called “Sapir Report” on “An Agenda for a Growing Europe: Making the EU System Deliver” which he had co-authored with Pisani-Ferry, Helen Wallace and others to make the EU future-proof in the face of “rapid technological change and strong global competition” (Sapir et al. 2003). In 2005, Bruegel moved its “fledgling team of eleven, of which eight had just joined” to offices it still occupies on Brussels’ Rue de la Charité near the royal park (SC 2015). Graphic designer Jean-Yves Verdu designed its red logo and - with pro-bono help of a strategy consultant - fuss-free visual branding but also came up with “Sapir Paper”, an eight-page policy brief, effectively co-inventing this publication series (SC 2015).

While CEPS’ business unfolds in a harsh project economy, attempts to get non-restricted core funding (comparable to Bruegel’s fundraising success) for a generalist think tank have also been tried, twice, but failed. According to CEPS’ Jacques Pelkmans these “attempts to have an endowment...are shrouded in the fog of history” and proved “very, very difficult...next to impossible in Europe”; at a second try “two private bankers approached [over 20] extremely wealthy people in Europe” - literally visiting their houses to pitch the need for CEPS’ sustainability - and “the idea was that if a few would agree...others would join...to give it critical mass...and that failed, and that was a pity” (I57:16). Thus, CEPS’ activities continued to be funded “from a variety of sources, including [like Bruegel] corporate or institutional membership fees, projects, foundation grants, conference fees” or sales (SC 2017, see Chapter 6).

In 2005, a European Foundation for Democracy (EFD) took shape in Brussels as a “policy institute...working with civil society, academic, government and other stakeholders on [preventing...] all forms of radicalization which can lead to violent extremism regardless of political or religious ideology that may drive it” (SC 2017). Its founder-president is Roberta Bonazzi, an Italian political scientist who had led pan-European campaigns on the topic. Next to policy briefs, publications and events, EFD engages in advocacy work or “practical tools to support front-line professionals (teachers, social workers, NGOs) by developing practitioner’s guides on prevention” (SC 2017). To combat Jihadist terrorism, EFD promotes “integration of communities with Muslim heritage in Europe”, stressing its watchdog role to ensure this “remains in the public eye” (SC 2017), as terrorism was still much-debated on the world stage.

Another advocacy think tank was founded in 2005: Open Europe. Its Brussels office is headed by Pieter Cleppe, a trained lawyer who previously worked at Itinera Institute, a small Belgian think tank. “Open Europe was Business for Sterling...to convince the British government not to adopt the Euro”, Cleppe says in the interview (I11-Cleppe:14). “Unlike many other leading think tanks”, as Open Europe puts it, it does “not accept money from the EU institutions, governments or big corporations”; while this means it claims “independence” from public funds, it singularly “relies on individual donations”, chiefly by British businesspeople such as “leaders of Financial Times Stock Exchange 100 firms and small business entrepreneurs” (SC 2017). Not unlike lobbyists would argue, Open Europe declares that “our supporters employ more than one million people across the world...in every industry sector” (SC 2017).

At the time, the internet revolution continued: many homes - and knowledge-intensive organizations like think tanks - had (increasingly higher-speed) access. Later in the 2000s, Europeans’ usage of smartphones or social media accelerated too. As an only recently created “policy think tank [for] fast analysis ahead of the game”, Open Europe’s relatively young, media-savvy Brussels team chose to prioritize being “quoted and interviewed...in the media” as a “lean and small operation” (SC 2017). During the 2000s, Open Europe positioned itself as a Eurosceptic think tank: its core tenets under first chairman, a conservative House of Lords member, were to oppose UK adoption of the euro and revival of the EU’s constitutional spirit in the pending Lisbon Treaty. In fact, an early report - “Guide to the Constitutional Treaty” (2007) - of Open Europe claims that “the ‘new’ treaty essentially reintroduces virtually all the changes proposed in the original constitutional treaty” based on textual comparison.

Open Europe Berlin was set up as a “German Denkfabrik with European orientation” and sister organization “for EU fundamental reforms” in a spirit of Ordnungspolitik - in fact its director Michael Wohlgemuth, a University of Jena economist, had been an associate with the German ordo-liberal think tank Walter Eucken Institute (SC 2017).

In the foreign policy domain, the French origin IFRI opened a Brussels branch in 2005 to act “as an interface between activities of IFRI Paris, the [EU] institutions and debates organized in the European capital, the vast network of think tanks...and the private sector” (SC 2017). Pierre Defraigne - who would later direct Madariaga - managed the office upon retiring from the Commission’s DG Trade department. IFRI’s studies and events covered “an ever-widening spectrum”, both geographically speaking and in terms of cross-cutting topics, which include “classic yet fundamental issues such as security and international economy” but also extended “to areas such as energy geopolitics and climate [or] demographics (notably migration)” (SC 2017). As IFRI’s founding chairman Thierry de Montbrial notes in retrospective, “over time its relationships with the corporate sector have taken on ever-greater importance”; it is still “non-partisan and not subject to any government supervision”, he urges, since the think tank’s management “strives to diversify its sources of funding” (SC 2014).

Intent on advancing his political beliefs after leaving office, Confrontation’s founding chair Herzog also saw to it that a Brussels office near European Parliament (above Rue du Luxembourg’s Café Marnix pub) was set up, to continue his legacy as a parliamentarian and “remain an actor of the European construction” (I18-Baud:28, McGann/Weaver 2000:44). Notre Europe’s founding president Delors “wished to step down from his duties in 2005 and passed on the baton to his former chief of staff at the Commission, Pascal Lamy” who would then go on to lead WTO (SC 2017).

In 2006, six sampled EU think tanks were established, little over a decade ago. The Centre for European Policy (CEP) was set up as a “European policy think tank of...Stiftung Ordnungspolitik” in Freiburg, Germany, physically and ideologically close to Freiburg’s ordo-liberal school of thought (mentioned above) as imagined by Walter Eucken, Friedrich von Hayek or put to the test by Ludwig Erhard (SC 2017). The EU must enable free markets for them to reach their alleged theoretical potential, CEP’s reasoning is, “on the basis of modern, liberal, market-based ordo-economics” while “keeping regulation and bureaucracy to a...minimum” (SC 2017). Financed by endowment income from its parent foundation, surveys for the European Parliament and “donations, small and large”, CEP declares itself “independent of vested interests

and party-politically neutral” but avowedly endorses a “market-based system in Germany, Europe and the rest of the world” (SC 2017) as an advocacy think tank.

CEP derives the urgency of making the case for “a free-market Europe” from a frequently cited presumed figure that “80 percent of legislation valid for...Germany is passed in Brussels, while 20 percent originates in Berlin”; to monitor or evaluate EU policies, the advocacy think tank has developed a blanket “traffic light system” to evaluate policies: red traffic lights stand for CEP’s conviction that a given “policy intention should not be implemented” per se, red-yellow finds it “very questionable”, yellow or yellow-green mean “must be revised and can be implemented (only) with described changes”, green lights signal CEP views nothing wrong with it (SC 2017). The fact that advocacy think tanks like Open Europe or CEP - this innovation is just one elaborate example - are willing and frequently do take institutional positions is a clear distinguishing mark compared to academic think tanks such as CEPS and SWP.

In Brussels, the European Centre for International Political Economy (ECIPE) - another advocacy institute - began with base funding of Free Enterprise Foundation in Sweden on impetus of two like-minded economists: Oxford University and LSE-educated Swedish economist Fredrik Erixon (its interviewed director) was previously a World Bank and J.P. Morgan analyst, had advised EU governments and worked as an economist in chief for Stockholm’s free-market think tank Timbro. “You need to be an intellectual entrepreneur”, he reflects, “you need to be creative...I worked in different spheres, different sectors, with different backgrounds”, he adds, and a think tank was “what I wanted to do [and] happened to be what Razeen Sally wanted to do ...it was a perfect match” (I22:14, 18). Co-founder Sally is a Sri-Lankan born long-time LSE faculty member who belongs to Hayek Society and Mont Pelerin Society. ECIPE’s ideological stance is “rooted in a classical tradition of free trade, an open world economic order...The idea of a trade policy think tank in Europe is not new”, it acknowledges, citing London’s earlier Trade Policy Research Centre (SC 2017). With a sole sponsor “initially we could not claim...to be financially independent”, Erixon readily admits, but the ambition was to get to a point where no individual sponsor could represent over five percent of our total revenues” (I22:22-24). It does not explicitly communicate names or break down amounts paid by businesses - what becomes clear is it targets supporters “sharing ideas in favor of open world economic order based on voluntary exchange and free trade” (SC 2017, Chapter 6 details this).

EU watchdog think tank CEO started a “Lobby Planet” report on corporate lobbying in Brussels by the mid-2000s (a pun on the popular “Lonely Planet” travel guides); in subsequent editions, ECIPE has been heavily criticized as “one of Brussels’ many corporate-funded think tanks...promoting industry-friendly trade policies, such as the strict enforcement of patents on medicines, which dramatically harms the availability of affordable medicines in the South” (2011:25). In this light, CEO’s team claims, it is highly problematic that next to foundations, businesses “including pharmaceutical giants Eli Lilly and Pfizer or...Nestle, Nike, Google and BP” contribute (2011:25).

“Explanatory” label work behind Brussels platform think tanks was furthered in 2006 by European Institute for Science, Media and Democracy - or Atomium - launched by another founder “couple”: ex-French president Valéry Giscard d’Estaing and journalist Michelangelo Baracchi Bonvicini contemplated “an independent, supranational non-profit aimed at creating a...permanent platform for European excellence in the fields of academic research, innovation and its dissemination” since they met back in 2004 (SC 2014). A “European manifesto” was signed on occasion of Atomium’s launch explaining it would form a “European nucleus for coordination of new knowledge” from academia, media, business, policy-makers and citizens as a “real and virtual meeting point...promoting inter-sectoral, inter-disciplinary dialogue” (SC 2014). Behind this lofty rhetoric is the founders’ conviction that the future “knowledge society depends...on the production of new knowledge and transmission through education (universities), its dissemination through reliable information (newspapers), and its use through new industrial processes (businesses)” (SC 2017).

In its early years, Atomium built up a partner network of academic and media organizations in most EU countries, for instance including LSE, Lund University or El País newspaper. It took until 2009 at another European Parliament conference for Atomium’s work to take more concrete steps “to promote...out of the box thinking”: for instance, a “European Intersectoral Summit on Research and Innovation” was convened; it sought to advance citizen science or “humanize” the internet in projects. Meanwhile, ESI continued its think tank-as-filmmaker work: in 2006, a documentary “Return to Europe’ started as a series of conversations in Vienna cafés” of ESI’s founder and chair Gerald Knaus with ERSTE Foundation, Austrian broadcasting corporation ORF and the German TV network 3sat; the films’ format, it was agreed, would be “a journey with 10 stops, passing through all of South East Europe, and ending on the shores of the Bosphorus” (SC 2017). For the sequel “Balkan Express”,

broadcast 2008, ESI analysts interviewed thousands of individuals in ten countries; the think tank figures that at least four million people watched the films, earning it a European media award by the European Society for Education and Communication for mixing in new ways “inspired directing with sound scientific research” (SC 2017).

Aside from such Balkans specialization, an Institut de Prospective Economique du Monde Méditerranéen, or Mediterranean World Economic Foresight Institute, (IPEMED) was founded in 2006 “to integrate countries to the North and South of the Mediterranean via economic means”, convinced that “in a world of increasing regionalization, Mediterranean countries should construct a regional vision”: based in Paris as a “Euro-Mediterranean think tank”, IPEMED is financed by 37 major Mediterranean companies (which it does not name) as well as French public sector grants; it “strictly respects North-South parity” in its governing bodies (SC 2017).

“If there are divisions over politics or culture, only economics can reduce the gap”, founding president Jean-Louis Guigou, a French academic who had worked for France’s foreign ministry, reasoned. The future-oriented Paris institute was meant to “interweave ideas to enlighten...the largest possible number of decision-makers or opinion leaders on benefits of bringing together the Euro-Mediterranean” (SC 2017). Its first president Panagiotis Roumeliotis, a Greek economist, banker and European Parliament member, promised prospective patrons “privileged relationships with economic, political decision-makers” (SC 2017), a by then common marketing move.

The vexing problem of climate change, it became clear, would not be solved by Europeans - or humanity for that matter - as a merely scientific issue without tackling the context of many stakeholders’ necessary decision- and behavior changes. In 2006 Lisbon Council staged former US vice president Al Gore - a Nobel Peace Prize laureate for climate activism jointly with the IPCC a year later - to screen his slide show-based documentary warning “An Inconvenient Truth” (Guggenheim 2006). In London’s Southwark neighborhood, not far from City Hall, another EU think tank called Climate Strategies started as a membership-by-invitation only expert network. As a networked pan-European platform think tank with a small UK secretariat, Climate Strategies draws members “from universities, renowned think tanks or not-for-profit research institutions”, typically mid-career to senior climate policy experts. Managed by Andrzej Błachowicz, a Polish ex-GMF Marshall Memorial Fellow, its reports or Climate Policy Journal are paid by governments, businesses, foundations. It goes without saying, its Charter of Independence underlines, that “wherever

possible [it] intends to blend funding sources...for each project” (SC 2017). Yet, its charter further stresses independence in that “fundors do not receive exclusive access to meetings [...and] do not hold a right to object to a Climate Strategies publication”; the think tank casts itself in a triple role of “inspirer, convener, translator” (SC 2017). This by then cliché-ridden “desire to bridge the gap” led many of its members to turn “increasingly international and multi-disciplinary in outlook” (SC 2017); in a sense, the group reflects the more general potential of platform think tanks - be it Atomium, CEPR, EPC, FoE or Policy Network - to fill concepts with life that find the future of science and progress lies not in further technical specialization but in the blending or cross-fertilization of what we know across disparate fields (elaborated in Chapter 9).

The Warsaw-based EU think tank WiseEuropa results from a merger (in 2016) of a Wise Institute and what was previously known as demosEuropa, created in 2006 to advance “strategic reflection on European politics, foreign policy and economy”; although more generalist than Climate Strategies, for example, its keynote too was “multi-disciplinary skills and experience are increasingly indispensable” (SC 2016). Its toolkit of research methods is agnostic to social science quantitative-qualitative debates: WiseEuropa uses “statistics and econometrics, macroeconomics and system modelling, as well as sociological, political and institutional analysis” (SC 2017). Its funding comes from “business, administration [and] science” partnerships (SC 2017). Next to Polish ministries or the Commission, it also partnered with EU think tanks including Bruegel, CEPS, ECIPE, Notre Europe, GMF as well as Atlantic Council, then came to focus most on Polish-EU, -German, -French and transatlantic relations.

Two major transatlantic conferences existed then: Munich Security Conference (since 1963, Ischinger et al. 2014) and World Economic Forum meetings at Davos-Klosters (since 1971, Schwab 2009). In 2006, GMF launched the Brussels Forum, its yearly signature event, as a three-day “forum that better covered the breadth of the relationship, including everything from immigration to energy issues”, says current leader Karen Donfried (Siegel 2012:29). Its conversational format, off-the-record nightly and breakfast sessions drew powerful guests like Commission president Barroso, EU High Representative for CFSP Javier Solana, a NATO secretary general or deceased US senator John McCain and a worldwide crowd of several hundred; it “led to international media coverage and a higher profile than anything [GMF] had done before”; a prominent convener of foreign policy experts and heads of state, GMF also hosted German chancellor Angela Merkel in 2006 (in 2017, she would



grant yet another speech at GMF's 70th anniversary in Berlin, see Siegel 2012:29). Merkel held her very first foreign policy speech on the EU's role on the international stage in 2006 at DGAP's newly created Alfred von Oppenheim Center for European Studies, meant "to further debate on European policy" (SC 2017). It was led by Jan Techau, who was brought on board from Germany's defense ministry and, in 2011, joined Carnegie Europe, the US-origin but Brussels-based EU think tank, as director.

Carnegie Europe had started 2007 as a stand-alone Brussels branch of the US' oldest international affairs think tank Carnegie Endowment. It had a European station since the 1950s near the Palace of Nations in Geneva, switched from grant-giving to funding own policy research in the 1960s, acquired and raised the recognition level of the Foreign Policy Magazine, and set up a Moscow center (in 1994), a Beijing branch (in 2004) plus a Beirut office (in 2006). As part of a bold strategic decision "to build the first global think tank...to benefit of multiple national viewpoints", Carnegie moved to add a veritable EU think tank in to its sprawling network of centers "to keep pace with globalization" (SC 2014). Its managers saw a need - and a possibility to finance - this rejuvenating cure as a way "to stay young as it grew in age by regularly reinventing itself" (SC 2017). "Moscow...was part of the post-Cold War deal, that Russia was important", Carnegie Europe's interviewed director Jan Techau notes, "the other three offices came around the same time...under leadership from Jessica Matthews", Carnegie's president whose career spans several sectors:

*"She came up with this idea of what she called the 'global vision'. She wanted to have a think tank that is not only looking at the world from Washington D.C., and explaining the world from that perspective, but to have real local offices around the world."* (I59:20)

Carnegie's vice-president and research leader Thomas Carothers "made a strong case inside Carnegie that a European office was needed" and opened the Brussels office, "initially not meant to be a full-scale think tank office [...but] a platform office only"; as Techau was hired, "the mandate I was given was 'expand, improve content output, make it a voice in the debate'" (I59:20). Carnegie Europe had "the luxury position where our money - almost a hundred percent... - comes from this special fund created in the mid-2000s to create the 'global vision'", Techau explains, US "foundation money put in a big pot and then the three offices were created out of it. We are riding on this, have almost zero corporate donations", Techau says (I59:26, see Chapter 6).

In terms of public profile Carnegie Europe is eager to rebut suspicions of US bias: It presents itself as "a European enterprise, run by Europeans, Europeans work

here”, Techau says, “things we worry about, for the most part, are European affairs ...often in relation to the US, but just as much in relation to other parts of the world”; “there is no American messaging in this”, he insists, although “we employ American methodology, and the entrepreneurial spirit” of the US “mothership” (I59:16). Whereas it relied on re-posting Carnegie’s global contents or newspaper op-eds in its early years on topics like US democracy promotion (Carothers’ specialization, see 2009) to EU-Russia and EU-Turkey relations; under Techau’s lead it doubled down on in-house as well as visiting expert content production and struck a chord in hiring journalist Judy Dempsey as editor-in-chief for a “Strategic Europe” blog in 2012, which outshone other institutes’ short-lived or half-hearted blogging (see Chapter 9).

Carnegie Endowment was not alone as a US roots but globalizing think tank: transnationalization of GMF and ICG - a Carnegie offshoot (via Abramowitz’ ties, see above) - has been noted; EWI expanded geographically to China and Middle East as well during the 2000s - its “Strategic Trust Building” program began in 2006 “to reduce political obstacles to elimination of the threat of nuclear weapons” (SC 2017). However, the fact remains that hitherto “global think tanks” had US roots or funding (McGann/Sabatini 2011); “being in Europe” usually stood for “being in Brussels”.

This changed when European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) appeared on the scene as a truly pan-European foreign policy institute based across several EU capitals, deliberately absent from Brussels at the start (it later added an “antennae” office there). Mark Leonard, founding director of FPC who had led CER’s foreign policy program, co-founded ECFR with Mabel van Oranje who managed OSEPI; former Finnish president Ahtisaari and German ex-foreign minister Joschka Fischer joined their 2007 Financial Times call for a “strong European voice” in CFSP and lent their name to “a pan-European institution to combine establishment credibility with intellectual insurgency” (SC 2017). It further “loaded up” on symbolic capital by eliciting high-level endorsements and testimonials about its own uniqueness: German foreign minister and soon-to-be president Frank-Walter Steinmeier backs it; 50 (now 300) other renowned supporters got involved, as board or council members, including many former heads of state or (prime) ministers, Commissioners, business and civil society leaders - notably Sweden’s Carl Bildt, public intellectuals Timothy Garton Ash and Ivan Krastev, EU High Representative for CFSP Solana or German politician Norbert Röttgen (SC 2017). FRIDE supporter Hidalgo as well as Soros were also early supporters. ECFR would be “the only think tank that has a truly pan-

European network” by building “presences in Berlin, London, Madrid, Paris, Rome, Sofia and Warsaw...to grasp viewpoints from across the continent” (SC 2017).

Funding for this ambition was secured from foundations, but also corporations, individuals, the Commission, NATO and foreign ministries (SC 2016). ECFR’s publication formats were innovative in the sense of capitalizing on the young think tank’s unique selling point: since 2007 its so-called “Power Audit” reports “highlight ...contributions of each EU member state towards global players like China, India, US, Russia or Turkey...instead of a usual [EU] institutional focus”; since 2011 the “European Foreign Policy Scorecard”, an annual ranking of the EU’s global role “has become a staple publication” for many foreign policy experts, also thanks to an attention-grabbing grading system (reminiscent of CEP “traffic lights” noted above) used to evaluate states’ unity, resources, actions and total performance.

The European Risk Forum (ERF) split off EPC’s so-called “better regulation” program in 2007 as a small stand-alone “expert-led...think tank” (SC 2017). Its interviewee, Swiss consultant Lorenzo Allio who had previously worked for EPC’s regulatory unit, explains “it was not properly ex novo [...but] just a spin-off...we basically gave a legal entity to this forum that existed anyway”; however, there is a major difference: while EPC’s multi-stakeholder approach meant that “also NGOs or non-private sector members could participate...ERF has always had [only] corporate membership” (I33:17, 19). So ERF breaks with a multi-sectoral membership logic. It is also funded exclusively by corporate membership fees (not clearly specified, see Chapter 6) and led by private-sector lobbyists: its chair Howard Chase also directs Dow Chemical Company’s European government affairs after a long career with BP, Dirk Hudig the secretary general previously worked for BusinessEurope, and board members hail from EU affairs jobs at metal and chemical companies (SC 2017).

Just a few weeks after a Commission white paper on sport (2007) another small Brussels-present EU think tank launched: Sports & Citizenship (S&C). Its founders came “from the private sector, the sport movement and the Commission itself”, S&C’s interviewed EU affairs manager informs, “to feed EU institutions with new ideas” in the direction of sport being an “original tool to...communicate positively what the EU does, specifically on EU citizenship” (I18-Leblanc:14). The Paris- and Brussels-based group’s aim is “transversal, multi-disciplinary reflection [...on] sport” (SC 2017). Founder Julian Jappert joined from DG Education and Culture’s sport unit, “a very small unit of ten people, so it was impossible for them to cover all areas,

they cannot be experts in all fields” from sport (think fitness), health (think obesity), education (think values) or citizenship (think integration) at once (I18-Leblanc:12).

S&C’s president Laurent Thieule had handled sports business of Havas (a French public relations firm), and worked at the EU’s Committee of Regions. As the “only think tank in Europe whose social objective is the analysis of sporting policies and study of sport’s societal impact” (SC 2017), S&C obtained Commission buy-in under the Europe for Citizens program: “We managed to convince [it] that sports and physical activity was an innovative way to promote citizenship, that the old recipes which do not really work anymore could be balanced with this strong communication power of sports” (I18-Leblanc:24,16). Next to networking hundreds of subject matter experts, the small EU think tank - creating and filling a highly specialized niche of its own - uses its unique position to innovate when it comes to disseminating its inputs: To grab the attention of busy policy-makers and the public, it relies on a so-called “ambassador program of athletes and journalists” as key multipliers best suited “to convey the ideas, principles or recommendations that we develop”, and uses the European Parliament’s “Voxbox” studio for its multimedia interviews (SC 2017). Such public celebrity- rather than merely elite politician endorsements, say by ski- or golf champions in this case, are still rarely used in the field to gain symbolic capital.

The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies (HCSS) opened in its namesake city in 2007 “with a small team of senior experts or analysts” drawn from RAND, the Dutch defense ministry, UN and Netherlands Organization for Applied Scientific Research (TNO) in The Hague, among others, with the declared noble if rather vague slogan of “transforming global challenges of today into solutions for tomorrow” (SC 2017). Its founder is Rob de Wijk, a former journalist turned defense ministry employee turned Leiden University political science professor who had done his doctorate on NATO; he devised the new organization based on the then tried and tested mix of some in-house research staff with a wider network of affiliated experts (SC 2017). HCSS funds itself mainly with public sector contracts, also private sector advice (SC 2017). In 2007 two more countries officially joined the EU: Romania and Bulgaria, as Turkey, Croatia and Macedonia became future membership candidates. The 27 EU members signed the Lisbon Treaty, intended to boost EU efficiency and democracy.

The European Centre for International Affairs (ECIA) was created in 2008 as a Brussels think tank tackling “global issues from a European perspective” (SC 2017). Managing director Alfonso Giordano, the “engine behind [its] establishment” saw it

not as another “EU think tank but a European one”; together with the interviewed research director, this provided “the directional energy behind ECIA” whose “remit was always this question of ‘global issues from European perspective’” (I4-Teti:32). As scholarly platform think tank, ECIA briefings, policy papers, articles or lectures are produced by a network of residential or non-residential fellows, usually financed as side projects of scholars’ academic work at their home universities or institutions.

What began in late 2007 as a US subprime mortgage market crisis turned into an all-out global financial crisis, epitomized by Lehman Brothers’ 2008 meltdown. In spite of taxpayer-funded bail-outs to stabilize the financial system, a global economic downturn ensued, throwing millions out of work next to bankrupting entire countries. However, put bluntly this focal event led to continued employment for think tankers, most of whom had not seen a crisis coming, as the EU was in dire need for proposals how to deal with the complex consequences of the “black swan” event (Taleb 2001, 2007). Greece - granted EU entry on the basis of dressed-up statistics, it turned out - became one focal point of Europe’s debt crisis following on the heels of this Great Recession. Paradoxically, the immediate effects on think tanks’ work consisted in a simultaneously higher demand for extramural expertise, but lesser budgets to fund it.

Think tanks with non-diversified funding models were existentially shaken, but some managed to make the best of it as a window of opportunity to policy influence. For instance, ELIAMEP, “like everyone else living in Greece, was affected in many ways by the crisis” but claims to have “emerged stronger from this ordeal”: next to an “institutional partnership program” to tap into company funds it had set up in 2004, it expanded both number and value of Commission projects (SC 2014). “Since 2008, when national budgets, private sector budgets and foundation budgets for this kind of work were constrained”, GMF’s Brussels head Ian Lesser notes, “this space has been filled largely by Commission-funded work; FP7 and other multi-year EU programs for funding are really an engine behind the sector” (I53:27) in the crisis’ aftermath. The burning issue of financial crisis causes and effects arrived on Bruegel’s doorstep precisely three years after it took up operations in 2005. Its secretary general reflects:

*“It would be disingenious of anybody at Bruegel not to say we had a very good crisis. We were doing fine before 2008 but during the crisis, interest in what we did just bloomed..It was that external circumstance that put us in the spotlight. We could’ve disappeared into obscurity. But we took advantage of the spotlight...Without a crisis, we would still be doing fine, but I do not think we would be as well known as we are now.” (I19-Dann:48)*

Other (particularly larger) EU think tanks were also able to capitalize on the crisis as a chance to restructure operations. As mentioned above, Bertelsmann Foundation “achieved a breakthrough with regard to our headquarters in Gütersloh...there was considerably increasing awareness among board members that our model of social market economy is threatened by that severe crisis”, its Brussels interviewee explains, “that we have to play the ball via the EU level...or beyond Europe” (I27-Fischer:23). Its board moved to open a new office in Washington D.C.; it tasked Thomas Fischer to overhaul the structure and contents of the Brussels branch so as to better mirror the scope of Bertelsmann Foundation’s work in Germany and scale up its EU expertise.

For ICG, the financial crisis “was a serious shock to the organization with all sources of funding hit hard...governments dependent on tax revenues, foundations working from endowments, private individuals, corporate donors all felt the pinch” (SC 2014). In early 2008, ICG had actually begun fundraise for a so-called “Securing the Future” capital endowment for long-term financial stability; this was not eroded by the crisis, even as immediate fundraising refocused to keep ICG fully operational (SC 2014, see Chapter 6). ICG explains another less obvious effect this crisis had:

*“The international economic meltdown rapidly accelerated a trend in the world’s information environment: shrinking or collapse of major traditional news media outlets. [...Think tanks like] ICG are increasingly finding themselves filling the gaps. It has never aspired to become a news agency, but as old news sources fell away...it has been evolving to meet the reality of the new information landscape.”* (SC 2014)

While for the activist think tank CEO “in the early years it could feel like a David against Goliath battle” to dun what it saw as undue EU level finance lobby influence, its director Hoedeman finds that “today it is less clear-cut...After the financial crisis broke out, you had a debate about how this could happen” (I63:26). Its ally TNI was “at the forefront of organizing a civil society response, issued as ‘Beijing declaration’ [...a manifesto with] a radical critique of the financial crisis” as the alleged result of corporate capture, or “economic policies that put markets before people” (SC 2017).

2008 was also the year James McGann started the annual “Global Go To Think Tanks Index Report” series at the University of Pennsylvania (McGann 2009b), which became a “tournament ritual” for US, EU and international think tank scenes (see Chapter 2 and 9). Since its inception, the top spots of US or non-US think tank typically went to “seniors”: Brookings Institution and EU think tank Chatham House.

Bucharest-based Romanian Center for European Policies (CRPE) was formed in 2009 “by a group of experts bound by a shared objective of supporting Romania’s

role in Europe” as a new post-communist member state; it was a vehicle to “promote Romania...in development of EU agendas or policies” after half-joking, half-serious Mark Twain motto - visibly placed on CRPE’s website - “patriotism is supporting your country all the time, and your government when it deserves it” (SC 2017). Its project-based work is supported by GMF, the Open Society Foundations, UNDP, EU institutions and German political foundations, among other sources (SC 2017).

On the climate change-challenged island San Giorgio Maggiore in the sinking city of Venice - in a case of how a think tank location other than Brussels can afford symbolic capital - International Center for Climate Governance (ICCG) was founded jointly by the Fondazione Eni Enrico Mattei and Fondazione Giorgio Cini in 2009 to “focus on the design of climate policy and related governance issues” (SC 2015). Its director is Venice University president and environmental economics professor Carlo Carraro, a well-networked IPCC member and former Eni Enrico Mattei Foundation scientific director, also a CEPR board member and a CEPS associate research fellow. Next to publications or events from its remote peripheral location, the new think tank installed “international observatories on specific aspects of climate governance” - notably its “Think Tank Map”, a yearly ranking of worldwide climate think tanks - and consciously widened its think tank product portfolio to comprise “art exhibitions, contests, cultural debates and film festivals” as well as a “collection of e-publications to support e-learning or research”, as digitalization gained further ground (SC 2017).

Ahead of Copenhagen’s climate conference, E3G “built and helped fund the largest global NGO climate coalition”, the Global Call for Climate Action (SC 2017). IEEP started publishing its flagship Manual of European Environmental Policy. And GPPI launched a “global energy governance” program which led to an edited volume on “new rules of the game” (Goldthau/Witte 2011) in this field but “closed down its energy work [...when] key people driving this agenda moved on and we were unable to find a full-time intellectual lead for the program” befitting GPPI’s team (SC 2017). The Treaty of Lisbon took effect end of 2009, rebooting the European project: it reformed many (if not all) reform-worthy aspects of the EU, notably unifying its three-pillar design into one legal entity and merging external relations departments of the Commission and Council to form the EEAS, with a diplomatic corps first led by the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton. Parallel to the EU’s new potency, other institutes joined Brussels’ scene in 2009: IIEA started a branch there, mainly for the “Irish community in Brussels” (SC 2017).

SWP also felt that beyond the “German capital Berlin, exchange of ideas also takes place in Brussels” (SC 2017). For SWP, being in Brussels reflected “the absolute centrality of Europe for German foreign policy” as the country domestically debated shouldering more international responsibility: “completion of German reunification greatly changed and expanded international expectations”, SWP leaders realized, as the world entered “an era of globalization and fluid multipolarity [...leaving] no state, not even a single alliance, in a position to solve global problems” alone (SC 2015).

EU think tanks moved on other fronts as well, namely people and headquarters: For instance, Defraigne - who set up and led IFRI’s Brussels office earlier - switched to oversee Madariaga in 2009. ICG won Louise Arbour, ex-UN high commissioner for human rights, as its new president. Bruegel co-founder Véron extended his career transatlantically in 2009, joining the Peterson Institute next to his Bruegel affiliation. ECDPM bought and renovated “Pelican House” in Maastricht as a new headquarters. Chatham House began to look for options to accommodate the institute’s growth too; it succeeded - highly optimistic about its prospects - to get “a 999-year lease on...an adjacent building, Ames House”, so it could host more fellows and events (SC 2017).

### **2010s: “The times they are a-changin’” – Still thinking ahead for Europe?**

In the 2010s, up to the timeframe of analysis by 2015, only four more of the sampled institutes (5 percent of 85 identified, see Chapter 4) joined the organizational field, indicating slower rates of growth than previous decades (but it is only half a decade). In a birds eye view, existing think tanks’ outlook turned ever-more global, then more inward again as the EU’s basic consensus on an ever-closer union became contested.

GPPI’s Thorsten Benner, for instance, initiated a “Global Governance Futures” program convening young professionals from Germany, China, Japan, India and the US “to look ahead ten years and recommend ways to address global challenges” by trying to methodically blend trend analysis with scenario-building tools (SC 2017). In 2010 Joachim Koops, Vesalius College’s dean at Free University Brussels (VUB), founded Global Governance Institute (GGI) based on the college’s Brussels campus. It sought “forward-looking approaches to global governance...informed by a truly global perspective” by focusing on EU but also NATO or UN affairs (SC 2017). The similarity to GPPI is no coincidence: “I did my PhD in Kiel” in Germany, Koops says, “another PhD student of my supervisor was [GPPI founder] Thorsten Benner”, who - in a case of think tank leader-to think tank founder advice helped him to start:



*“He was very instrumental...we had early-on phone calls,he gave me some very insightful advice on how you set up a think tank...That was start-up norm or knowledge diffusion (laughs). I really admire [GPPI’s] model, they have really - in a short time span - come from nothing to an impressive output. With few people - but the right people.” (I2:22)*

“As always, it’s personal networks, isn’t it, and interpersonal relations”, Koops sums up, explaining he also linked up with another future GPPI director, Benedikt Franke, who had advised UN secretary general Annan and co-organized the Munich Security Conference (I2:22). GPPI’s founder felt EU think tanks “over-emphasize the EU...We could never compete with CEPS. Why have another think tank that just focuses on EU issues? It was clear for us, as a non-model”, he says, “to make sure we...focus on global issues” (I2:22). “Pragmatic idealism” in global problem-solving translated into a vision of a “more equitable, peaceful and sustainable global order based on effective but accountable IOs, global rule of law and empowerment of individuals” (SC 2017). This led to projects or executive training modules funded by IOs, as GPPI enlarged its core team with a relatively large “cloud” of affiliates (see Chapter 7).

FRIDE hired Giovanni Grevi - an ex-EPC research leader who joined straight from EUISS - to open a Brussels branch in 2010: his think tanker career was deeply invested in EPC’s “not just European but Europeanist agenda”, he says (I44:18). As a “European think tank for global action” FRIDE sought to partly imitate this, at a time when EPC itself underwent a leadership change: founders Kohnstamm and Crossick both died 2010; former Bulgarian Commissioner for consumer protection Meglena Kuneva became the platform think tank’s next chairwoman of the governing board.

Some EU think tanks had to bear a brunt of criticism by 2010 amidst mounting transparency and accountability pressures (see Chapter 6): Bertelsmann Foundation again experienced the flak of vocal criticism. Books dubbed it a “network of power” (Wernicke et al. 2007), allegedly obscure and undemocratic, depicting Germany as a neoliberal “Bertelsmann Republic” (Schuler 2010) dancing after policy advisers’ whistle. It reacted by refuting such allegations in a case of “legitimate” label defense. It also surrounded itself in the good company of some of Brussels’ most prestigious EU think tanks by creating, with IFRI, the annual Brussels Think Tank Dialogue in 2010, boosting symbolic resources via leadership for the field’s common enterprise.

A second interesting case of dealing with skepticism of bias is Open Europe. Once portrayed as “controlling British EU coverage...spoon-feeding lazy journalists” as a Eurosceptic group in *The Economist* (Rennie 2010), the British magazine’s same journalist - in a think tank piece for CER - acknowledged that under director Mats

Persson, from 2010 onward, Open Europe “worked to shake off an early reputation as a partisan campaign group, concentrating exclusively on negative aspects of the European project...feeding attack lines to the British tabloid press” (Rennie 2012:36). “To its credit”, CER noted, “it eschewed the nationalism of many Eurosceptic groups ...defending such liberal principles as free movement of migrant workers in the EU”; yet Open Europe’s free trade at all costs advocacy could feel “as much as a campaign group as a think tank” to CER, which moved to quit the Stockholm Network in 2010, a “pan-European...market-oriented network” of well over 100 free market think tanks.

As EPC widened its business membership, its interviewed director is surprised, “we have sometimes been attacked for taking more money from corporates, which I find a bit strange because the decision process was the other way around. We wanted multi-stakeholder membership, then we decided there was a different ability to pay”; seen from this angle, the platform think tank’s self-justification is that “what we did is massively discount membership for groups which cannot afford it” (I5-Zuleeg:25).

In 2011 the US-based Center for Global Development (CGD) - ten years after its creation by entrepreneur Edward Scott, Peterson Institute’s Fred Bergsten and ex-World Banker Nancy Birdsall - added a Europe office in London, considering that decisions driving development “are more global, in design, decision, and reach”, as a stand-alone institute “with a separate board...but part of the CGD family” (SC 2017). LSE- and Oxford-educated aid expert Owen Barder, a Briton working in Ethiopia at the time, was hired to lead CGD Europe. He described his motives to join as follows:

*“There are two reasons I think we need more of CGD’s approach in Europe, and why it is distinct from anything we have already. First, there is more to development than aid... Second, as a citizen of a rich country I want to focus on policies of rich countries rather than lecturing poor countries what they should do.”* (SC 2011)

Consequently, self-denoted “think and do tank” CGD Europe rationalizes “principles of independence, transparency and accountability” as integral for its work (SC 2017). Research of its expanding transatlantic team of resident and visiting experts centered on global policy reduction and EU “development policies beyond aid” at the start - notably in form of its “Commitment to Development Index”, ranking rich countries (similar to ECFR scorecards) on whether policies hinder or promote poor countries’ development (SC 2017). CGD Europe’s yearly flagship index (2018) had Rockefeller Foundation support and is original in going beyond comparing foreign aid volumes to quantifying a range of policy results; it added to this graphs, maps or spreadsheets,

in line with CGD Europe's pairing of reports with blogs, podcasts or infographics.

Other EU-focused institutes were also catching up to the promises or perils of digitization: next to growing reliance on online or social media, not least to "hunt" down impact (see Chapter 9), the dark side of the internet and cybersecurity became trending topics too. For example, ISD sought to be a "force in mobilizing the tech industry and civil society to respond to propagation of hate or extremism online", issuing a prescient first study on social media intolerance in 2011 (SC 2017). That year EFD warned of similar issues in the Commission's "radicalization awareness network" (SC 2017). GPPI, also active on data or technology politics, rather saw this niche as an opportunity to learn and cross-fertilize its work in other areas (SC 2017).

The European Leadership Forum (ELF) started in London in 2011 with support from Anglo-Saxon foundations such as Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation or Carnegie Corporation of New York. A self-denoted "active network of former and emerging European political, military and diplomatic leaders", it seeks "to address pressing foreign, defense and security policy challenges of our time" (SC 2017). A prime concern is conventional and nuclear disarmament in Europe as well as Euro-Atlantic security. To illustrate, it organizes a "top-level group of UK parliamentarians for multilateral nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation"; with this clear strategic thrust, it spends less time insisting on its unique selling point and rather "supports imitation of this in other EU countries" to help create worldwide "sister networks" (Asian or Latin American so-called leadership networks, SC 2017). It also joined the EU Non-Proliferation Consortium, a formal EU think tank network.

In The Hague, the HCSS was joined by The Hague Institute for Global Justice (HIGJ) in 2011 which also thought the think tank form best fit to provide "innovative inter-disciplinary research, policy development and professional skills training on issues of peace, security or justice" (SC 2017). The "think and do institute" issued a "The Hague Approach" handbook (2013) to strengthen peacebuilding effectiveness. When the Western European Union construct dissolved in 2011, the EU agency EUISS was reexamined: it "was kept for a number of reasons", interviewed director Missiroli explains, including "inertia - it is more difficult to change the status quo than to keep it" (I41:18). Now regulated under a Council decision and bankrolled with a €5 million budget by EU members according to a GNI-based formula, Paris-based EUISS moved to open a Brussels office. The fact that it is "accountable to both 28 member states and the EEAS", Missiroli draws the line to stand-alone think tanks,

does “make for a number of limitations...to what we can say, print and do” (I41:10).

The EU was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize as an IO in 2012 for contributions “to the advancement of peace, reconciliation, democracy and human rights”; most of Europe had been transformed from a continent of war to one of peace (EU 2012). Delors praised this feat, or the Commission, at EPC conferences that year (SC 2017). However, amidst celebratory unity, think tanks like Carnegie Europe asked “Is the UK heading for divorce?”; its director Techau warned of “hidden issues on which EU members cannot agree”, making his point that “Brits have developed an attitude to Europe totally out of synch with actual benefits Britain has” (2012). Meanwhile, former Dutch labor minister Aart de Geus assumed Bertelsmann Foundation’s board chair (together with Liz and Brigitte Mohn and ex-Roland Berger consultant turned state-level science senator Jörg Dräger). He cautioned “Europe’s nation-states to use the EU, the only reasonable path, for moving forward in the 21st century” (SC 2016).

In 2013, Croatia became EU member state number 28. As EPC’s new director Fabian Zuleeg remarked in its annual report “there continues to be a lot to do for a European think tank” (SC 2013). The EU emerged from acute public finance crisis, yet underlying Eurozone imbalances were a continuous concern. With Bertelsmann Foundation and King Baudouin Foundation, EPC launched a “New Pact for Europe”. The punchline was asking bold questions like “What do we need the EU for?” and “What kind of collaboration is needed at EU level?” in its pan-European reflection groups and member state debates so as to offer a venue of public orientation (2013).

The last EU think tank sampled in the project’s analysis timeframe, launched in 2013, is Bratislava’s Central European Policy Institute (CEPI), which since 2015 has been merged with GLOBSEC (formerly Slovak Atlantic Commission) and renamed GLOBSEC Policy Institute (GPI). CEPI relied on donations in its founding phase. It lost its founding president Tomáš Valášek - a GMF Marshall Memorial Fellow who had worked at Slovakia’s defense ministry, NATO and CER - to Carnegie Europe, where he succeeded Techau as the much larger think tank’s director in 2007. As GPI notes, Bratislava is “capital of the only Visegrad country...in the Eurozone” and “a crossroads for the realities of Central and Western Europe” (SC 2017). To “re-energize and re-invent the EU project” with a positive agenda in the face of a rise of identity politics and return of geopolitical power plays, the young think tank focuses on migration and assists an EPC-led New Pact initiative follow-up project; it also works in the cyber security and “digital democracy defense” topical niche, and on

EU enlargement and low-carbon energy in Central Eastern Europe (SC 2017). GPI, a Slovak institute of a “global, all-European outlook”, remarks in its strategy brochure:

*“Whether we like it or not, times are good for think tankers because they are hard for almost everybody else. Military men see old military alliances eroding...Economists fret over post-crisis malaise. Mainstream politicians feel...increasingly impotent. It provides both an opportunity and a responsibility for any institution willing to act as interlocutor between society and elites, in and across their countries. Ideas rarely emerge from closed environments and think tanks are best suited to offer differing perspectives.”* (SC 2017)

This project’s analysis timeframe does not include EU think tanks set up after 2014, although new ones have certainly been created. FRIDE disbanded for financial reasons end of 2015 but (to the best of my knowledge) all other 84 remain operative. There has been no shortage of organizational, European and global challenges for the EU and the EU think tank landscape ever since: faced with a “legitimacy crisis”, Commission officials felt a “growing gap between political institutions and society” but find it “difficult for a bureaucratic institution...to speak to journalists, or to speak directly to citizens”; as a BEPA adviser reveals, “expert communities are also used as a relay, to pass on the message” (I37-Ioannides:22, see Chapter 9). Commission president Juncker slashed the chief scientific adviser position and rebranded BEPA as EPSC, reporting directly to his team and, as of 2015, headed by Lisbon Council founder Ann Mettler in a relatively rare think-tank-to-higher-Commission job move.

In terms of war and peace not all is well: as ICG points out, UN data shows the largest annual fatalities in 2014 since Rwanda’s genocide back in 1994 (SC 2017). SEF also lamented that “growing dysfunctionalities in the international system are especially apparent in acute crises and conflicts”, be it in Gaza, Iraq, Sudan, Syria or 2014 Ukraine conflict and Russian annexation of Crimea (SC 2017). Health issues like the West African Ebola virus epidemic 2013 or security implications of global warming arose with fresh urgency. Most EU think tanks proceed to press for a more strategic security culture, exemplified by Carnegie Europe’s “Strategic Europe” blog. On the energy and climate front, as E3G celebrated its first decade, its Brussels head Dufour remarked that “three people [in Brussels] doesn’t seem like much given the challenges we take on”, but sees a “good track record in punching above our weight” in driving home the key storyline that “if Europe is to complete its transformation to a net zero carbon economy by 2050, to keep climate risk below a 2 degree threshold, the voice of ‘climate takers’ has to become louder than that of fossil fuel companies or ‘climate makers’”, she opines (SC 2017). CEPS also contributed to negotiations

leading up to a 2005 agreement reached at Paris' UN climate conference (SC 2017). Ecologic Institute now employs over 100 persons (SC 2017). The world, of course, still grapples with global warming or its impacts, illustrated in "Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power", a follow-up documentary on Gore's activism (Cohen/Shenk 2017).

Cost of inaction or disruption on war-torn countries and a changing climate brought a so-called migrant or refugee crisis to EU states, starting 2015 with millions of people fleeing via the Mediterranean Sea or Southeast Europe, mainly from Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia. Think tanks like ICG were filled with indignation: "over 65 million people are now displaced", it cites the UN, "due to conflict or persecution, more than ever recorded" (SC 2015). While CEPS or other institutes could build on decades of experience in the fields of migration and asylum, their recommendations all too often fell on deaf ears in Brussels and capitals occupied in domestic debates.

What can feel like an age of a "hydra-headed crisis" (Held/Kaldor 2010) - from the global financial and ensuing debt crisis to security crises, a migration crisis and ever-looming environmental crisis - poses challenges and opportunities for EU think tanks. As if wicked problems were not enough to keep them busy (see Chapter 1), by the mid-2010s, many EU think tanks faced a more profane organizational challenge: leadership transition. It was not so much conscious organizational renewal but rather the necessity for an older think tanker generation of handing the baton to the next which drove changes in personnel and management. Craig Kennedy, for instance, stepped down in 2014 after nearly two decades at GMF's helm. Karen Donfried, his successor, came from US National Security Council after previous stints with GMF. Louise Arbour stepped down as ICG president, followed by ex-UN undersecretary general for peacekeeping Jean-Marie Guehenno, testimony to ICG's prestige by now.

At Bruegel, the handover from Pisani-Ferry to a new director, Guntram Wolff who had worked for the Commission and German Bundesbank, was rather due to the term limitations enshrined in its governance statutes. Pisani-Ferry kept busy heading policy planning for the French prime minister next to teaching in Berlin at the Hertie School of Governance, authoring a book on "The Euro Crisis and its Aftermath" (2014), then shaping Emmanuel Macron's economic platform of his presidential run as a sort of "eminence grise" (Briançon 2017). In retrospective, Bruegel chair Trichet attributes its relatively rapid success to "the lucidity of the people, including Pisani-Ferry, who launched the idea and...set up a core of researchers of remarkable quality" like Sapir and Veron plus the "period of unprecedented crisis, global and European":

*“In such periods, thinking out of the box is of the essence...The ultimate explanation for Bruegel’s...success is probably the moment and location of its birth. Bruegel was born in 2005, only two years before the start of the worst global financial crisis since the Second World War; and it was born in Europe [...where] one of the boldest historical economic and monetary endeavors ever started in human history is taking place.” (SC 2015)*

The mix of these factors presented the specialist think tank with rich possibilities for access, attention and influence. A 2016 external task force reviewing its performance in one sense already declares “mission accomplished”, noting it “achieved goals set in the mandate over a decade ago...it truly is the Brussels-based European think tank whose intellectual output is widely read, listened to, discussed and taken into account by people interested in political, economic issues” like decision-makers or opinion-formers (SC 2016). Still, it recommends resource diversification too (see Chapter 6).

EPC managed to attract Council president emeritus Herman van Rompuy as its president in 2015, as it moved to new premises on Rue du Trône including “custom-built, fully equipped [venue] able to seat 120 people” (SC 2017). Says van Rompuy:

*“I firmly believe think tanks such as EPC play an invaluable role in explaining the EU to citizens and in promoting sensible debate. In these crisis-driven times, we desperately need think tanks that can remind us of the importance of long-term, strategic thinking and that can connect the dots across different policy silos” (SC 2017)*

Jacques Delors Institute Berlin, an offshoot of Notre Europe jointly run with the Hertie School of Governance started “as a scientifically-based think tank” in 2014; located a stone’s throw off Berlin’s Brandenburg Gate on Pariser Platz, a team around political economist and the policy school’s current leader Henrik Enderlein attracted projects with Bertelsmann Foundation, the German chancellery and finance ministry.

With discussions about a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), trade policy turned more salient on Europe’s agenda. Digitization, too, and the transformative disruption it entails in many walks of life, business and politics continued to be a popular topic of research and recommendations to EU institutions. Lisbon Council, now personally well-connected with the Commission and housed in spacious Residence Palace offices, set up a European Digital Forum and convened its first event in the US on transatlantic digital economy. FoE merged with Security & Defence Agenda in 2014, runs the online platform Debating Europe, a pan-European policy journal called Europe’s World and uses “online brainstorming [...to] innovate how we convene and shape discussions” (SC 2017). IFRI, after “years of intensive work on its management culture” also renewed its online presence (research is now

available in French, English, German or Russian) and its Brussels branch alone held around 30 events annually in past years. EWI is now a “truly global entity” serving most multi-media channels from its eight offices with 50 full-timers and a network of “value-based ‘can do’ women and men”; in 2016 it launched a Global Commission on the Stability of Cyberspace (SC 2017). CASE, like many think tanks nowadays, offers webinars. And CEPS also chose digitization as a main current research theme.

Like Bruegel and other established central players, CEPS has also come of age: it now employs nearly 60 pan-European researchers and 20 support staff, churns out 200 publications and holds 100 events per year, bringing together over 200 members (SC 2017). Its annual flagship conference (since 2014) is called CEPS Ideas Lab - a title slightly reminiscent of the Aspen Institute’s Ideas Festival - convenes hundreds of speakers and participants on bold annual questions like “Does Europe Matter?”, “More or Less Europe?” or “Reconstructing the Union” (see above and Chapter 9).

In many ways, the events of 2016 caught EU think tanks off guard: it is too early to tell whether it was a turning point for the entire West’s history, but two events set precedents changing the direction of an “ever-closer union of peoples”: As CER - in the midst of it - stresses in its annual report: votes for Brexit and Trump are “biggest shocks of the year”, a “wake-up call for liberals” (SC 2016, see Chapter 1). “Circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief” (Oxford Dictionaries 2016) - this is one definition of 2016’s declared and debated international word of the year “post-truth”. CER (it had highlighted costs of leaving) finds think tanks are in jeopardy (SC 2016). Others tend to agree; in its annual report Lisbon Council also finds strong words on the “beginning of the Age of the Populist and ‘post-truth’ politics...this stunning dive of policy down a rabbit hole of pre-modern thinking...Put simply, we must redouble our commitment to evidence-based policymaking”, president Hofheinz writes, now battling with “the fact that facts don’t seem to matter much anymore” (SC 2016).

However, in the lead-up to 2016 Lisbon Council is a case of how visibility-gearred think tanks distinguished themselves from experts: “studying [business...] was quite boring”, says co-founder Ann Mettler in a European Voice profile interview on herself, “I wanted it to be about real issues, bring in practitioners, not just experts... What people don’t understand”, Mettler adds, “is just because you run a think tank doesn’t have to mean you get to sit around all day and think” (Panichi 2014:18).

Of course, “Trump is a creature of the moment”, a TIME Magazine journalist



opined before the 2016 vote, “of improvisation, of polarity...of learning public policy not from experts [but...] more from newspapers and what he calls ‘the shows’”; while Obama stressed “You’ve actually got to know what you’re talking about” on Hillary Clinton’s campaign trail, she fears that “Trump’s candidacy has become a referendum on whether the credentials of the qualified elite are a liability next to machismo, single-minded nationalism and information-age street smarts” (Meacham 2016). EU think tankers, politicians and citizens are perplexed by his administration’s Leitmotif: “From this moment on, it’s going to be America First”, Trump insists, or - as the latest investigative reporting depicts it - rather chaotic governance of “America only” (Woodward 2018). Freedom House also sees a worldwide decline of political rights or civil liberties 2004 to 2016, with shrinking spaces for CSOs (Foa/Mounck 2017).

However, for many a mood of “Regrexit” set in; EU approval ratings soared: over 60 percent of citizens in many countries feel it should play a more active role in world affairs, according to most recent data, as Commission president Juncker argues “Europe can no longer afford to piggyback on the military might of others” (Munich Security Conference 2017:16), a message US-origin institutes like Carnegie Europe set the stage for earlier. “Is truth dead?”, a TIME magazine cover pointedly asks (2017). It is too early to tell. As think tanks continue to inform and irritate the history of EU integration, their leaders still debate “Europe’s troubled future” (Merritt 2016).

Bertelsmann Foundation, which celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2017 and handed over its Brussels branch to Henning vom Stein, an ex-Brussels liaison officer of Commerzbank and Thyssen Krupp, continues to invest in European programs (SC 2016), as most think tanks make due with significantly lower, often fragile, funding. In a four-page 2017 local newspaper ad, Bertelsmann Foundation’s board chair de Geus is alerted that “political freedom of civil society is at risk in Europe”; as “fear is conditioned by lack of knowledge”, he thinks, so think tank’s “courage and optimism about the future” will be needed more than ever (Neue Westfälische Zeitung 2017). Having examined EU think tanks’ field emergence, structuration and current state, let us now turn in more detail to their financial and human resources, networks as well as hybrid role enactment at crossroads of societal spheres in the following chapters.

## Chapter 6

# Financial Resources: Does He Who Pays the Piper Also Call the Tune?

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### Introduction

Let us move from mapping the field's history to mapping EU think tanks' budgets. This is one crucial structural basis for assessing their debated financial independence (see Chapter 1), possible resource dependencies as well as concomitant isomorphism. Data was obtained for the Brussels-based cross-section of 39 EU think tanks, mainly by analyzing their available balance sheets and other material such as annual reports. Unlike in the US, no consistent overview or disclosure exists. Thus, this chapter tries to systematize and compare all publicly available information for funding patterns<sup>3</sup>.

The concept of resources is understood to include material and symbolic forms (see chapter 2). But the debate regularly centers in on think tanks' funding, as indeed it should. Think tank funding naturally co-determines constraints and opportunities. Size and sources of EU think tank revenues will concern us most in discussing their relative autonomy and funding patterns, a basis to scrutinize their own independence claims later (see Chapter 9). We will touch upon institutes' assets, expenditures and budget balances. Revenue size is a crucial indicator to understand how large a think tank is in a sense of what it can do; diversification of budget portfolios is one proxy indicator of independence. But, it turns out, this is understood differently in Anglo-Saxon- as opposed to the continental European think tank traditions (Kelstrup 2016).

EU think tank financing now hails from a range of revenue streams: individual donations or membership fees, foundation and corporate funds, government or IO - such as EU - grants, contracts and consulting work. Of course, they can also generate investment income (securities or interest on savings), event fees, real estate rental or publication sales. Our main analytical interest here is the share of public-, business- and civil society sector financing, as well as interviewees' qualitative evaluation of different funding arrangements and what they mean for the puzzle of independence. The next chapter complements this financial picture with human resources analysis.

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<sup>3</sup> Financial information was collected in 2014 and 2015. The functional currency of most EU think tanks is euros, some use US dollars, so amounts are stated in euros or converted into euros at rates of exchange in effect during the month of reporting. Where the reporting currency was the dollar, the time-sensitive European Central Bank's Statistical Data Warehouse currency converter (<https://sdw.ecb.europa.eu/curConverter.do>) was used for conversion.

## **Scale of expenditures and assets: Brussels institutes' outlays and savings**

While the analyzed Brussels EU think tanks' revenues will be the main focus of this chapter's balance sheet and financial information break-down, let us briefly gain a glimpse of what their typical outlays and overall financial assets are in the first place.

### *Expenditures and spending posts of Brussels EU think tanks*

Data as of 2014 was found for 20 of 39 Brussels EU think tanks (51 percent). Almost half of this limited subsample of mostly but not exclusively larger Brussels institutes had expenditures under €5 million, the other half €10 million or even €50 million, which only Bertelsmann Foundation and RAND (overall, not just RAND Europe) surpass (see Appendix 5). Only the subsample of these 20 EU think tanks present and active in Brussels for which expenses were available and coded spent nearly half a billion euros taken together during 2014, namely €439.481.041 to be precise. Thus, a first finding is that even if financial capacity is more limited than in the US, still EU think tanks appear to expend serious sums of money in Brussels and beyond. The pattern is of course in line with the revenue structures the next section details.

What are the biggest spending posts of the covered think tanks? Some, it turns out when we turn to the quality beyond these quantities, have higher overhead costs for staff or administration than program outlays, notably scholarly institutes Bruegel, GRIP, IFRI or SWP, but also platform think tanks like Maastricht's ECDPM or EIPA (the latter has a two to one ratio); personnel- and program-related outlays are roughly or exactly the same for Lisbon Council and PLS; CEPS, Bertelsmann Foundation and the US-origin Carnegie, EWI, GMF and RAND spend more for programs than staff (partly acting in a grant-giving role). Comparing Bruegel's and CEPS' expenditures composition is interesting: while two thirds of Bruegel's €4 million 2014 expenses are staff or admin costs and one third program spending, CEPS' situation is reversed: two thirds of its €7 million expenses program costs and a third staff or admin outlays. The institutes operate differently, given historical path dependencies (see Chapter 5): as we will see, CEPS needs to refinance itself through projects, more so than Bruegel.

The available major EU think tanks' expenditures were also coded over time (see Appendix 6). Indicating post-financial crisis recovery by the time of research, the observed program expenses rose particularly for large US-origin EU think tanks but stayed stable for most other institutes with program costs under €5 million. For human resource costs, the US-rooted institutes experienced most oscillation - several

million euros for GMF, Carnegie or ICG (overall, not their Brussels office) - whereas for most other EU think tanks this pattern is one of more stability or slight increases. Only US-origin Brussels institutes follow a tradition to separately declare fundraising costs: from 2011 to 2015, these more than doubled for Carnegie to €1.7 million, also rose from one to €1.5 million at ICG, doubled for GMF (investing €700,000 in 2015) and remained relatively stable - around the half a million Euro mark - only for EWI.

### *Budget balance and financial assets of Brussels EU think tanks*

We can also get a sense of think tanks' financial position from their budget balance. A budget surplus (revenues exceed expenditures) can indicate an institute is being effectively managed, it has higher net assets which can be used to spend, pay off debt or save in the future; a balanced or break-even budget (expenditures equal income) is often the aim of think tank and non-profit leaders, hoping their projections work out; however, a budget deficit (outlays exceed income) can of course arise, and there can be good reasons to willingly opt for running a deficit in a given financial year as well.

For example, this can result from a board decision to invest in fundraising, new programming or communications, or simply appear as a lesser evil than having to cut staff costs. Thus, think tanks' willingly lowered net worth and financially weaker state at a deficit budget year's end can still turn out to be a smart strategic decision. In other words: public sector or foundation grants are typically meant to break even, but organizations like think tanks do not necessarily always have to do this each year.

As with limited expenditures data availability, a budget balance could also just be calculated for 20 (51 percent) of 39 Brussels EU think tanks as of 2014. Carnegie Europe ran the largest budget deficit in that year, over €3 million. At well under €200,000, the deficits of IFRI, IIEA, EPC and GRIP are significantly smaller. PLS' activities in 2014 resulted in a break-even budget. This almost applies for the heavily project work-funded CEPS, which accrued a negligible €15,000 surplus. Bruegel had an almost €200,000 surplus (see Appendix 7 for a bar chart with the exact amounts). Such surplus budgets are only surpassed by German as well as US-origin think tanks: EWI, SWP, ICG or GMF all had between two to five million euros budget surpluses; the overall RAND and Bertelsmann Foundation figures (not just Brussels presences) - near €13 million and over €48 million, respectively - are again stellar in comparison. Let us briefly turn to how institutes' assets may "shield" them from market pressures.

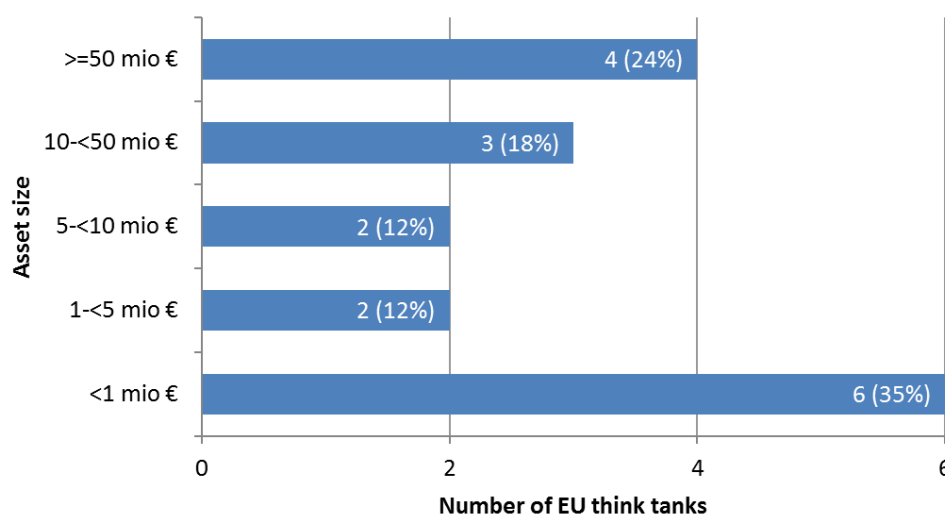
The sampled Brussels institutes have starkly different financial assets at their disposal. As not-for-profit actors, they do not have owners and thus list net assets (assets less liabilities) on their financial statements. This includes endowments which can shield from competition to an extent, say by enabling a think tank to live off its interests. Again, such detailed data as of 2014 was only available for a subsample of 17 out of the 39 EU think tanks active in Brussels (44 percent). Taken together, these wielded nearly two billion euros financial assets, namely an aggregate sum of €1.954.209.788.

Again, however, Bertelsmann Foundation’s overall worth already accounts for over one billion, RAND had €362 million assets in 2014, Carnegie Europe and GMF assets worth hundreds of millions of euros - more than the rest of covered institutes put together. But such significant assets are the exception, not the rule: almost every second sampled think tank has assets under five or a million euros (see Figure 11).

Longitudinal data (see Appendix 8) shows, for instance, that IFRI’s €12 million euro assets surprisingly surpass the US-origin EWI’s €11 million that year; Ecologic Institute’s assets grew from four to seven million euros from 2010 to 2014, CEPS’ dropped from six to five million euros in the year leading up to its first “Ideas Lab 2014” event - as we will see a big investment for this central player (see Chapter 9); and Bruegel experienced increasing assets, with €4 million financial buffer in 2014 (a million euro less than CEPS). All other Brussels EU think tanks for which asset data was found disposed of around or under one million euros - not much of a financial protection to speak of. Again, we see US-origin think tanks active in Brussels play in a financial league of their own, approximated only by few of the EU-origin institutes.

**Figure 11.** Brussels EU think tank asset size categories (N=17)

Note: Expenditure data as of 2014 available for 17 or 44% of the 39 Brussels institutes.



## **Revenue size and composition: Who bankrolls Brussels EU think tanks?**

How exactly do the sampled 39 EU think tanks in Brussels fund their own activities? As we began to see in the previous section, think tanks at the EU level are typically small organizations, and yet the yearly financial resources wielded significantly vary. Based on the assembled financial database (see Chapter 3), for the first time since academics study EU think tanks, we can reveal patterns in terms of budget portfolios, for shares of public (including EU), business or civil society sector income also vary.

For 37 (95 percent) of the 39 Brussels institutes, revenue figures as of 2014 (or 2013, and if possible further years) could be identified and systematized (no funding information was found only for ECIA and Madariaga). Interviews help triangulate officially stated numbers, and shed additional light on the rationales underpinning the revenue portfolios or aspects like their internationality (say Anglo-American origin).

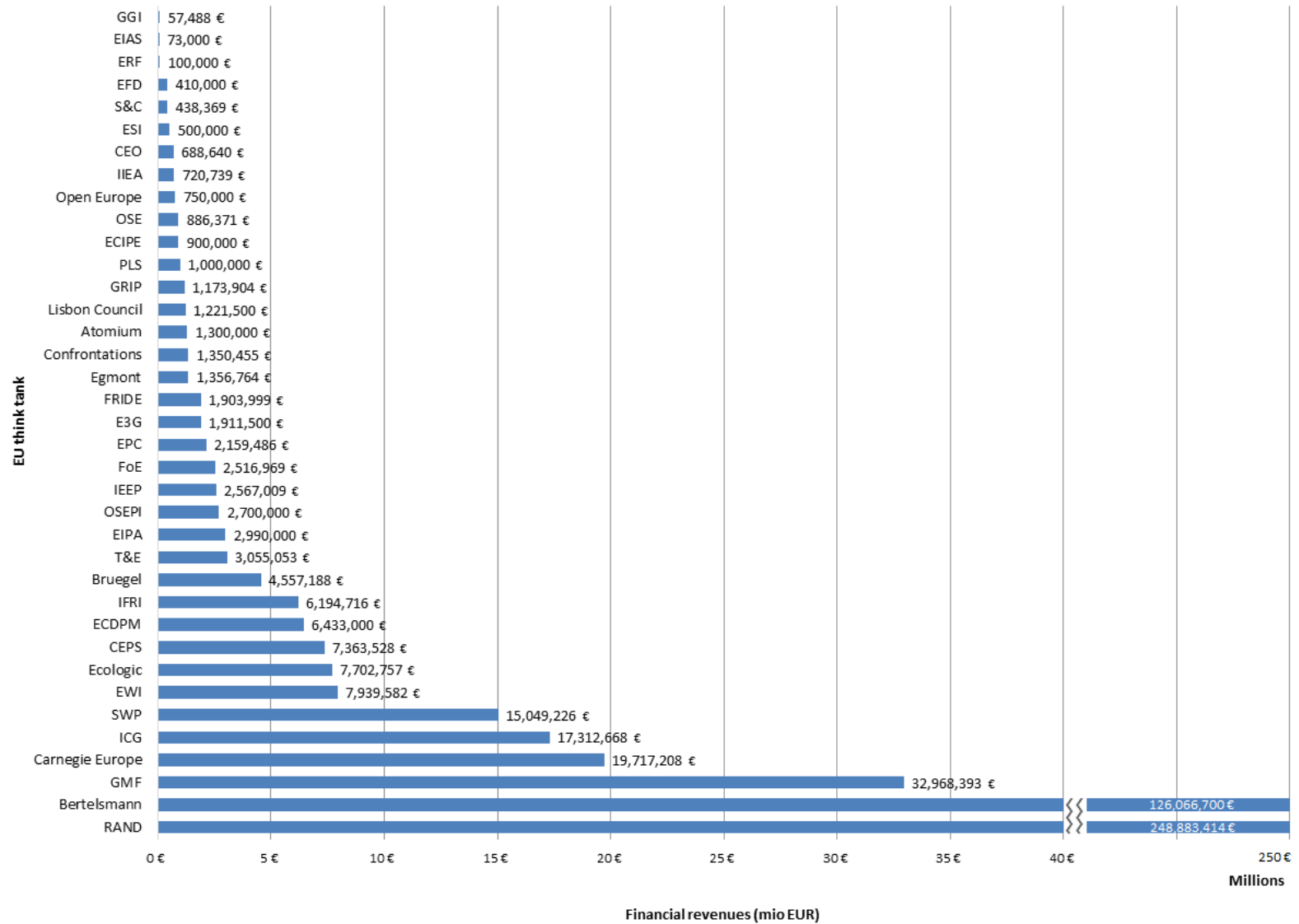
Figure 12 depicts Brussels EU think tanks' revenues and the stark differences are immediately conspicuous. Overall, the organizational field's 37 EU think tanks in Brussels for which revenue data was available taken together managed to accumulate total revenues of over half a billion euros, or €532,919,626 (similar to expenditures, see above). Taken together, clearly they do not just wield ideas but serious money.

However, a caveat is as that only RAND Corporation's overall revenues rather than RAND Europe's separate figure could be used, the former already accounts for nearly €250 million in 2014; this also applies to Bertelsmann Foundation's over €126 million figure, which refers to the overall foundation and not just its Brussels branch. While these two organizations partly act as EU think tanks, they are also much more - a huge contract-based consultancy, and one of the larger European foundations. The RAND and Bertelsmann Foundation revenues far exceed even operating revenues of some of the largest US-based think tanks, such as the Brookings Institution (financial means of €107 million in 2014). GMF Brussels mustered nearly €33 million in 2014 and Carnegie Europe - again, only its overall figures could be detected - €20 million that year, followed by ICG's - overall - €17 million and SWP's €15 million budgets .

A key finding is that most Brussels institutes have revenues under €10 million. Figure 13 simplifies how Brussels EU think tanks break down by their revenue size: as mentioned, in the largest category of far over €50 million RAND and Bertelsmann Foundation are two "outliers", whose financial means - and this corresponds to impressions gained from interviews - place them in a league of their own. It may be one reason why RAND feels uncomfortable with a "think tank" label (see Chapter 4).

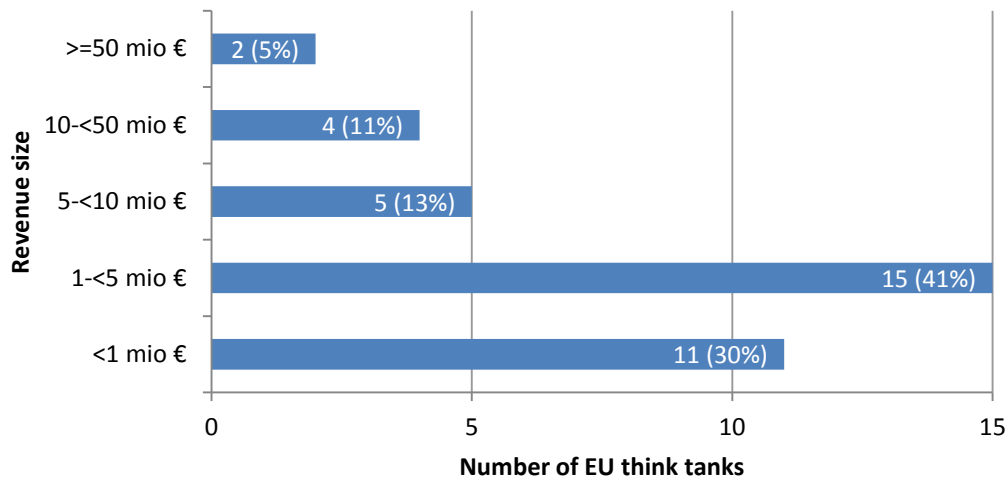
**Figure 12.** Revenue size of EU think tanks present in Brussels (N=37)

Note: Revenue data as of 2014; no data on revenues could be identified only for ECIA and Madariaga.



**Figure 13.** Budget size categories of Brussels EU think tanks (N=37)

Note: Revenue data as of 2014, available for 37 or 95 percent of 39 Brussels EU think tanks.



The pattern of US- and partly German origin institutes topping the revenues listing also applies to the second largest budget size category: the four institutes wielding over €15 million are Carnegie Europe, GMF, ICG, SWP (11 percent of 37 included). Another subset of relatively large EU think tanks commands considerable revenues over €6 million in 2014 (or 2013) - SWP's French counterpart IFRI and ECDPM - to over €7 million - CEPS, Ecologic Institute and EWI (together 13 percent of the 37).

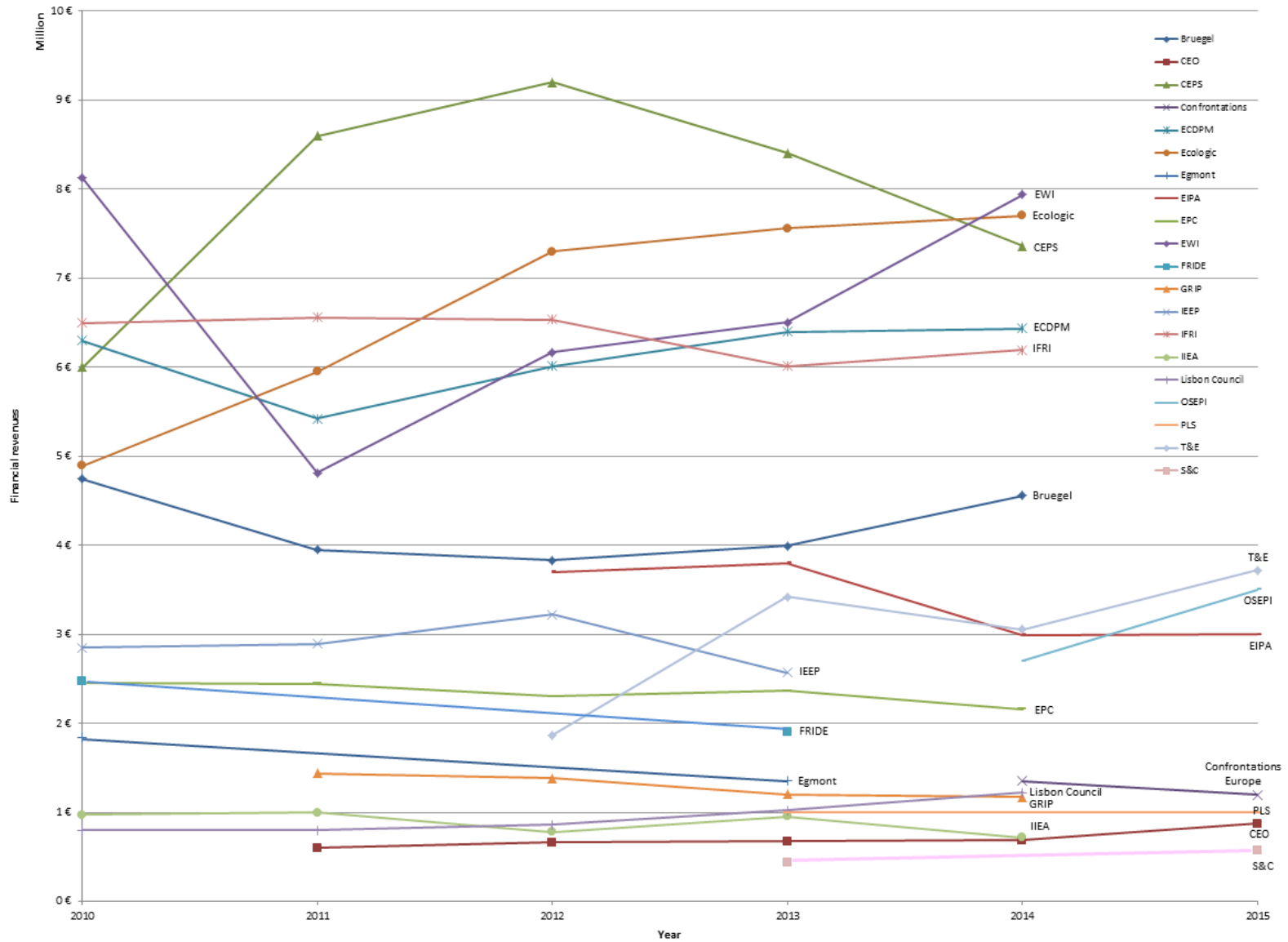
However, the median category - often a professionalization barrier - comprises 15 (or 41 percent) think tanks operating with yearly income of €1 million but under €5 million - Bruegel, FoE, EPC, Lisbon Council and PLS would be examples here. Finally, nearly a third of Brussels players for which financial data was found operate - at times well under - the €1 million threshold (11 or 30 percent): for instance, GGI (founded in 2010) had just €60,000 in 2013, a fraction of other think tanks' projects.

So a second key result is that the vast majority of Brussels institutes (31 or 84 percent) make due with under €10 million, mostly under €5 million yearly revenues. Comparatively speaking, this does mean that they tend to be smaller than their US capital counterparts in Washington, D.C. (see Medvetz 2012:165), as is much-noted in academic literature (see Chapter 1) and emphasized by interviewees. However, as Stifterverband's Berlin "think and do tank" Civil Society in Numbers (ZiviZ), which maps German CSOs since 2008 (Anheier/Spengler 2009), points out: over every second non-profit organization in the EU's biggest member state operates with yearly income under €10.000 as of 2015; only 4 percent achieve six-digit yearly revenue figures (Priemer et al. 2015:20). This makes EU think tanks' situation look less bad.



**Figure 14.** Yearly revenues of 20 Brussels institutes with under €10 million, 2010 to 2015

Note: All amounts in or converted to EUR (e.g. from \$) and rounded.



Zooming in on the Brussels EU think tanks with yearly revenues under €10 million, Figure 14 above depicts 20 institutes' operating revenue over time from 2010 to 2015. The general longitudinal pattern visible is one of relative revenue stability below the €5 million threshold, but more dramatic fluctuations above it in the early 2010s: for instance, several small EU think tanks starting out with around €1 million in 2010 or 2011 still managed to earn a more or less similar amount of income 2014 or 2015. T&E - below €2 million in 2012 - had doubled revenues to nearly €4 million by 2015. Bruegel's revenues - under €5 million in 2010 - took a dip the next years, only to rise again to nearly the same capacity of financial resources of over €4.5 million by 2014.

On the other hand, in the upper half of Figure 14 we can see the more varied revenue trajectories of large EU think tanks present in Brussels in the covered period, which of course includes the years beyond the immediate aftermath of the worldwide financial- and ensuing European debt crisis: the revenues of IFRI and ECDPM also remained relatively stable around or above €6 million from 2010 until 2014, while Ecologic Institute's income grew from approximately €5 million to nearly €8 million. From 2010 to 2011, EWI saw its budget dip from over €8 million to below €5 million, followed by three consecutive years of growth resulting in nearly €8 million by 2014. To the contrary, CEPS experienced a quite spectacular revenue growth 2010 to 2012 - a fifty percent increase from €6 million to over €9 million - only to see its budget shrink in the next two financial years, resulting in 2014 revenues under €7.5 million.

Figure 14 does not depict EU think tanks with revenue figures over €10 million (see Appendix 9 for a figure with revenues of all 25 major Brussels EU think tanks for which financial information over time is available, including the larger institutes). However, all the significantly higher revenue figures of these well-heeled think tanks stem from the fact that no separate income amount just for their Brussels office was found. This biases comparisons to other only Brussels-based institutes. Nonetheless, the following six Brussels actors - as integral parts of big or global think tanks - can safely be assumed to capitalize on the serious money that their "motherships" wield.

Berlin's SWP, in Brussels since 2009, is not wrong in calling itself "Europe's largest think tank in the field of international politics" (SC 2017): its revenues grew from under €13 million in 2011 to nearly €15 million by 2015, a solid financial basis. ICG could not cement its yearly income of over €21 million in 2010, but more or less managed to stabilize revenues during the following years around a €15 million mark (again, these figures refer to the overall organization, not Brussels offices separately).

GMF's "revenue journey" led from heights of well over €25 million in 2010 - even reaching nearly €33 million the next year - to what appears as a spectacularly slashed budget of €11.5 million in 2012, bouncing back to above €32 million 2013 and 2014, then falling again to €25.5 million revenues during 2015, the last year covered here. Carnegie Europe's parent think tank - the Carnegie Endowment - saw similarly conspicuous ups and downs in its available means: nearly doubling income from €15 million in 2011 to around €30 million the next years, dropping to €20 million in 2014 only to top a €27 million mark 2015 as "global think tank" (SC 2017, see Chapter 4).

As noted, RAND and Bertelsmann Foundation are outliers when it comes to financial stakes (although the total revenues of their respective Brussels office, which could not be separately identified, probably make up only relatively small fractions). Bertelsmann Foundation grew its already impressive total revenues of €122.5 million in 2012 to a whopping €156 million in 2015. This is only surpassed - overshadowed - by RAND Corporation's overall revenues as a global contract research think tank: it has rocketed from already over €204 million in 2011 to almost €278 million by 2015.

If we just take the 24 Brussels institutes for which budget data over time was found (62 percent of 39 sampled), the following cross-sectional pattern emerges: in their last two financial years coded (transition 2013 to 2014), ten (42 percent) saw revenues rise, five (21 percent) had stable budgets; nine (37 percent) saw them fall.

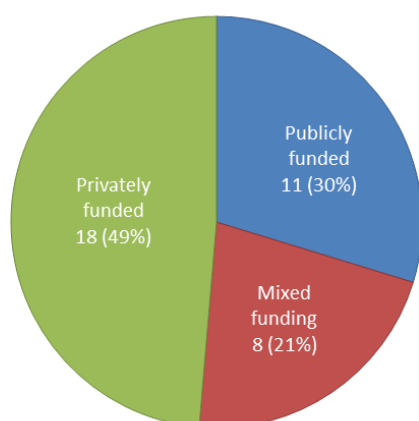
#### *What are Brussels institutes' funding models and sectoral revenue mixes?*

While revenue size is an important indicator of the scale of a think tank's operations, actual composition of income sources - the quality beyond these quantities - is a key concern when we discuss institutes' budget portfolio diversification, or independence. This section presents a first systematic overview and in-depth analysis of Brussels EU think tank funding models, discussing their different not-for-profit budget portfolios.

Empirical scrutiny of their financial resources' actual origins is very revealing: As Figure 15 (and Table 11 below) show, near half of 37 Brussels institutes - whose in-depth finances could be discerned - can be said to be exclusively or predominantly privately financed; a third relies strongly or only on public sector funding; and just a minority has mixed financing with sector-wise more - or less - balanced-out budgets. Table 11 below breaks down in detail both the proportions and sources of income: What becomes clear from this exercise is that most EU think tanks fall somewhere in between on the spectrum from purely public funding towards purely private funding.

**Figure 15.** Funding models of Brussels EU think tanks (N=37)

Note: Revenue data as of 2014, available for 37 or 95 percent of 39 Brussels institutes.



At least at the time the cross-sectional database was assembled, only a few institutes with a presence in Brussels achieved a balance of public- and private revenue shares. Let us zoom in before we address the chapter's title question based on triangulation with the interview-voiced experiences: Does he who pays the piper call the tune? The spectrum of institutes' financing, holistically seen, is rather broad: there are those with funding from exclusively public sector income; those with predominantly public sector- but partly private sector revenues; and some with a relatively hybrid funding (CEPS emerges as the only Brussels EU think tank close to fifty-fifty public- versus private revenue proportions, at least at the time of study); those mostly privately- but in part publicly funded; as well as, finally, the fully privately funded EU think tanks.

The threshold used to distinguish public- and private funding models is simple: only if over a third of institutes' income stems from each sectoral origin can we truly speak of mixed funding. Thus, EU think tanks with two thirds (or, more precisely, 66 percent) or more public sector income in their budget mix - be it by governments, regional authorities, the EU or other IOs - are considered publicly funded. Reversely, those financed two thirds or above by private sources - corporate fees or projects and civil society contributions of foundations, individual gifts or donations - are classed as privately funded. The middle category is diversified institutes which rely on fairly mixed sources. Borderline cases with mixed funding are Bruegel, whose lion's share of public sector income is still under two thirds of its total budget, and FoE, with over a third of public- and barely under two thirds private income. A key finding is: CEPS - often denounced as "Commission-funded", say by British journalists, or suspected to be "bought by corporations" - has, in fact, the most balanced revenues.

**Table 11.** Sectoral composition of Brussels EU think tank budget portfolios (N=37)

Note: Proportion of public sector-, private - or other income sources could be calculated for 37 (95 percent) of 39 Brussels EU think tanks (except ECIA, IEEP); all € amounts as of 2014 from the think tanks' own not-for-profit balance sheets, annual reports or other self-declared figures, rounded (at times converted from \$) and, unless otherwise indicated, the overall organizations' budgets are stated. Concrete sources (in brackets) are listed in order of their importance, from the most- to least important.

Name	Budget size (in € thsd)	Public sources	Private sources	Other income	Model
EIPA	2,990	100% (state members; governments; EU)	0%	0%	Public
SWP	15,049	99% (German government; regional)	1% (donations)	0%	Public
Egmont	1,357	99% (Belgian government; regional)	1% (corporations; donations)	0%	Public
GRIP	1,174	96% (regional; Belgian government; EU)	1% (donations)	3% (interest)	Public
GGI	57	92% (governments)	8% (donations)	0%	Public
OSE	886	82% (governments; EU)	18% (trade unions; projects)	0%	Public
RAND Europe	10,157 (overall 248,883)	82% (governments; EU; IOs)	18% (projects; corporations; foundations)	0%	Public
ECDPM	6,433	80% (EU; Dutch/other governments)	20% (foundations; endowment)	0%	Public
Atomium	1,300	77% (EU)	23% (unspecified)	0%	Public
Ecologic	7,703	77% (German government; EU; IOs)	23% (unspecified)	0%	Public
PLS	1,000	75% (EU; regional)	25% (corporations; associations)	0%	Public
Bruegel	3,992	63% (state members; EU)	36% (corporate/civil society fees)	1% (honoraria)	Mixed
T&E	3,055	61% (governments)	38% (foundations; member fees; projects)	1% (interest)	Mixed
CEPS	7,364	51% (EU; governments)	44% (corporate/institutional members)	5% (events)	Mixed
FRIDE	1,904	41% (EU; governments)	59% (gift; donations; foundations)	0%	Mixed
ICG	17,313	41% (governments; EU; IOs)	59% (donations; corporate/civil society fees)	0%	Mixed
ESI	500	40% (governments; IOs)	60% (foundations; associations)	0%	Mixed
EPC	2,159	39% (EU; governments; regional; IOs)	61% (projects; corporate/civil society fees)	0%	Mixed
FoE	2,517	35% (governments; regional; EU; IOs)	65% (corporate/civil society fees; foundations)	0%	Mixed
IIEA	956	29% (Irish/other governments)	67% (corporate/civil society fees; projects)	4% (events)	Private
IFRI	6,012	27% (French/other governments; EU)	70% (corporate fees; projects; donations)	3% (interest)	Private
Madariaga	n/a	20% (Chinese mission to the EU)	80% (College of Europe; foundations)	0%	Private
S&C	438	16% (IOs; governments; regional)	84% (corporate/civil society fees; projects)	0%	Private
Carnegie	19,717	13% (governments)	81% (endowment; gifts; corporate/civil society)	6% (renting)	Private
EWI	7,940	8% (governments)	89% (projects; corporations; foundations; gifts)	3% (events)	Private
GMF Brussels	1,048 (overall 32,968)	8% (EU; GMF support; governments)	92% (GMF support; projects; gifts; corporations)	0%	Private
EFD	410	8% (US government)	92% (foundations; gifts; donations)	0%	Private
Confront.	1,350	5% (French government; EU)	94% (corporations; associations; donations)	1% (events)	Private
E3G	1,912	2% (EU; governments)	98% (foundations; gifts)	0%	Private
CEO	689	0%	99% (foundations; donations)	1% (interest)	Private
EIAS	73	0%	100% (projects; corporate/civil society fees)	0%	Private
Lisbon C.	1,222	0%	100% (corporations; foundations; donations)	0%	Private
ECIPE	900	0%	100% (foundations; corporations; gifts)	0%	Private
ERF	100	0%	100% (corporations; gifts)	0%	Private
Bertels- mann F.	3,329 (overall 126,067)	0%	100% (indirect Bertelsmann holdings; gifts)	0%	Private
OSEPI	2,700	0%	100% (Open Society Foundations support)	0%	Private
Open E.	750	0%	100% (UK businesspeople donations)	0%	Private

## **“It’s all in the mix”: Effects of public, private or mixed think tank funding**

This section discusses Brussels EU think tanks’ funding patterns in more detail. Let us start with publicly funded ones, continue on to those with balanced financing and close with privately funded Brussels institutes. Figures of the non-profit balance sheet analysis are triangulated with insights from the qualitative interviews to gain a sense of the underlying reasons and stated rationales behind different funding situations, of their effects and evaluation as voiced by the think tankers themselves. Throughout, funding models’ practical implications for real or perceived independence (or rather relatively autonomy) of EU think tanks will serve as an anchoring point of reference.

### *Publicly funded EU think tanks*

EIPA, SPW and Egmont are examples of stand-alone institutes present in Brussels which are almost exclusively publicly funded - in the sense that they receive most if not all of their revenues from public sector grants, tenders or other income from the EU institutions, national governments, ministries and regional or local authorities. EIPA exclusively operates on public sector contributions or fees: “We are financed by [EU] member states and the Commission”, its Brussels representative explains (I9-Guggenbühl:10). next to countries’ statutory contributions to its nearly €3 million budget in 2014, Luxembourg and Catalonia’s regional government subsidize housing and related costs; other countries second staff; the Commission’s DG Education and Culture pays yearly operating grants (SC 2014). With roughly two thirds EU member state funds and a third Commission financing, it gets on without private sector funds. Yet, quasi by design, publicly funded institutes may pursue “underlying pro-EU agendas - certainly Eurosceptics would see that - being funded by various budget lines which...require strengthening the EU as part of what they do” (I74-Woolard:16).

A related issue arises for exclusively nationally funded EU think tanks: To what extent are they independent of a government in question, or transnational in outlook? SWP, for example, finds itself in a “comfortable position when you do not have to think about whether funding will come or not”, its Brussels head says (I3-Reljic:88). 99 percent of its €15 million budget in 2014 hails mostly from a budget line of Germany’s federal chancellery and other public sources, next to some donations (SC 2014). The interviewee worries about strings attached to private - corporate - money: “this is a point which makes us very different from other think tanks” in Brussels, he says, “we do not do commissioned research” (I3-Reljic:26). Still, “there is an interest

in getting more third-party funding”, another interviewed SWP expert reports, who insists “institutional independence of SWP is maintained, is guaranteed in its statutes, even if...SWP’s budget comes mainly from the federal budget, channeled through the chancellery” (I10-Brozus:18, SC 2014). SWP stresses it conceives of its research agenda, that independence “always means political independence, when it comes to results and which projects to accept” (SC 2014), a principle widely supported in German political culture and by the German Council of Science and Humanities.

Egmont, SWP’s smaller Belgian counterpart, and GRIP have similar almost exclusively public sector funding models, with virtually no budget diversification to speak of within their over €1 million euro 2014 budgets. For example, Egmont funds itself with Belgian foreign ministry or regional authority support. In line with SWP’s declared experience, GRIP’s research leader says “Belgian authorities are very free with that” but admits to - subjectively felt - limits inherent to a public support model:

*“We write what we want, but for sure inside ourselves we know we are also dealing with persons friendly to us. It certainly has an impact, only a hypocrite would say ‘No!’. But it is also very useful, because we cannot work as if we were an isolated island and have to take into consideration all constraints politicians have. This is not a bad thing. What is important is that you can say fundamentally what you believe in.”* (I40-Santopinto:38)

Thus, real risks of anticipatory obedience in a nationally-tilted public funding model - and potential allegations of resource and concomitant intellectual dependency - are rethorically wheeled around here: instead, benefits of political context sensitivity, of often unique political access as well as practice-oriented grounding are stressed. Public funding comes either in form of structural support or project work: “We have projects...where we provide analyses and do not publish them”, GRIP’s research leader explains, but it is “structural support from the Belgian government which helps us a lot, this is the most important part [...for these] subsidies have a different philosophy of ‘We support you because we believe that you are doing good work, and that you are socially important even if you do not make a profit’” (I40:42).

“We’re very lucky - because we’re very poor!”, the director of GGI - with a budget under €100,000 in 2013 (see above) - exclaims during the interview, which to him “means we have few people who can put pressure on us”; funding is “almost entirely based on project work. We follow a similar model as GPPI...start-up funding at the beginning...but essentially it’s project-driven, project-funded” (I2-Koops:12). While he sees this positively, the head of the much more safely funded SWP Brussels evaluated other think tanks’ project networking-for-funding skeptically: he is glad

that at SWP “no time is lost in looking for consortia...once you go for external funding, you make compromises” (I3:88). Project-funding is seen as a dangerous burden on top of expert research rather than a welcome trend or opportunity here.

OSE is the first think tank in our list (see Table 11) inching towards a degree of diversification away from pure public funding which still makes up 82 percent of its close to €1 million budget in 2014; the remaining 18 percent is from private sources, notably trade unions: “We are not affiliated to trade unions”, the director clarifies, “but have core funding from both European and [national] trade union movements”; asked about independence, he thinks strictly speaking “there is no such thing...Any think tank depends on someone - the ones who fund it - either public authorities or banks or other private funders, in our case trade unions...In the end somebody pays us. But we are independent in our thinking”, he maintains (I7-Vanhercke:24).

RAND Europe, for its - of course ten times larger - €10 million budget in 2014, has identical proportions of 82 percent public- and 18 percent private sources income but a very different underlying business model as contract research-based think tank (SC 2014). Actors with “a big pot of money...can establish their research agendas independently”, as RAND Europe’s head of the Brussels office puts it, but “we were never organized that way....we are independent, objective, but...our funding comes from a variety of clients with whom we establish contracts”; he further reveals that:

*“It’s even more so the case in Europe, where we are predominantly contract-based. It’s very much on the basis of a one-off study we do for a client...Then there is a chunk of research funding, for example Horizon 2020 grants...and a small proportion of private sector funders...very different from how most think tanks are funded.”* (I35-Hoorens:20)

Its mix of heavy reliance on national public sector contracts (or, less so, EU grants) with private research contracts raises a potential “conflict of interest issue, especially with private sector clients: it does mean sometimes we have to say ‘Sorry, we cannot work in this area’”, because unlike its US mothership - which counts US department of defense among key account clients - “we don’t accept any kind of funding from defense industry...That would just look weird. Even if we applied our standards...of objectiveness, it would look weird”; this logic applies to “commercial areas that are just contentious, like alcohol or tobacco”, RAND Europe’s interviewee explains, from which it does not - or, it turns out, cannot - accept funds, for instance when the UK department of health “has an explicit point in their contracts saying ‘We don’t want you to work with the alcohol industry’...we just have to be pragmatic” (I35:34).



Another institute with 80 percent public- and 20 percent private income is ECDPM. It had nearly €6.5 million budget at its disposal in 2014: “Ten member states in the EU provide us with annual funding”, its director says, “the Netherlands is the biggest one...It allowed us to be independent, autonomous” (I17-Engel:18). It is crucial to distinguish unrestricted and restricted funds: “UK department for international development funding is always restricted”, in ECDPM’s experience, “there are strings attached...From all other member states, it is simply unrestricted. They say ‘Go ahead, it’s an investment in your strategy, you determine the strategy’” (I17:22).

ECDPM’s private income is mostly from foundations. Merely two percent of its funding is endowment income: “Interest from the endowment...was supposed to be 100 percent coverage of our costs in 1986, but then they were counting with four to six percent interest rates, we have not seen those for a very long time”, as the director recollects, so the Netherlands stepped in with institutional funding (I17:22). In contrast to RAND Europe’s contract-based model, for ECDPM “securing a relatively high percentage of flexible core and institutional, multi-annual funding” is a fundraising priority (SC 2011). It reasons “a better mix of funding types would spread risks, make us less vulnerable, overly demand- or market-driven” (SC 2016).

PLS is the first sampled think tank with a three quarters public- and one quarter private funding model underlying its exactly€1 million 2014(and 2015) “budget pie”: next to Commission grants, for instance by DG Employment, it obtained funds from Brussels’ regional government; its quarter private revenues stem from corporate or association support, say by Caritas France, KPMG or McKinsey - PLS speaks of “hybridation des ressources” (SC 2013). As PLS’ founder, a trained economist, says:

*“In our business plan, we put that no contract can have more importance than ten percent of our chiffre d’affaires, of our budget. It means we do not have any contract over €100,000. It was €50,000 when our budget was still €500,000. So that is a decision. When we lose a contract we’re not very happy but it’s not a question of life.” (I34-Stokkink:22)*

### *EU think tanks with mixed funding*

Bruegel is classed as a think tank with mixed - if not perfectly balanced - financing: almost two thirds of its analyzed budget, nearly €4 million in 2013, is from public sources (member country support or EU grants); over a third is private income (civil society membership fees or contributions); honoraria also make up one percent. In terms of its income mix, this places Bruegel near “the middle, receiving money by governments and corporations”, as its secretary general explains; while “all corporate

members contribute the same amount, €50,000 per year”, and are treated equally, “the funds for state members depend on size of population and GDP” (I19-Dann:68, 24). Bruegel does not collect individual donations, but endowment contributions on top of businesses’ blanket- or countries’ formula-derived fees are encouraged. Its endowment was set up to stabilize “funding and buttress independence” (SC 2014).

In the eyes of one CEPS interviewee, Bruegel’s unbound state financing amounts to shielding it from competition: historically “they were heavily subsidized - and still are - by highly distortive means” on the Franco-German initiative of “French prime minister Raffarin and German chancellor Schröder. Their common letter...said ‘We have each already devoted half a million euros’ to the ECOFIN ministers and central bank presidents...‘So why don’t you chip in fifty or a hundred thousand euros, too?’” (I57-Pelkmans:16). Nevertheless, he continues, - not without envy- “they, more than us because we are not totally free in the money, are able to set their own agenda that is different from one or the other contracts” due to participating states’ stable support:

*“That’s one of the big problems I see with CEPS - (whispers) it doesn’t mean others don’t see problems, but I’m more outspoken: we should set more our agenda. Maybe set money aside every contract, say five percent, so that we always have money to say ‘Now we should do this’ and not ‘The European Parliament wants us to do that’ or ‘There is a tender on this’ - no - ‘We think it’s an issue. It is not picked up. We do this’.” (I57:20)*

On the other hand, CEPS’ expert opines, Bruegel - notwithstanding actual substance of its outputs - may be perceived by some as “too close for comfort” because of state funding (I57:44). Depending on one’s definition of independence, the same could be said about CEPS or other more project- or contract-based EU think tanks - and about corporate funding. Bruegel does make its members transparent, including fees, grants or projects. “We prefer to say members rather than donors or sponsors”, its secretary general insists, “sponsorship gives a particular idea of how people are interacting. Membership is...governed by rules. Sponsorship is about private deals. We don’t have any donors. Nobody gives us money for nothing at the moment” (I19-Dann:55).

Yet the institutional support in form of the €50,000 corporate membership fee “makes us most expensive in Brussels”, he admits, which - as with public funds - poses an obligation to prove Bruegel’s value for money, “that you are worthy of public money you receive from states, private money you receive from corporations” (I19:36, 56). Next to Bruegel’s 18 mostly larger state members, it has 12 institutional ones, mostly central banks, and over 30 business members its founders deliberately included “as a counterweight to possible influence of EU civil servants” (SC 2016).

Still, Bruegel's very own self-commissioned external evaluation recommends that:

*“Bruegel should seek to widen and diversify the range of corporate members. At present, there are a disproportionate number of financial companies or large multinationals. The membership would be stronger if it included a wider industrial range and scale of companies. One way to expand range...might be to introduce differential subscriptions for smaller corporations (as already happens with smaller states).”* (SC 2016)

Indeed, the fact that mainly big banks - such as Deutsche Bank and Morgan Stanley -, large digital players - including Amazon, Google and Microsoft - and industry giants - for instance Merck, Novartis and Pfizer in pharma, ENEL and Shell in energy - are the companies represented at board level, suggesting topics to its research agenda or with one-on-one access to Bruegel researchers must lead one to wonder: Why are they in? Do they have Europe's best interest in mind, in line with Bruegel's mission?

Aware of what it sees as “unfair criticism of a ‘pay-to-play’ model”, Bruegel is quick to point out all members “agree to refrain from seeking to influence...research or obstruct publication”; still, its own evaluation report grants that while “corporate subscribers suggest Bruegel should give more attention to issues of trade, investment, productivity and competitiveness...the wider audience...stresses particular interest in ...migration, labor market or innovation” (SC 2016). So a trade-off clearly does arise.

As think tanks opt to increasingly tap into willing corporations' funds - be it as mere corporate social responsibility (CSR) contributions or with expectation of reciprocity - they must tread carefully to avoid hijacking of research agendas. This is all the more true in Europe's post-financial crisis context, as many have tried to sign on companies to offset public or foundation money they feel or experience drying up. “My reflection is we had a great crisis, but couldn't turn it into cash”, says Bruegel's secretary general (see Chapter 5), “we managed to preserve the size of our budget, but couldn't grow it, still can't grow it. Whatever measure of success you apply to us ...this tells you something - that we also find it hard to turn into cash” (I19-Dann:60).

CEPS is the only EU think tank approximating fifty-fifty funding proportions. While half of its over €7 million revenues 2014 stem from projects tendered by EU institutions, agencies or governments, the other half is from member fees (corporate or institutional, private organizations and, less so, foundations or individual members like academics, politicians, bureaucrats or retired CEOs), or event income (SC 2014). So, at least in theory, CEPS has sound reasons to claim funding “from a wide variety of sources, which helps to guarantee its independence” (SC 2014). Unlike Bruegel's one-size-fits-all corporate fees, CEPS' “corporate membership fees vary according to

size and structure of the company” and are lower: usually €6,000 to €18,000, “inner circle membership” can be had for €30,000 (SC 2014). However, a crucial difference is that unlike Bruegel’s stable institutional funding of EU countries, most “project contracts...are awarded to CEPS on a competitive basis”. CEPS’ director feels this is “extremely important: direct Commission money is only a couple of percent. All the rest is not ‘Commission money’. These are ...Europe-wide tenders, for which we compete against universities and other research institutes, national ones, which have their salaries and budgets already paid for”; this occasionally means direct rivalry, “more or less on equal footing...in the economic field head-on with Bruegel” (I52-Gros:14, 32). CEPS’ CEO also stresses “there is no free money whatsoever” in its funding model, “researchers participate all the time in calls for tenders or research applications”; this has implications for a think tank’s autonomy and stability, he says:

*“With US think tanks, or if you have a few big donors, of course you have more freedom at the level of researchers, to do what you want to do...We have limited leeway, it’s well-known. You also need...a reputation before you can have funding independence...There are very few think tanks in Europe which have such independence we have. Our financial situation improved a lot...But there are no guarantees for the future.” (I45-Lannoo:20)*

Naturally, all interviewed experts of the think tank are acutely aware of this as well: “we earn any penny ourselves”, CEPS’ head of corporate and external relations puts it (I32-Born-Sirkel:30); “look at...the pie chart of our income: about a third is derived from open competitions of the Commission”, the foreign policy unit’s head tells (I1-Blockmans:36); “it is a terribly competitive process”, a senior colleague finds, “with all manner of academic peer review checkpoints in the process. It’s not institutional funding - it’s brutal competition among researchers” (I46-Emerson:16); he compares this to CEPS foreign policy unit’s predominant funding source of private foundations:

*“These are ideal funders from a researcher’s point of view...the grant-giver says ‘We like what you’re doing, here’s a cheque, get on with it, let us know how you get on’. These grant-making mechanisms have virtually zero bureaucracy, rely upon trust. Of course, if that trust is broken, it stops, so delivery has to be taken absolutely seriously. In comparison [EU...] framework contracts are...incredibly heavy...with work packages, identification of deliverables, reporting and financial requirements...Whether they are unjustifiably heavy is another matter. Because this is public money.” (I46-Emerson:26)*

Behind CEPS’ halfway public funding model is a logic: “it’s better to have a bit more on that side than to be too dependent on corporate funding” (I45-Lannoo:28). Yet the focus on chasing EU resources also means “we are talking about a think tank that doesn’t have strong funding by governments, or stable funding, so you need to search

for projects and activities that can bring you additional revenues”, one fellow notes, “that gives you visibility, even though it creates a lot of volatility” (I39-Valiante:13). In the budget mix, “we are not necessarily dependent” on public funds, a senior colleague believes, “but you also have to be fair, in a way we are. Because if we would not be so successful there, our total turnover would shrink enormously”, he acknowledges, “just shrink - not make losses. But with that goes away a lot of knowledge that is now kept alive in a number of different areas” (I57-Pelkmans:38).

Just like Bruegel has to continuously assert it is above suspicion despite being co-financed by EU member state governments and multinational companies, CEPS is summoned to constantly clarify that its mixed funding does not amount to being co-opted by the EU apparatus or corporate interests. This anecdote is a case in point:

*“A correspondent of [UK daily] The Times in Brussels...would often quote CEPS...as ‘CEPS, the Commission-funded think tank’. Which is, in Britain, like saying ‘You don’t really need to pay attention’...We kept writing to this guy ‘Look, Commission funding is...only a very small proportion’...It’s not because they provide us with some funding that we cannot be critical. At the same time, it’s not because it comes from the Commission that it doesn’t deserve to be repeated or made a point.”* (I43-Incerti:42)

And as for the imminence of corporate capture, CEPS can point to the fact that it has quadruple of Bruegel’s number of corporate members - 130, well over half of its 227 members are businesses - from a broader range of industries: since “it is a mixture of corporate sectors” (I61-Fujiwara:22), the thinking goes, “we can loose any of them. They also neutralize each other to a large extent”, says the director (I52-Gros:28). CEPS’ CEO adds that- as for Bruegel- corporate funding “has remained stagnant...it has not been affected by the [financial] crisis”; he wards off criticism of any capture:

*“Corporations have not become more powerful in determining our research agenda... Within 130 [corporate] members, interests of...oil companies, car manufacturers, pharmaceuticals or utilities, they’re all extremely divergent...Because of this big diversity of funding sources, no one ‘determines’ our agenda...organizations may be all of a sudden upset about what we do. But in principle, it couldn’t impact us.”* (I45-Lannoo:28)

Still, a crux of the matter is how principled diversification then plays out in practice. CEPS now counts huge enterprises among its members: Google and Samsung (tech), Nestle and Pepsico (foods), ExxonMobil and Shell (energy), Siemens (industry), Volkswagen (cars) and, as with Bruegel, a long list of powerful financial companies. “This is a constant tension I experience in my position”, CEPS’ head of corporate and external relations says, “researchers...are keen to guard their independence...and then

corporations - rightly so - pursue own interests”; she explains this tension as follows:

*“Corporations...are interested in bringing their topic forward, researchers are working on a related topic. Then researchers are worried they will get influenced or forced...to tweak their findings in any way. And corporations...need to make sure their interests are taken care of. How do we do that? We never bend our interest or try to please a company because that is not what we stand for. As the saying goes: it takes a hundred years to build a reputation, and one second to tear it down.” (I32-Born-Sirkel:20)*

The now defunct FRIDE is a case in point reminding us that fundraising is a matter of life or, in this case, organizational death - not all think tanks, even with diversified financing, survive. Its financing seemed fairly mixed in 2013, when its €2 million budget came from nearly 60 percent private- and slightly over 40 percent public (EU, other IOs or national ministries) income. However, beyond some foundation support private money came overwhelmingly from the founder-philanthropist Diego Hidalgo. A breakdown of its funds reaching back from 2004 to 2013 soberly reveals how just one person shouldered the lion’s share (on average Hidalgo, also invested in ECFR, paid for 53 percent of FRIDE’s operations, SC 2014); FRIDE held on two years, but by end of 2015 “ceased...for economic reasons. The board of trustees had to take this difficult decision”, its now dormant website informs, “since despite many efforts to diversify its funding sources FRIDE cannot sustain its operations with a view to 2016 or beyond” (SC 2017). Failure to diversify can have dire if not drastic consequences.

Like many think tanks, ICG also started out uncertain if it would be for the long run (see Chapter 5). As of 2014, its public-to-private income share was roughly 40 to 60 percent for the €17.3 million budget: the public component is from national sources and Commission grants, and its well over half private income from individual, corporate or foundation fees or contributions. A smaller institute with the same ratio is ESI. It stresses that its private portion is only from civil society: €300,000 of the €500,000 budget in 2014 is by big grant-making foundations like ERSTE foundation or Germany’s Robert Bosch-, Körber or Mercator Foundation; the residual €200,000 is government or IO grants. All these foundations are of corporate origin (an Austrian savings bank, German electrical engineering or retail firm). Still, ESI’s interviewee - asked about independence - insists “we have never taken money from companies...as we think anything we would then write would be regarded as biased”; ESI’s grant-giving foundations, Soros and Nordic governments, she finds, “just say ‘Work on Western Balkans or Turkey’ and give us completely free hand” (I12-Stiglsmayer: 12).

The platform think tank EPC relies on two strategic partnerships - the Belgian King Baudouin Foundation and Compagnia di San Paolo - for “ensuring we can have a long-term focus which is independent”, its director says; while projects, fees or contributions from a diverse membership make up a bulk of the budget, the amount it receives from EU institutions “is relatively limited” (I5-Zuleeg:20). Its €2.2 million 2014 budget evens out nearly 40 percent public- with over 60 percent private funds.

To get a sense of who pays, on the public side it counts 78 diplomatic missions and embassies, 38 regional bodies or local authorities, 3 agencies and 16 IOs among members (next to EU grants or tenders); on the private side stakeholders include 56 corporations, 78 professional or business associations, 50 NGOs, 28 foundations, five religious and two academic members - all in all over 350 members (SC 2014). EPC uses price discrimination regarding membership fees, as corporations pay most:

*“I think we can achieve relatively high levels of independence because of the diversity - both in terms of funding and in terms of membership..About a third of our funding is from membership, but it’s very diverse. Yes, there are different categories of membership, but...we always said ‘Membership is membership’. In essence, we take more money from those who can afford to pay more...rather than seeing corporations as a special category, I see it as a differentiated payment dependent on ability to pay.” (I5-Zuleeg:18, 22)*

With its model of mixed finances including mixed members, it should be noted, the established Brussels institute achieves budget shares of over two thirds untied funding (in previous years too, see Missiroli/Ioannides 2012:17), unlike many other institutes. At first sight, this think tank of mixed funding should indeed have great leeway to act.

However, at closer inspection one finds - beyond its impressive member count - that EPC’s (notably corporate) stakeholders who support its operations and mingle at its networking events tend to be the large and the powerful, the big and the dominant. To illustrate, at the time of study EPC’s “platinum” and other corporate members included, among others, ExxonMobil, Suez, Statoil or Total in the energy business; in pharmaceuticals Amgen, BASF, Dow, GlaxoSmithKline, Johnson&Johnson or Sanofi; technology giants like Google or Facebook; BT or Vodafone in telecoms; also the European Roundtable of Industrialists, US, German and British chambers of industry and commerce; Philip Morris International and the largest European cigarette producers’ association; or the public affairs group APCO Worldwide (SC2016).

Again we must ask: Why do they sign up? Of course it is possible they do so out of a conviction - as corporate citizens - that it is crucial to have and contribute to expertise or democratic debate. EPC itself rather signals “unparalleled networking”:

*“EPC membership gives unparalleled access not only to our in-house expertise, but also to our network of organizations and to the European Commissioners, MEPs and high-ranking officials from EU institutions or IOs who regularly speak at events.” (SC 2017)*

FoE is another Brussels platform EU think tank with a similarly sized budget (€2.5 million in 2014), broad membership, and mixed funding (35 percent public to 65 percent private). The public component here also comprises under ten percent from the EU or IOs, and nearly three times as much from Brussels country missions. As in EPC’s case, FoE’s private financing part is primarily corporate contributions (SC 2014). Its corporate members list reads strikingly similar - even overlaps - with EPC. Next to global firms like Allianz, BAESystems, BP, Coca-Cola, IBM or Siemens, we again find BASF, Dow, ExxonMobil, Facebook, Shell, Suez, Total, Vodafone (all EPC members too) among other also small or medium-sized enterprises (SC 2014). This is a key finding: several big companies now diversify think tank memberships - not to put all eggs in a basket, so to speak - to potentially have a say in their agendas. Once more we must wonder what money can or can not buy in this non-profit realm.

FoE’s strategic wording is that “it does not represent interests of its members who...pay an annual ‘participation fee’ without any other prerogative or role in [its] governance” beyond “guaranteed participation at all debates, hard copies of reports, a right to suggest topics and...networking opportunities” (SC 2017). Furthermore, FoE says its “contracts for sponsorships are clear - just as for a cultural or sporting event - that we offer broadly two things: visibility/logo [placement] and a place to take part in events. Editorial balance remains our exclusive responsibility” (SC 2017).

“All think tanks work with corporates”, argues FoE’s policy director, “that’s where the money is...They may not be as transparent” or diversified as FoE, she says; she used our interview occasion to project this also intended image of diversification:

*“The think tank world is a world about credibility, a world about balance...The fact that think tanks receive money from several sources...ensures credibility and independence ...We’re not here to sell a product, we’re not here to sell a policy. Consultants, PR firms, lobbyists do that...If you want to survive in this competitive world, you have to make sure people trust you [...that] they know you are independent of all influence.” (I20-Islam:20)*

In FoE’s case, indeed no single private funder can pay over six percent of the budget (reminiscent of PLS’ five percent rule for project size, and unlike FRIDE’s situation). In diametrical contrast to Bruegel - using high-priced membership as quality signal - FoE depicts its membership fees as “among the lowest in Brussels, so as to stimulate as wide and heterogenous membership as possible”; it does use price discrimination



among membership types too, however (NGOs pay €500 a year but corporations €2,000; so-called “VIP members receive visibility in our reports and at our debates, and are invited to roundtable discussions for reduced audiences” for a price tag under €2,000 for NGOs but €7,000 for corporates interested in this “package”, SC 2017).

FoE has set up an “independence and transparency board [...of] people from various walks of life to consider any potential issues” or interest conflicts (SC 2017). The think tank explicitly bars representatives of extremist parties or tobacco industry from membership, citing article 2 of the Treaty of EU and World Health Organization framework conventions on tobacco control; but it does accept arms manufacturers (defined with SIPRI as firms with over 50 percent sales from weapons) as members, noting it “will not offer them a high profile as partners...nor accept partnership money”; third countries are also eligible after case-to-case consideration (SC 2017).

#### *Privately funded EU think tanks*

A key result of this chapter is that most Brussels EU think tanks are privately funded (see above). Moving further away from a sector-wise funding equilibrium, nearly half of the analyzed institutes are privately financed, deriving over two thirds or all their income from private sources, be it corporations, private individuals, foundations or CSOs. One could argue that at the extreme end of the spectrum, conceptually speaking, are privately affiliated think tank-alike entities - say forward-thinking units of INGOs or “corporate think tanks” of businesses (Poguntke 2014, see Chapter 2). Examples are The Economist Intelligence Unit, McKinsey Global Institute, Deutsche Bank’s research arm, Daimler’s future unit, Google Ideas, Samsung’s Economic Research Institute, Eurasia Group or consultancies like Accenture, Boston Consulting Group, Deloitte, EY, PricewaterhouseCoopers or Roland Berger. But, as stated from the outset, these are not EU think tanks in the definitional sense here (see Chapter 2).

EU member state-rooted think tanks present in Brussels such as IIEA and IFRI exhibit conspicuous proximity to the corporate sector in terms of financing. Over two thirds of IIEA’s nearly €1 million 2013 budget accrues from private sources - membership “subscriptions” by individuals, corporations or other institutions make up the biggest part - whereas under a third is by Irish- and other government grants. Aside from foundations and banks, most paying members are Irish companies such as Allied Irish Banks Group and large multinationals like Google present in Ireland: in fact, IIEA has also received “ongoing support through Google grants” (SC 2017).

IFRI's €6 million 2013 budget was similarly dominated by 70 percent private income of members or program supporters, and under a third public income of Commission, French- or other government grants (SC 2013). "We have very good ties with businesses - in terms of funding, this is our main source", IFRI's Brussels chief openly declares, "and when I say 'private funds', it's mostly corporations", although as he puts it "we don't work for them, but we work with them" (I23-Pertusot:14, 20).

IFRI's list of contributing members includes large, mostly French enterprises: from Airbus, Air France, L'Oréal, Michelin and Renault to banks like BNP Paribas, Rothschild & Co. or Société Générale to energy giants EDF, Total, Veolia (SC 2017). When IFRI's annual report mentions that it "works to diversify its resources", it does not primarily have sectoral diversification of funds in mind at all: next to stressing "tax advantages to donors", it says IFRI's fundraising priority is to "establish firm, long-lasting relationships with the [nearly 70] businesses that support it" (SC 2013).

IFRI's interviewee points out that compared to the safely publicly funded SWP "our budget is five or six times less...so it's hard to compete in terms of in-house capacity" (I23-Pertusot:30). Private funding has also raised other issues, he explains:

*"When IFRI started in 1979, our budget mainly came from the French administration. About fifteen years ago, we switched to focus fundraising efforts on companies...because we were seeing these resources were shrinking...Now, private funds represent 70 percent of our budget. It's quite stable, but we see a different approach from the companies...Five years ago, giving money to a think tank was a good thing to do for many, they have a budget for that kind of activity. Now they are a lot more demanding: for some of them - either it's explicit or not - their funding comes with strings attached."* (I23-Pertusot:16)

The higher the share of private sector funding, we can expect, the more pertinent this issue becomes for any not-for-profit organization, and think tanks are no exception. S&C is another mostly privately funded - but much smaller, less stable - case in point: its little over €400,000 budget for 2014 splits into 16 percent public - and 84 percent private sector income from corporate and civil society fees, contributions or projects (SC 2014). S&C's interviewee still claims that "the funding is very diverse", but admits that it would be quite precarious since "it works from one year to another":

*"It is very difficult - and actually tiring - to renew [Commission] funding. This is where the question of independence comes: on one side, you want to be able to produce whatever content you want, and defend ideas for the greater good; on the other hand, the stability of the structure is at stake every six months. You need to attract private sponsors, because today you can't survive with only Commission funding."* (I18-Leblanc:24)

Yet, does drifting toward private funding exert isomorphic influence on the thinking?

If S&C's specialization revolves around EU level sports policy, and its supporters prominently include not just the Commission's sports unit and French ministry of youth affairs and sports, for instance, but also inevitably interested firms like Nike and Nestlé Waters, the issue of possible quid pro quo arrangements returns again. Do companies subject their support of think tanks to explicit or unspoken conditions?

Beyond straightforward business contract strings attached; think tanks might voluntarily give in to what they feel are implicit corporate expectations, toning down any eventual criticism of involved businesses in a form of anticipatory obedience; or they may refrain from criticizing these firms or the corporate sector in general, either consciously caving in under pressure or simply out of the fear - well-founded or not - to lose corporate funding, which might threaten undermining their business model.

Madariaga has also experienced unsettled funding, albeit of a different nature: 80 percent of its 2014 income is from private civil society, by the College of Europe and foundations; it did not make its budget size transparent at the time of research, but curiously the remaining share of 20 percent came from China's mission to the EU in Brussels (SC 2014). A Politico article called it a "China-backed think tank" (Panichi 2015). Similar to earlier New York Times stories on whether or not "foreign powers buy influence at US think tanks" (Lipton et al. 2014), Politico's piece raises the question if "backing of the Chinese government or Chinese companies" biases Madariaga in any way; it also attempts to establish a connection with its advocacy of closer EU-China relations and its director's criticism of a TTIP deal (Panichi 2015).

Madariaga's answer came promptly: in a letter to Politico still prominently placed on its website today, the director defends his team as "fiercely independent", noting its president Javier Solana had opted to support EU-US talks, and that "lively exchange between speakers with different views" is in no way obstructed by China's €50,000 contribution; on the even more delicate and twice as high funding by the so-called Beijing Peace Tour Cultural Exchange Center, he admits the damage is done: "I put an end to it. I realized we could have been used as lobby for special interests", he writes, adding "our ethics have always been extremely rigorous on this" (SC 2015).

How about the revenue composition and independence of big, privately funded EU think tanks of US origin present in Brussels like Carnegie Europe, EWI or GMF? They are usually significantly better-endowed.. Carnegie Endowment, for instance, of which Carnegie Europe is one of six global think tank offices, boasts a 2014 budget of almost €20 million, half of which is endowed money. It is indeed "fortunate to be

able to rely on its endowment, the legacy of Andrew Carnegie's original 1910 gift" (SC 2014). Accumulated interest income of the permanently restricted fund stood at \$256 million in 2014, enough to cover almost half of the yearly budget. Carnegie finds that an endowment "ensures scholars can maintain their independence", adding that "as a matter of policy, we do not allow donors prior approval of drafts, influence in selecting project participants...or over findings and recommendations" (SC 2014).

Yet, Carnegie does seek funds beyond what its endowment and a special fund created in the 2000s to expand its global network of policy research centers provides (see Chapter 5). In the experience of its interviewed career think tanker Jan Techau:

*"The independence question is key...We don't have to sell our expertise, we are not doing commissioned research...We have so far never applied for EU funding. We are now in the process of looking at this, because...we have to find replacement money...I'm not sure I found the magic key yet...We will try to target all kinds of sources in the future...Our goal is to keep the quota of external money below 50 percent. As our president...always says: If you go above 50 percent, you start to chase other people's agendas." (I59:26, 28)*

EWI's €8 million budget in 2014 rests primarily on private sources too: 89 percent hails from private individual, corporate and foundation donors. Interestingly, even if the institute's roots lie in the US, its vice-president and Brussels head are always senior German diplomats, seconded to the post by the country's foreign office as a historical "legacy of EWI contributions to Germany" (SC 2017). EWI's interviewed ex-diplomat Brussels leader finds its multi-million revenues mostly stable (including an endowment) even if - like Carnegie Europe - "we also need to increase funding, prepare applications for grants, it's part of the business" (I25-Mäder-Metcalf:16).

As an "American institution [...for] cooperation between the US and Europe in the spirit of the postwar Marshall Plan", GMF also operates a Transatlantic Center in Brussels, best known for staging the annual Brussels Forum; it works with €1 million of the overall think tank's hefty total revenues of almost €33 million (SC 2014). EU funding and GMF support sourced from governments account for eight percent, while the remaining 92 percent originate from GMF's privately obtained or earned income. With regard to competition for public funds at EU level, its Brussels director notes, GMF "has the 'luxury' of being a little more at arm's length of this, simply because we have an endowment", although it does also fundraise publicly (I53-Lesser:21).

A much smaller privately and less than one-tenth US government-funded EU think tank is EFD: its under half a million euros budget consists of eight percent US State Department funds 92 percent private income from foundations and donations

Despite this single non-European government and otherwise overwhelmingly private funding, EFD claim its “funding comes from a variety of different public and private sources” (SC 2014), an assertion that - upon closer scrutiny - simply does not hold.

Confrontations Europe, as a “think tank, a network, a general interest lobby” had a €1.3 million budget in 2014 made up of five percent French government or EU funds but 94 percent corporate, association- or donation income (SC 2014). “The Commission has reduced its allocations”, its interviewed Brussels head explains the trajectory which led to this financing model, “so more and more we work with the private sector” which now represents the biggest pillar of funding (I18-Baud:18). If Confrontations Europe claims to be a “general interest lobby” but is for the most part financed by businesses, it must again face the enquiry of ‘whose interest?’. Or, expressed differently: do privately funded think tanks work with or for corporations?

Moving further into the territory of mostly or exclusively corporate-funded EU think tanks, Lisbon Council achieved a linear, if not drastic, fundraising growth to arrive at a €1.2 million budget by 2014 that yielded 100 percent from private sources: namely income by corporations, foundations or donations - in that order respectively. As noted for EFD, its public claim of a “diversified funding base including project funding, research grants won in competitive tenders and donations from corporations and foundations” (SC 2014) does not - sectorally speaking - correspond to its factual funding breakdown that year. To illustrate, if it focuses on renewing Europe’s digital economy as one championed “economic and social challenge of the 21st century” (SC 2018), it is enabled to do so primarily by the likes of Google, Hewlett-Packard, Oracle, Philips or Telefónica - and much more rarely by the EU or member states.

Although it commands under a tenth of Lisbon Council’s revenues, ERF also relies 100 percent on private income of corporate membership fees and contributions. While this does not necessarily render it a pure lobbying outfit, and its interviewee insisted absence of public- and EU funding would help ERF to “set our own agenda”, it is co-located at Finsbury International Policy and Regulatory Advisers (FIPRA) and Business for New Europe across the street from Brussels’ Schuman roundabout. It is in this direction of impact that ERF seeks to advance “smarter” risk regulation.

Within the domain of private funding, corporate money and foundation funds by no means contradict each other. ECIPE’s €900,000 2014 budget is a case in point: it is 100 percent of private origins with base funding by the Swedish Free Enterprise Foundation, but “financial support from individuals, foundations and organizations

sharing our ideas in favor of...free trade” (SC 2014) are also welcome. ECIPE seeks no public- or EU funds. While the seed funding hailed from the Swedish foundation ideologically attuned to its worldview, “the ambition was to quickly get to a point where no individual sponsor could represent more than five percent of our revenues”; according to its director, it has 65 business- and foundation sponsors (I22-Erixon:26).

The previous chapter has already sketched how the evolution of a think tank can benefit and be closely linked with the fate of a company for the German case of Bertelsmann Foundation (see Chapter 5). Its European program’s €3 million (€126 million total) 2014 budget accrued primarily from income of its indirect holdings in the Bertelsmann media company, next to partnership funds or financial reserves (SC 2014). Its majority shareholder status financing the bulk of its work originates from Reinhard Mohn’s original gift in 1977; as think tank, it has no members paying fees.

“Basically there are two different modes of operation”, its interviewed Brussels head says, either “you are privately financed, and- let’s call it - autonomous in this way, or you receive project-related funds by the EU or whomsoever”; he finds that:

*“In the first case you are able to work supply-driven...to identify yourself, as a think tank, with the societal or social questions you deem to be particularly important. If you receive money of third parties, you work demand-driven. This, in itself, is only to a certain extent complying with the ideal of independence. If your agenda is set by people giving money to you...that is a structural problem. I’m not saying other think tanks receiving public money are bribed by [EU] institutions, it’s simply a structural friction.” (I27-Fischer:19)*

Of course its own funding model still leaves a possibility that the Bertelsmann family wishes to have a strong say in which societal or social questions are precisely tackled. Interestingly, the interviewee observes, while this concern is often raised in Germany and Bertelsmann Foundation’s alleged business entanglements criticized, the think tank’s public perception is experienced in a rather different light at the EU level: “in Brussels...working as a privately financed think tank, being completely independent from public funding by EU institutions, is perceived by most other think tanks active here in Brussels as a privilege” (I27:15). It benefits from its status as a private operational foundation, making it “a rather beloved cooperation partner for most think tanks”, the Brussels head thinks, “apparently our financial autonomy enhances our credibility in the perception of policy-makers from the EU institutions” (I27:17).

OpenEurope pursues yet another privately funded vision of an open Europe: namely one based on social and economic liberalism of mainly British businesspeople supporters which donated 100 percent of Open Europe’s €750,000 budget in 2014. It

does not seek EU funding as a matter of principle: “We are almost the only think tank...commenting on the EU but not funded by the EU”, its Brussels leader claims (I11-Cleppe:14). Despite purely private financing, Open Europe stresses it “does not engage in direct representation of interests” and that its “supporters include men and women who run businesses operating in every industry sector throughout the UK” (SC 2014). They support it in a personal capacity, Open Europe notes - but also boasts on its website “our supporters employ over a million people worldwide” (SC 2017).

When asked to clarify composition of its pool of funders, the Brussels office head assures that “these are individual donors, it’s not that their company board can say ‘Why are we giving money to that?’. They have no financial interests, it would be a very bad investment, frankly, to invest in us” for this, he finds, adding that “it is like funding Greenpeace: you happen to agree with their policies, so you give cash... Our donors are very open about the fact that they believe in the ideas we promote, and we believe in the ideas that our donors promote - so we are one” (I11:18). This, it is an interesting case invoking both the symbolic capital inherent in not receiving EU funds - being autonomous from allegedly distorted EU or Europeanist agendas - as well as the entrepreneurial support and political clout of businesspeople endorsers.

### **Lift the veil of secrecy: Accountability pressures for funding transparency**

It is not impossible to gain an overview of how think tanks at EU level are financed, as this chapter has demonstrated. I do not follow Kelstrup’s (2014) assessment that lack of a central overview database prevents us from scrutinizing their funding, or only allows using human resource size as a proxy for how “big” they are (2016). It is doable, but takes considerable effort. As mentioned, there is no equivalent of the US’ IRS forms for private foundations or nonprofits at EU level. Arguably, it saves EU think tanks - with often small administrative backbones - overly heavy reporting requirements. But funding transparency, as will be shown in this chapter’s last section, is also a reputational concern. Let us briefly consider this from three vantage points.

#### *Vantage point one: The story of the European Transparency Register (ETR)*

The ETR, jointly operated by the European Parliament and Commission, started in 2008 as “Lobbyist Register” (it was renamed in 2011) “to answer core questions such as what interests are being pursued, by whom and with what budgets” (Commission 2017, see Chapter 5). The voluntary public register covers several types of actors

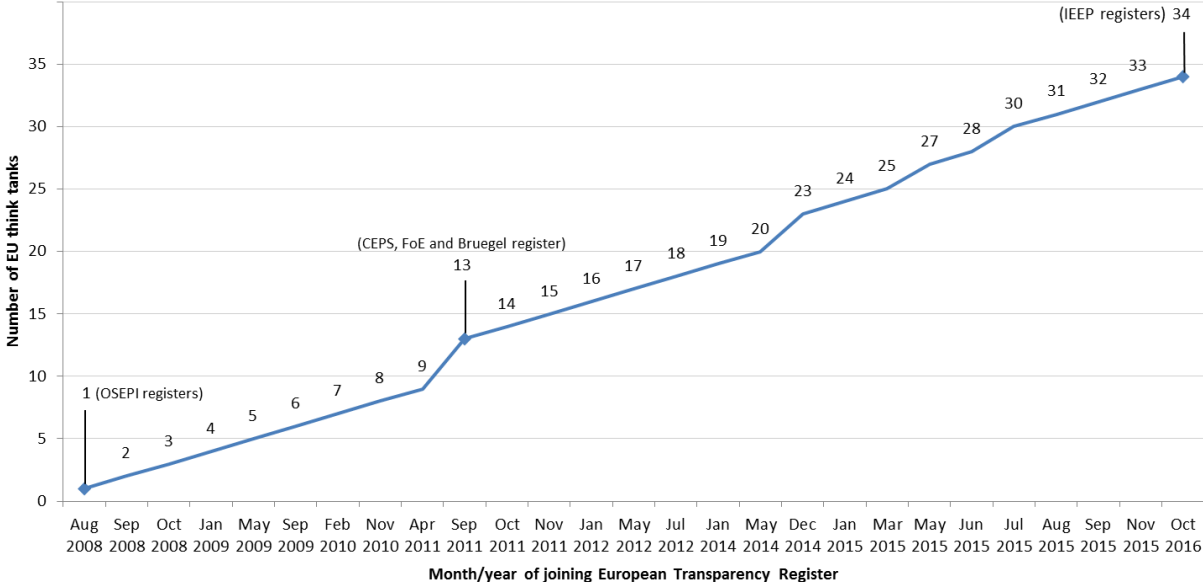
active at EU level: it now includes a special category for “think tanks and research institutions”. But it is not mandatory to sign up or fill in comprehensive information. Thus, the ETR covers lobbyists, law firms, NGOs, think tanks and other actors who fill in data which is more or less detailed - or accurate, for that matter - on staff and budget size, legislative fields of interest and (self-reported) received amounts of EU funds. Its data quality and overall transparency gain is disputed: amidst reports of wrong or contradictory data, Transparency International argues only a mandatory register has potential to curb corruption and boost public trust in the EU (2009), a position to which the European Parliament has been more open than the Commission.

Only registered lobbyists are now granted passes to access parliament buildings and incorrect entries are not allowed in a code of conduct accepted upon signing up. However, in practice this is hardly checked or sanctioned by EU institutions (for example with commented deletions of entries or loss of parliamentary access passes). “The problem is: it is voluntary...they do not have to disclose much”, CEO’s leader laments; in his view, the EU “put the bar very low so they could get them to sign up voluntarily. But that is the Achilles Heel of the whole set-up.” (I63-Hoedemans: 30).

As of 2017, of 11,521 entries (European Commission 2017), 552 (5 percent) of organizations had self-registered as “think tanks or research institutions”. However, clearly not all entities appearing in this category are stand-alone think tanks. This compares with a lower number of 316 (3 percent) self-sorted academic institutions active at EU level and larger number of 3,051 (27 percent) of “NGOs, platforms and

**Figure 16.** Brussels EU think tanks registered on the ETR, 2008 to 2016 (N=34)

Note: As of 2017, 34 institutes had ETR entries (87 percent of 39 sampled); 5 did not (13 percent): EWI, Ecologic, ECIA, EIPA, Madariaga (as of early 2018, still none of these think tanks signed up).





networks”. Voluntarily registered lobbyists or business stakeholders include 1,330(12 percent) “professional consultancies, law firms or consultants” as well as a whopping 5,669 (49 percent) “in-house lobbyists, trade, business or professional associations”, the single largest category with nearly half of all the ETR entries. 603 (5 percent) of signed-on entities say that they represent “local, regional and municipal authorities, other public or mixed entities, or churches and religious communities” (ETR 2017).

Of the Brussels EU think tanks, 34 (87 percent of the 39 sampled) had an ETR entry by early 2018, after a linear growth in registrations, as is shown in Figure 16. Five EU think tanks (13 percent) were still not signed up by 2017. OSEPI’s entry dates back to 2008 when the ETR was still called the “Lobbyist Register” (to the dismay of think tanks like FoE, vocally refusing to sign up on this ground), it took until late 2011 for major institutes like Bruegel, CEPS and besaid FoE to sign on, and until the mid-2010s for another fifteen institutes to contribute details. Several small institutes (for instance GGI and PLS) and large Anglo-Saxon think tanks (Carnegie Europe, GMF, RAND Europe) only signed up in 2015; IEEP most recently in 2016.

In other words, the choice of Brussels institutes to sign onto this EU register - especially during its early stages when still called “Lobbyist Register” - hinges on an institutes’ self-concept as being a think tank involved in what can be broadly defined as lobbying activities in the mere sense of seeking to influence EU decision-making. Later on, the register’s renaming, extra think tank section plus rising peer pressure or public scrutiny of think tanks’ transparency led most to bend to isomorphic pressure: “There has been a battle about whether they should register in the Lobby Register in Brussels. Most of them have done so, some of them were reluctant”, as EU Observer editor-in-chief Lisbeth Kirk puts it, “but I think the trend is that think tanks need to be transparent about where they get their funding from, and what kind of motivations they have for doing what they do, what they want to achieve” (I75-Kirk: 20).

For example, EPC - whose founders’ careers were in lobbying - already had an ETR profile by January 2009. It had little issue with being seen as influencing policy: “We have a commitment to transparency and decided to register with the ETR fairly early on”, EPC’s CEO explains, “we never saw ourselves as a lobby organization. But our aim is to influence policy. So we accepted we should be on the interest register. It is not a lobby register which is an important difference” (I5-Zuleeg:18-20).

Yet “the Lobby Register did not differentiate initially. It said ‘You are all lobbyists - private sector, civil society - you are all trying to affect policies, therefore

you're lobbyists'", OSEPI's interviewee (the ETR's first registrant) points out, "whereas the not-for-profit people [...said] 'Actually, no, we're not lobbyists', but the linguistic difference had been lost in the register" at its beginning (I69-Campbell:32).

FoE only signed up only in late 2011 because it saw doing so as problematic: Given the broad definition of the scope of the transparency register, virtually all of FoE's activities may be said to fall under it, explains its interviewed policy director, stressing that in her view FoE does not push for or against particular policies and does not represent any vested interests (see I20-Islam). The watchdog think tank CEO is not convinced by this argumentation. It criticizes that the ETR, a good idea, still "fails basic transparency standards and does not yet live up to its name" (I63-Hoedemans: 28). Like INGO Transparency International, it advocates a compulsory register along transparent registration guidelines developed by ALTER-EU (2017). CEO's Oliver Hoedeman recounts ETR's story as one protagonist in "The Brussels Business", a documentary on EU lobbying (Lietaert/Moser 2012, see Chapter 5). He praises Sim Kallas, who had started it 2008 as incoming Commission vice-president:

*"He had a kind of common-sense take on things, different from the way most of the long-time Eurocrats looked at it. He felt as well it was clear that think tanks like FoE are playing an important role in lobbying...so he said 'Clearly, they should be in the register'. This does not mean that they are lobbyists, but they facilitate lobbying, so they are part of the lobbying landscape, and they have to be a part of the register."* (I63:28)

#### *Vantage point two: The story of Open Society-funded Transparify ratings*

The so-called Transparify initiative started in 2014 with funding from Open Society Foundation's (OSF) Think Tank Fund to provide a first yearly "global rating of the financial transparency of major think tanks"; over the last years it finds rated "think tanks around the world are becoming more and more transparent" (2017, see 2018).

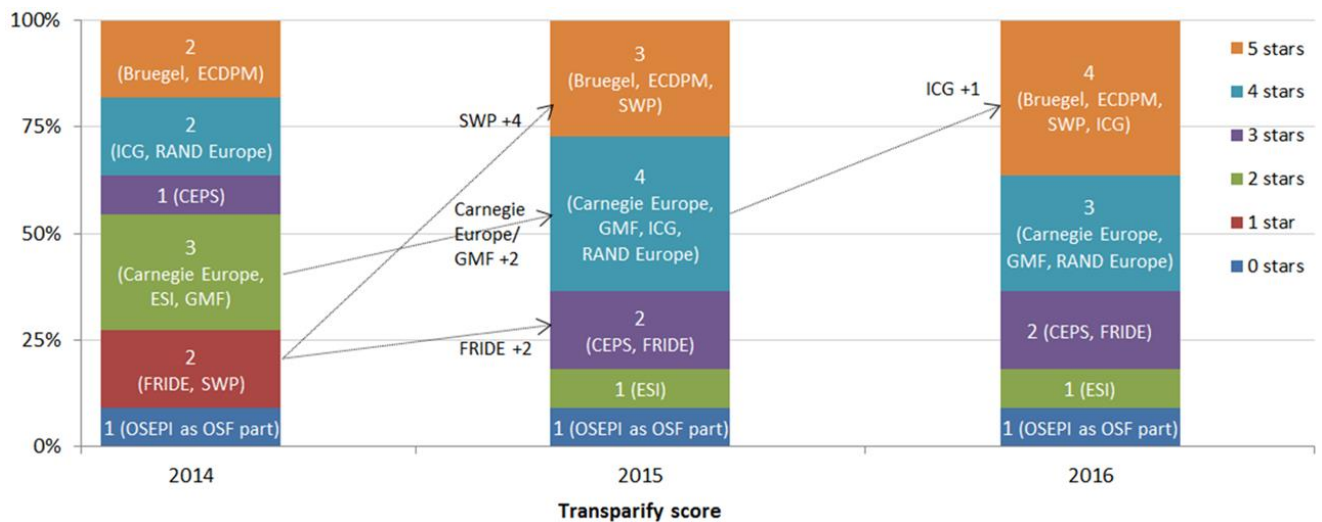
In an attempt to standardize the organizational field's funding transparency, the initiative consistently uses the same rating criteria during the three covered years to assess what revenues think tanks disclose on websites: zero stars means no or no relevant or up-to-date information on funding sources; one star stands for mentioning some donors but in no exhaustive or systematic way; two stars signify a list of all or a range of donors but with no or few financial details; three stars mean all or most donors are listed in broad brackets (e.g. \$5,000 to \$15,000); four stars are awarded if all donors are listed in four or more precise funding brackets (at least all over \$5,000,

with anonymous donors making up less than 15 percent); finally, five-star think tanks are fully transparent, publishing all donors, amounts and sources (Transparify 2017).

Eleven Brussels EU think tanks (only 28 percent of the 39 sampled) were rated by Transparify. How do they fare in terms of star scores? And does the trend towards increased revenue transparency also hold true for this specific think tank population? Despite the limited sample resulting from Transparify’s data, it seems to be the case: as Figure 17 shows, five EU think tanks have become more open about their funding over last years, which corresponds to nearly half (45 percent) of those analyzed here.

**Figure 17.** Brussels EU think tanks’ Transparify scores, 2014 to 2016 (N=39)

Note: Rated are: Bruegel, Carnegie Europe (as part of overall Carnegie Endowment), CEPS, ECDPM, ESI, FRIDE, SWP, GMF, ICG, OSEPI (as part of OSF), RAND Europe (as part of overall RAND).



SWP and ICG improved to five stars next to Bruegel or ECDPM which consistently obtained this highest rating - and make prominent use of the “stamp of approval” in their marketing materials and websites. Citizen can clearly see where these think tanks’ money comes from. Of course, their relative autonomy in practice is a different matter to be discussed in more detail (see below and Chapter 9). In SWP’s case, the improvement is a direct reaction to Transparify’s accountability pressure and low initial score: like Bruegel as a five-star institute, it now reports this symbolic seal prominently throughout strategic communications and on the website (SC 2017). Interestingly, OSEPI (as part of OSF’s network) is the lowest-rated EU think tank - despite Transparify’s own OSF funding - since it discloses no exact funding details.

*Vantage point three: EU think tanks' own transparency claims and views*

How do EU think tanks themselves comment on the topic of financial transparency? In the coded interviews corpus, 27 coded utterances or interview passages relate to EU think tanks' funding transparency; coding strategic communications material of Brussels institutes (see Chapter 3) yielded another 14 such claims. Several but far from all EU think tanks actively stress this issue's importance; but the interviewees were keenly aware how this might impact their perceived independence. "They are aware that they need to be transparent about who is funding them", as one interviewed journalist notes, but adding that "some more than others" (I75-Kirk:20).

There is a clear pattern: those who are already open about their finances tend to confidently declare transparency as a core organizational value, making strategic references to Transparify's positive portrayal; these are typically bigger, financially better-endowed institutes for which accountability pressures are therefore rather high. Financially transparent EU think tanks also tend to be more financially diversified. Smaller EU think tanks tend to be more closed and less communicative about their precise funding arrangements and income sources, so size clearly matters; these smaller-budget institutes appear more preoccupied with donor accountability than public accountability - they may see all-out transparency as less desirable, in fact, and shy away from the extra reporting burden it entails (see Gilroy 2014). Moreover, particularly if small institutes rely on single or less diversified income sources, a full disclosure may not appear attractive since one risks exposing resource dependencies.

To illustrate, Bertelsmann Foundation claims "maintaining transparency and ensuring openness are central principles underlying [its] work", pledging to offer "in-depth information to anyone interested" (SC 2015). EPC's annual report stresses the institute is "committed to sound financial management and transparency of funding" (SC 2015). "For us", its CEO says, "independence should always be talked about in conjunction with transparency: a critical issue for us is that people can see where our funding sources are from"; in the interview, he calls transparency one "safeguard in place for independence" (I5-Zuleeg:24, 118). Bruegel, also transparent of its funding, declares that since "independence, professional integrity and objectivity of Bruegel's research are among its principal assets...scholars and management disclose their outside interests annually" and it "publishes all funding and spending" (SC 2015).

While CEPS makes no explicit mention in its strategic communications about the importance or value of transparency, it does publish its financial details and lists

members' names as well, convinced that "the element to preserve your reputational capital is transparency", as one interviewed CEPS expert puts it (I39-Valiante:15). Bruegel's secretary general assertively describes its proactive take on transparency:

*"No matter where you get your funding from, you are still going to have to answer that question 'Are you independent enough?'. If we went on the streets and collected money in a tin, we'd still have to answer that question. The public should not ever stop asking it. It's a very good question. It's perfectly legitimate. We need to be held accountable in terms of what is our role, what is our influence, is that legitimate, who gets involved in our work, what value does it bring to democratic institutions...Bruegel is ready to answer. I would welcome colleagues in other Brussels think tanks to also do so."* (I19-Dann:62)

Transparify's five-star rating of Bruegel is heralded on its website as a synonym for "exemplary transparency...setting the gold standard for the field as a whole", thus using Transparify's language as a sort of external accreditation of field leadership (SC 2014). ECDPM cites its five-star score with exact same phrasing on its website although it was a late-joiner to the ETR in 2015 (SC 2014). SWP boasts that this rating would effectively make it "the most transparent think tank in Germany and one of the most transparent worldwide" (SC 2014). GMF, in a brochure, refers to its "exceptional" four-star Charity Navigator rating as proof that its funding openness "exceeds industry standards" (Charity Navigator 2017, SC 2014). And GRIP hints at its presence on the Belgian equivalent website donorinfo.be and membership with the Association Pour une Ethique dans les Recoltes de Fonds (AERF, SC 2014).

In line with Transparify results, OSEPI's exact funding details remain obscure, as do those of ECIA, E3G, Madariaga or Open Europe, but donors are occasionally named. "We are a tiny little drop in that very large puddle" of OSF's nearly billion dollar annual philanthropic spending, OSEPI's head of EU policy argues, but "the privilege is that we are not dependent on any EU funding, which is not the case with a lot of the think tanks or civil society organizations in Brussels" (I69-Campbell:22).

This is another rhetoric pattern often observed in the interviews: a status quo of a given funding situation - including revenue sources not part of the mix - is elevated as an independence understanding or portrayed as a matter of organizational policy. Open Europe, for example, lists no financial details beyond names of supporters. Thus, when prompted to elaborate who exactly UK businesspeople funding it were, the interviewed Brussels office leader said "they are all on our website, everything", arguing other EU think tank's acceptance of EU funds makes them less independent; pressed on this point - "Wouldn't this also apply to Open Europe with its corporate

funding? Don't corporations also have an agenda, an interest?" - his answer was that "it is all very, very transparent. We are our donors. And our donors are us...These are individual businesspeople, also ordinary people. We get some small donations [but] a large chunk is from bigger donors", without going into further detail (I11-Cleppe:14). Other interviewees could also be quite opinionated about whether public sector (particularly EU) or business funding (notably by large corporations) is normatively acceptable and qualifies a think tank as an "independent" institute (see Chapter 9).

Still, in the interviews there was at least verbal agreement that transparency is desirable in any case, that the right funding mix is a balancing act - a question of how rather than whether or not to accept public- or private sector funding opportunities. Still: "I worry about those with...a very pronounced ideology [of] radical free-market politics", watchdog think tank CEO's leader says; referring to a "Lobbying Planet" study (2011, see Chapter 5) linking several EU think tanks to lobbying or industry interests, he opines that "large and influential think tanks" - such as Lisbon Council - "were really...dependent on industry funding. Some of them have changed their funding model a bit, also because they did not like this criticism. They tried to attract more foundation money, maybe Commission money" (I63-Hoedemans:22). Other interviewees shared - but also challenged - this concern with the extent and subtleties of EU think tanks' corporate sector funding and what this implies for transparency:

*"You can have British-American tobacco funding your study - as long as you disclose it, and make sure how you run your research process is not affected by the interests of the research sponsors. You need to hear them. There should be a reason why they sponsor your study...to influence the process, but on the basis of facts...You need not be afraid. But you need to make sure that the process is entirely transparent."* (I39-Valiante:51)

This is how one CEPS researcher who was highly reflective of "reputational capital" makes sense of the link between corporate funding, research and independence. In fact, CEPS is a good case study for this connection, which two other interviewees also brought up. "It's vital that think tanks are absolutely transparent about funding", Transparency International's EU office leader - unsurprisingly - argues, adding that:

*"I was surprised to note...we were invited to take part in a CEPS task force...and we were initially happy to be invited. Then I looked at the price tag, the small print. It turns out to be part of this task force...it will cost you anywhere between five to ten thousand euros...I think if that's the funding strategy...it should be up front. Let people know it is not just an independent report, it's also a report that takes the inputs of people who paid to be there. I am not saying it's an illegitimate funding strategy, I just think they should be absolutely clear...this is how they fund their work in a particular area."* (I78-Dolan:37)

“If I look at CEPS, I know there are tenders from the Commission but when it comes to members it’s not so clear...how much corporate members pay individually”, ERF co-founder Lorenzo Allio points out, “whether it’s a uniform contribution or there is a big member paying for everybody”; akin to CEPS’ cited expert, he asks and argues:

*“Does it change CEPS’ reputation - if it has good ideas - whether it’s paid by Philipps, or Acer or Buick? What does it change? Even if you have Acer telling CEPS ‘Now you should issue a report on Thailand’, what’s wrong? If there is a problem, if they issue a report on Thailand, if it contains good ideas...I don’t see why it shouldn’t be ideal. Of course, better if they say ‘We start a report on Thailand because we have an...Acer grant’ - that’s fine - but what does it change in terms of outcome?...Whether it’s paid from A or from B is less relevant, in my opinion.” (I33:63-65)*

This line of argument is not free from self-interest in this case: the tiny business-funded risk management think tank ERF itself relies “basically one hundred percent” on its corporate membership fees, Allio explains, “and they all pay the same fee” (I33:29). Its ten corporate members (next to seven trade associations) are BASF, Bayer, British American Tobacco, Chevron, Dow Europe, Henkel AG, Norilsk, Philip Morris International, Sidley Austin and Syngenta AG (SC 2017, see above). ERF’s Brussels office consists of desks hosted by Business for New Europe, an advocacy group whose interviewee - like ERF’s analyst - equates transparency with legitimacy: “People will say ‘You’re just speaking on behalf of big business’. Fine, they are our supporters...we are perfectly honest about that” (I31-Thomas:22). “But the Brussels understanding is that a think tank should be neutral and independent and open doors”, Allio finds, which he generally sees as “a good development” (I33:59).

*How does this project assess the availability and quality of financial data?*

Financial information (at least basic balance sheet data for the timeframe studied) was actually available for 35 (90 percent) of the 39 sampled Brussels EU think tanks. Financial years of the majority of 30 of the institutes go from January to December. Only those of Anglo-American origins (Carnegie Europe, EWI, GMF, ICG, RAND Europe) have different reporting traditions. No financial details could be identified for 4 (10 percent) of the institutes: ECIA, E3G, Madariaga and Open Europe; they do not make budget overviews or detailed financial indicators available publicly on their websites, as most other think tanks by now do given the accountability isomorphism.

As noted, Open Europe stresses it is a “non-partisan and independent policy think tank” (SC 2016) whose supporters include “leaders of FTSE 100 firms and

small business entrepreneurs who support Open Europe in a personal capacity”; yet the exact nature or extent of its “businesspeople” funding remains obscure. ECIA, a self-described “network of residential and non-residential fellows” which - according to its interviewed research director (I4-Teti) - mostly relies on contributions as a side project on top or outside of their university-funded jobs, does not detail a total budget nor a breakdown of funding sources. Finally, E3G and Madariaga note some of their “partners” or “donors” by name, but without up-to-date totals or specific magnitudes.

So in line with Transparify’s practitioner findings analyzed above, there is considerable variation in the extent of reported financial details and public disclosure standards. A strong majority of EU think tanks does choose to make their funding publicly transparent, and seems keenly aware of this need to back up their frequent independence claims (or at least avoid negative allegations of being non-transparent). And actual accuracy of self-reported financial data is naturally beyond the author’s capacity to confirm. The level of detail of the financial information provided varies: it is merely superficial for 16 (41 percent), stated in some detail by 3 (8 percent) and extensively detailed by 16 (41 percent) of the Brussels EU think tanks covered here.

Thus, there is a clear-cut split: roughly half (19 or 49 percent) of the financially scrutinized Brussels institutes provide at least some or detailed facts about finances; the other half (20, or 51 percent) makes no or only general, superficial information about their funding public on their websites or in annual reports. In other words: as accountability pressures for think tanks at EU level have risen, as demonstrated, a number of institutes now voluntarily publish funding details as “good role models”; but a lack or incompleteness of many EU think tanks’ financial transparency persists.

While this chapter has shown that gaining an empirical sense of think tanks’ funding situation – one crucial proxy for likely resource dependencies, corresponding isomorphic pressures or organizational independence – is not impossible, as some authors have claimed (see Chapter 2), it would be wrong to reduce the issue of their relative autonomy to finances only. In fact, it is argued here that institutes’ human resources can be as important for shaping their common or differentiated profiles. Thus, let us now turn to their professionals’ backgrounds, to the “EU think tankers” who are active across the organizational field’s pan-European hotspots and Brussels, before we complete our analysis of their structural resources by considering networks and drawing together qualitative insights about what observed patterns mean in action regarding their innovativeness, independence and impact in the subsequent chapters.



## Chapter 7

# Human Resources: Isomorphism, or Birds of a Feather Flock Together?

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### Introduction

The previous chapter examined financial resources of EU think tanks in Brussels. Drawing on interview insights, it related findings to debates on their independence - or relative financial autonomy -vis-à-vis the public, private or civil society sectors. This chapter will address another aspect of their transnational spread or infrastructure. Beyond funding, it is argued, institutes' core assets are their human resources, the EU think tankers with their various educational or professional credentials and relations. Let us empirically answer a simple guiding question: Who are the EU think tankers? In today's institutionalized field (see Chapter 4 and 5), are they - as we expect given institutionalists' prediction of isomorphic homogeneity (see Chapter 2) increasingly "birds of a feather that flock together", so to speak, similarly socialized or imprinted?

Beyond financial leeway - thanks to or with whom they are active at EU level - the interest here is in the size-, educational attainment and sectoral career credentials of EU think tanks' workforce. Next to their estimated headcounts at the board- and staff levels, it is argued that the size, skills and status of personnel allows institutes not only to effectively perform but also affords them with crucial symbolic resources such as academic or other forms of capital, as well as potential political connections. Given think tanks' frequent claims of rallying diverse, innovative teams, employees' work locations, gender, age, nationalities and languages will also be briefly analyzed.

We can draw on the census sample of Brussels EU think tanks' staff and board CVs, self-declared biographical vignettes (or LinkedIn profiles) compiled and coded for this project (on N=2,080 census-sampled individuals), expanding upon Mevetz' (2012) work on US think tankers (see Chapter 3)<sup>4</sup>. This database enables first insight of where EU think tankers studied and worked (educational and career credentials) and about their training and sectoral sensitivities. Think tanks' detailed network ties to for-profit, non-profit or public sector organizations are tackled in the next chapter.

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<sup>4</sup> The detailed CV coding was carried out by the author in 2016 based on biographical information collected for this relatively limited population of 39 sampled Brussels EU think tanks' staff or board members listed within institutes' websites or strategic communication (as of 2015). Of course, these results cannot be easily generalized to the wider field of 85 identified EU think tanks (see Chapter 3).

**From tiny to thriving: Size of Brussels institutes’ workforce and boards**

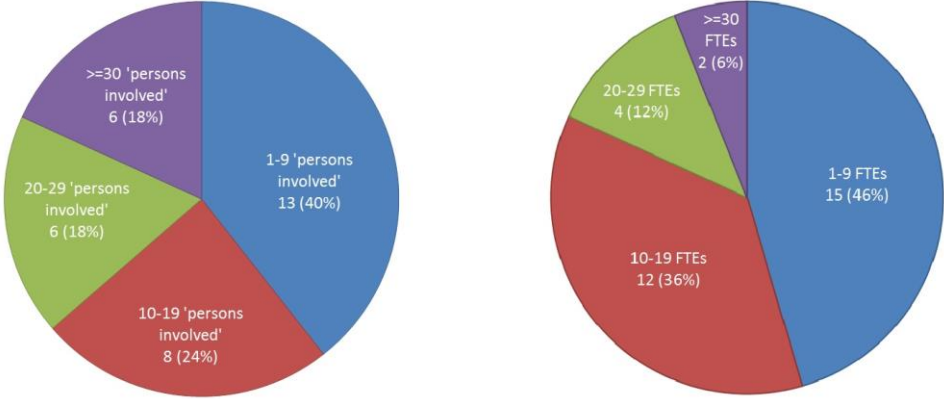
This first section presents existing data and the author’s own human resource count estimates. ETR entries with at least basic information on staff size were available for 33 (85 percent) of 39 sampled Brussels-based EU think tanks at the time or research (see Chapter 6). However, it often remains unclear whether their self-declared ETR numbers on “persons involved” and corresponding full-time equivalents (FTEs) refer to institutes’ overall- or just specifically Brussels-based employees. Moreover, ETR profiles of think tanks usually do not include specific information on their boards.

According to the ETR profiles, in 2014 the 33 Brussels EU think tanks together involved at least 574 persons in their regular operations, corresponding to 442 FTEs. On average, they report 17 “persons involved”, which in turn shrinks to just 13 FTEs. Clearly, the Brussels scene of think tanker professionals is relatively limited, at least compared to at least 30,000 lobbyists roaming the streets of Brussels, which nearly match the 31,000 staff employed by the European Commission (Traynor et al. 2014). But the total does not include staff of Brussels EU think tanks without an ETR entry (or, of course, the other 46 sampled institutes active beyond the EU de facto capital). On the other hand, it is clear how from early isolated endeavors of Chatham House or Egmont (see Chapter 5), the field nowadays employs hundreds of professionals in Brussels - where most EU think tanks cluster geographically (see Chapter 4) - alone.

Figure 18 categorizes Brussels EU think tanks’ self-stated “persons involved” (on the left) and corresponding FTEs, lower due to part-time workers (on the right): nearly two thirds of the subsample involves under 20 persons in their operations; if we consider only FTEs, this figure is even more drastic: 82 percent employ under 20.

**Figure 18.** Brussels institutes’ “persons involved” and full-time equivalents (N=33)

Note: Based on self-reported information from institutes’ ETR profiles as of 2015; no entry or staff size figure was found for EWI, Ecologic, ECIA, EIPA, IEEP and Madariaga at the time of research.



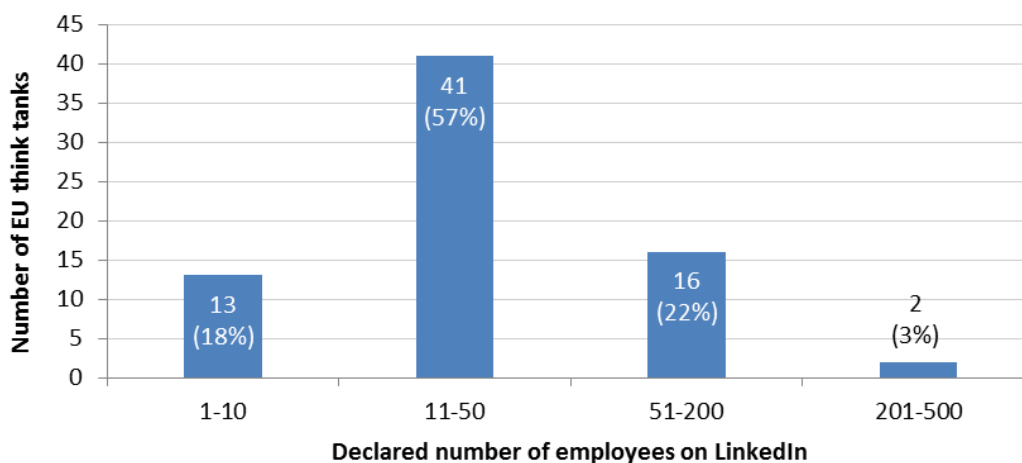
An advantage of the ETR is that precise human resource capacities - the actual FTEs beyond numbers of persons involved - become visible. This can be telling: to illustrate, Brussels-headquartered ICG declares a total 31 “persons involved”, but employs merely ten FTEs (it probably means only those working for its secretariat). A note of caution is in order, because self-declarations might suffer from reporting inconsistencies. For instance, IIEA reports a single person involved (Brussels office only), whereas ECDPM says it involves a maximum of 60 persons(all employees).

In between lies a variety of tiny think tanks with under five FTEs in Brussels (say ERF) or stationed in Brussels (for instance IFRI or the of course larger SWP); those with five to nearly ten FTEs (say Lisbon Council, ECIPE, Open Europe, PLS); those with ten to nearly twenty FTEs in town (examples are Bruegel, Bertelsmann Foundation or Egmont, but also the US-origin institutes Carnegie Europe, GMF, ICG and RAND Europe); and large EU think tanks with at times well over twenty FTEs (notably CEPS and ECDPM as well as Brussels platform think tanks EPC and FoE).

The ERF data’s limitations - reporting discrepancies and nothing on boards - make it worthwhile to complement it with the amount of employees according to EU think tanks’ organizational LinkedIn accounts and the author’s own count estimates from the EU think tanker database-coded profiles of their leaders, staff and boards. As can be seen in Figure 19, modal workforce size category of institutes in as well as beyond Brussels - according to their LinkedIn profiles - lies between 11 to 50: 41 (57 percent) of institutes report this. It roughly corresponds to the ETR data of only those in Brussels; however, Brussels-based think tanks or -offices appear generally smaller in that they more frequently involve just under ten persons as well as FTEs.

**Figure 19.** EU think tanks’ self-reported employee size on LinkedIn (N=72)

Note: Organizational LinkedIn profiles as of 2015 were available for 72 (85 percent) of the sampled 85 EU think tanks operating in or beyond Brussels; the 13 without profiles are mostly small institutes.



LinkedIn data reveals that the Europe-wide organizational field is by no means limited to smallish EU think tanks with mostly under 30 contractually affiliated staff: at least if we trust their own professional social media size depictions, a fourth of the 85 EU think tanks employs over 50 people, likely counting experts and non-research staff. Bertelsmann Foundation reports over 200 employees. Chatham House, CEPS, SWP, GMF, IFRI and RAND Europe place themselves within the 51 to 200 bracket.

What are the exact numbers of EU think tanks' personnel or board members? This question is most accurately answered not with an organizational survey (prone to answering inaccuracies irrespective of question phrasing, see Rap/Paxton 2018) but by cross-sectional counts of leaders, experts, non-research staff or board members listed in institutes' strategic communication material, notably their websites or annual reports where all these personnel types are usually comprehensively covered (unlike non-residential fellows, or interns, who are sometimes but not always mentioned).

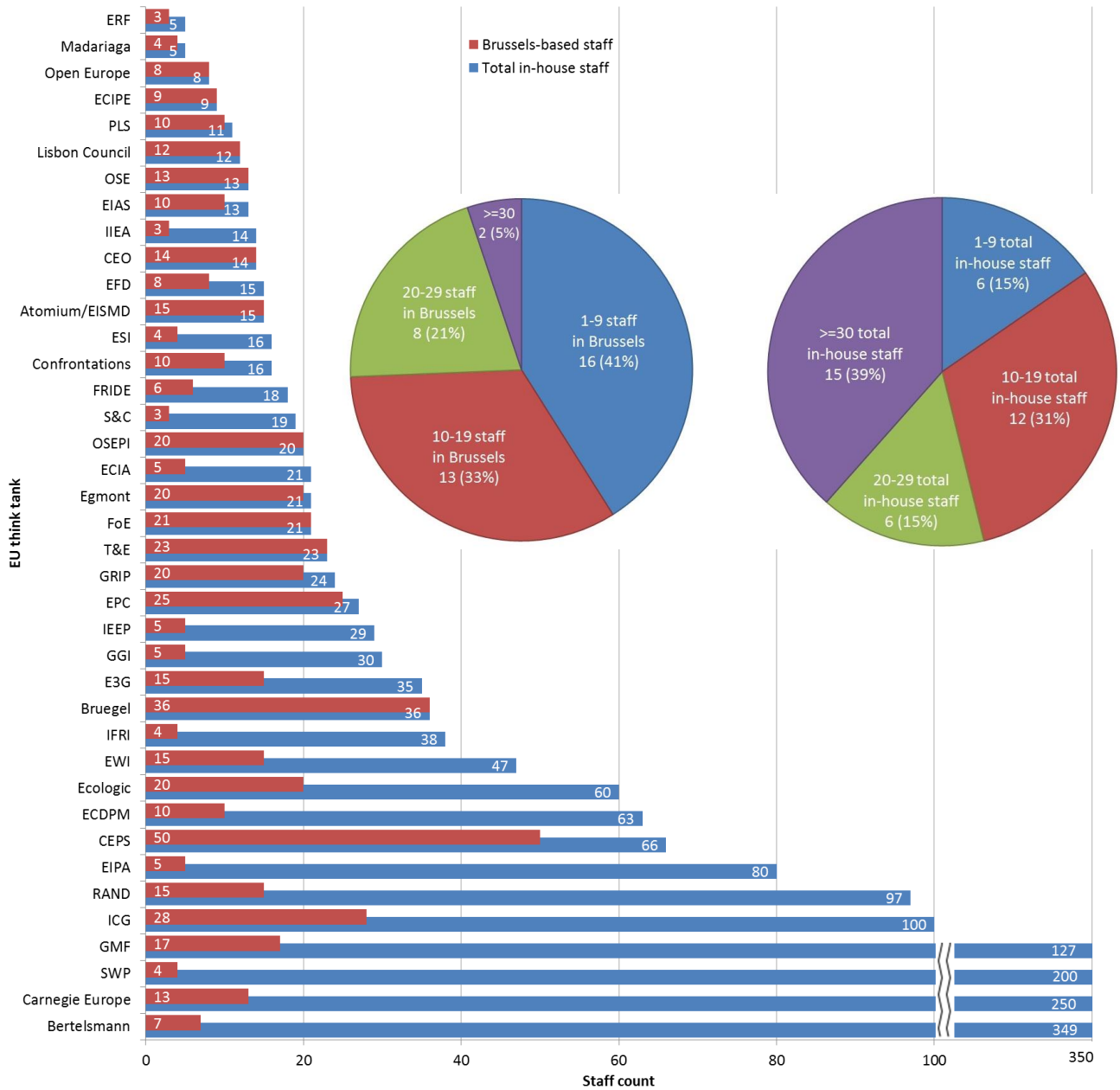
For Brussels' institutes subsample, this project's CV database offers the most detailed biographical information to date on all their think tankers or board members. Beyond more accurate count estimates of think tanks' staff- and board size, this non-reactive, detailed biographical data (systematically coded by the author) also enables descriptive insights on their expert- to non-research staff proportion, gender balance, staff or board location-, age-, nationality-, education- and career experience profiles.

According to the author's count, in 2014 the 39 sampled Brussels institutes together employed at least 515 Brussels-based professionals (as listed in their annual reports and - typically the most up-to-date, authoritative source - on their websites). This comes very close to the ETR-declared 574 "persons involved" (and 442 FTEs), so a key finding is that we can be rather sure there are around 500 EU think tankers active in Brussels alone. On average, 13 staff working in the city are listed, although with a considerable range - from only three (reported by ERF or IIEA) to 50 (CEPS).

Overall, considering the total in-house staff of Brussels institutes also beyond the city (expert and non-research staff, but excluding non-resident fellows or interns), the subsample of institutes with a Brussels branch enlists 2,080 affiliated individuals. However, the significantly higher total in-house staff average of 50 is largely driven by the handful of Brussels EU think tanks which exceed a threshold of over 100 staff - the range is from only five at the spectrum's lower end (at Madariaga) all the way to the Bertelsmann Foundation's 349 total staff (but just seven stationed in Brussels). Figure 20 on the next page illustrates Brussels EU think tanks' Brussels-based- versus

**Figure 20.** Brussels-based and total staff size of Brussels EU think tanks (N=39)

Note: As of 2015; total count-estimated staff size of lowest-listed four institutes exceeds 100 threshold.



total in-house staff size. As its pie charts show, the count-estimated modal category (41 percent) is one to nine staff in town, followed by a third (33 percent) of Brussels institutes with under 20, several (21 percent) below the threshold of 30, which only Bruegel and CEPS - among the most central players as we saw and will see - exceed.

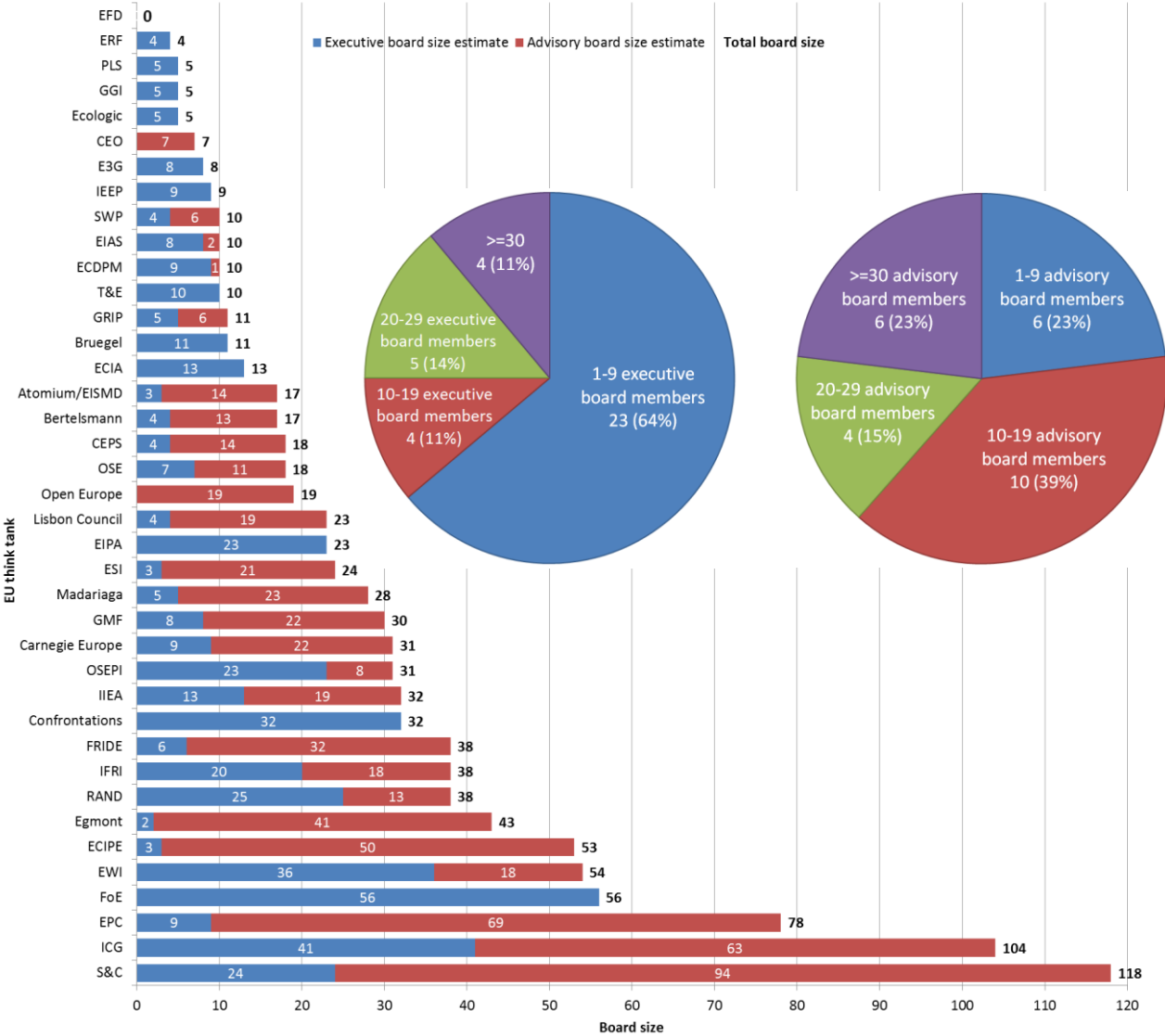
If we turn to think tanks' total in-house staff count, a different pattern emerges: think tanks with just one to nine total staff are actually the minority (15 percent) and no longer the most frequent group as in the ETR; near half of Brussels institutes (46 percent) employ between 10 to 29 people; plenty (39 percent) employ well over 30.

Next to Bruegel and CEPS, for example, Ecologic Institute, ECDPM and EIPA have a workforce somewhere between 60 and 80 in-house staff (across multiple locations). RAND Europe or ICG approach a human resources threshold of 100 - and US-origin Carnegie Europe and GMF or German SWP and Bertelsmann Foundation surpass it. Human resource-wise, they are Brussels' most potent players, at least quantitatively speaking (staff size is neither a guarantee for quality nor impact, see Chapter 9).

Turning to the 39 EU think tanks' board members involved beyond their staff, as of 2015 these bring together over 1,000 often distinguished individuals to serve as members of either executive or advisory boards, namely 1,081 altogether in my count. A board could be discerned for nearly all think tanks (97 percent), typically in the form of a not-for-profit executive board of directors, often also advisory committees.

**Figure 21.** Executive and advisory board size of Brussels EU think tanks (N=39)

Note: As of 2015; of the 39 sampled Brussels institutes, 36 (92 percent) were found to have executive boards, 26 (68 percent) advisory boards; EFD either does not have or publicly list board members.



On average, sampled think tanks involve 28 persons in a board member capacity. But, as Figure 21 shows, total board size ranges from zero in the case of only EFD and a handful of board members for small institutes like ERF, PLS and GGI (but also the much larger Ecologic Institute) all the way to over 50 affiliated individuals for the platform think tanks FoE and EPC, and even over 100 in the case of ICG or S&C. The pie charts illustrate that executive boards tend to be smaller than advisory ones: nearly two thirds (64 percent) of Brussels institutes with executive boards assemble less than ten persons to oversee organizations' finances, operations and management, whereas a majority of advisory boards (77 percent) convenes well beyond ten people. Differing governance- or fundraising roles likely explain this (Pfeffer/Salancik 1978).

S&C's so-called "scientific committee" brings together nearly 100 "European experts considered as authorities in their own field", for example, with a goal to build "collective expertise on sport" (SC 2015). Open Europe is a rare case with only an advisory board, but a long list of "supporters" lending their names to the cause. Similarly, besides Confrontations Europe's already large executive board, it boasts a "sponsorship committee" of 240 persons for symbolic resources or fundraising aims.

On the other side, think tanks like ERF or PLS, the Ecologic Institute, IEEP or T&E solely have an executive board with five to ten members at the time of study, indicating a focus on organizational steering. In general, it can be assumed that small governing boards and scientific committees are designed to keep institutes afloat, management effective and accountable or to ensure think tankers' quality standards; whereas the primary concerns of larger and the conspicuously broad boards is raising funds or to externally link institutes, enabling think tanks to "stretch out their feelers".

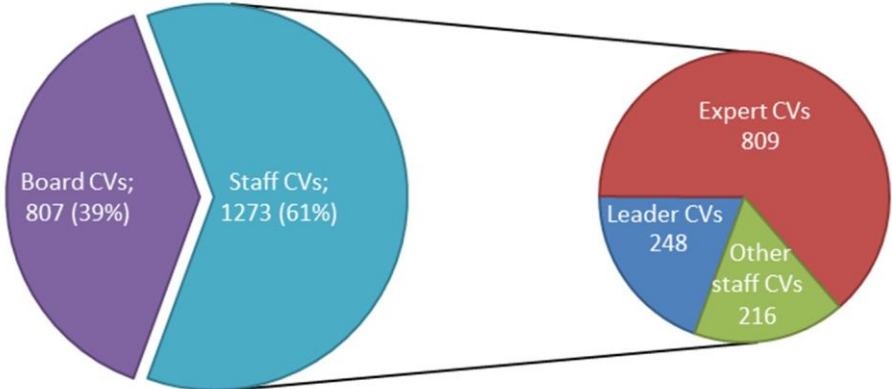
Of course, the authority, powers and roles of think tanks' executive or advisory boards vary, not only in their organizing documents - statutes, bylaws and articles of incorporation - but also in governance practice. The next chapter further visualizes board relations (next to EU think tankers' sectoral ties) and interlocking directorates.

Beyond sheer size of EU think tanks' human resources or organizational boards, in a next step of our organizational demography let us analyze their composition in detail. While financial resources of think tanks active at the EU level - and elsewhere - are regularly brought up, in my view there is surprisingly little attention paid to who precisely their self-proclaimed experts and often high-level board members are. But before we get to think tankers' educational and careers credentials, let us briefly discern their staff types, work location, gender-, age- as well as nationality profiles.

**Human resource composition: Who inhabits Brussels think tanks’ field?**

Of the 807 board members among the 2,080 publicly listed and coded individuals in the CV database, 458 (57 percent) belong to executive boards - often called board of directors or board of trustees; the remaining 349 (43 percent) to advisory boards. Beyond board members, as is shown in Figure 22, Brussels EU think tanks’ staff CVs break down into three broad categories: the majority of 809 (63 percent) are experts, 248 (20 percent) are think tank leaders and 216 (17 percent) other non-research staff.

**Figure 22.** Compiled CV database structure on Brussels EU think tankers (N=2,080)



Nearly all board members are regular members (97 percent) but the remaining chairpersons or vice-chairs of boards are also included. Within the group of experts, nearly half (48 percent) are classified as senior experts, with job titles like senior policy analyst, senior researcher or distinguished fellow; over a third (36 percent) are regular experts, called adviser, policy officer or fellow; and a fourth (23 percent) are junior experts, associates or research assistants (Chapter 9 details label implications).

Think tank leaders break down to institute directors, deputies, Brussels office heads or presidents (39 percent); nearly as many research leaders (36 percent); several communications leaders (17 percent); and members of management teams, including the think tankers in the position of CEO, COO, CTO or secretary general (8 percent).

Finally, the non-research group consists of programming staff (60 percent), including project coordinators, assistants, heads of events or conference management; communications personnel (28 percent), with job titles like head of communications, brand identity- or public relations manager, social media- or online communications specialist; and the editing staff (12 percent), with coded primary positions such as editor-in-chief, publications- or content manager or head of knowledge management.



**Table 12.** Brussels EU think tank human resources portfolio composition (N=37)

Note: Proportion of in-house leader-, expert- or non-research staff types calculated for 37 (95 percent) of 39 Brussels EU think tanks (except Bertelsmann Foundation Brussels and Carnegie Europe); all CV-based information as of 2015 from think tanks' websites and own strategic communication (a caveat on the stated proportions: while leaders and experts are virtually always reported, this is not as consistently the case for other/non-research staff types as well as non-resident affiliates or the interns).

Name	Staff CVs	Leaders/managers	Experts/researchers	Other/non-research staff (communications/events; admin)	Ratio (expert per non-research)	Non-resident /affiliates	Yearly interns	Predominant staffing focus
Ecologic	60	5% (3)	93% (56)	2% (1 admin)	56	n/a	1	Expertise
Egmont	21	10% (2)	90% (19)	0% (no other staff website-listed)	19	n/a	n/a	Expertise
ECIA	21	5% (1)	86% (18)	10% (2: 1 comms/event; 1 admin)	9	3	n/a	Expertise
GGI	30	17% (5)	83% (25)	0% (no other staff website-listed)	25	50	5	Expertise
EFD	15	7% (1)	80% (12)	13% (2 admin)	6	2	n/a	Expertise
IFRI	38	8% (3)	71% (27)	21% (8: 3 comms/event; 5 admin)	3,4	28	n/a	Expertise
RAND Eur.	97	3% (3)	70% (68)	27% (26: 24 comms/event; 2 admin)	2,6	13	n/a	Expertise
EIAS	13	23% (3)	69% (9)	8% (1 admin)	9	20	n/a	Expertise
IEEP	29	10% (3)	69% (20)	21% (6: 1 comms/event; 5 admin)	3,3	10	n/a	Expertise
ECIPE	9	22% (2)	67% (6)	11% (1 admin)	6	21	n/a	Expertise
OSE	12	8% (1)	67% (8)	25% (3: 1 comms/event; 2 admin)	2,7	7	8	Expertise
FRIDE	17	18% (3)	65% (11)	18% (3: no break-down available)	2,8	n/a	n/a	Expertise
T&E	23	4% (1)	65% (15)	30% (7: 5 comms/event; 2 admin)	2,1	n/a	n/a	Expertise
CEPS	66	3% (2)	65% (43)	32% (21: 7 comms/event; 14 admin)	2	11	n/a	Expertise
IIEA	14	14% (2)	64% (9)	21% (3 comms/event)	3	2	1	Expertise
CEO	14	7% (1)	64% (9)	29% (4: 2 comms/event; 1 admin)	2,3	n/a	n/a	Expertise
E3G	35	23% (8)	63% (22)	14% (5: 3 comms/event; 2 admin)	4,4	9	2	Expertise
EPC	27	4% (1)	63% (17)	33% (9: 3 comms/event; 6 admin)	1,9	16	n/a	Expertise
ECDPM	69	9% (6)	61% (42)	30% (21: 9 comms/event; 12 admin)	2	9	8	Expertise
ERF	5	40% (2)	60% (3)	0% (no other staff website-listed)	3	n/a	n/a	Expertise
Madariaga	5	20% (1)	60% (3)	20% (1 comms/event)	3	n/a	3	Expertise
ESI	16	19% (3)	56% (9)	25% (4: 2 comms/event; 2 admin)	2,3	n/a	n/a	Expertise
Bruegel	36	11% (4)	56% (20)	33% (12: no break-down available)	1,7	21	14	Expertise
SWP	200	2% (2)	56% (112)	42% (84:36 comms/event; 48 admin)	1,3	13	n/a	Expertise
PLS	11	9% (1)	55% (6)	36% (4: 2 comms/event; 2 admin)	1,5	n/a	n/a	Expertise
GRIP	24	21% (5)	46% (11)	33% (8: 3 comms/event; 5 admin)	1,4	28	10	Expertise
EWI	47	15% (7)	38% (18)	47% (22: no break-down available)	0,8	28	44	Non-research
FoE	21	14% (3)	38% (8)	48% (10: 7 comms/event; 3 admin)	0,8	2	n/a	Non-research
OSEPI	20	15% (3)	35% (7)	50% (10: 4 comms/event; 6 admin)	0,7	n/a	n/a	Non-research
EIPA	80	3% (2)	43% (34)	55% (44: no break-down available)	0,8	n/a	n/a	Non-research
ICG	100	3% (3)	37% (37)	60% (60:22comms/event,38 admin)	0,6	7	n/a	Non-research
GMF	127	6% (8)	34% (43)	60% (76:9 comms/event; 67 admin)	0,6	3	n/a	Non-research
Open Eur.	8	38% (3)	25% (2)	38% (3: 2 comms/event; 1 admin)	0,7	n/a	n/a	Leadership
Lisbon C.	12	42% (5)	42% (5)	17% (2: 1 comms/event; 1 admin)	2,5	3	n/a	Leadership
Confront.	16	44% (7)	44% (7)	12% (2 admin)	3,5	6	1	Leadership
S&C	19	47% (9)	21% (4)	32% (6: 4 comms/event; 2 admin)	0,7	11	n/a	Leadership
Atomium	15	50% (5)	0% (0)	50% (5: 4 comms/event; 1 admin)	0	n/a	n/a	Leadership

**Figure 23.** Predominant staffing focus of Brussels EU think tanks (N=37)

Note: As of 2015, available for 37 (95 percent) of 39 sampled Brussels EU think tanks.



Similar to the empirical check of Brussels EU think tanks’ finances (see Chapter 6), Table 12 transcends the hitherto presented overall human resource counts to give an impression of their proportional composition in terms of functional staff types - think tankers in leadership or managing roles, with expert or researcher positions, and other non-research staff like communications-, events- or administrative personnel.

While this structural breakdown on an institute-by-institute basis is interesting in and of itself - it is almost never publicly declared by the think tanks themselves - a clear pattern also emerges from this CV-based “human resources coding” exercise: as is illustrated in Figure 23 above, the predominant staffing focus for over two thirds (but, as we will see, not all) of Brussels institutes revolves around expertise - their analysts, fellows and researchers typically constitute the broadest group of staff. For example, they account for nine out of ten employees in the case of Ecologic Institute, Egmont or ECIA, with small leadership teams and lean administrative backbones. For most other institutes - no matter whether large or small - the experts also make up over half or even two thirds of the total workforce, as one would perhaps expect.

However, there is a group of institutes with non-research staff as largest share. GMF - as a hybrid think tank and grant-maker - is one example. Next to a sizeable pool of experts, its annual Brussels Forum or the Marshall Memorial Fellowship, for instance, are programming-intensive formats. It also holds true for EWI’s leadership development or backchannel diplomacy, or EIPA’s learning and workshop programs, which also require higher shares of non-research personnel. FoE employs nearly as many communications or events personnel as experts with its focus on regular events. In a similar vein, the ICG and OSEPI also exhibit a high share of non-researchers.

A handful of think tanks have a staffing focus on leadership teams which surround themselves with few extra experts. Atomium is one case in point: the platform think tank's presidents Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and Michelangelo Baracchi Bonvicini have communications staff and an administrator at their disposal to further their own or partners' work but seemingly employ no in-house experts - a human resource model indicative of "legacy think tanks" as described in the literature (see Chapter 2).

Table 12 also denotes the think tanks' ratios of expert- per non-research staff. While institutes with expertise-focused human resource models muster at least one and a half experts per non-research employee, this is naturally reversed for programming- or convening- and advocacy-heavy institutes with less than one expert per person devoted to communications, events or admin. For example, Ecologic Institute or Egmont have more employed researchers than administrative personnel. RAND Europe, CEPS or ECDPM have at least two experts per communications or administrative staffer, but still keep over 20 employees for non-research tasks. SWP, as a more scholarly think tank, clearly has a staffing focus on its over 100 experts; however, what is often less seen is its large communications and admin team with over 80 persons; this is unmatched in the field (GMF programming staff gets close).

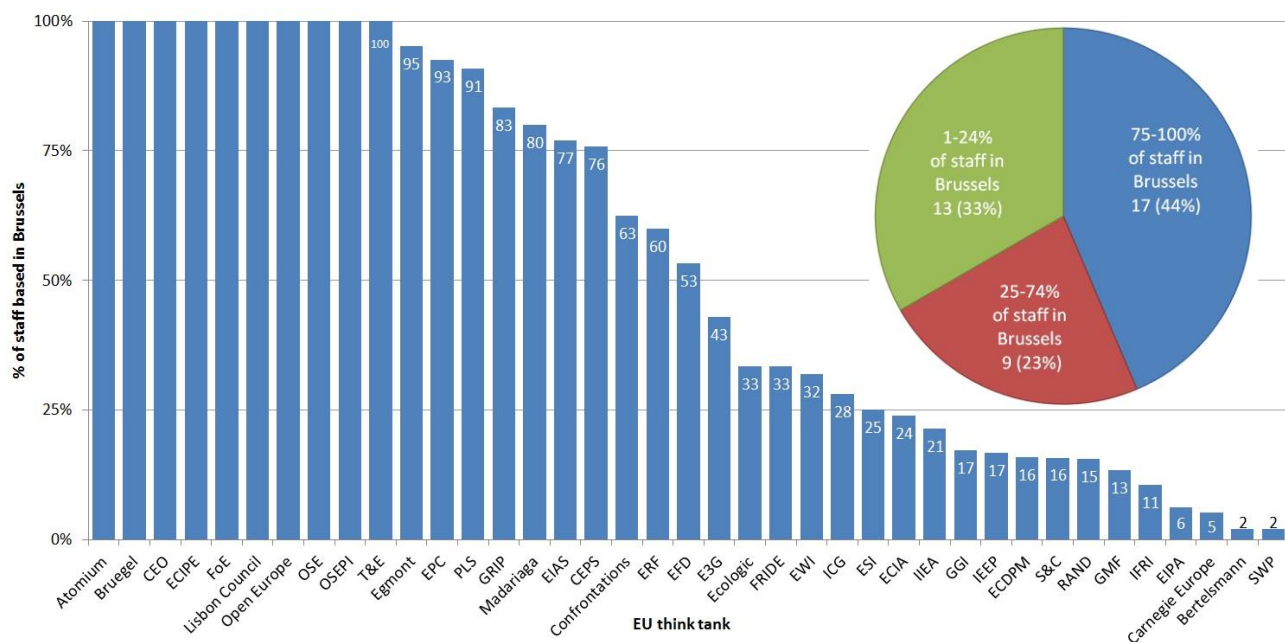
The number of yearly interns assisting Brussels EU think tanks' experts or non-research work varies significantly but could not be obtained across all institutes. It is one indicator of think tanks' training role, as "human resource pipelines" for the next generation of policy professionals (see Chapter 9). For 13 institutes publicly listing interns as of 2015, the range is from one - for instance at IIEA - all the way to the Bertelsmann Foundation's 56 - if one includes interns in the tally, this is 14 percent of its total workforce. Bruegel recruited 14 interns to support its 36 staff - so they even make up 28 percent. EWI's 44 interns were most blatantly nearly on par with its 47 employees that year - "summer interns" account for 48 percent of its total staffing.

Finally, table 12 above also lists how many non-resident fellows or loosely associated affiliates there are at the 24 Brussels institutes making these public. Some Brussels EU think tanks do not draw on affiliate experts beyond their own formally employed think tankers at all. Others involve less than a handful as of 2015, for instance FoE or Lisbon Council. CEPS maintains a network of eleven, Bruegel of 21 extramural but formally affiliated experts, while IFRI, GRIP and EWI integrate 28 non-resident fellows each. GGI's think tank model, however, involves the single largest number of 50 affiliates (double the number of its in-house expert staff of 25).

*At which location are Brussels EU think tankers or board members based?*

Of the think tankers included in the CV database, 445 (35 percent) appear to be permanently based in Brussels<sup>5</sup>, whereas nearly two thirds - or 828 (65 percent) - of those working for institutes present in Brussels operate from elsewhere. Of the covered board members, a higher proportion but less than half - 351 (43 percent) - seem to operate in the city, but the majority of 456 (57 percent) is also stationed outside Brussels. Figure 24 depicts the share of Brussels-based staff for the EU think tanks in town: for one thing, the staff of 17 (44 percent) - from Atomium to CEPS - is entirely or almost exclusively Brussels-based; for another, there is a sizeable cluster of 13 (33 percent) of institutes with an office in the city but less than a fourth of their staff residing there - from ECIA to SWP, with only two percent of staff there.

**Figure 24.** Percentages of Brussels-based staff for Brussels EU think tanks (N=39)



Brussels is the city hub where think tank activity at EU level clusters (see Chapter 4). The importance of being in Brussels can hardly be overstated, in the view of many interview partners. However, it does not mean EU- or related global affairs-geared work only happens in this epicenter of EU action: SWP, say, is present in town with two permanent people, yet it has “about ten to 15 researchers working on the EU and related fields” in Berlin as well, plus “there are 52 researchers in Berlin who cover absolutely everything, from drones to climate, and regions” as well (I3-Reljic:10,54). EIPA’s “faculty of roughly 40” (I9-Guggenbühl:30) mostly works outside town, too.

<sup>5</sup> Thus, of the 515 counted Brussels-based staff 445 (86 percent) could be included in the CV database.

*What is the gender balance for Brussels EU think tanks' boards and staff?*

A gender could be identified and coded for all 2,080 think tankers in the CV database; nearly two thirds (65 percent) are men, and barely over a third (35 percent) women. The most striking pattern is that of 807 board members of EU think tanks in Brussels 633 - nearly four out of five - are men (78 percent) and only 174 women (22 percent). The gender distribution is somewhat more balanced among their 1,273 sampled staff: 709 men (56 percent) make up the majority of Brussels institutes' leaders, experts or other staff-taken together-but 564 women(44 percent) also are part of the workforce.

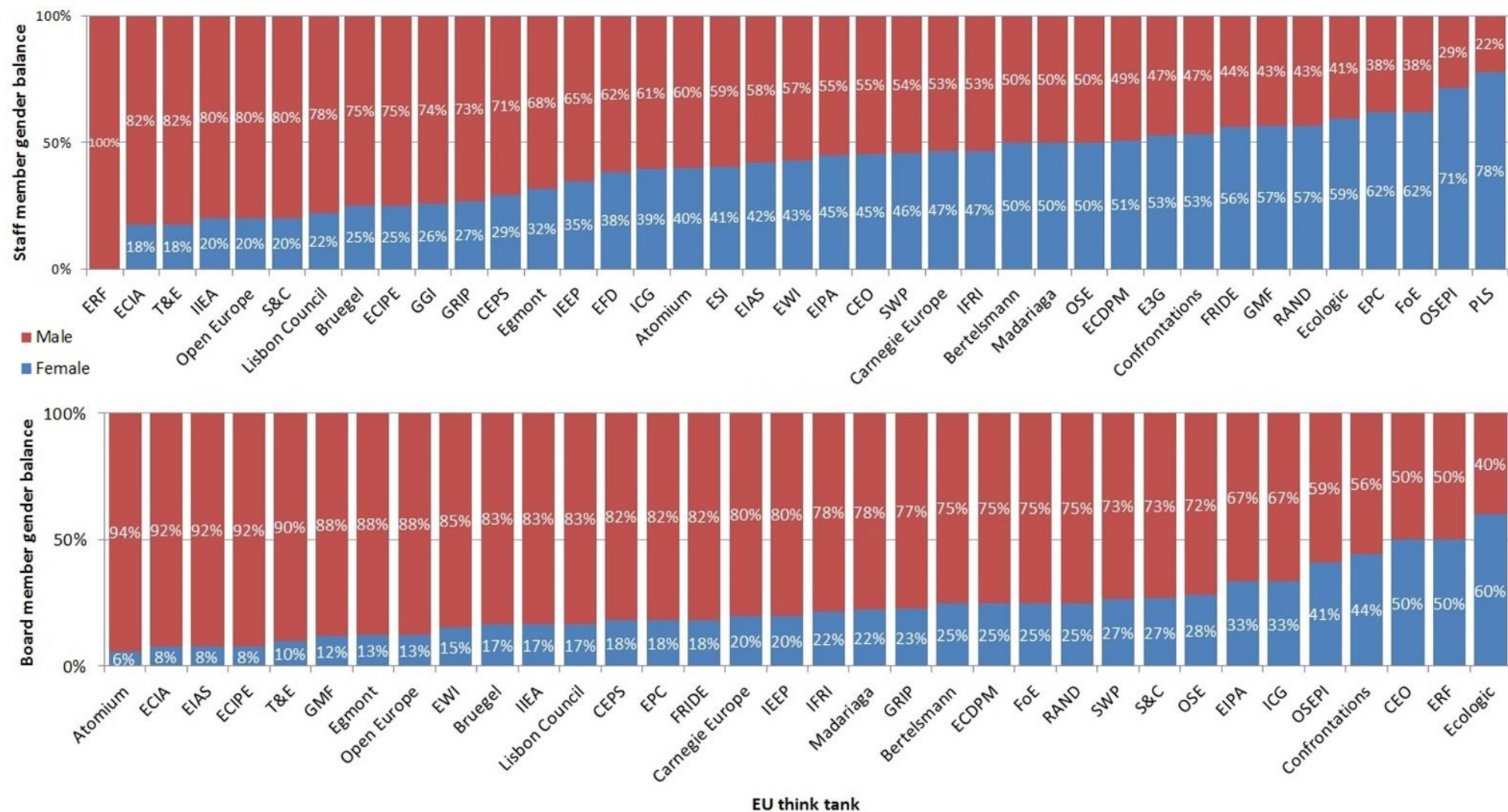
Yet, as Figure 25 details, beyond the male-dominated boards of Brussels EU think tanks, the staff of most institutes is clearly tilted towards men as well. Lumping together expert and non-research staff, men account for at least seven out of ten staff in over ten think tanks including ECIA, Open Europe, Lisbon Council, Bruegel and CEPS. Bertelsmann Foundation's Brussels office, Madariaga and OSE emerge as the only EU think tanks with gender parity for their limited staff present in Brussels.

Bertelsmann Foundation is also one of four institutes (next to Ecologic Institute, ECDPM and EIPA) publicly declaring in-house gender balance: according to its 2014 annual report, it claims to employ two thirds women and a third of men overall (not just considering its smaller Brussels office). However, this ratio is nearly turned on its head when taking hierarchical type of employment of these "Bertelsmen and -women" into account: of 21 senior managers, 15 (62 percent) are men but only 9 women (38 percent); and virtually all (93 percent) of 110 half-timers are women.

Patterns of occupational segregation by gender are frequent in many industries: analyses based on DIW's German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP) reveal that both a gender wage gap and part-time pay penalty are "persistent and pervasive labor market phenomena" (Gallego Granados 2018), at least in Germany. EU think tanks are likely no exception: at least the women choosing to work there - and actually being chosen in their hiring practices - tend to occupy systematically different jobs, both in terms of hierarchical placement and their functional occupational activities. At leadership-level - with 117 sampled think tankers in director's or managing roles - seemingly more gender-balanced staff structures "drop back" to the pattern observed for boards: 89 - nearly four out of five - EU think tank leaders are men (76 percent). At the expert- or research leader-level, women and men are more equally distributed: 57 percent of experts are men. Women are only the majority in "other" non-research positions: over two thirds of communication professionals, for example, are women.

**Figure 25.** Brussels EU think tank staff and board member gender balance (N=2,080)

Note: Based on biographical data or CVs of N=2,080 individuals as of 2015; no board CVs with gender info could be identified for E3G, EFD, ESI, GGI, PLS.



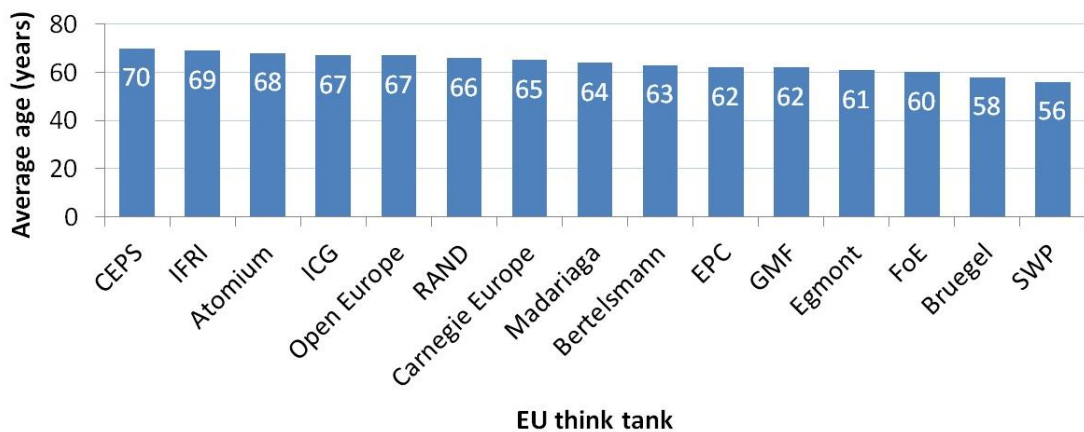
*What is the average age of Brussels EU think tankers and board members?*

As knowledge-intensive organizations, EU think tanks need to find a balance between extensive experience of - oftentimes costly-to-hire, tricky-to-win- senior professionals and the innovative energy of recently graduated, bright and still moldable junior staff (see Chapter 9). Because age is not conventionally reported in CVs or biographical website vignettes - particularly among younger generations - the empirical insight we can get on this basis remains severely limited and incomplete. Of 2,080 think tankers, some age information could be coded for 34 out of 39 Brussels institutes (89 percent) but on average, ages were only found for a fourth of staff and half of board members.

The youngest individual in the database is a RAND Europe staffer of 26 years, while the oldest person is a 94-year-old - definitely experienced - EWI board member. Although the data gaps make it difficult to accurately assess this, the average age of Brussels EU think tankers systematically seems to be at least a decade below boards' averages. For example, the average age of 7 out of 16 Bruegel employees for which age could be coded is 45 years - but, it turns out, its board's average age is 58 years.

**Figure 26.** Brussels EU think tank board age profiles (N=15)

Note: Only institutes with CV-coded age as of 2015 for over 50 percent of board members are shown.



Another indication of average staff age is available in the strategic communication material of Bertelsmann Foundation and EIPA, and both state an average of 42 years. EIPA adds that this average compares to a Dutch working population average of 41 years, 43 years in Dutch public administration and 44 years in education (SC 2014). In fact, the average age of CEPS board members is a decade older than Bruegel's; the same holds true for IFRI board members when compared to the SWP (see Figure 26). Clearly, Brussels EU think tank boards are the domain of the elderly and experienced, not young influencers or upstarts. Board members are typically over 60 year old men.



*How diverse are Brussels EU think tankers in terms of nationalities?*

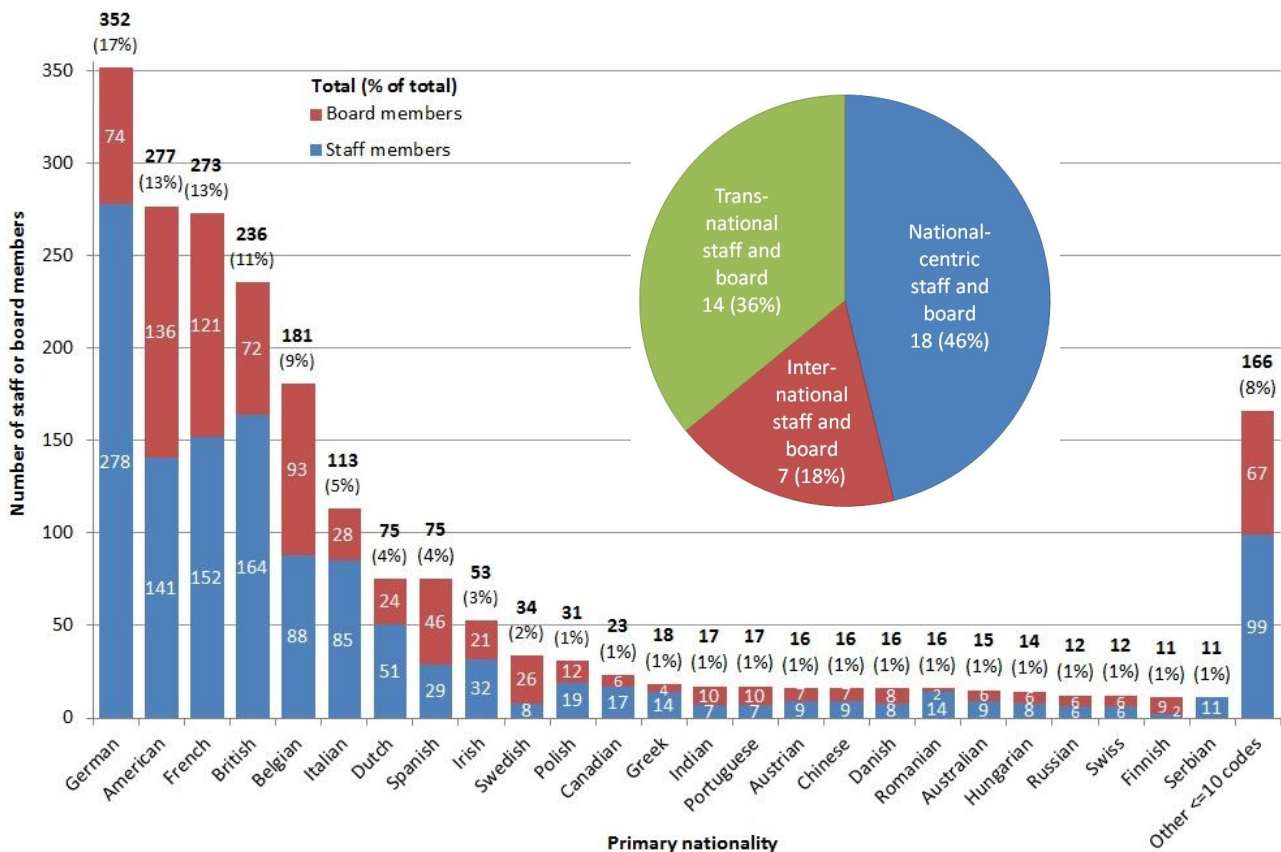
Another important element we can screen for on basis of the compiled CV database is think tankers' countries of origin, to see whether their organizational field is either marked by a parochial pattern of delimited nationalities or rather by internationality. A primary nationality could be detected for 2,080 covered individuals (100 percent).

Figure 27 presents top 25 primary nationalities of Brussels EU think tankers, which are of course driven by the overall human resources size of - notably larger, national-centric - institutes in Brussels: while the German top spot (17 percent of all CV tags) makes intuitive sense, given the country's status as largest EU member state, SWP or Ecologic Institute alone employ big shares of German-origin EU think tankers. US-Americans are also well-represented (13 percent) as single largest group in Brussels EU think tank boards, and notably at US-origin institutes EWI, RAND Europe, GMF and Carnegie Europe. French nationals make up a similarly sizeable (13 percent) group of think tankers, followed by less Britons, Belgians, also Italians.

As the figure's pie chart shows, nearly half of Brussels institutes can be said to be national-centric in terms of who they employ and involve at staff and board levels.

**Figure 27.** Top 25 nationalities of Brussels EU think tank staff and boards (N=2,080)

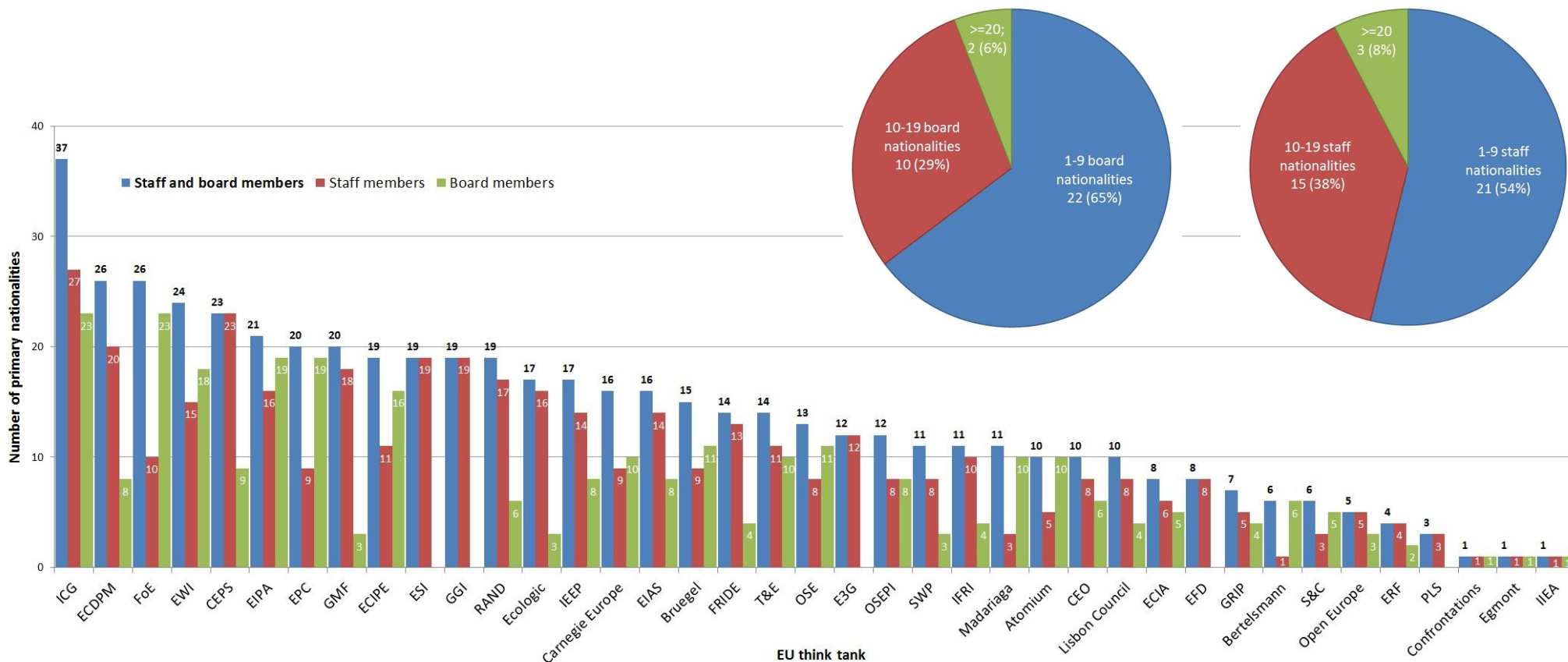
Note: Based on biographical data or CVs for all individuals of 39 institutes as of 2015; board member CVs with information on primary nationalities not found for five institutes (E3G, EFD, ESI, GGI, PLS).





**Figure 28.** Number of Brussels institutes’ staff and board member countries of origin (N=2,080)

Note: Based on biographical data or CVs for all individuals at 39 institutes as of 2015; no board primary nationalities available for E3G, EFD, ESI, GGI, PLS.<sup>6</sup>



<sup>6</sup> Primary nationality refers to individuals’ status of belonging to a particular nation, whether by birth or naturalization. Of course, double- or multiple citizenships are possible and have also been coded, if applicable: 41 percent (16) institutes had no double- or multiple citizens; another 41 percent (16) had one to three; and 18 percent (7) - a minority of Brussels institutes - is found to employ or involve four or more individuals with double or multiple citizenship across staff or board level.

Being national-centric holds true for US-rooted institutes (mainly US-American), but also applies to institutes like Confrontations Europe (exclusively French), Egmont (solely Belgian) or IIEA (only Irish). There are predominantly nationally-staffed and -overseen institutes as well: SWP (92 percent German), IFRI or S&C (82 percent French), Bertelsmann Foundation's board and Brussels office (76 percent German) as well as Open Europe (69 percent British). Moreover, the following Brussels EU think tanks draw at times well over half of the crew from a "home zone" country: Ecologic (65 percent German), E3G (59 percent British) or ECIA (53 percent Italian). Of course, it does not mean national-centric staff cannot be transnational in outlook.

However, about a fifth of Brussels institutes are structurally internationalized: EIPA, for instance, had staff or board members from 21 out of 28 EU countries at the time of research. Next to diversified financial resources, CEPS and Bruegel, it turns out, are similarly staffed with cross-European knowledge workers, adding occasional US board members (among Bruegel's 15 nationalities), Israeli, Japanese or Turkish staffers to the think tanker mix (who work alongside 20 other nationalities at CEPS).

Moreover, over a third of the EU think tanks in Brussels are truly transnational: as a veritable "global village tank", metaphorically speaking, Brussels-headquartered ICG convenes 37 nationalities under one roof (mainly American, British and French but also from China, Pakistan, South Africa or remoter countries such as Kyrgyzstan). As two further cases, development policy-focused ECDPM and platform think tank FoE each draw together people from 26 different countries of origin.

Finally, there are several institutes - big or small - whose hiring practices and leadership teams are transnationally diversified (meaning under a third have the most common origin). This is the case for the platform think tank EPC (20 nationalities across 87 - frequently British, German or French - staff and board members) but also for ECIPE (19 nationalities - mostly US-American or British - for 71 think tankers) and for GGI (19 countries of origin across 70 most frequently German professionals). Some smaller institutes exhibit even higher degrees of national diversification, say ESI (with 19 nationalities across 37 most often Austrian or German think tankers).

Figure 28 breaks down the number of overall, staff- and board member primary nationalities for all 39 Brussels institutes. It also shows that overall, boards tend to be more nationally homogenous than staff: while roughly half of the sampled institutes bring together under ten nationalities, this is the case for almost two thirds of boards. Appendix 10 offers an alternative visualization of nationality patterns, as a network.

*Which languages do Brussels EU think tankers and board members speak?*

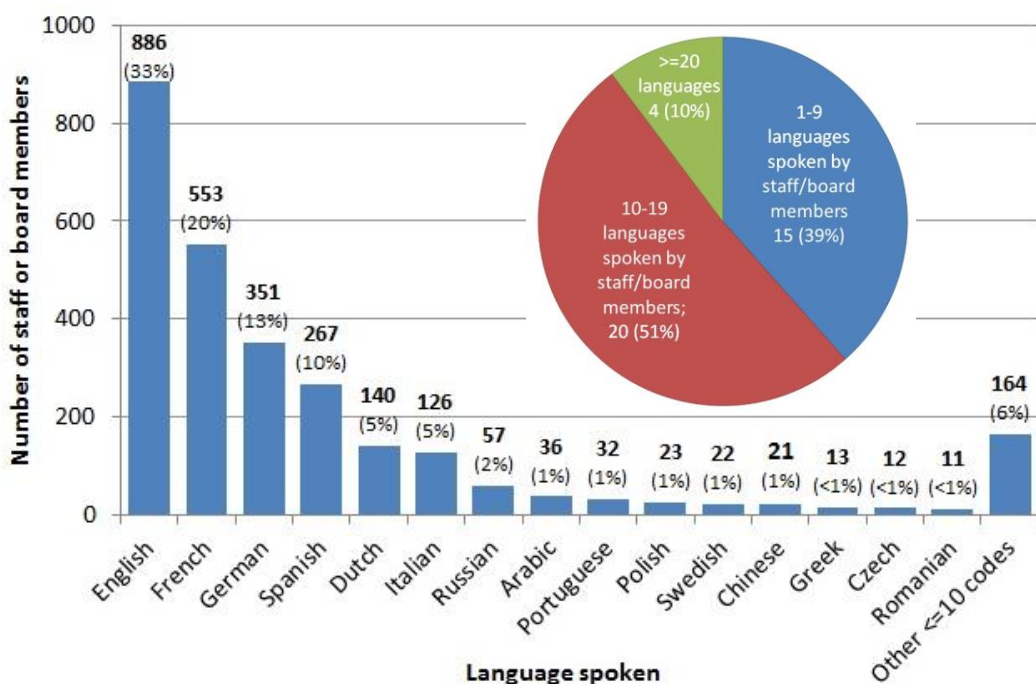
Let us take EU think tankers’ omnipresent “translation” rhetoric - typically referring to “bridging” between academia and politics, or other sectors - literally for a moment: to what extent can this variously transnational workforce transport and translate ideas - liaising between national and supranational governance levels (see Chapter 4) - by virtue of literally speaking different languages, say a domestic language and English?

As for age data, info on which languages Brussels institute think tankers speak is not consistently available: it could be recorded for under half (44 percent) of 2,080 individuals; and while CEPS, Ecologic Institute or ECDPM systematically list it for all employees and board member CVs were easy to track down, this is not the case for other institutes such as Bruegel, EIPA or SWP. Still, we gain a useful impression.

The coding exercise of spoken languages yields 2,714 tags across 65 languages. On average - and this is also the median amount- sampled persons speak 3 languages (at least proficiently enough to list them publicly); the maximum was 6 languages. This compares to an average 2,2 languages spoken by the general EU population - or median of 1 for instance in Italy or the UK, 1,5 in Spain or France and 2 in Germany - according to a special Eurobarometer on EU countries’ multilingualism (Commission 2012). The key finding is EU think tankers are better at languages than most people, naturally also a corollary of their generally quite high education or national diversity.

**Figure 29.** Top 15 languages spoken by Brussels EU think tankers or boards (N=905)

Note: Based on biographical data or CVs for subsample of 39 institutes’ members as of 2015.



Appendix 11 alternatively visualizes the linguistic pattern relationally by using SNA. Half of Brussels EU think tanks muster staff and board members who can converse - possibly also work - in 10 to 19 languages. ICG, CEPS, GMF or Ecologic Institute are the most linguistically versatile think tanks (with over 20 languages spoken). On average, Brussels EU think tanks draw together personnel speaking 14 languages. Naturally the smaller think tank offices in Brussels - of the Bertelsmann Foundation, Atomium, ECIA, PLS or ERF, for example - have a more narrow linguistic range of under ten languages spoken by staff and board members taken together.

One could argue a narrow linguistic scope might affect the ability to “bridge” between national academic literatures and policy communities, or - to put it plainly - the richness of thinking. However, this would definitely be an overstatement, as the figure shows another clear pattern: English is the lingua franca of Brussels’ EU think tank world (see Figure 29). It is the most frequent language cited by the 39 institutes’ members on their CVs (either as a mother tongue or foreign language). English is the key to transversally communicate, and only followed by French and German among top languages (French also due to echoes of its historical prominence at the EU level as the language of diplomats and international bureaucrats, German more mundanely due to the field’s present prominence of German EU think tankers). The think tank leaders or country experts who speak Arabic, Chinese and Russian are still the exception and not the rule - here, an argument that this affects their “literacy” in following critical country or regions’ native discourses of course has more weight.

More generally speaking, the ability to liaison, bridge and broker that is often ascribed to (EU) think tanks rests, in large part, on their declared diversity regarding both internal human resources’ backgrounds and ideas or their external tie portfolios. The main finding here is that while some institutes do must a strikingly international workforce, several nationally-rooted EU think tanks present in Brussels exhibit rather homogenous pools of staff and board members when it comes to nationalities, gender or other characteristics. This of course does not mean that they are deterministically determined by such features of their personnel but may indeed reduce innovativeness (see Chapter 9), or their potential for a truly transnational outlook, a broad overview of many rather than only their “homezone” EU countries. For example, while SWP describes itself as a European think tank, it still often represents - or is seen to do so - views from Germany as the largest, economically most powerful EU member state. Of course, this does not mean it is always iron-caged by German perspectives, either.

## Well-trained experts? Brussels EU think tankers' educational credentials

One important - so far not empirically examined - aspect of Brussels institutes' field is its think tankers' educational backgrounds: where and what they studied and which expertise or skills they built up, typically during formative university years or next to the job. This section answers the following question: How are educational credentials of Brussels EU think tanks' human resources (staff or board members) distributed?

To this end, again the basis is the database with coded biographical material<sup>7</sup>. Table 13 details the coding scheme applied in the analysis of the thousands of CVs or biographical vignettes as of 2015 regarding academic degrees or disciplines studied. Data coverage is excellent: educational attainment is coded for 95 percent (1,969) of the 2,080 census-sampled individuals (not found for only 111 persons), disciplines pursued for 94 percent (1,931) and the universities studied at for 93 percent (1,931).

**Table 13.** Educational credentials coding scheme of academic degrees or disciplines

Note: own scheme; based on Medvetz' "Think Tanks in America" (2012) to enable future comparison.

Educational credential	Categories
Highest academic degree	Bachelor's degree; Master's or professional degree; PhD or doctoral degree ( <i>Professorships were also coded, also as jobs in academia where applicable</i> )
Academic disciplines studied ( <i>either reported or degree-derived field</i> )	Business/admin.; Humanities/arts (history/area studies, philosophy, literature, other); Journalism/media; Law/legal studies; Natural sciences/medicine; Social sciences (economics, political science/public policy, sociology, other)

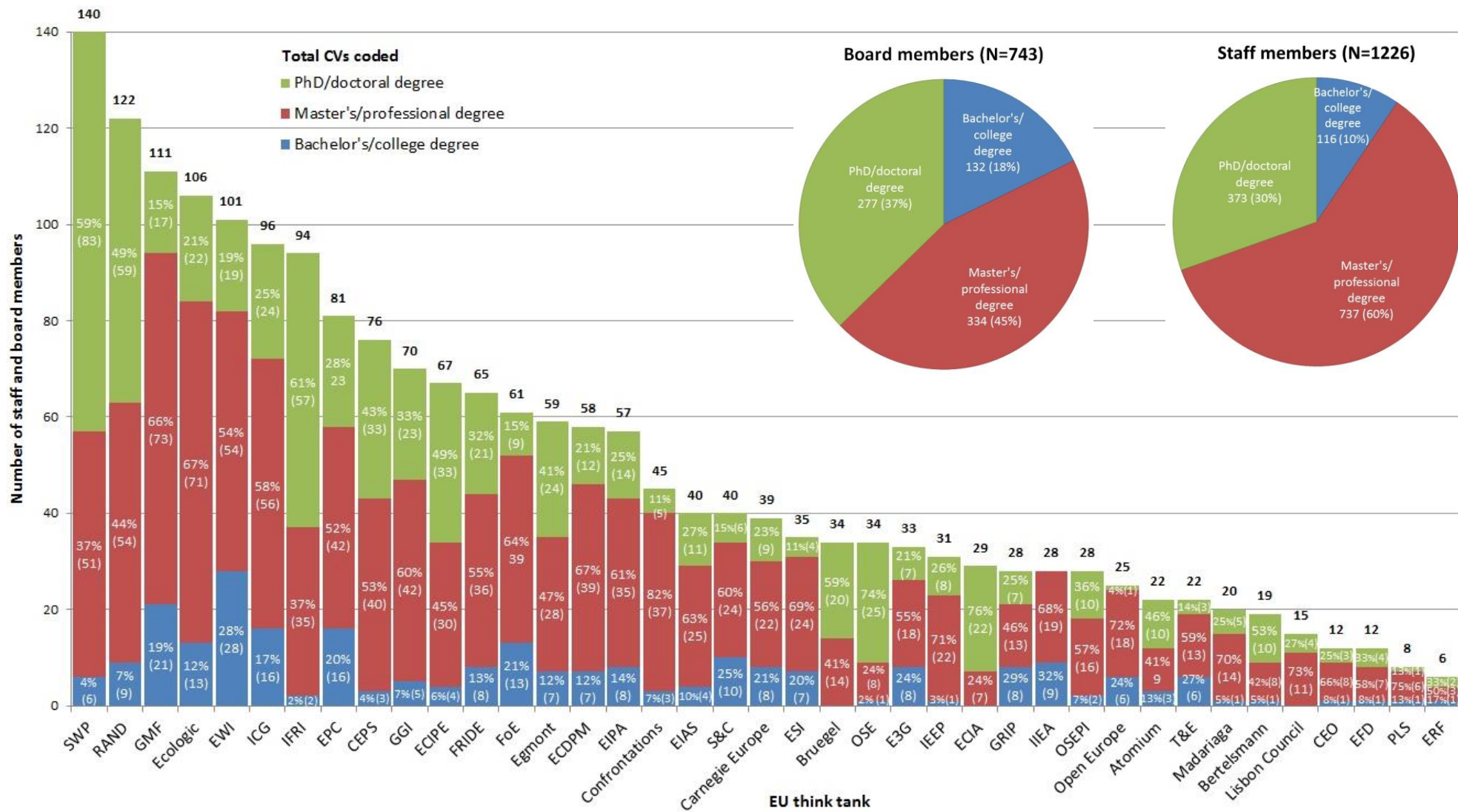
Once aggregated, we can discern education profiles at organizational- and field level. Formal degrees, courses of study or universities "signaled" on think tankers' public profiles and CVs are theoretically assumed to form part of their symbolic resources (see Chapter 2) as a proxy for being well-educated and well-versed in their trades, be it as trained generalists or specialized experts, and irrespective of whether this is true.

Figure 30 gives an overview of the composition of all 39 Brussels institutes regarding highest educational attainment of their human resources (see bar chart), including both board and staff members (see pie charts). A 60 percent majority of think tankers -lumping together expert and non-research staff- holds a Master's or professional degree, nearly a third has completed a PhD or doctoral degree, whereas only a tenth of the think tanks' workforce is Bachelor's-or college degree-educated. Among the board members, even more hold PhDs or doctorates (37 percent including

<sup>7</sup> As a reminder: in the CV database with N=2,080 staff and board members across 39 Brussels institutes, the author has systematized and code publicly available but hitherto never synthesized information on their characteristics, educational or career credentials, also as a basis for SNA (see Chapter 3 and 8).

**Figure 30.** Highest educational attainment of Brussels institutes' human resources (N=1,969)

Note: Based on biographical data or CVs for 1,969 (95 percent) of the 2,080 sampled staff and board members across the 39 sampled Brussels institutes as of 2015.



nearly a fourth with professorships) or Bachelor's and college degrees (18 percent), while near half finished their formal education with Master's or professional degrees (45 percent, including a significantly higher share with an MBA than among the staff). Over two of ten board members (23 percent) qualify as a professor. Interestingly, next to 171 board members with this highest of all academic ranks, there are nearly 100 other professors among the leaders or experts (98 - or 8 percent - to be precise).

This overall board and staff pattern changes once we zoom into the staff levels: when the leadership or experts are disaggregated from non-research staff, it turns out, the boards' rate of doctorate attainment is also achieved by the think tanks' experts and leaders (with 35 or 38 percent holding PhDs or doctorates, respectively). Every second research leader of a Brussels EU think tank attained a doctorate (54 percent). The doctorate attainment rate drastically drops for operational staff (only 5 percent) - communications, event organization or admin personnel - since the vast majority of those 197 individuals (73 percent) is hired by their institute with a Master's degrees.

In terms of gender distribution, sampled women have comparatively less PhDs or doctorates than the men (27 as opposed to 37 percent rate of doctorate attainment), and proportionately more Master's degrees (61 versus 51 percent). Again, this is best explained by the fact that women more often work in non-research think tank jobs. Regarding nationalities, while the largest share is also always Master's level studies, the doctorate attainment rate is highest among 344 sampled Germans (44 percent; as we have seen, many of these work at the scholarly "ink tank" SWP), followed by the 222 covered British board or staff members (39 percent have a PhD or doctorate), the 248 French nationals or 110 Italians (each 34 percent). The 267 US Americans in the database hold the least doctorates and the most Bachelor's degrees (22 percent each), indicating a higher willingness to hire younger think tankers directly post-Bachelor. But there is no significant contrast between individuals based in or outside Brussels.

Educational profiles are also displayed for each Brussels institute in Figure 30. SWP's 83 leaders or experts with a PhD or doctorate are second to none in the field, only approached by RAND Europe's 59 or IFRI's 57 this highly-educated personnel. However, relatively speaking, a proportional breakdown reveals other think tanks are on a par, notably IFRI but also over seven out of ten people at the smaller scholarly ECIA and OSE hold PhDs or doctorates, the highest share in the field (76 and 74 percent, respectively) before Bruegel's 20 (59 percent), CEPS' and ECIPE's 33 as well as RAND Europe's 59 doctorate holders (42 as well as 49 percent, respectively).



*At which universities did Brussels institutes' staff or board members study?*

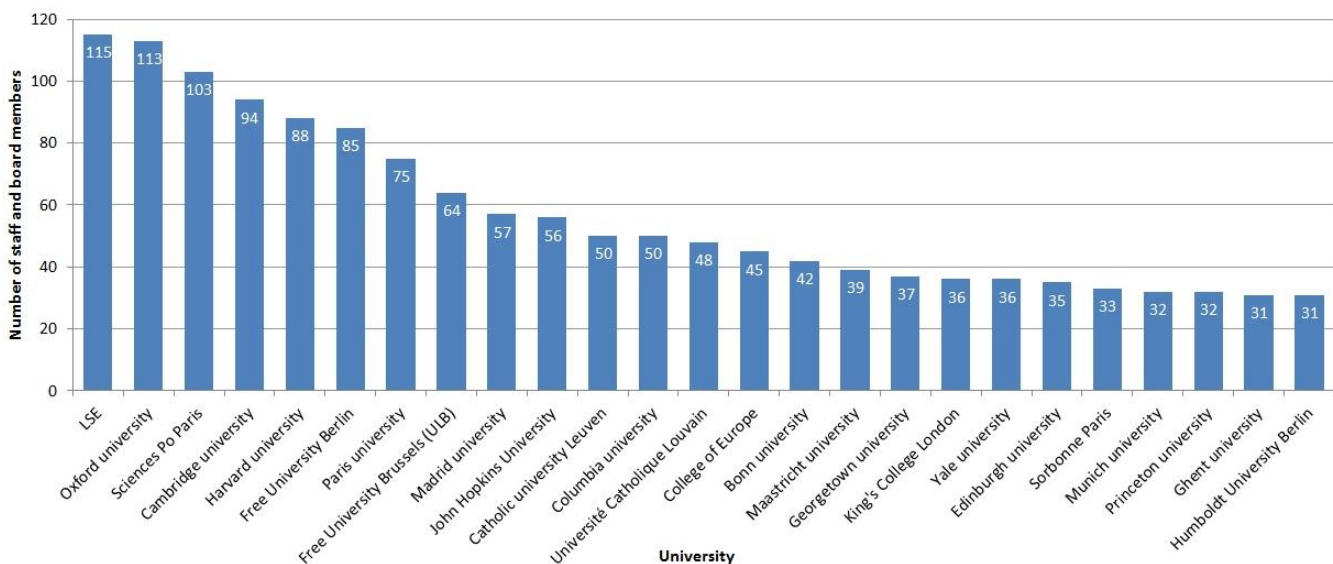
To what degree is Brussels institutes' workforce also isomorphic in alma maters? This background information could be coded for 1929 of the 1969 Brussels EU think tank staff or board members for which educational degrees are recorded (98 percent), with 4039 codes across 722 - or 471 highest-degree primary - academic institutions.

The top five most visited universities are part of academia's elite, including the "crème de la crème" offering esteemed public policy or political economy programs: LSE, Oxford University, Sciences Po, Cambridge University and Harvard University (see Figure 31). The pattern is similar for primary universities where highest degrees were obtained, except that Oxford University comes out on top, again followed by Sciences Po, Cambridge University, Harvard University and LSE. Clearly, institutes have a penchant for hiring or involving people from the most prestigious universities.

Germany's excellence initiative Freie Universität Berlin, Humboldt-Universität Berlin or Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich are also represented in the top 25 - next to Belgium's Free University Brussels or College of Europe, Paris' Sorbonne, Madrid University, Washington, D.C.-area John Hopkins- or Georgetown University, and US private ivy league Columbia, Yale or Princeton University (see Figure 31). Other prestigious European - but also US-American - alma maters among the top 50 (of 722 coded universities) include France's École Nationale d'Administration (ENA), Italy's European University Institute, MIT, and Silicon Valley's Stanford University.

**Figure 31.** Top 25 universities where Brussels EU think tankers studied at (N=1,969)

Note: Based on biographical data or CVs of 1,969 (95 percent) of 2,080 sampled staff or board members across 39 Brussels institutes as of 2015; an "other" category is not displayed but contains 2,612 (65 percent) of all assigned 4,039 CV codes across 722 universities (on 697 with under 30 codes each).





Board members most often obtained their highest degree at Harvard University (37 persons), but Oxford University is the most common alma mater among staffers (42). This is true at both leadership- and expert staff levels, although for the latter Oxford University shares its top spot with Freie Universität Berlin; for both groups, the top 5 primary universities also include LSE, Cambridge University and Sciences Po Paris.

A crude categorization of all the 722 coded universities into “elite” (commonly classified as top or world-class institutions) and “non-elite” (more peripheral ones) - without claiming perfect accuracy - corroborates that institutes’ elite orientation is particularly pronounced at board level: over a third (36 percent) of board members obtained highest degrees from elite schools, compared to 30 percent of think tank leaders and experts, but only 10 percent of non-research staff. Moreover, most elite degrees are PhDs or doctorates and Master’s degrees (35 or 30 percent, respectively). Appendix 12 depicts a full university network of all think tankers’ - not just primary - degrees (the larger the actors’ nodes, labels or lines, the higher the count of ties).

The key finding is that think tanks active at EU level in Brussels employ a very internationally educated workforce and tend to convene elite-educated boards. This evidence seems to precisely fit our theoretical expectations of isomorphic similarity among focal players - EU think tankers - in an institutionalizing organizational field (see Chapter 2). A significant portion of Brussels institutes’ human resources are sourced from a cluster of top or, in many cases, world-class alma maters. Given that highly- and elite-educated staffers likely ask for higher salaries - and EU think tanks’ funding is not limitless (see Chapter 6) - it surely is no mere coincidence or statistical artefact, but a hiring pattern resulting from conscious choices and good connections. Also at the board level, prestigious educational profiles are conspicuously common.

It is important to stress no quality judgement about think tankers’ education is intended. The fact that their educational credentials now tend to be strikingly similar - proof of an isomorphic elitary hiring mechanism at work (DiMaggio/Powell 1983) - simply shows that field participants exhibit significant commonalities in this regard; it does not mean elitary-educated think tankers necessarily perform better in their job - far from such a logic of efficiency, we can interpret the fact that institutes hire not among a boundless but narrowly defined pool as proof of a struggle for institutional legitimacy in contexts where academic capital is prized. Symbolic resources inherent in extensive and exclusive education can increase a think tank’s economic or social fitness and, in turn, ensure that think tanks’ category appears effective and legitimate

*Which academic disciplines did Brussels institutes' staff or boards pursue?*

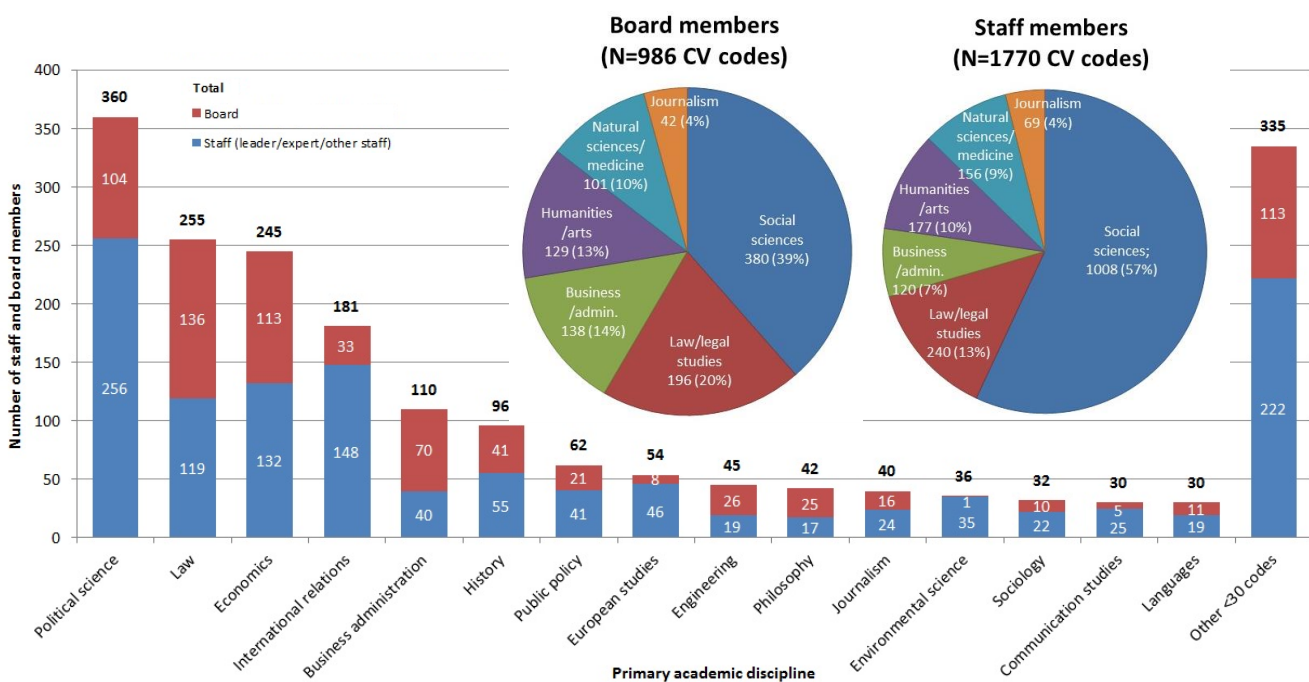
A primary academic discipline studied could be identified for 1,953 of 1,969 Brussels think tank staff and board members with educational degree information (99 percent). But all pursued disciplines - also beyond highest degrees - were coded (see Table 13 above). In practice, achieving almost full coverage frequently meant complementing the organizational website profiles or vignettes with professional social network data.

Brussels EU think tankers are overwhelmingly trained social scientists: half of the 2,756 CV codes assigned to their biographical material tag social scientific disciplines (51 percent), followed by law (16 percent), humanities or arts (11 percent), business studies (9 percent), natural sciences or medicine (9 percent) and journalism or media studies (4 percent). As Figure 32 shows, this sequence of top disciplines is the same for board and staff members, but there are proportionately more business- and law graduates among the board members (see pie charts); the top 15 highest-degree primary disciplines of all human resources are also presented (see bar chart).

Political science comes out on top - even more so if we count in public policy, international relations or European studies as sub-branches. However, there are even more trained lawyers than political scientists among the board members. The second largest group among both the staff and board members consists of trained economists.

**Figure 32.** Academic disciplines studied by Brussels EU think tankers (N=1,953)

Note: Based on biographical data or CVs for 1,953 (94 percent) of 2,080 sampled individuals across 39 Brussels institutes as of 2015; “primary discipline” refers to the one of the highest academic degree (see bar chart), whereas the higher CV code numbers capture all disciplines pursued (see pie charts).



The disciplinary pattern is very similar - near-identical - for sampled men and women. The key finding here is that political-, legal- and economist skillsets are highly prized across the organizational field. Most Brussels institutes typically hire social scientists, followed by lawyers, while natural scientists are conspicuously absent from the mix. This is the case for think tanks such as EIPA (88 percent social scientists or lawyers), OSE (87 percent), GGI (86 percent), CEPS (83 percent) as well as EPC (80 percent). At the advocacy-oriented ESI and OSEPI or the academic think tanks SWP and IFRI, between seven to eight out of ten employees still studied social sciences or law, but a splash of humanities is added to the mix as their next most frequent type of discipline.

The situation is similar for Bruegel, ECDPM, ECIPE, Lisbon Council or Open Europe, except that their disciplinary exposure next in size is to business studies. They inch towards more disciplinary diversification: for instance, Bruegel specializes in economics but has natural scientists (8 percent, compared to CEPS' 7 percent). IEEP onboards natural scientists (20 percent), but still has two thirds social scientists and lawyers. It also applies to ICG - with splashes of humanities or journalism - and GMF or FoE whose "other half" of non-social scientists is quite multi-disciplinary. Highest disciplinary diversification is achieved by the environmental institutes E3G, T&E and Ecologic Institute - the latter hired 40 natural scientists (27 percent) next to its social scientists or lawyers (50 percent), and RAND Europe hired 48 natural scientists (28 percent) to work alongside its social scientists or lawyers (48 percent).

Business studies graduates or historians make up a smaller fraction in the field. Under 50 think tankers, respectively, hold highest degrees in engineering, philosophy, journalism, environmental science, sociology, communication studies or languages. And for forty further more peripheral disciplines (see "other" category in Figure 32 bar chart) such as geography, literature or physics, under 30 CV codes were tagged.

As an interim conclusion, when it comes to their educational specialization and disciplinary socialization, Brussels EU think tankers tend to be highly homogenous. This further confirms the "master hypothesis" of isomorphism (see Chapter 2) for the increasingly structured organizational field (see Chapter 5). EU think tankers, as they became distinctly recognizable policy professionals geared to the transnational level, not only belong to epistemic communities in various other domains (Haas 1992) but have come to significantly resemble each other regarding their academic formation. As noted in Chapter 2, we would expect this to be one driver of isomorphic structures (see Chapter 8 on networks), outlook and behavior (see Chapter 9 on role enactment).

## Sectoral sensitivities: Career credentials of the Brussels EU think tankers

We have seen Brussels institutes hire highly trained employees and tend to convene well-educated boards (even if doctorate attainment rates vary). Before their - often elitary - educational ties are detailed in the next chapter, let us first get an overview of the EU think tankers' sectoral career credentials, or previous sectoral affiliations.

As with academic achievement, their career trajectories have not been studied empirically to the best of my knowledge. But scrutinizing previous work experience is doubly valuable: for one thing, it allows us to gain a descriptive sense of relative “exposure” to the business, civil society or public sector, likely importing their institutional logics; on the other hand, it serves as a basis for mapping institutes' network ties to sectoral organizations (see Chapter 8). Next to funding portfolios (see Chapter 6), an understanding of sectoral sensitivities and diversification will broaden our assessment of their relative autonomy, of independence of mind rather than just money (see Chapter 9). To do so, we can once again draw on the CV database of institutes present in Brussels for whom occupational credentials as of 2015 are coded (see Chapter 3). Table 14 shows the sectoral and respective industry coding scheme.

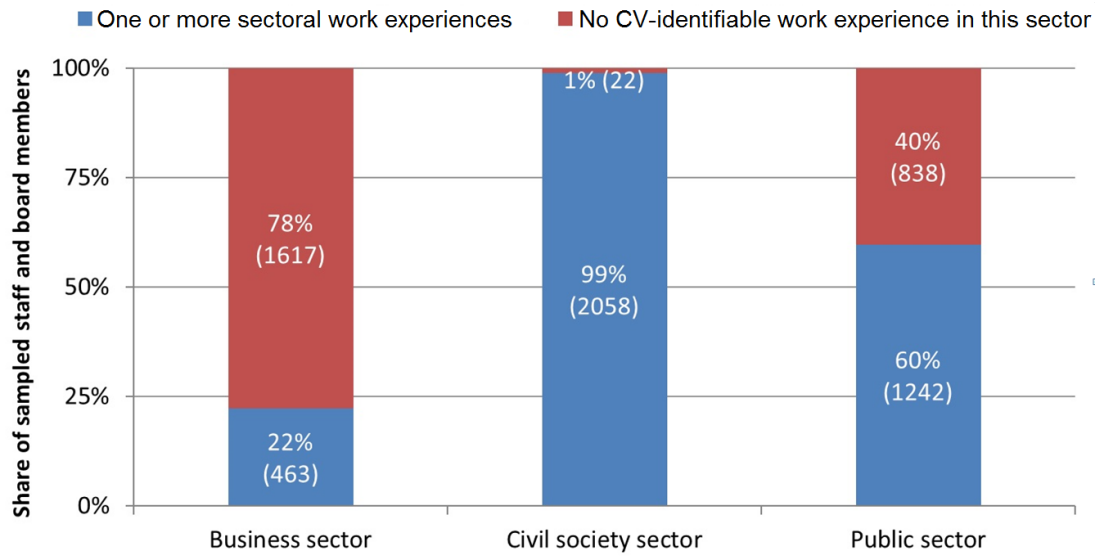
**Table 14.** Career credentials coding scheme of sectoral and industry work experience

Note: own scheme; departs from Medvetz' “Think Tanks in America” (2012) to enable comparisons.

Sector	Industry	Categories
<b>For-profit</b> <i>(business sector)</i>	Journalism	Mass media; magazine; newspaper; TV/radio; internet company <i>(CV-listed news media citations or op-eds are not counted here)</i>
	Business	Research/consulting; banking/finance; energy/oil; pharmaceutical; high tech; automotive/transportation; defense; insurance; engineering; advertising/marketing; aviation/aerospace; other
	Professions	For-profit law; Medicine
<b>Not-for-profit</b> <i>(civil society)</i>	Academia	College or university professor <i>(including (un)tenured, visiting or adjunct)</i> ; research fellow <i>(includes post-doctoral research and directorships or staff positions at academic research institutes)</i> ; academic journal/book publishing; university administrator/trustee
	Think Tank	Name of organization <i>(including current or past affiliation status)</i>
	Research/advocacy	Labor; business; other civil society organizations <i>(includes local and international NGOs, foundations, public interest groups, activist initiatives, advocacy groups, political campaigns)</i>
<b>Public</b> <i>(public sector)</i>	Federal government	Full-time staff <i>(including government, state agencies, ministries)</i> ; elected official <i>(political party)</i> ; law/judicial; military; advisory/consulting <i>(including semi-active positions of board members)</i>
	International organization	Full-time staff; advisory/consulting <i>(national representatives with international governing body coded as federal government official)</i>
	State/local politics	Full-time staff; elected official; advisory/consulting

**Figure 33.** Brussels EU think tanker share with sectoral career affiliations (N=2,044)

Note: Business sector includes journalism and professions, the civil society sector includes academia.

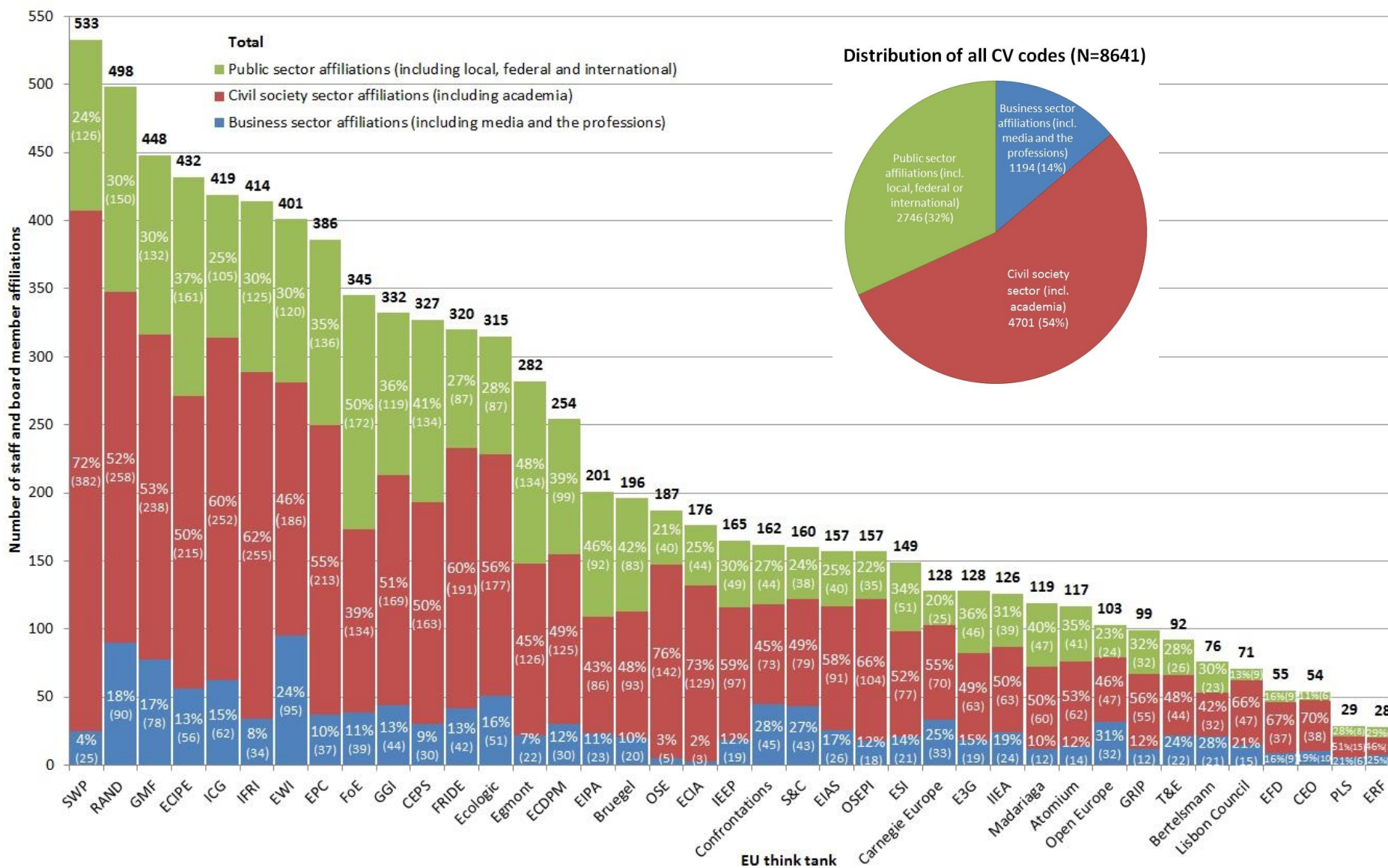


Again, data coverage is excellent: career info was for 2,044 (98 percent) individuals, which typically meant corroborating institutes’ biographical portrayals (“Our Team” websites) with think tankers’ ascertained LinkedIn profiles (fully anonymized here). As Figure 33 illustrates, virtually all staff and board members of Brussels EU think tanks previously worked in the civil society sector, counting in academia next to all not-for-profit organizations (including other think tanks). 40 percent have worked with public sector organizations. Yet, under a fourth - 22 percent - have had stints at for-profit companies, be it in for-profit journalism, other industries or the professions.

Previous or current civil society jobs at other think tanks were also separately coded, and additionally all board memberships beyond jobs captured (see Chapter 8). As Figure 34 on the next page shows (see pie chart), of 8,641 career tags across the biographical material, over half (54 percent) are civil society sector affiliations, including all previous or current jobs held within academia; the next biggest realm of Brussels EU think tankers’ past career experience is the public sector (32 percent), including work at all levels from local politics to federal or international governance; staff and board members had noticeably less career connections to the business sector (14 percent), even if media organizations and the professions are also subsumed here. In the bar chart, Figure 34 also details sectoral dispersion of all 39 Brussels institutes. Naturally size matters: institutes with more staff and large boards muster more total career affiliations among their human resources than smaller or leaner ones. To illustrate, well-staffed SWP or RAND Europe can draw on the collective experience

**Figure 34.** Sectoral career affiliations of Brussels EU think tanks' human resources (N=2,044)

Note: Based on biographical data or CVs for 2,044 (98 percent) of the 2,080 staff and board members across the sampled 39 Brussels institutes as of 2015.



of their staff and board members accumulated at around 500 different career steps, whereas smaller institutes such as Open Europe or Lisbon Council only boast 100 or less total career credentials across the public-, private- or civil society sector. Despite being relatively small, ECIPE is as a case in point of board members' potential reach: with its 50 board members included, it musters over 400 previous career affiliations.

A second finding is that the overall distribution of sectoral experiences - chiefly civil society, then public- and least frequently business affiliations - recur, to a varying extent, if we zoom into think tanks' respective human resource portfolios as well - we can actually see this impressively isomorphic pattern virtually across the board, even though - as we would expect - preferential hiring of people from civil society or academic job experience is most pronounced at scholarly institutes like SWP, OSE or ECIA (where over 70 percent hail from this sphere). FRIDE and IFRI are two further examples (around 60 percent), but involve slightly more with business experience. More activist-minded or advocacy-oriented institutes, say ICG, Lisbon Council, EFD or CEO also have high shares of civil society experience (around or over 60 percent).

A third result of disaggregating occupational credentials is that a few institutes' human resources have over 40 percent of past public sector career "exposure", which comes not only with potential political access but also insider knowledge of politics. Interestingly, it most applies to institutes with significant public funding, supporting our expectation that resource dependencies intensify isomorphic resemblance (DiMaggio/Powell 1983:155, see Chapter 2): Egmont (48 percent with public sector credentials), Bruegel or CEPS (43 and 41 percent). Perhaps most strikingly, half the think tankers convened by FoE worked in or consulted the public sector (50 percent).

When it comes to the private sector, Open Europe is the only institute at which a third of career affiliations hail from the sphere of business and media (31 percent). A handful boast a fourth of personnel with business stints: Bertelsmann Foundation's Brussels office and board (28 percent worked in business or media), but also French-origin Confrontations Europe or S&C (28 or 27 percent) and the US-origin Carnegie Europe or EWI (27 or 24 percent). At scholarly think tanks (SWP, IFRI, OSE, ECIA) business is hardly part of the human resource mix, indicating lesser prevalence of the institutional logics characteristic of private business- and for-profit media industries.

A detailed analysis of sectoral career backgrounds shows how cross-sectorally experienced institutes' personnel seems. Bertelsmann Foundation, Carnegie Europe, EWI, Confrontations Europe, S&C, Open Europe and T&E are the most diversified.

## Chapter 8

# Networked Institutes: Sectoral- and Organizational Ties That Bind?

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### Introduction

Thus far, this dissertation mapped EU think tanks' transnational organizational field, its historical origins and structuration as well as current financial or human resources. While we could gain insights into patterns of similarity or difference among sampled institutes, mainly in Brussels, it has been stressed that they are no "isolated islands". Regarding all the three "I's" – innovation, independence and impact (see Chapter 1) – institutes act in wider governance networks rather than as self-sufficient hierarchies. Increasingly, the "model of a 'lonely organization' determining its policy in isolation is obsolete...And horizontal networks replace hierarchies" (Klijn/Koppenjan 2004:3). Thus, this chapter scrutinizes the EU think tankers' multi-level network connections.

By drawing on the EU think tank- and CV databases compiled for this project, unlike previous accounts - which regularly narrow the concept of EU think tanks' "network" to only the handful of formalized, relatively visible fora they have set up – the chapter includes, maps and visualizes institutes' multi-dimensional network ties: their inter-organizational think tank network (staff flows, interlocking directorates); formally institutionalized think tank networks ("meeting places" of field participants); their leaders' or staffers' – much overlooked – network of further board memberships; and career affiliations to organizations in different sectors (institutional imprinting).

Social network analysis (SNA) is used to visualize this relational space (see Chapter 3), interpretable as one of opportunities (ties can enable access to structural- or symbolic resources) or as one of constraints (ties that bind materially or mentally). What will become clear is different institutes' degree centrality and sectoral leanings, and the institutionalized field's expected center-periphery structuration is confirmed. Thus, the chapter transcends the common portrayals of think tanks as atomistic actors. It pioneers this empirical entranceway of how to study institutes' network dimension (even if further more sophisticated SNA will of course be possible on this data basis). However, in a spirit of relational sociology we should bear in mind that "beneath the formal ties lies a sea of informal relations" (Goddard 2009), which – also based on the extensive qualitative interview material – are teased out in the following chapter.



### Inter-organizational think tank network: Staff flows and board interlocks

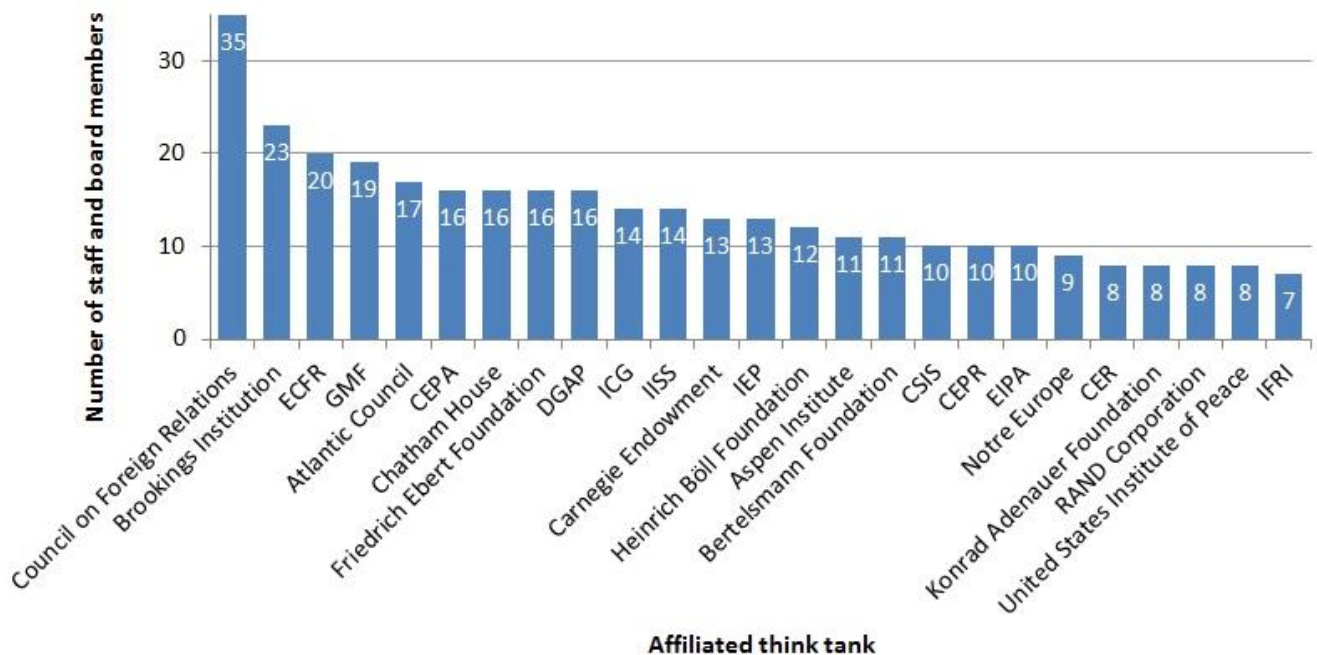
Similar to Medvetz’ single depiction of personnel movement among major US think tanks (2012:118, see Chapter 3), let us first examine networks of EU think tanks in Brussels amongst themselves and with other think tanks, based on the CV database. This is of interest because institutes’ hiring pipeline is naturally not limited to people with “outside” sectoral experience in the for-profit, media, non-profit or public sector. It also covers job transitions (or double affiliations) within the think tank sector itself.

Medvetz’ basic network visualization shows Brookings as the most central US institute regarding both inbound and outbound think tankers. It has hired several people from RAND, Council on Foreign Relations and Urban Institute, for instance, and its staff has been hired away by Hoover Institution at Stanford University, which poached ten RAND staffers too. How does this contrast with scale and structuration of EU think tanks’ professional links? Is there a similarly lively staff fluctuation? Which worldwide think tanks beyond the Brussels institutes are central or peripheral?

Coding of biographical material yielded 614 tags across 173 think tank-alike entities. Overall, of 2,080 sampled EU think tankers working at Brussels institutes, 21 percent (435 persons) worked at one or more think tanks before, according to the CV data; but a majority of 79 percent (1,645) hails directly from neighboring sectors.

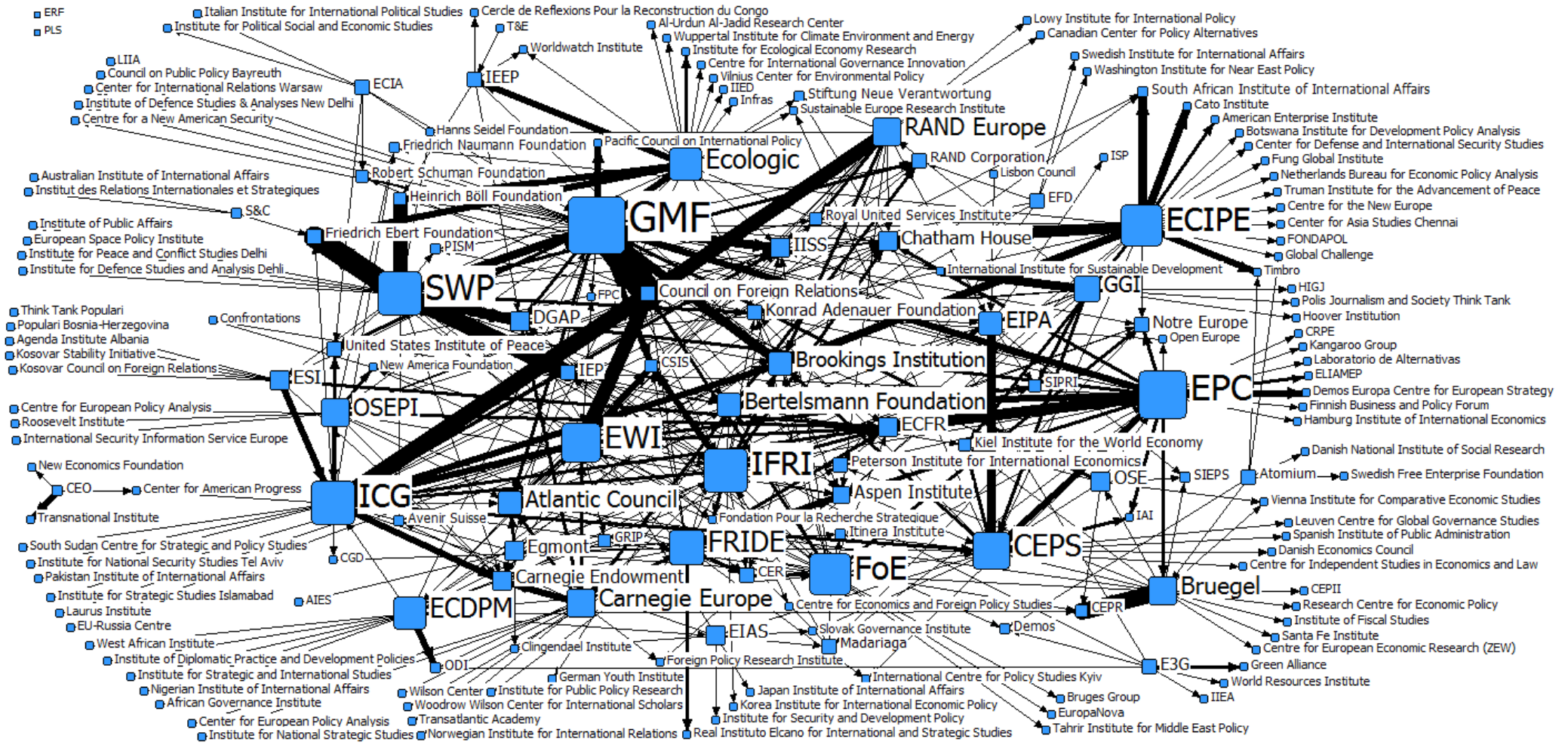
**Figure 35.** Top 25 think tanks with Brussels EU think tanker career ties (N=614)

Note:Based on biographical data or CVs for 435 (21 percent) of 2,080 sampled staff or board members across 39 Brussels institutes as of 2015; “other” category (not displayed) contains 270 (44 percent) of the assigned 614 CV codes across 173 think tank-alike entities (namely on 148 with less than 7 tags).



**Figure 36.** Inter-organizational network of think tank-alike entities where Brussels institutes' think tankers previously worked (N=435)

Note: Based on biographical data or CVs for 435 (21 percent) of 2,080 sampled individuals across 39 Brussels institutes as of 2015; two-mode network (no cutoff, all ties are displayed), visualized in UCINET/Netdraw, line strength, node labels and size shown by degree centrality (the amount of ties passing through nodes).



US-origin institutes - notably Brookings Institution or Council on Foreign Relations - turn out to be the organizations most of Brussels institutes' professionals who were previously employed or affiliated with think tanks in their career passed through. As Figure 35 shows, they are followed by ECFR, GMF, also Chatham House as central pipelines where about 20 sampled think tankers previously worked; German political foundations such as Friedrich Ebert-, Heinrich Böll- and Konrad Adenauer Foundation (not counted as EU think tank but think tank-alike entities, as discussed in Chapter 2) as well as DGAP, IEP and Bertelsmann Foundation are also important career stations.

The centrality and portfolio of connections of Brussels institutes or think tank-alike entities beyond their Brussels-clustered organizational field (see Chapter 4) are visible from Figure 36. It depicts Brussels institutes' inter-organizational network, still in terms of previous think tank affiliations of their staff and board members. For ease of interpretation: the size differences of all nodes, labels and lines are visualized by degree centrality (the more ties there are, the larger actors' nodes, labels or lines); the line arrows' direction indicates whether there have been staff inflows or outflows; while thin lines mean that at least one person has transferred from one to the other in the indicated direction, the thick lines (without number of ties for ease of readability) represent intensified personnel flows or heavier "human resource traffic" so to speak; finally, node size and -placement indicates how central or peripheral an actor is. We can see that it has been mainly think tankers from US-rooted institutes - GMF, EWI, ICG but also RAND Europe - who were involved with Council on Foreign Relations; however, stints at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C. are also relatively common career experiences among the personnel of CEPS and ECIPE in Brussels or the academic think tanks ECIA, IFRI and SWP beyond these large US think tanks.

The general picture is one of a clear center-periphery structuration, as expected (see Chapter 2). Of course, degree centrality is also driven by the size of the sampled institutes' human resources (see Chapter 7) which means a higher number of CVs are collected for them and naturally increases their relational "branching out" compared to institutes with a tiny workforce. Still, there are clear differences in how central the sampled Brussels EU think tanks are, and the more peripheral and outer layers are made up of not only European but also globally dispersed foreign affairs or otherwise specialized think tank-alike entities (note that political foundations are included here). ECIPE (on the upper right) would be one example of an institute linking up with both established institutes but also free-marketeer ones from Sweden to the US to Africa.

The network in Figure 36 also contains information how frequent it is for Brussels institutes to hire people with experience in the think tank sector: the bigger the nodes, the more commonplace think tanker careers are in their human resource composition. Thus, SWP, ICG, GMF and EWI (towards the left), IFRI, FoE or FoE (in the middle) as well as ECIPE and EPC (towards the right) are important central hubs with high degree centrality within the inter-organizational network of Brussels EU think tanks. Theoretically speaking, they are important “meeting points” of interaction within the – as we see of course much wider – organizational field where transnationally active professionals pass through in career trajectories or are socialized as EU think tankers, where their mutual and self-awareness of being engaged “in a common enterprise” (DiMaggio/Powell 1983:148, see Chapter 2) of a – possibly hybrid (see Chapter 9) – profession for transnational policy research and –convening most visibly crystallizes.

Indeed, the noted institutes are more often ex-employers than career destinations for the coded individuals with previous work affiliations at think tanks. To give but one example, five DGAP think tankers, six of Heinrich Böll Foundation, seven of IEP and nine of Friedrich Ebert Foundation have spent professional time at the SWP. However, the well-staffed Berlin institute does not “receive” inflows of the same level from any specific think tank, even if think tank sector backgrounds are common for it.

Finally, beyond the eye-catching focal players, think tanks’ network also shows that the tiny think tanks ERF or PLS (the two isolates on the top left) have no staff or board members with previous stints at other think tanks, and which organizations are career-wise more peripherally connected around the perimeter of this network graph. In fact, little “clouds” of also national think tank scene connections (which also count among the organizational field’s – albeit not so prominent – community participants) can be easily spotted. For instance, professionals from ESI (on the left) have gone to work for think tanks in the Balkans like Popolari Bosnia-Herzegovina or the Kosovar Stability Initiative; those of ECDPM (bottom left) for African think tanks such as the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs; and as hinted at above, ECIPE’s personnel (top right) has been hired by the US conservative American Enterprise Institute, Cato Institute, the Nordic free market advocacy tank Timbro and a range of more global entities like Fung Global Institute or South African Institute of International Affairs.

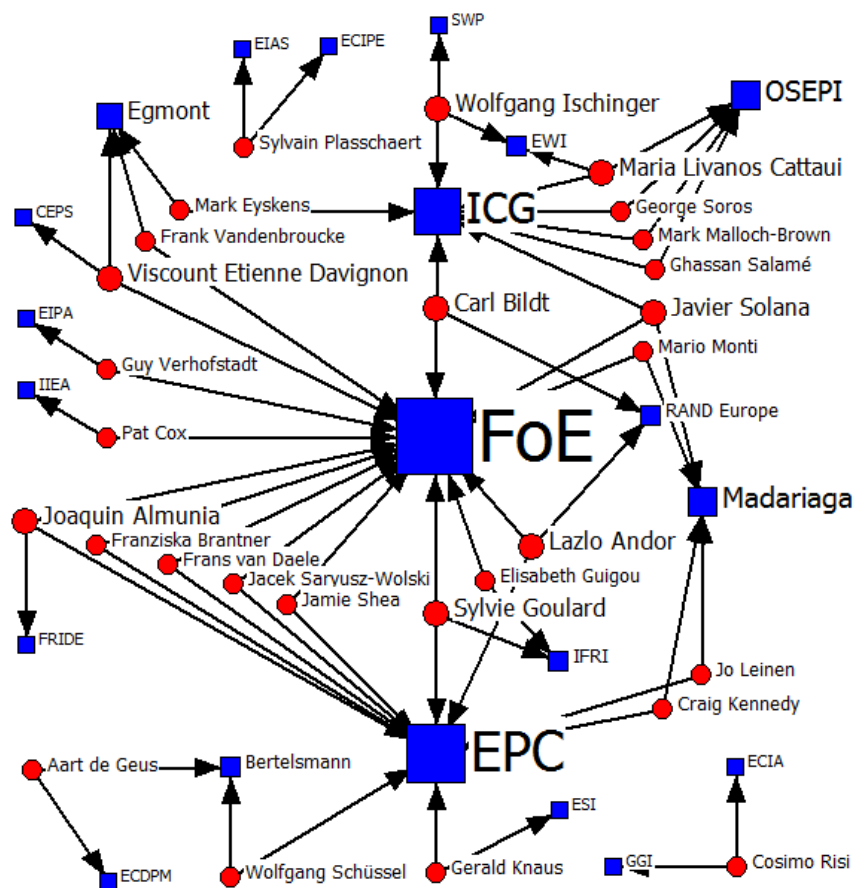
While degree centrality is an important first step in the SNA of EU think tanks, it should be noted that when checking for betweenness centrality the importance of intermediary think tanks like Council on Foreign Relations or CEPS becomes clearer.

And taking a step back from this network visualization's considerable complexity, we see that slightly over half (54 percent) think tank ties are with national institutes but the remaining affiliations (46 percent) are career experiences at EU think tanks. Career movements from EU think tank to EU think tank were slightly more common at the staff or leadership level than at board level (49 compared to 42 percent of ties). Thus, EU think tanks' human resource flows are not "detached" from their respective national country of origin's think tank- or research institute fields in a clean-cut way. At the same time, there is a striking amount of personnel exchanges only between our sampled EU think tanks, which is further structural proof of field institutionalization. And EU think tanker interaction appears to be layered by job position as well: field-internal career trajectories are more common at the leadership- than at the staff level.

An important aspect of leadership overlaps are interlocking directorates, a very established analytical focus in literature on business ties or organizational studies but absent from previous scholarly accounts of (EU) think tank to truly surprising extent. Yet several board members sit on multiple EU think tank boards, as Figure 37 shows:

**Figure 37.** Board interlocks network of Brussels EU think tanks (N=36 affiliations)

Note: Based on biographical information as of 2015 on board members of 39 Brussels institutes; two-mode network, visualized in UCINET/Netdraw, node labels and size visualized by degree centrality.



These interlocking directorates of institutes present in Brussels via well-networked, typically high-profile individuals are rarer – resulting in a much less cluttered SNA chart – but far from uncommon. The platform think tanks FoE and EPC share seven board members with each other, for example ex-Commissioners Joaquin Almunia (he had also lent his name to FRIDE) or László Andor (also on RAND Europe’s board) and French politician Sylvie Goulard (also on IFRI’s board). As the network graph shows, the US-origin ICG also boasts several direct as well as indirect interlocks with EU think tank boards. Munich Security Conference chair Wolfgang Ischinger – “Germany’s best-connected former diplomat” (The Economist 2017) – links it to both the SWP and EWI, for instance, and the former EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana to FoE and Madariaga. Etienne Davignon, himself a former Commission vice-president, sat on three boards at the time of study, namely of CEPS, Egmont and FoE’s board, as another centrally connected individual.

Thus, we know these individuals have inside information on several think tanks. They link typically central, prestigious institutes as part of a transnational think tank board elite. Most EU think tanks are within two or three “steps” from each other in this network. However, it is still a relatively low number of 28 individuals binding EU think tanks’ boards together through participating in the governance of several Brussels institutes. The majority of these board leaders can look back on an extended political career, typically at larger EU member states as well as with EU institutions. Theoretically speaking, such overlapping group membership is important because it stands in for – at least potential but highly likely – flows of information, resources (both material and symbolic) as well as relational chances (both strong or weak ties). Not only can they be another mechanism for isomorphism beyond the hiring patterns, by serving as vehicles for mimetic or normative diffusion of styles and policies, say, but they can also be decisive factors for ensuring well-connected institutes’ survival by making their management teams aware of coming developments or boosting their symbolic resources via political testimonials or access of high-profile board members.

An extension beyond counting staff- and board member overlaps would be to also systematically code think tank website-listed “partnerships” (although it is rarely clear what this word substantively stands for in practice, from mere likemindedness to concretely implemented projects or even cost- or staff sharing arrangements). For instance, Plehwe has taken to counting the conservative New Direction Foundation’s and the free-market Stockholm Network’s declared partnerships (Plehwe et al. 2016).

And of course, the interlocking directorates theme touches upon the discussion about “revolving doors” within the – particularly Anglo-American – think tank literature. In Europe, “it’s true to say that Brussels is the epicentre of this”, the itself central GMF’s leader in town notes, “with people moving around. It’s also a reflection of the fact that both EU institutions and NATO have fewer and fewer public civil servants. People are on short-term contracts, so almost by definition people go in and out” (I53-Lesser:39), even if interviewees generally agree that when compared to the US, the “revolving door” phenomenon is less pronounced at EU level (the next chapter’s survey results will also show limited Commission-to-EU think tank staff movement).

In a rare but more elaborate attempt of SNA for US think tanks, Joon Nak Choi has presented working papers on the ideology and homophily of the “American think tank elite” (2009a) as well as the “imprinting...in US think tank networks” (2009b). He similarly argues that US institutes’ social network comprises not only formal fora but think tank co-affiliations like scholar exchanges and board interlocks, and finds a clear ideological sorting pattern in that “conservative and center-left think tanks form two largely disconnected clusters” (2009a:4), which is explained by shared research interests, or – to put it differently – homophily. By way of comparison, we can also see a marked pattern of homophily for the individuals within the EU think tank elite: they are typically high-level politicians with long-lasting, deep ties to EU institutions. Choi usefully points out that while advisory board members are often “selected largely for their strong personal relationships with specific individuals, governing boards ...typically include major donors, think tanks’ key officers and prominent former policy-makers. Board interlocks may also be common” at US institutes, he surmises, “because large foundations fund multiple think tanks and receive representation on each board” (2009a:5), which helps spread information or innovations (Davis 1991).

What precisely happens behind the scenes of the structurally detected networks is within the speculative realm, although the following chapter triangulates meanings of these findings here with interview insights. At this point, however, it is important to stress that beyond EU think tanks’ “elitary layer” of leadership or board interlocks, of course their staffers can similarly sit on organizational boards – also beyond the think tank world – which can boost an institutes’ informational or reputational edge. Thus, let us now turn to Brussels EU think tankers’ cross-sectoral board memberships before then examining the role their formally established think tank networks play, and - on the basis of the compiled CV database - scrutinize their sector-by-sector ties.



**Elected participants: EU think tankers’ cross-sectoral board memberships**

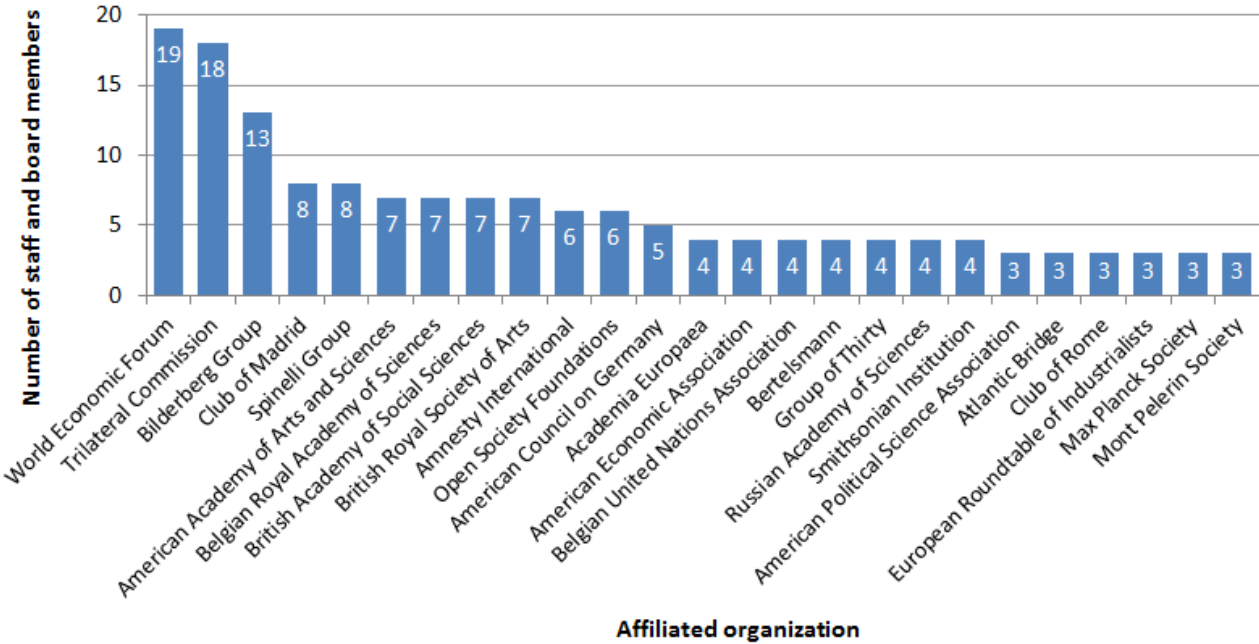
Thus far, the analysis of Brussels EU think tankers’ career background networks was limited to their sectoral experiences, and we have seen which board members hold more than one and frequently overlapping memberships on Brussels institute boards. Following Medvetz’ and Choi’s work on US institutes, to the best of my knowledge this is the first systematic study tracing and triangulating networks of EU think tanks.

Beyond the inter-organizational network and board interlocks, 22 percent (463 persons) of the CV-coded total 2,080 staff and board members are themselves board members across nearly one thousand (987) further for- or not-for-profit organizations. While this amounts to nearly one in four EU think tankers, the majority of 78 percent (1,617) is no board member next to their work or involvement at respective institutes.

As shown in Figure 38, the top five organizations with most EU think tankers in their boards consist of some of the world’s most influential fora, clubs and groups: 19 sampled staff or board members sat on the World Economic Forum’s board at one point, followed by 18 for the Trilateral Commission, 13 for the Bilderberg Group and eight networked at the boards of the Club of Madrid and Spinelli Group, respectively. National or royal academies of science and Amnesty International are also among the top 25, as well as European Roundtable of Industrialists and Mont Pèlerin Society.

**Figure 38.** Top 25 organizations with EU think tanker board memberships (N=463)

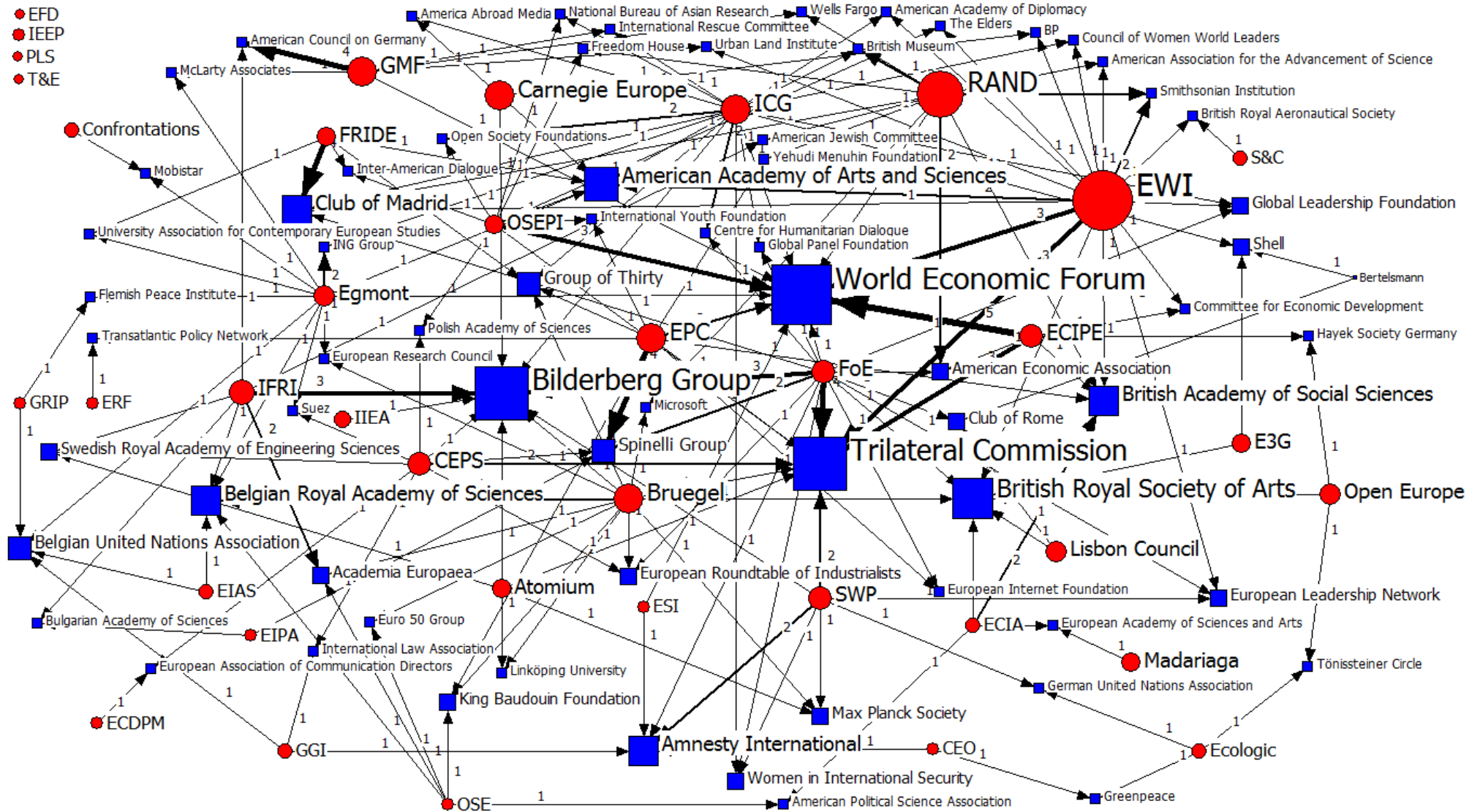
Note: Based on biographical data or CVs for 463 (22 percent) of 2,080 sampled staff or board members across 39 Brussels institutes as of 2015; “other” category (not displayed) contains 1,059 (87 percent) of assigned 1,216 CV codes across 987 organizations (namely on 962 with three or under three tags).





**Figure 39.** Board membership network of Brussels EU think tank staff and board members (N=463)

Note: Based on biographical data or CVs for 463 (22 percent) of 2,080 sampled individuals across 39 Brussels institutes as of 2015; two-mode network (no cutoff, but all pendants have been removed), visualized in UCINET/Netdraw, line strength, node labels and size shown by degree centrality (amount of ties nodes have).



The network charted in Figure 39 shows just how central these organizations' boards are in bringing together think tankers of Brussels institutes within their own activity. To tame illegible complexity, only ties of overlapping board memberships are shown (all pendants where no other EU think tanks' personnel sat on the board are removed). The two-mode network chart can be similarly interpreted as the previous ones. For ease of readability: the bigger Brussels EU think tanks' node (red circles), the broader its reach in terms of other organizational board memberships of its leaders and staff; the bigger concrete cross-sectoral organizations or networks' (blue rectangles) nodes, the more EU think tankers they involve as board members (higher degree centrality).

We cannot discern from this if individuals sit on same boards at the same time; it often applies, but next to current positions (as of 2015) past ones were also coded. Thus, the structural overlap as presented here is not necessarily temporal overlap too. Nevertheless, it is safe to assume that the for- and not-for-profit organizations benefit from the experience and often reputation of the think tankers they get on their boards, and that similar isomorphic pressures inherent in the board relations apply vice versa: in turn, board-wise well-connected Brussels EU think tanks stand to gain access to these venues' or their other board members' personal networks or symbolic resources.

A conspicuous finding is that EWI think tankers boast 152 board memberships in total, and with 112 such positions RAND Europe's people are also extremely well-networked in this regard. True to their platform design, EPC (60 board memberships) and FoE (43) are also quite branched out in helping to steer different organizations. Despite its high specialization and smaller size, it turns out that Bruegel counts more board members (62) among its ranks than the generalist CEPS (which has 38 in total). Institutes like GRIP, EIPA, ECDPM or OSE muster ten or less board memberships. The network chart's upper left corner shows EFD, IEEP or T&E have no overlapping board memberships with other EU think tanks; and PLS' small team even has zero, so compared to EWI or RAND again we see that the size of human resources matters. As has been speculated in recent other research – and is structurally confirmed here – the mid-sized central think tanks Bruegel and CEPS have “directors and researchers who have used their personal contacts” after the financial- or ensuing Eurozone crisis to network “for symbolic capital...and professional prestige...as multiple insiders” inside fora whose “professional mobility gives them access to international centers of epistemic power” (Coman 2018:5, Helgadottir 2016:2, Henriksen/Seabrooke 2016:2). In this vein, board network centrality is a proxy of political connections and prestige.

However, the second key finding here is the centrality of three far from arbitrary fora for EU think tank's field: the World Economic Forum, Bilderberg Group meetings as well as Trilateral Commission (the top and most central fora in Figures 38 and 39). Beyond their own formalized networks (discussed in the next subsection), Brussels EU think tankers participate in these exclusive – by invitation only – elitary settings of interaction, even shaping these central meeting places in a board member capacity.

Urry stresses what he calls the “meetingness” through which network relations are activated, maintained and extended: “networks have...to be performed, they have to come together from time to time...and are also conduits for interests, influence, and for the making of political careers” (2004:109). For Plehwe, such fora or the German Hayek Society – linking the advocacy-oriented ECIPE and Open Europe's boards (on the right hand side in Figure 39) – are a crucial part of “transnational expert, advisory and lobbying advocacy networks” (2011). And Zielinski's (2017) case study of specifically the Bilderberg Group conferences argues their informal governance network is among “the most powerful in the world today”, a “transnational network of influential people in positions of power” or case in point for how “power is primarily exercised by and through networks” (Castells 2011:774).

Initiated in 1954, over 60 Bilderberg Group meetings have now been held in nearly 20 countries, involving around 2,578 participants under Chatham House rules among which there are think tankers of US- (notably Council on Foreign Relations) but also EU-focus (Bruegel, CEPS or IFRI) institutes next to the network's “old boys club”-style inner circle hailing from finance or business sectors (Zielinski 2017:108). What is more, the Bilderberg network maintains close ties to the Commission and - not visible from the two-mode network presented here – to the European group of the Trilateral Commission: its six chairmen were all Bilderberg participants (2011:121). In Zielinski's portrayal, these fora – highly central also according to the data here – can be interpreted as de facto “informal fora of NATO” (Gijwsijt 2007:298, van der Pijl 2012) or, in an elite sociology lens, as “vehicles of international elite integration, linking capitalists to a political-cultural community” for mediating class extremes (Carroll 2010:39). Central EU think tanks, as we saw, partake in this board network.

Who holds board memberships among think tanks' human resources? A third result not immediately visible from the network charts is that (as expected) it is typically their board members - a pattern frequently found in other network research - who are most engaged and best-connected when it comes to sitting on further boards.

Although they are a minority in the sample, Brussels institute board members occupy 1,004 (83 percent) of CV-tagged organizational board memberships; experts sat on 124 boards (10 percent); leaders on 72 (6 percent); and other staff on 16 (1 percent). In practice, this means that for example EWI's or RAND Europe's board members account for over 90 percent of their links with other boards, and for several think tanks like EPC or Open Europe it is exclusively their board members who sit on other boards. Leaders account for the highest share of board memberships at E3G (for which no own board members were identified) and Ecologic Institute. GGI, Bruegel, Lisbon Council and the SWP are the only sampled think tanks with over ten of their experts sitting on an organizational board. Regarding gender, only a fourth of coded board memberships pertain to women, 75 percent to men - ten percentage points below or above their respective sample share. Board members indeed tend to be men.

Far from only being functional advisory or steering committees, organizational boards can be crucial venues – or informal “hang-outs” – for EU think tanks' leaders. “Comparative think tank research in Europe has been mostly concentrated at the national level and tends to treat individual think tanks as isolated organizations”, as others have also pointed out, and “although pan-European networks are occasionally noticed, very few in-depth studies of such think tank networks have been conducted ...Interactions between think tanks and other groups...remains on the ‘still needs to be done’ list” (Plehwe/Schlögl 2015:13, but see Plehwe/Walpen 2006 or Plehwe 2008). Thus far, this chapter has shown how we can structurally study think tank relations among themselves as well as through interlocking board memberships. Of course, EU-focused institutes can also belong to a plethora of policy or governance networks (Blanco et al. 2011, Börzel 2011, see Chapter 2). Studies of European governance have more generally highlighted the role of networks as a feature of non-hierarchical steering between state networks and non-state actors such as – but not limited to – EU think tanks at different levels (see, for instance, Kohler-Koch/Rittberger 2006).

At the same time, the SNA approach to mapping and qualitatively triangulating think tank networks pursued here should of course not blind us to the existence – and importance – of various formalized think tank networks that have sprung up in the European context, which may similarly act as platforms for trans-border expertise or ideological fellowship. Which different transnational think tank networks have EU-focused institutes formalized? And why do they choose to link transnationally up in this way? The next section considers this before turning to their sector-by-sector ties.

## Formal EU think tank networks and competition-collaboration dynamics

Which formal inter-organizational think tank networks do EU think tanks lead or are a part of? And how do their competition-collaboration dynamics play out in practice? Boucher's initial count of EU-oriented and EU-focused policy institutes (2004:133) already contained a useful list of formal networks they had built at the time, which has since been expanded and addressed in more depth in Tatyana Bajenova's (2017) work. Perhaps the most visible case of a transnational think tank network in which EU think tanks present in Brussels participate is the Brussels Think Tank Dialogue (as noted in Chapter 4 and 5). Its member institute logos are depicted in Figure 40:

**Figure 40.** EU think tanks participating in the Brussels Think Tank Dialogue (N=10)

Note: Graphical presentation is from the formalized network's own strategic communications (2018).



Initiated by the Bertelsmann Foundation's Brussels branch in 2010, the informal annual policy forum pursues the idea of strengthening institutes' collective impact; in our conceptual framework, it is one of the field's front region "meeting spaces" for interaction or mutual awareness of a "common enterprise" (DiMaggio/Powell 1983) and its sheer existence – irrespective of effectiveness – can be seen as a further proof of the Brussels field's (however imperfect) march towards further institutionalization. It is frequently mentioned by interviewed and involved think tank leaders, say from EPC (I5-Zuleeg:50), IFRI (I23-Pertusot:56) or Confrontations Europe (I18-Baud:56), and Bertelsmann Foundation widely acknowledged to be the "pillar, really" (I18:56), which "started it, also due to our privileged position as a financially independent think tank", its interviewee says (I27-Fischer:15), or private funding (see Chapter 6).

The Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA), created already in 1974, is another formal group of in this case near forty national think tanks from over thirty countries (both EU member states or candidate countries) headquartered in Brussels. While it is characterized – mistakenly, in my definition and view – by Marybel Perez (2018) as a proper “EU think tank”, its interviewed executive director openly stresses TEPSA has no in-house research capacity, operating as a network (I49-van de Berge). However, as such it can certainly create “structural conditions for socialization” (Checkel 2005), as Perez pointed out elsewhere (2014b), similar to board interlocks. In fact, TEPSA is among the “first trans-European research networks”, founded by the Italian EU think tank IAI and Federal Trust in London under the influence of European federalists back in the early 1970s (Ulrich 2004, Missiroli/Ioannides 2012).

Behind Bertelsmann Foundation’s recent think tank network leadership lies the conviction that the field would benefit from more collective positioning or advocacy. But “it is very difficult to have consolidation” in this sense, as EUISS’ interviewed director remarks, “every think tank...has a certain flag...a sort of patriotism...of ‘I prefer to be master in my little think tank and making my little own point’ rather than having bigger impact”; he adds that this “is very European: we prefer to be small and numerous, to have different voices rather than being big, and one...so there is proliferation without consolidation”, as in foreign policy domains (I41-Missiroli:40). Bertelsmann Foundation benefitted from the network in positioning itself as a leader.

However, it is CEPS which has helped to spur and successfully formalize early think tank networks as an important “spider in the web”, so to speak, notably within the European Network of Economic Policy Research Institutes (ENEPRI), convening over twenty member institutes from mostly EU- and candidate countries since 1996, and European Policy Institutes Network (EPIN) with even more think tank members across Europe, which was established by CEPS in 2002, and is still coordinated by it. As one interviewee asserts, “it is very important for think tanks to not only understand what is going on here in Brussels, but also to have feedback of what the reality in various member states is”, adding that this grounding “enhances legitimacy of what you’re putting forward and gives you this richer perspective” (I33-Allio:59). At the same time, the CEPS-based organizer of the formalized think tank network ENEPRI Mikkel Barslund brings up that for national policy institutes “the Brussels agenda, in many countries, is just very far away...you’re working on more nitty-gritty national political details...But you really don’t have the EU agenda in mind” (I51:32).

Thus, reminiscent of EU think tanks' important liaison function discussed earlier (see Chapter 4), formal think tank networks like EPIN, firmly anchored around CEPS, can make sure national EU-oriented or -geared institutes "are connected, and talking to each other...to get a broader, more varied view", its coordinator stresses, adding that the research consortium role is also important as "we often bid for research projects together" (I51-Barlund:12, see Stone 2013, Bajenova 2017). In fact, EPIN's origins revolve around the constitutional Convention on the Future of Europe: with partial Commission funding, it initially organized over 30 conferences under the "Future of Europe" program in EU member states and candidate countries; when this stream of funding ran out, CEPS director Daniel Gros (who gave decisive impulses that led to the network's creation, see Coman 2018) "decided to keep the network in operation" and provide the necessary financing to pursue issues of common interest or fortify "a common European dimension in national debates on Europe" (SC 2017).

Other examples of formal transnational think tank networks which will not be elaborated in any depth but follow a similar founding impetus or direction of impact are the Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission (EuroMeSCo) also created in 1996 as "the main network of research centers on politics and security in the Mediterranean" in Barcelona (SC 2018); the Policy Association for an Open Society (PASOS), set up in 1999 in Prague for Open Society Institute-related policy centers' capacity building; the Notre Europe-led Think Global Act European (TGAE) somewhat looser network of around 16 EU think tanks launched in 2008 to reflect on EU external relations; or the EU Non-Proliferation Consortium initiated through a Council of the EU decision in 2011 for a "European network of independent non-proliferation and disarmament think tanks", which has since been led by IISS in London, SIPRI or others (SC 2018). European political party-affiliated (but not strictly speaking think tank) networks also sprung up during the 2000s, for instance the EPP Group-coordinated European Ideas Network (EIN) or European Socialists' Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) which bring together politically likeminded national or pan-European actors (Bajenova 2017:7, see Dakowska 2009 on their EU level "norm entrepreneurship"). All of these show, as Bajenova points out, what could be called a "multiplier effect" of European think tank networks hovering between representativeness or exclusivity: in spite of the competition promoted by think tank rankings as "tournament rituals" and institutes' entrepreneurial logic (see Chapter 5 and 9), there is clearly also a pronouncedly cooperative, collaborative side to the world of EU-focused think tanks.

On one hand, Brussels institutes network “because of finances. They try to network, to make coalitions, to form consortia, to be able to gain funding” (I3-Reljic:88) at EU level. As EIPA’s representative puts it, “we are by definition a European institute, we are supposed to operate in networks” – a case of EU-induced coercive isomorphism – “we network the national institutes of public administration, so the very essence of what we’re doing is one of a network” (I9-Guggenbühl:40). On the other hand, many interviewees also emphasize that in Brussels’ relatively overseeable organizational field, often “there is no point in having cut-throat competition” (I1-Blockmans:68), as “cooperation...enhances the standing of both or all partners which are involved” (I5-Zuleeg:50), so “you work with your peers and your competitors” (I20-Islam:46). “We have a nice word in Dutch”, ECDPM’s interviewed director chimes in, “it’s ‘concullega’, it means a competitor and a colleague at the same time” (I17-Engel:40).

Not unlike other organizational fields, in “the think tank community...you have partners, you may have friends, but still they are your competitors”, IFRI’s Brussels leader explains this chasm, “you may have lunch, drink beers or have very good relations with them in private life, and even share some ideas...but at the end of the day, in terms of organizations, they’re still partly competitors” (I23-Pertusot:58). EPC’s director also readily relativizes his openness for cooperation in admitting that “competition is not just institutional competition, individual analysts are competing for attention, for status” (I5-Zuleeg:50). “If there’s a brilliant idea, or unique access, you are careful not to share it too quickly with others”, a CEPS interviewee says, “but because it’s such a small town...in the long run it is untenable to guard that turf for oneself” (I1-Blockmans:70). In competing for EU funds the stance institutes take to one another resembles “brutal competition among researchers” (I46-Emerson:26).

However, “if you look at this as an iterated prisoner’s dilemma”, as ECIA’s research leader puts it, “we believe in cooperation as a strategy” (I4-Teti:28). In fact, the EU think tanks “often berate – and bore – policy-makers with the importance of cooperation”, GGI’s director muses, “it would be ridiculous if we, as a think tank, do not look at this in the same way” (I2-Koops:54). So while there is niche competition – for example of CEPS “in the economic field of course head-on with Bruegel” (I52-Gros:32) – the general picture is one of largely cooperative field interaction, at least in rhetoric. “With Bruegel, there is a lot of...in Dutch we say Argus Augen, you look with a certain suspicion...and try to beat them...In EU foreign policy there is – surprisingly, perhaps – a good-humored type of cooperation” (I1-Blockmans:67).



An important insight from the interviews, triangulating structural network patterns, is the parallelity of formal and informal transnational think tank network relationships: “at the end of the day, the really strong relations are informal”, GRIP’s interviewee believes – say through board membership or previous work affiliations – “but maybe you meet the people in a formal network” (I40-Santopinto:72). “For many projects these days, you need a broad consortium of partners” at the EU level, the executive director of TEPSA points out, “and it really does help to know that an institute is a trustworthy partner, because you cooperated through a network like TEPSA” (I49-van de Berge:14). ENEPRI’s coordinator of CEPS similarly stresses the network’s “added value through personal ties: you actually meet people in a similar situation, you talk over lunch” during physical meetups, or digitally beyond (I51-Barlund:12).

The Urban Institute’s senior fellow Raymond Struyk (2002) has summarized transnational think tank network’s types on a spectrum from loose partnerships all the way to formalized regular gatherings such as the Brussels Think Tank Dialogue. Ivan Krastev (2001:32-33) has listed six reasons for Central and Eastern European policy institutes to be involved in regional networking: influence, common ground, legitimacy, utility, training and quality control are his catchwords. Bajenova (2017) adds that certain forms of what could be called “European institutional capital” in the field of Eurocracy (Georgakakis/Rowell 2013) can be gained from such participation. In fact, the Commission itself considers “self-selection by the NGO community, through the appointment of representatives and setting up of networks or platforms” a “useful alternative” to selection by the Commission or its interlocutors (2000:11). It literally portrayed networking as the “European way” and DNA (2000:19, see 2001).

Ulrich (2004:2) laments growing use of formal and informal networks makes studying EU think tanks even more complex than it already is. But as has become clear, it is crucial to understand that theoretically speaking and in actual practice, they “do not operate in a vacuum” (Boucher et al. 2004:130). Rather, they are part of global knowledge networks, both partaking in “transnational advocacy networks, transnational executive networks, global public policy networks” as well as epistemic communities and discourse coalitions and, in turn, can come to make up “new public spaces in the global agora” or the EU themselves, as a field (Stone 2013:2). Formal EU think tank networks can create an overlapping personal and communications infrastructure for faster, more effective transfer of new ideas or policy approaches (Stone 2000:36), and are also important indicators of their field’s institutionalization.

## **Sectoral think tank networks: Civil society-, public- and private sector ties**

Beyond Brussels institutes' inter-organizational think tank network, interlocking directorates, overlapping other board memberships or formalized think tank networks (empirically studied and discussed in the previous sections), the CV databased of this project enables us to also better comprehend their career affiliations to organizations across the civil society- or academic- as well as public-, for-profit- and media sectors. On top of the dissertation's mapping of Brussels EU think tanks' financial resources assessing their leeway when it comes to money (see Chapter 6) and human resources to gain a better sense of their academic moulding or intellectual mindset (Chapter 7), this will allow us to further empirically locate institutes' sectoral loyalties or leanings.

While (to paraphrase Kenis/Schneider 1991:36) think tank networks “might be best understood as webs of relatively stable and ongoing relationships that mobilize and pool dispersed resources so that collective (or parallel) action can be orchestrated to achieve a common objective”, the following network layers of EU think tankers' organizational ties from previous (or, in rarer cases, parallel) previous workplaces are an empirical proxy for their institutional imprinting or exposure to sectoral logics (as argued in Chapter 2). They are another important puzzle piece of their portfolio of symbolic resources – or reputational capital – in the sense that we can expect the general wisdom “‘who you know’ is part of ‘who you are’ and, no less important, who other people think you are” (Jenkins 2009:149) also applies to EU think tankers.

Throughout, as will be explained, a basic assumption is that what distinguishes the third sector or academia from the public and private sectors are different skill- and mindsets - irrespective of which precise sectoral organization was the workplace. However, a related interest is of course also which are these top entities or industries. Again, the SNA results are visualized based on degree centrality (simply the amount of relationships), even if alternative measures such as closeness- and betweenness centrality could be a worthwhile future extension based on such data (see Trappmann et al. 2011:266), but the focus here is simply on centrality - prestige or prominence - of institutes (see Freeman 1979:215-239 on centrality measures, or Jansen 2006:142).

Again, the presented network charts are just the surface depiction of a whole world of meanings: to which extent the EU think tankers compartmentalize or blend (see Chapter 2) the institutional logics of their professional socialization experiences into hybrid professional identities and can be innovative, independent or impactful in practice is the question qualitatively adressed in some depth in the following chapter.

*For which academic or civil society organizations did think tankers work?*

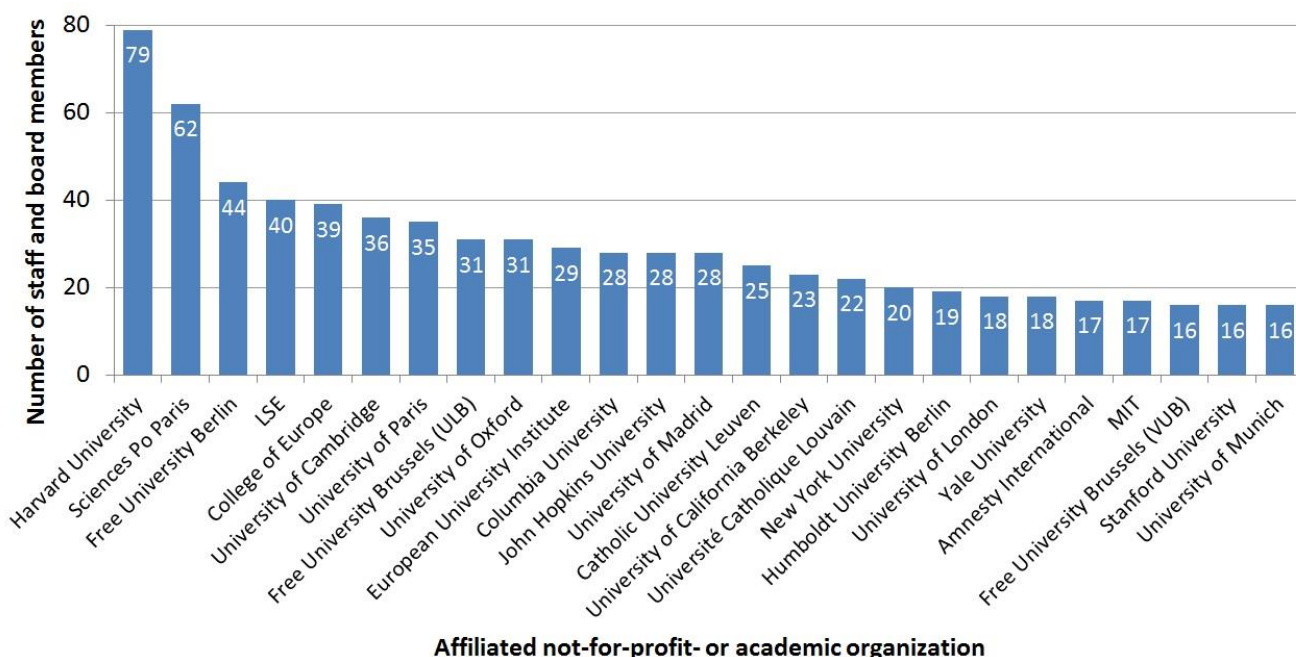
Virtually all the CV database-covered 2,080 individuals - 2,058 (99 percent) - worked at a university or not-for-profit organizations at some point in their previous careers. 4,222 tags were assigned to their biographical material across 2,235 non-profit entities. Clearly, the 22 individuals (1 percent) without any professional stints in the academic or third sector are the absolute exception among this civil society-attuned workforce.

Similar to the pattern for universities they studied at, staff and boards' top 25 most frequent academic- or civil society employers are dominated by pre-eminent academic institutions: Harvard University, the continental European Science Po Paris, Free University Berlin, College of Europe and Britain's Fabian Society-founded LSE are the top five, followed by a "best-of" European, UK or US ivy league universities (see Figure 41). As the world's largest human rights INGO, Amnesty International is the only civil society organization in the top 25 (for which 17 think tankers worked).

It is clearly a common thing for Brussels EU think tankers to take up jobs at their own alma mater or other academic institutions. Most other coinciding sectoral career credentials are with political initiatives such as the European People's Party (15 coded credentials) or Barack Obama's presidential campaign (10) at the time of research; international CSOs such as European Movement International or Friends of the Earth (10 each); and Belgian, German, Spanish or US parties (9 each), as of 2015.

**Figure 41.** Top 25 not-for-profit or academic organizations with career ties (N=2,235)

Note: Based on biographical data or CVs on 2,058 (99 percent) of 2,080 sampled staff or board members across 39 Brussels institutes as of 2015; "other" category (not displayed) contains 3,485 (83 percent) of all assigned 4,222 CV codes across 2,235 non-profit entities (namely on 2,210 with under 6 tags).



**Figure 42.** Top 10 types of non-profit or academic career ties by position (N=2,793)

Note: Based on biographical data or CVs for 2,058 (99 percent) of 2,080 staff or board members at 39 Brussels institutes as of 2015; of 2,793 CV codes for which type could be detected (66 percent), the “other” category includes two further types with 10 or less tags (10 associations and 2 churches).

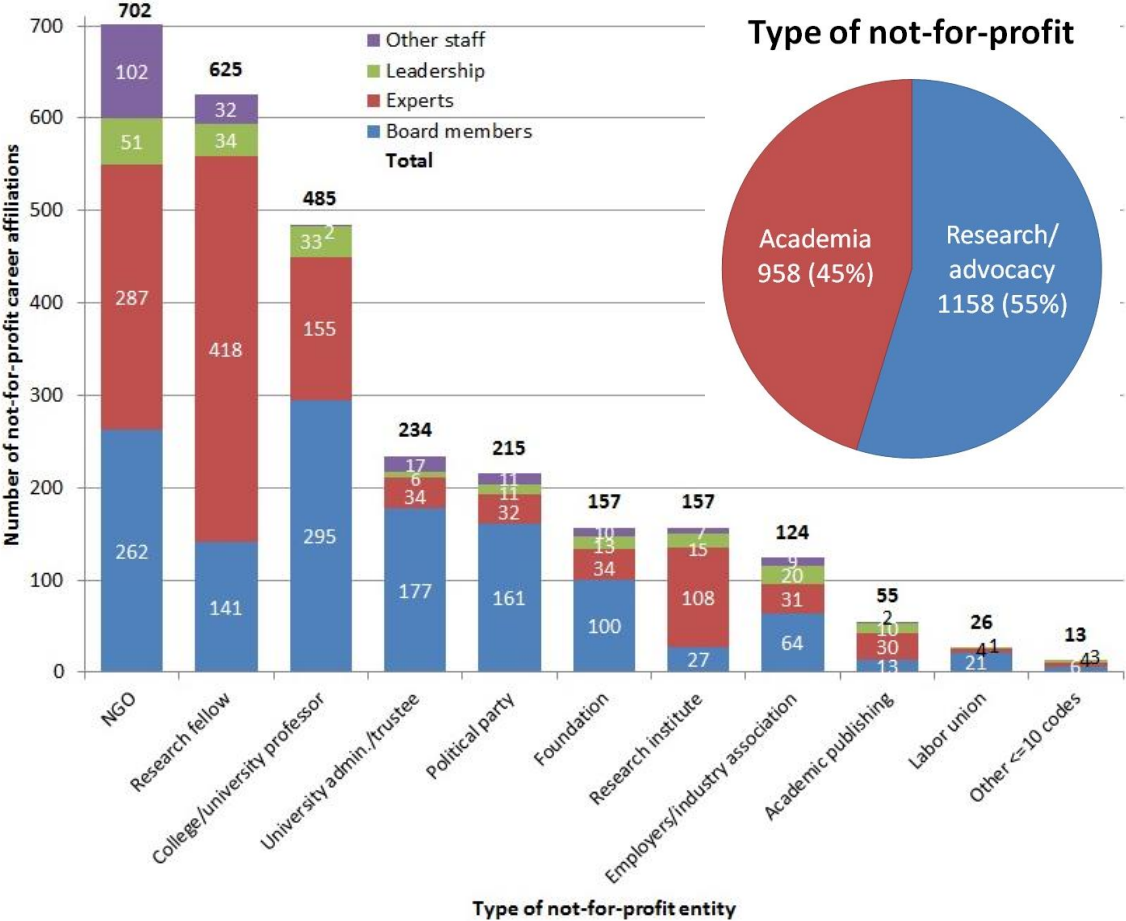


Figure 42 distinguishes the types of not-for-profit organization career affiliations: over half of them (55 percent) were in the wide field of research and advocacy, the other 45 percent pertained to academia. Besides university career phases - mostly as a research fellow and professor (but also half as frequently as an administrator or university trustee) - NGOs are by far the most common previous employers. They are the largest category among think tank leaders or other staff, although experts have even more often been research fellows and board members university professors. Political party or foundation experience is also relatively common among the boards; over 100 EU think tank experts previously worked with research institutes. Employer or industry association jobs are six times more common than labor union experience.

Research and advocacy jobs are the most common civil society background for boards (57 percent of their non-profit CV codes), leaders (64 percent) and especially other staff (74 percent); only experts’ larger half hails from academic job positions. Thus, an isomorphic academic outlook is apparently most pronounced at staff levels.

**Figure 43.** Network of academic or not-for-profit entities where Brussels EU think tankers previously worked at (N=2,058)

Note: Based on biographical data or CVs for 2,058 (99 percent) of 2,080 sampled individuals across 39 Brussels institutes as of 2015; two-mode network (cutoff value  $\geq 2$  ties), visualized in UCINET/Netdraw, line strength, node labels and size shown by degree centrality; Bertelsmann or EFD are isolates (only single ties).

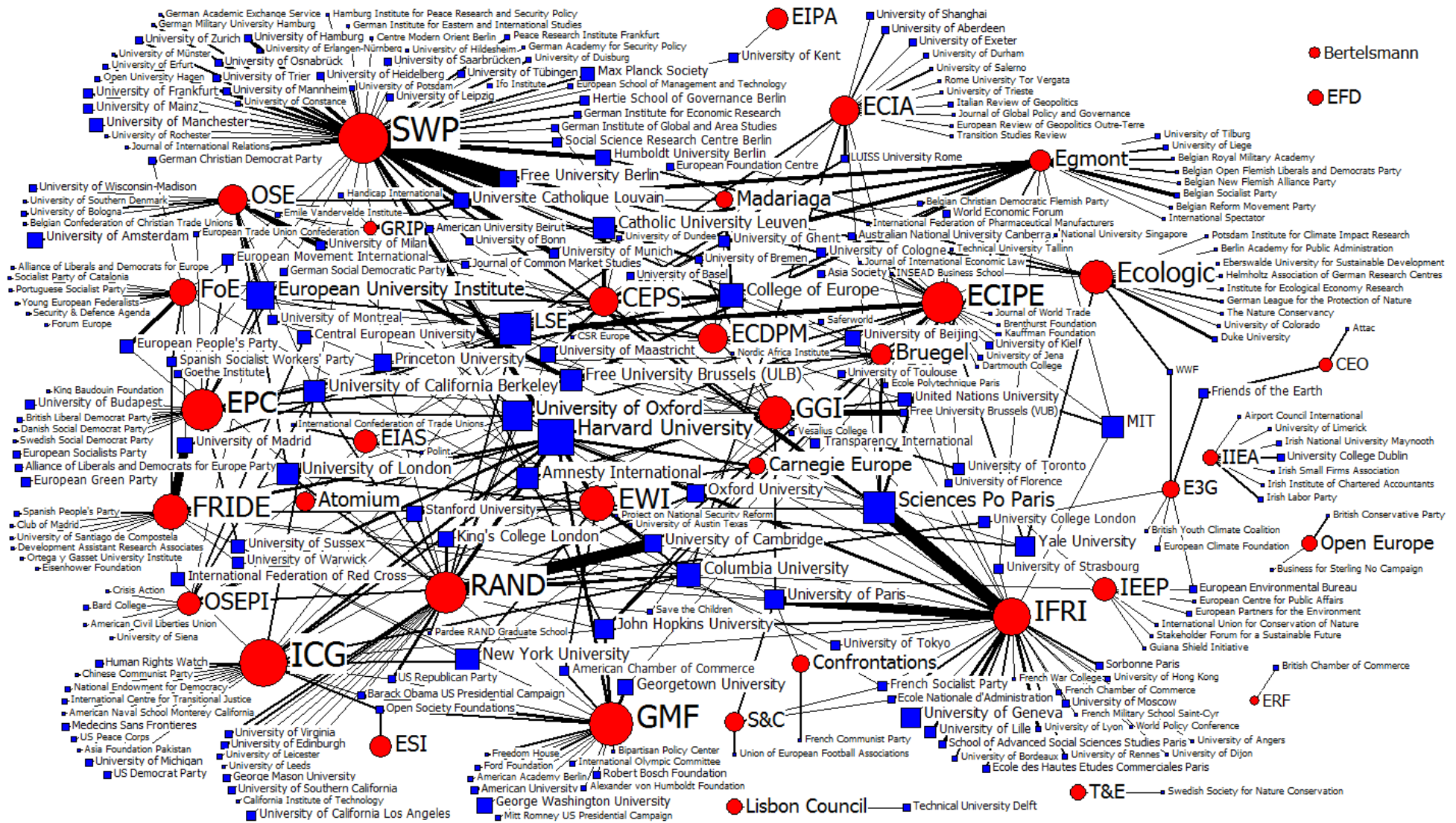




Figure 43 plots the not-for-profit and academic career network of Brussels institutes (red circles), only graphing entities (blue rectangles) where at least two think tankers worked (this is what is meant with the “cutoff value” noted below the figure’s title). Again, the size of all nodes or lines is shown by their tie numbers (degree centrality). Although the length of work stays could not be coded (usually not on people’s CVs), we can assume the simple fact of “having been there” in employment arrangements of a certain duration does rub off, so to say, on institutes’ respective skill- or mindsets.

The network chart also shows: professionally formative experiences were often gained in quite specific academic and civil society research or advocacy settings. The central universities are Anglo-Saxon or continental European, as has been noted, but academic think tanks like SWP (on the top left), ECIA and Egmont (top right) or IFRI (bottom right) can also draw on valuable research, teaching or work experience at a range of field-wise peripheral - but nationally often highly regarded - universities. In fact, the visualization in Figure 43 shows “clouds” surrounding the institutes, which capture breadth of their German, Italian, Belgian or French human resource pipelines.

The US-origin institutes present in Brussels complement their elite university work credentials with experience outside the ivory tower at top league international NGOs and foundations. ICG and GMF (bottom left) are the clearest cases: both have career ties at Amnesty International and Open Society Foundations and, separately, Human Rights Watch or Doctors Without Borders (ICG) as well as Freedom House or Ford Foundation (GMF). Their political party-savvy staff worked with presidential campaigns, the US Democrat- or Republican Party. The platform think tanks EPC and FoE (on the left) are comparatively better connected with political parties at EU level - notably European People’s Party - and several member states’ national parties.

This is more than we could learn only from descriptive statistics on the types of non-profit sector ties. Harvard, LSE, Sciences Po, College of Europe or EUI - even beyond academic training, it turns out, these universities are important think tanker pipelines, too. As such, it is even more likely that they condition, or culturally imprint, a significant portion of EU think tankers with an appreciation of scholastic standards of excellence or, particularly among younger cohorts, European or global governance outlooks transcending statist grids of analysis to make sense of our globalizing world. Of course, it is also entirely possible that they rather induce a good smack of elitism in think tankers trained in such exclusive – thus often (nonjudgementally) elitary – academic settings, which can both lead to a sense of “noblesse oblige” or entitlement.

Having said that, academia- or not-for-profit sector-moulded institutional logics are not the only clearly identifiable “sectoral staining” on EU think tankers’ career paths. Even if distinctive non-profit values, rules and learned behaviors are the dominant professional influence driving most scholarly-, platform- and advocacy-oriented think tanks’ human resource profiles, in practice these will be continually renegotiated with other sectoral ways of doing things. Even in the same sector, no two organizations will be completely identical regarding their unique “DNA”. Thus, we can assume that usually there will be multilayered sectoral or organizational imprints from past career affiliations at work in think tanks: metaphorically speaking, we can think of this as sedimentary deposits underneath how institutes appear on the surface, as a sort of institutional osmosis, a process of give-and-take of adopted or departed ways.

Still, what clearly emerges from Figure 43 is a center-periphery structure of the EU think tanks’ ties that may or may not bind towards the academe and civil society: while institutes like SWP, CEPS or IFRI are in the thick of it (high degree centrality), others such as the Lisbon Council, T&E, ERF or Open Europe (bottom right) are not. And while both specialist institutes like Bruegel and generalist ones like CEPS count over 25 previous (or, in some cases, current) college- or university professors among their human resources, which is on par even with Germany’s much larger SWP, this is not the case for more politically geared, smaller advocacy tanks like Open Europe.

An interesting detail, already hinted at above, is that labor union expertise is conspicuously absent: for instance, Bruegel has one employee with labor union experience and one who has worked for an employers’ or industry association; CEPS musters 12 previous employers’ or industry association staffers, none from a labor union. It is a direct continuation of how their membership and funding is composed, and might be interpreted as confirming our expectations of isomorphism. Institutes like OSE (upper left in the chart) receive a heavier portion of labor union funding. It does have at least a couple of staffers of Belgium’s Confederation of Christian Trade Unions. Vice versa, the small ERF (bottom right) is financed exclusively by private funds, and has overlapping employees only from the British Chamber of Commerce.

Next to not-for-profit and academic working stint influences, experience in the public sector is common among EU think tankers (see Chapter 7), both in the state sector - public services or -enterprises – and public international organizations. These are themselves often target groups of transnational think tanks’ advisory work. Thus, let us now examine institutes’ sectoral location regarding public sector relationships.

*Which type of public sector organizations have think tankers worked for?*

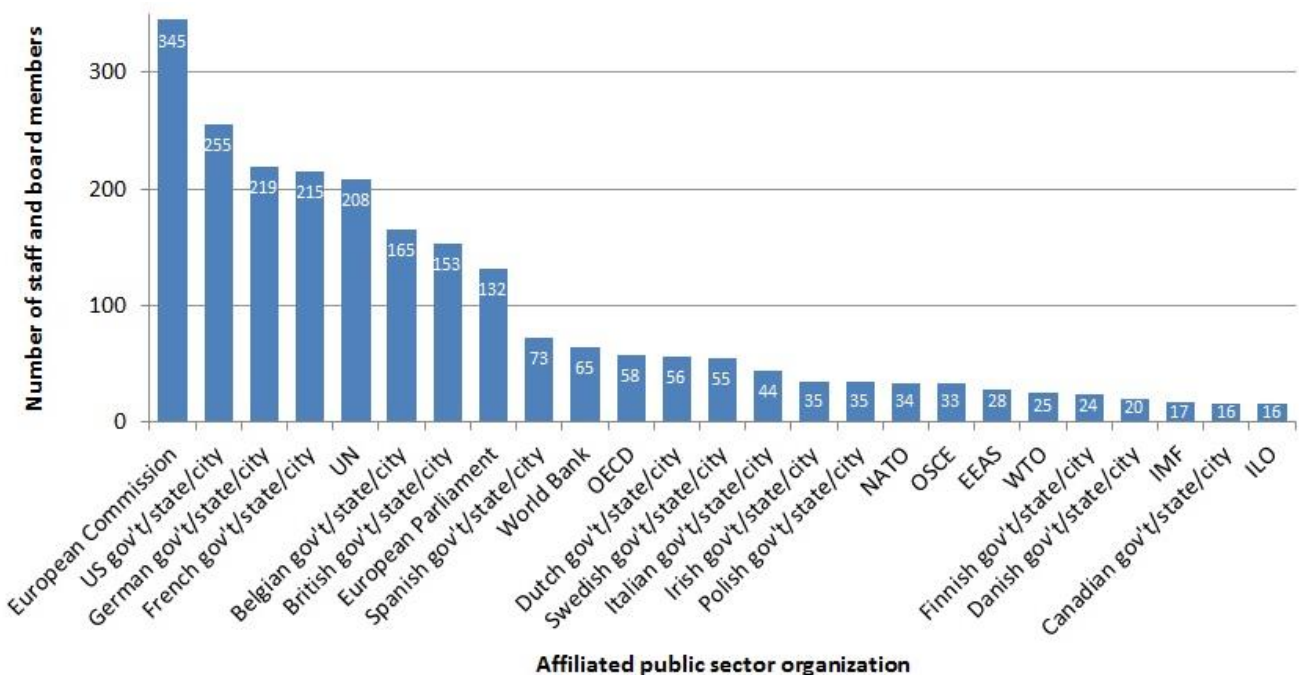
Six out of ten of the sampled 2,080 individuals - according to the coded CV data - had at least one salaried stint or advisory consulting experience in the public sector, whereas 40 percent had no CV-identifiable past public sector touch points. The biographical analysis resulted in 1,242 CV tags across 606 organizations (this counts all Commission DGs and state bodies separately, subsumed it is 144 organizations).

An exceptionally clear pattern emerges for public sector ties (see Figure 44): 345 worked at the Commission as dominant public sector employer, and have insider knowledge how it designs legislation, takes decisions and handles daily EU affairs (this will compare to under 20 former employees at most media or for-profit finance companies or international NGOs, and under 80 at Harvard or other top universities). Over 200 think tankers worked at the US, German- or French public sector or the UN. With over 100 tagged persons European Parliament experience is also common. Other top international organizations (with around 50 or less CV tags) include World Bank, OECD, NATO, OSCE, WTO, IMF and ILO; familiarity with their work is “in stock”.

Figure 45 gives the breakdown of governance levels and types of employment for the coded public sector positions: half concern the governmental- or federal level, 43 percent international or global entities, 5 percent the state level and local politics.

**Figure 44.** Top 25 public sector organizations with career ties (N=2,746)

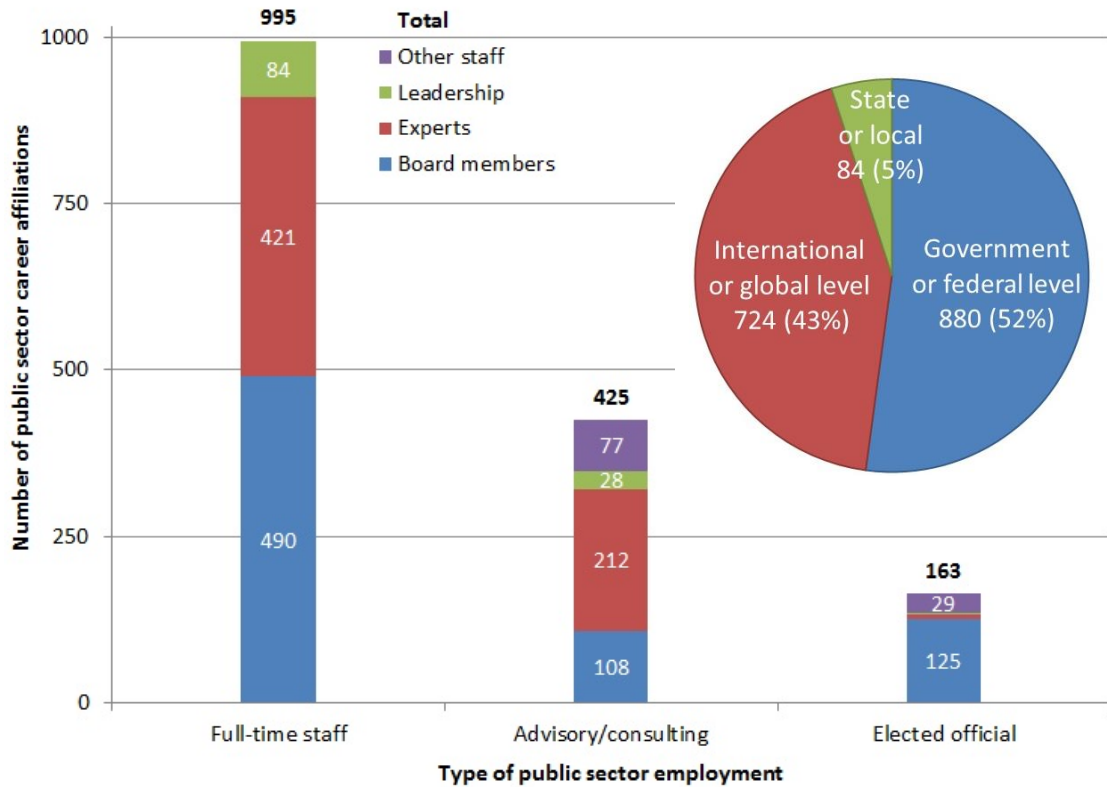
Note: Based on biographical data or CVs on 1,242 (60 percent) of 2,080 sampled staff or board members across 39 Brussels institutes as of 2015; “other” category (not displayed) contains 420 (15 percent) of assigned 2,746 CV codes across 144 subsumed public entities (on 119 with under 15 tags).





**Figure 45.** Top levels or employment type of public career ties by position (N=1,688)

Note: Based on biographical data or CVs for 1,688 (60 percent) of 2,080 staff or board members at 39 Brussels institutes as of 2015; governance level (pie chart) could be coded for all individuals, whereas a type of public sector employment could be discerned from their CVs for 1,583 (94 percent).



More than anything, the weight of EU and global level work experience of institutes' human resources is striking. And as the figure's bar chart shows, this typically took place in salaried employment situations (in 63 percent of cases), next to advisory and consulting activities (27 percent). Ten percent served as an elected public official, which nearly exclusively applies to board members (although a few other staff have also been elected, for instance in local politics). At the expert level, both regular and consulting contracts with public sector organizations - often at EU level - are common.

The network chart in Figure 46 below shows just how central EU institutions are, in particular the Commission if we count all general or specific DG tags together. The UN has the highest degree centrality of global level international organizations. Several staff or board members of large think tanks like EWI, ICG but also ECDPM, ECIPE, GGI and FRIDE (all institutes interested in global governance) worked there. Despite its presence in Brussels, few institutes boast insider knowledge of NATO, notably FoE, IFRI, GMF or RAND Europe. Governments, ministries and occasionally capitals' or bigger city administrations make up a significant share of public entities, and as the chart clarifies, they are typically linked to institutes' countries of origin.



Again, we can assume from our institutionalist lens that public sector work will, to a greater or lesser - but certainly to some - extent socialize contract or consulting staff in particular directions. Working for the EU may lead to mental “buy-in” or osmosis which might reduce the critical distance or innovation in subsequent think tank work. At state or national level, public sector work routines stress abiding by hierarchies. Risk aversion is endemic, even if New Public Management (NPM) reforms may have resulted in business-like “client” focused management practices in the definition and delivery of public goods or services, notably in the UK, US and the Nordic countries.

Similarly, the changing world of multilateralism and international bodies’ work will infuse a keen awareness about boundaries of the politically possible, the weight of “conservative” forces preserving the status quo, or long haul time horizon required to proverbially bore through thick planks for achieving significant political progress. Since the EU institutions are often core constituencies for many Brussels institutes, explicit and tacit knowledge about their transnational work - even from relatively short job stints - is valuable for their analytical and advisory activities at EU level. Moreover, board members who have served in high profile political offices can offer important contacts and connections - even beyond the associated reputational capital.

Of sampled board members with public sector backgrounds, a majority of 58 percent had worked for national governments, and 37 percent served internationally. EU think tank staff members - experts, leaders and other staffers - are comparatively more experienced when it comes to international organizations (half of all CV tags). There were no significant differences by gender, although covered men had slightly more federal level experience as compared to sampled women (55 versus 46 percent). The types of employment were salaried contracts in two thirds of cases, respectively.

FoE, ECIPE and - no surprises here given its extensive contract research work - RAND Europe emerge as the think tanks with most public sector career affiliations, followed by EPC and CEPS, with well over 100 ties for all of these named institutes. The platform think tanks EPC and FoE, plus CEPS, have among the highest share of international and global level public sector experience (76, 70 and 60 percent of ties), fully in line with their isomorphic pro-EU outlook. Established think tanks RAND Europe, GMF or Egmont, IFRI and SWP show reverse patterns of overwhelmingly country level experience (over 70 percent of ties). Bruegel, for instance, has a diversified public sector portfolio (with a fifty-fifty split). Its think tankers mostly worked at the Commission, but also in the German, French and Polish public sector.

*In which for-profit industries or media outlets have think tankers worked?*

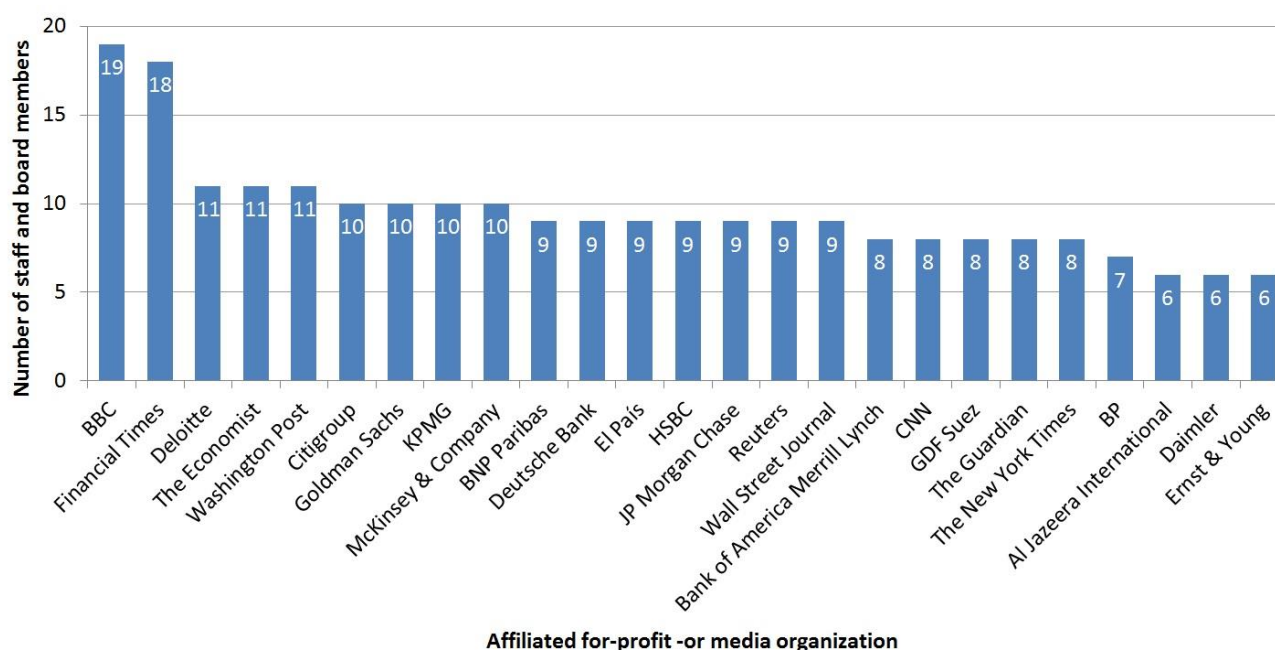
Out of the 2,080 individuals covered in the CV database, 463 (22 percent) had at least one working experience at a for-profit organization as per their biographical material. The coding exercise yielded 2,041 CV tags across 1,524 businesses or media outlets.

The pattern here is that global news media, financial or consulting companies and specific energy, oil and car giants are the most frequent past for-profit employers (see Figure 47): the BBC, Financial Times, The Economist and the Washington Post are part of the top five, together with UK-incorporated global consultancy Deloitte. And the top ten for-profit organizations further include McKinsey & Company and KPMG next to important financial players like Goldman Sachs and Deutsche Bank. But these observations are based on smaller numbers of individual cases. To illustrate, less than ten staff or board members held jobs at GDP Suez, BP or Daimler.

As can be seen in the pie chart in Figure 48 below, two thirds of private sector affiliations derive from work stays at companies across a range of business industries; a fourth pertain to journalism, usually for-profit media outlets or public broadcasters; only one in ten work experiences were gained in the professions (law and medicine). The top ten industries where Brussels EU think tankers have gained work experience are shown in the figure’s stacked bar chart: again, research or consulting jobs come out on top - overall, but also for all staff categories (notably the experts or other staff).

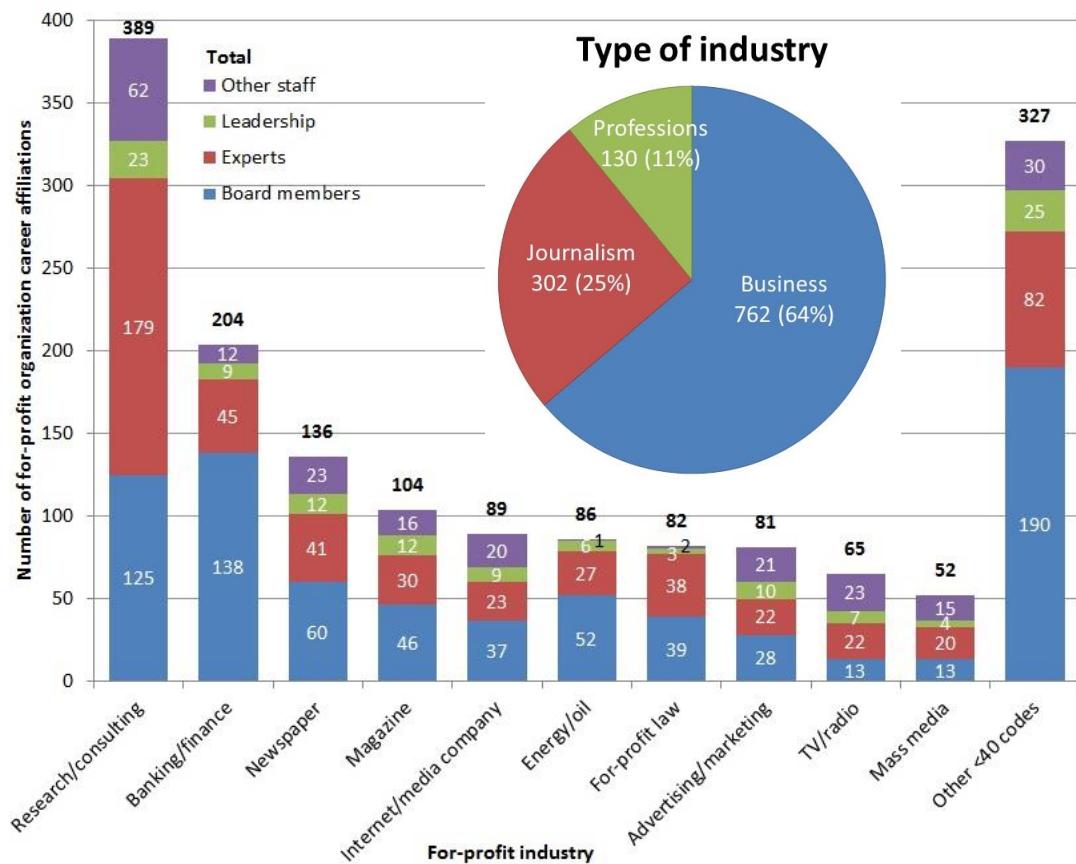
**Figure 47.** Top 25 for-profit or media organizations with career ties (N=1,524)

Note: Based on biographical data or CVs for 463 (22 percent) of 2,080 sampled staff or board members across 39 Brussels institutes as of 2015; “other” category is not displayed but contains 1,803 (88 percent) of all assigned 2,041 CV codes across 1,524 for-profit entities (on 1,499 with under 6 tags).



**Figure 48.** Top 10 for-profit or media industry career ties, by position (N=1,615)

Note: Based on biographical data or CVs for 2,044 (98 percent) of 2,080 staff or board members at 39 Brussels institutes as of 2015; of 1,615 CV codes, 327 are “other” industries with under 40 tags.



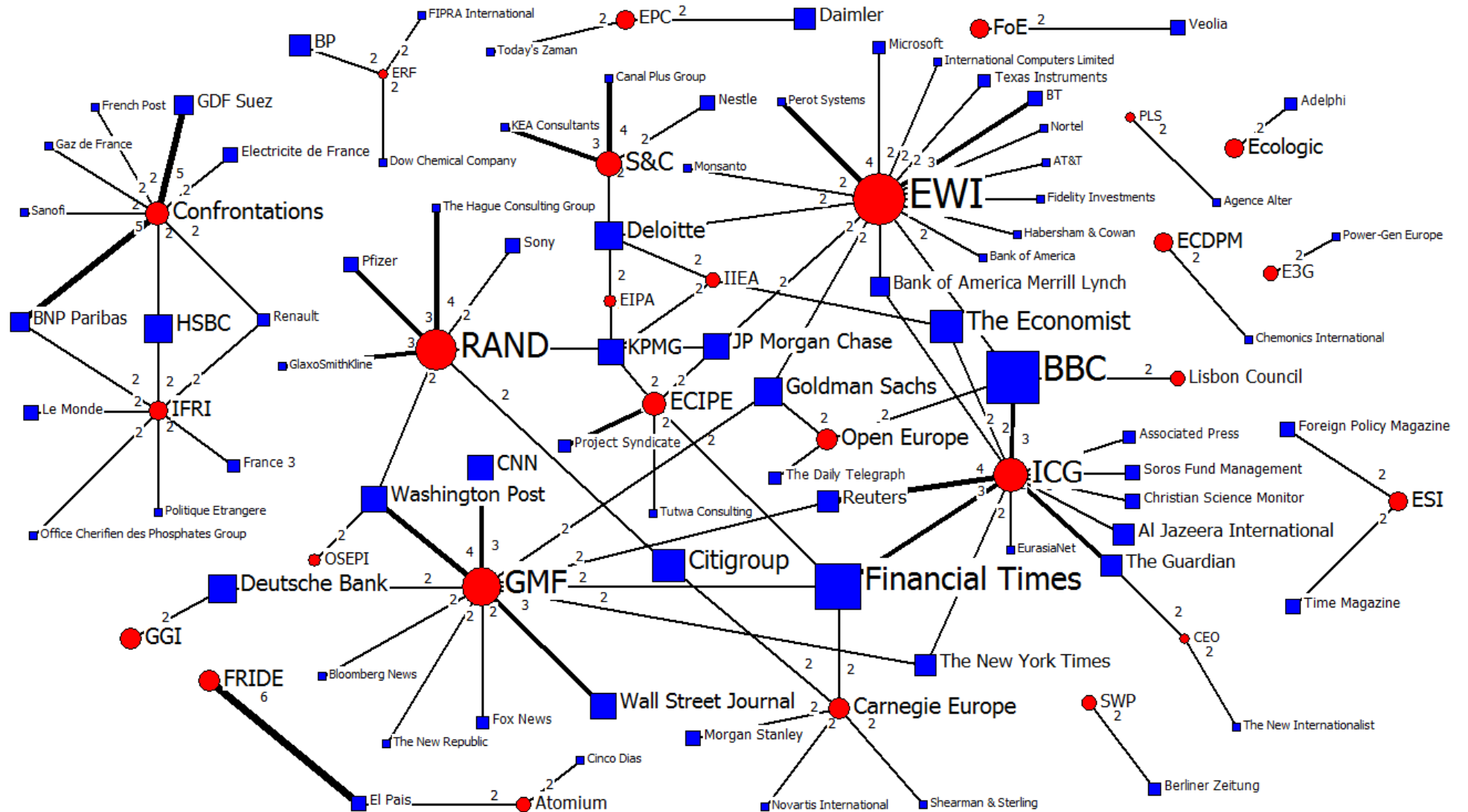
Banking or finance ranks in second place overall. It is the top industry among boards. This can likely be explained with the skills for steering and overseeing management, and with the symbolic capital an MBA degree affords at board level (see Chapter 7). The next most frequent industries relate to journalism: newspapers or magazines, but also internet- or other media firms (TV, radio and mass media are also in the top ten), followed by experiences in the energy or oil industry, for-profit law and advertising. Fewer than 40 think tankers worked in the car industry, pharma, telecommunications or the high tech, defense or other industries; a single person once worked as architect. Clearly, think tankers leaving these surely more lucrative, possibly more comfortable ways to earn a living for joining think tankers’ ranks are the exception, not the norm.

Research and consulting is by far the most common for-profit experience, further corroborating our finding that this skill- and mindset is highly valued in the field. The following network chart only visualizes at least double ties to for-profit organizations to cut complexity. But generally speaking, Bruegel for instance is most heavily tied to the banking and finance industry, CEPS to the energy and oil industry.



**Figure 49.** Network of companies and media outlets where Brussels EU think tankers previously worked (N=2,044)

Note: Based on biographical data or CVs for 2,044 (98 percent) of 2,080 sampled individuals across 39 Brussels institutes as of 2015; two-mode network (cutoff value  $\geq 2$  ties), visualized in UCINET/Netdraw with line strength, node labels and size by degree centrality; 10 isolates (with single ties only) have been removed.



To repeat, Figure 49 on the previous page does not visualize ties to all 1,524 tagged for-profit and media organization career affiliations, but only those for which at least two work experiences were identified. Again, EU think tanks' nodes (the red circles) as well as those of for-profit entities (blue rectangles) and line sizes are shown by the amount of ties (degree centrality), so that the bigger the graph elements the more ties.

With several employees or board members hailing from a specific company or media outlet, we would expect that these organizations' culture and competencies are influencing or relayed to think tanks' way of thinking and operating - plus, of course, there is a higher "risk" that institutes' staff and board members know each other, too, and assess specific and overall social realities on the same "wavelength", so to speak.

In line with what we would expect from a varieties of capitalism (Hall/Soskice 2001) lens, big US-origin institutes in Brussels (close to US liberal market economy) show the clearest pattern of staffing their ranks with people from the same businesses and media companies: EWI - with the highest absolute number of business sector ties (see Figure 49) - involves several bankers from Bank of America, Goldman Sachs, JP Morgan Chase and Fidelity Investments, for example, or ex-employees of leading international tech or telecommunications companies like AT&T, BT and Microsoft. It has also hired several persons from the BBC - like ICG, for which the chart reveals even better journalistic connections: to the New York Times, Financial Times and Reuters, for instance. All of these, in turn, overlap with GMF's "media experience portfolio", which also includes TV positions at Bloomberg News, Fox News or CNN.

Confrontations Europe and IFRI form a cluster apart from mostly Anglo-Saxon think tanks in the network chart's main component: both French institutes have overlapping private sector experience with the European banks BNP Paribas and HSBC or French multinational car manufacturer Renault; and while IFRI's other notable ties are mainly tangent to French media, Confrontations Europe preferentially hires those versed in France's energy industry (Électricité de France, Gaz de France, GDF Suez). The business and media network also uncovers patterns for smaller think tanks. For example, it turns out the executive team of ERF (on the top left) - seeking to "raise awareness of risk management issues at EU level" (SC 2018) - has strong job relations to BP, Dow Chemical Company and Brussels-based pan-European lobbying firm Finsbury International Policy & Regulatory Advisers (FIPRA). It is a case in point for how we must wonder, as the corollary of these empirical observations, if and how this affects its thinking: Is ERF's idea of risk management still independent?

The strength of SNA, in such cases, is being able to go beyond mere financing (see Chapter 6 where in this case of ERF the same question has very similarly popped up) to also reveal issues regarding not just independence of money, but also of mindsets. By studying institutes' finances plus human resources' sectoral involvement, I argue, we get a deeper, structural grip on what may impinge on their independence, innovation and, ultimately, direction of impact (detailed in the following Chapter 9).

If we take serious institutionalist ideas of imprinting effects in work contexts, it is likely that, as knowledge workers, business-experienced think tankers' thinking passes through the lens of institutional logics that are prevalent in the private sector. This encompasses practices like performance benchmarking or impact measurement, adopted by most bottom-line focused multinational companies in their unrelenting pursuit of profits, competitiveness or declared commitment to "business excellence"; but also - on a supraorganizational level - socially, historically entrenched sectoral mentalities, say regarding global capitalist market forces for which the sky is the limit.

Likewise, experience at news media organizations presumably both imprints an appreciation of normative concepts such as independence and objectivity - including journalistic practices how one should guarantee them - and a keen awareness of fast-paced, market-driven work contexts prizing newsworthiness and audience orientation. However, as revealed in this and previous chapters (notably in Chapter 7), public sector and especially civil society work is empirically even more common among Brussels EU think tankers than for-profit organization or for-profit media outlet ties. Their respective institutional logics' imprinting processes and isomorphic loyalties can be expected to influence individual, organizational as well as field-level activity. However, this chapter has raised but not yet answered the prominent "how" question: So what for EU think tankers' innovativeness, independence and impact in action?

It is to this crucial question that the next and penultimate chapter now turns, drawing together and augmenting this and the previous chapters' structural findings by drawing heavily on the qualitatively coded material from 80 conducted interviews and teasing out the ramifications for the three research puzzles - the three "I's" - stated at the outset (see Chapter 1). Next to mapping institutes' intellectual outputs or interaction styles, the main focus will be on answering the theoretical questions how EU think tankers, with their hybrid backgrounds, borrow or differentiate themselves from neighboring domains, whether they have in turn carved out unique professional identities, and how at long last scholars and they themselves assess their performance.



## Chapter 9

# Hybrid Experts: Innovativeness, Independence and Impact in Action

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### Introduction

This penultimate chapter brings the structural patterns of EU think tanks' resources identified in the previous chapters alive. It draws analytically on the coded interview material and links back to the conceptual framework, notably on field isomorphism and hybrid institutional logics at the organizational- and individual levels of analysis. To assess their organizational novelty, professional autonomy as well as significance, the guiding questions are: What do EU think tanks mainly do, and how do they do it? How do their three "I's" from the chapter's title (see Chapter 1) play out in practice? That is, to what extent can the institutes be innovative in terms of ideas or practices? Have EU think tankers forged an own commingled or hybrid professional identity? How do they see - even measure - impact of their work, can we gauge how it is used?

### **Innovation: EU think tanks' intellectual outputs and interaction formats**

As for their counterparts in national settings, EU think tanks' knowledge management and various networking practices attract attention because they come with a promise: their organizational form or formats frequently stand in for "out-of-the-box" thinking or cross-sectoral "multi-stakeholder" networking in European multi-level governance. Unlike their national counterparts, think tanks at EU level also commonly claim they can offer much-needed transnational policy expertise and exchange (see Chapter 1). The 80 field participants interviewed for this project generally agree that publications and events are the two archetypal activities to fulfil these overarching functions. As is shown in Table 15 below, however, a closer look shows EU think tanks' varied intellectual outputs and interaction formats materialize in a myriad of other ways, too. Indeed, institutes use a variety of formats to publicize their work and to interact first and foremost with their core constituencies, each other, or sometimes a wider public.

Others point out that from a regional view, North American and European institutes produce more books or longer reports, whereas think tank-alike entities in the rest of the world have lower in-house research capacity for these (McGann 2016). In a comparative study of German, Danish and UK think tanks, Kelstrup (2016) finds

**Table 15.** Overview of (EU) think tanks’ intellectual outputs and interaction formats

<b>Intellectual outputs</b>	Books (monographs or edited volumes); policy journals; policy reports (or discussion papers); policy briefs (or commentaries); backgrounders (or fact sheets, event write-ups); presentation slides; infographics; websites (or blogs); e-mail newsletters; guest contributions; newspaper op-eds; social media feeds
<b>Interaction formats</b>	Public debates (panel discussions, public lectures or fishbowl conversations); keynote speeches (or seated dinners); conferences (policy summits, barcamps); parliamentary testimony; talkshow or media appearances; trainings (executive education courses, summer schools, political simulation games); expert groups (workshops or seminars, advisory councils or high-level task forces); closed meetings (appointments at public authorities, business briefings or webinars); think tank-, policy- or governance networks; internal team- and staff meetings

that, as of 2012 and controlling for number of full-time staff, UK institutes churn out more reports, stage more events, get more newspaper mentions than counterparts on the continent, confirming a more output-oriented Anglo-Saxon think tank tradition. Medvetz (2012) also observes a change in output orientation away from research to active involvement with the media and 24-7 cable news networks for US think tanks. Boucher (2004:33) finds EU-specific institutes rarely publish books - usually shorter briefings, or longer reports. We know little about EU think tanks’ output portfolios or their interaction styles, let alone about the underlying rationales driving such choices.

*How similar or different are Brussels EU think tanks’ intellectual outputs?*

A general pattern can be discerned from the interviews with Brussels EU think tanks: first, there are systematic differences regarding prioritized outputs between institutes active at EU level which exhibit a more scholarly-, platform- or advocacy emphasis. On a continuum from in-house research to networked knowledge to active advocacy, continental scholarly think tanks such as SWP stress the former; platform think tanks like EPC and FoE crowdsource more content; advocacy tanks prize media visibility. Second, however, at the field level isomorphic pressures towards shorter publication formats can be discerned, as the information load for field participants increases and institutes’ touted potential for complexity reduction in a complicated world is valued.

In essence, academic think tanks like SWP focus on “substance over visibility”: its longer “SWP Studie’ is not something which is hot, which is happening”, its Brussels head explains, even if it also developed shorter formats ”where we’re trying to catch the wind...like ‘Kurz Gesagt’ [translates to ‘in a nutshell’], almost like a blog, where you can react to something which just now happened” (I3-Reljic:26). Still, as noted in literature on think tanks, Germany’s “culture of science” continues to influence its policy institutes (Braml 2006:246, Thunert 2006:208, Kelstrup 2016).

The neighboring country's IFRI also "still believes substance is important...so many of our reports are fairly long", its Brussels leader says, adding "we do not have two-page policy briefs...it's nothing we do on a regular basis. We may do it in the future" (I23-Pertusot:10). GRIP is another academic think tank case for which "publications, certainly, are our core business"; media work is a situative add-on consequence, but not a primary ingredient of its intellectual production: "once we have published, we receive interviews...but the center of our activity is publications" (I40-Santopinto:56). As in the case of Bruegel, another institute prizing in-house production, the interview tellingly took place in front of large bookshelves - a mini-library - showcasing the think tank's latest and cumulative mass of printed publications (a symbolic resource). And as with most other think tanks, IFRI's intellectual musings are "almost entirely available in digital format, with free access for all", a brochure highlights (SC 2013). Organizational online presences have become the main gateway to the actual content.

CEPS, another central and scholarly player in Brussels' think tank landscape, is very differently financed than SWP: its director's motto is "projects have to come first" (I52-Gros:26), as "everything has to be funded by projects" (I51-Barslund:52). Thus, CEPS also finds "publications as outputs matter most" (I1-Blockmans:20), "we always emphasize that it's research at a quasi-academic level" (I43-Incerti:30). Of course, one can distinguish "pure research activities from EU projects [...or] less research-intensive" studies (I39-Valiante:23). Yet even from a managerial perspective - given CEPS' project reliance (see Chapter 6) - "our choice has always been...to say 'Look, research first'", its CEO asserts, "which means above all we invest in people who contribute income. Who can contribute income? Researchers with expertise"; in this view "all the rest is basically overhead...that's where you have your value added, it's not in events, because everybody can organize events" (I45-Lannoo:34). A senior research fellow remarks: "I'm old-fashioned. What I learned over the years is: a good paper gets around...All this going around in circles and meetings is okay...but if you have a number of papers with your name on it...then people take you serious" (I13-Egenhofer:34). CEPS also condenses publications "into short commentaries, no more than 1,000 to 1,500 words, or slightly longer policy briefs" (I1-Blockmans:20). In its annual reports, it boasts: "every year we publish hundreds of commentaries, reports or policy papers, which originate from our strong in-house research team" (SC 2014).

Brussels' platform think tanks also publish things, if at somewhat smaller scale: in 2014, EPC produced 57 publications "on a range of EU and global policy issues",

and FoE similarly averages “over 50 publications a year” (SC 2014). However, to achieve this level of output, they rely more on “guest contributions...We outsource quite a bit”, FoE’s interviewee explains, “and then it’s obviously not the view of FoE but one we consider a valid point of view...The idea is to have a brain bazaar...to give people our platform” (I20-Islam:23). Such content crowdsourcing already relativizes the importance of own - human resource-wise costly - in-house research operations. This is taken a step further in one of the sampled advocacy think tanks interviewed: the Anglo-Saxon think tank Open Europe’s head of the Brussels office readily admits that “press is our number one concern”; unlike others’ research-heavier operations, its theory of change is to play the puck against the boards, so to speak, “because that is how you reach the public, and the public will then push the politicians in a certain direction”; the focus here is on ad hoc, proof point-oriented “hard-hitting research...to influence the debate...trying to get our message out in the media” (I11-Cleppe:10).

Thus, there are clear differences in how EU think tanks pursue their missions. Yet, at the same time, all interviewees’ felt a trend towards shorter formats - similar to what US think tanks have experienced - which rests on the now widespread belief that “people don’t have time to read books in their jobs. They may have time to read two-to-four-pagers” (I41-Missiroli:20). CEPS’ communications head attended a 2014 think tank summit assembled by James McGann in Barcelona at the time of research: “it was attended by most of the important European think tanks, mostly the directors ...one thing that not everyone agreed on but which seemed to be emerging is that the direction things are going you will have to publish less books”; he further elaborates:

*“Chatham House has cut down, it was saying ‘We deliberately...do a tenth of the books we used to do, simply because no one takes the time to read a full book anymore. And the cycle is so fast that a book can be a good display of your expertise, but it’s overkill.’ I guess impact in the future is likely to come more from policy briefs and commentaries. Because these get read, and therefore...may be taken into account.”* (I43-Incerti:12)

The policy brief format itself is a clear case of mimetic - transatlantic - isomorphism: the Heritage Foundation’s strategic communications portray the trigger event behind the product innovation as follows: its founders Paul Weyrich and Edwin Feulner who worked as Congressional staffers got hold of a helpful policy report after (not timely before) an important Senate vote, the story goes; it had been intentionally delayed by the American Enterprise Institute, so as not to influence the voting (Rich 2004: 54); the founding duo was frustrated with “lack of policy-relevant conservative research” and came up with the so-called “briefcase test” for its research products - politicians

“had to be able to take a copy...from their briefcases and read it completely in the 15 minutes journey from Reagan National Airport to Capitol Hill” (O’Connor 2007:11, see Gilroy 2012:32-33, McCombs 1983). The rest is history, as they say: the format’s sleek marketing style was widely imitated, by the likes of Cato Institute as well as Brookings Institution; it has subsequently been similarly adopted by EU think tanks. For example, the academic think tank Egmont’s interviewee says “we have definitely evolved towards producing ever-shorter things...The policy briefs are like the classic four-pager, sometimes they go to eight pages. They’re only distributed electronically and those really get around...if they are short, if they are snappy, they are read” (I42-Biscop:22). As we will see, coercive isomorphic pressures also play a key role here.

This is because consumers of think tanks’ intellectual outputs, notably the EU institutions’ bureaucrats and policy-makers, “they want concrete and down-to-earth”, as SWP’s Brussels head reports (I3-Reljic:66). “I’ve seen it in various policy-makers, sometimes you need to go to a meeting, you don’t know what to say on this”, GGI’s director observes, “but ‘Ah! Fantastic, there’s a two-page brilliant paper on it...you highlight it and then make your position. We’re all human beings, policy-makers too. Sometimes you simply do it to have something to say in a meeting” (I2-Koops:26). Demand-sensitive institutes’ short outputs cater to a desire for complexity reduction: “many issues are highly saturated in the sense that there is so much existing research, it’s not really a problem of knowledge or information”, ECIPE’s director notes (I22-Erixon:68). Yet “the world is complex. [German statesman Hans-Dietrich] Genscher used to say ‘everything is connected to everything’ - ‘Alles hat mit Allem zu tun”” (I3-Reljic:84). This makes think tanks’ real or perceived filtering function attractive. On a more fundamental note, the field’s rising information load leads to a clear case of what can be called the paradox of complexity, as Herbert Simon correctly foresaw:

*“In an information-rich world...a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention and a need to allocate that attention efficiently among the overabundance of information sources that might consume it.” (1971:40-41)*

Think tanks try to be organizations for an information-rich world. Even in an era that predated blogging and twittering, observers pointed to sound bite politics and shorter attention spans (Kirp 1992), “so one cannot help but believe things have worsened since then” (Hird 2009:524). In an alteration of Simon’s insight that “a plentitude of information leads to a poverty of attention”, we can expect rising competition for the latter as “a scarce resource, and those who can distinguish valuable signals from

white noise gain power...Brand names and the ability to bestow an international seal of approval will become more important” (Nye/Keohane 1998:89). As knowledge-intensive actors amidst increased amounts of transnationally available information, EU think tanks risk that sound policy analysis does not reach the ears and eyes of decision-makers where it matters, say at the European Commission; so dissemination and convening activities next to to-the-point formats become ever-more important (see Brooks et al. 2013, Kelstrup 2016). Who still carries briefcases in today’s workplace? Think tanks may increasingly have to pass a “smartphone test”: policy-makers and their aides download PDFs and skim websites in minutes and on screens.

*Which patterns regarding their interaction formats and event styles can we discern?*

Think tanks typically do not limit their work to publishing. They interact beyond this. We tend to think of events as their main - most visible and public - interaction format. A first finding of the interviews, content analysis and embedded fieldwork at CEPS is that although differences persist, there is clear isomorphism towards quite similar-styled seminars or conferences among Brussels EU think tanks; yet, a second finding is that most also engage in a range of meetings and informal exchanges with policy-makers - often less publicity-attracting but equally consequential - to stay on the ball of political discourses, get political access, and symbolic resources associated with it. Thus, they put resources or relational opportunities to use for meeting a dual mission, public in rhetoric but elite in orientation, interacting closest with core constituencies.

The choice of organizing public events or prioritizing informal meetings rests upon a trade-off between public visibility and political access (or potential influence). Again, which priority is set boils down to think tanks’ resources or theory of change. There are differences between more scholarly-, platform- and advocacy think tanks. SWP’s strategy, according to its annual report, is not to “organize any public events with media coverage; we see our comparative advantage in this market in the quality” of research (SC 2014). Its Brussels leader adds: “if we invite people for an exchange, then it is a confidential exchange” (I3-Reljic:36). Thus, in its interaction formats, the publicly funded SWP pointedly prizes political proximity over media visibility.

For other scholarly institutes in Brussels, there are high entry costs in doing successful events: the “events market is crowded”, Egmont’s interviewee notes, “if you want to have people come to your thing, it has to be good, because there is too much going on” (I42-Biscop:22). Then again, “if you do an event, the more public it

is the more branding you get”, GGI’s leader says (I2-Koops:34); most agree that it definitely “helps raise the profile” (I36-Dufour:36). But over the course of the last one and a half decades, “the think tank events market ...became much more crowded...So either one has critical mass, the resources to have high-profile meetings regularly, or you don’t and better do small workshops now and then” (I44-Grevi:24). Both strategies can be observed within the organizational field.

For its identity as a platform think tank, “it’s important that the EPC does a lot of events”, its director stresses (I5-Zuleeg:40). In its own count, it staged 146 of them in the course of 2014 in Brussels, as well as 53 in other EU member states (SC 2014); according to its annual report “half of them were public”, but as its director explains:

*“We do a lot of events, discussions, workshops where we directly interact with policy-makers...There is this closeness to policy-making, we are involved in the process rather than a separate institution...We have unparalleled ability to put an event together within days, if we have to...and we always look for multi-stakeholder angles.”* (I5-Zuleeg:14,22)

Thus, this platform approach tries to mix public publicity with political participation. “Even if we don’t do anything in terms of a task force or a publication”, the director elaborates, “we often work with DGs...over a longer period on particular events, also giving some of the Commissioners a platform in the public arena” (I5-Zuleeg:40). As another platform think tank, FoE also prioritizes events over in-house research. Yet its interviewee was wary of being reduced to “just an event organizer, that is not the case either”; she thinks compared to “CEPS and Bruegel, we are more on the side of EPC which is also very good at bringing people together, also has expertise at home but doesn’t cover the entire world” in its intellectual production (I20-Islam:28).

Self-styled “think and do tank” ECDPM also highlights the platform aspect: “stakeholders in a policy process often tend to speak to certain people, but other people - who could be very important for them to be successful - they don’t invite”, as its director sees it; yet the institutes’ facilitation formats were scaled down as “big meetings...took us a lot of energy and others can do it better” (I17-Engel:10, 17).

US-origin institutes present in Brussels, moulded in an Anglo-Saxon think tank tradition, are often most ambitious in going beyond small seminars towards larger conferences. GMF’s Brussels office is known for convening a “Brussels Forum” on a yearly basis, a high-level “meeting of influential US, European and global political, corporate and intellectual leaders in Brussels” (SC 2014). As a consequence, “we’re rather convening-heavy”, its Brussels leader finds, “it’s sort of our speciality...quite

labor-intensive” (I52-Lesser:12, 39). In 2014, GMF overall “had 4,514 attendees at 272 events from 92 countries” (SC 2014). Its Marshall Memorial Fellowship has a network of over 2,000 alumni inculcated with the value of transtatlantic cooperation; alumna Federica Mogherini became EU high representative on foreign and security policy; and alumnus Emmanuel Macron since turned French president. Carnegie Europe also frequently organizes policy summits for internationally composed audiences: “our events are often focused on trying to ask the hard questions”, its leader declares, “we try not to be too academic and long-winding” (I59-Techau:24).

Next to their predominant focus on research, or projects, the central players Bruegel and CEPS have also taken to regularly hosting events in Brussels or beyond. Bruegel held 79 events at the time of research, welcoming 3,155 attendees (SC 2014). The generalist CEPS “organized over 100 events: seminars, conferences, corporate breakfasts and webinars” (SC 2014). In 2014, it charted new waters in introducing a significant interaction format innovation: its flagship conference “CEPS Ideas Lab” (full disclosure: the author assisted organizing it during his visiting fellowship there) in April 2014 introduced the concept of “an innovation platform of exchange and co-creation bringing together national think tanks across Europe, representatives of national governments, businesses, NGOs and European institutions” (SC 2014). Over 500 participants took part in “debates across ten thematic streams, the labs. The 30 debates” passed into “face-offs”, then a plenary session (SC 2018). This “event of events” for CEPS was a meta-conference for the organizational field’s participants.

It was a major investment for the project-reliant generalist EU think tank. “It has taken a lot out of the team...it’s a big investment”, CEPS’ head of corporate and external relations acknowledges after the conference, but “my feeling is corporations liked it a lot. From academics, we need to see. The higher political representatives... were also much in favor and said ‘You need to do this again’” (I32-Born-Sirkel:31). In fact, it has been repeated on a yearly basis - with 600 participants in 2015; 700 in 2016; by 2017 it had “become one of the main events on the Brussels calendar”; and attracted Commission president Juncker plus 1,050 participants in 2018 (SC 2018). Aside from formal think tank networks such as Brussels Think Tank Dialogue (see Chapter 8), CEPS thereby successfully recast its central top dog status in the field:

*“The main lesson for us is that we need to do this, from time to time, just for PR reasons, just to get ourselves more on the map. And that sometimes we need to make compromises with our focus on research, we need to invest into outreach, just to be known [...even if] these events imply a lot of operational costs, operational risks as well.” (I45-Lannoo:36)*



These words by CEPS' CEO are echoed by a senior research fellow who spent two decades at the think tank: "I sense the buzz of activity there - the number of people - meant it was a really good party (laughs), and had a bit of a sparkle on the PR side", he remarks, "branding in terms of CEPS having a broad landscape of competences, which no other think tank in Brussels can do...was very positive" (I46-Emerson:56). But the innovation slogan may have raised unrealistic expectations in his assessment:

*"The rethoric was very high on innovation and new ideas, that this conference would somehow result in a massive outpour of creativity...from the ideas labs, the test tubes out of which would come a new formula. Frankly speaking, we live in Brussels, there are about ten seminars per week at different institutions on different topics...This Ideas Lab just happened to have 30 of them in the same place at the same time."* (I46-Emerson:56)

Of course, as for other EU think tanks, CEPS' interaction format portfolio also includes informal exchanges and off-the-record meetings with elites at the EU level: it regularly invites members of the EU institutions to its Place du Congrès 1 premises "or, conversely, we go to their offices to discuss in private - behind closed doors - or ...in corridors, or in the reception circuit...We also talk with them on social occasions, and hear their general worries, or concerns, or desires" (I1-Blockmans:34). Similarly, CEPS' corporate members "have the possibility to just stop by, to say 'I want to know about these things you are doing, what you think' ...to be briefed" (I39-Valiante:23).

The interviewee of the scholarly Egmont raises similar points: "Sometimes I'm invited to have lunch with people in the Commission or in the EEAS, you know, 'I want to pick your brain a bit'"; in inviting public officials, he notes, the policy is:

*"We always say 'Look, you're not here because you're a representative of France or the Commission, but we invited you as a person, so there's no need to defend the institution'. If it works, if people get into brainstorming mode, then that's very productive...to enrich our thinking. And I think people participating also take things from that."* (I42-Biscop:20)

Open Europe's interviewee is torn as to whether events constitute "best bang for the buck" for reaching its advocacy goals: "It's a very interesting question, but I am not sure I have the right answer"; he recalls having lunch with someone from the New Direction Foundation and he "didn't believe in events...you have few people, it's better to invest your time and money in coming up with some interesting news and pushing it into a newspaper so a lot of people can read it" (I11-Cleppe:28). However, in an interesting twist to the discussed complexity reduction theme for publications, Open Europe's Brussels office head also believes that "we are going through a kind of information overkill. And when you actually sit down for one and a half hours and

listen - with or without checking your smartphone all the time - it's a different way of experiencing ideas" (I11:28). If afforded a chance, he also "very much believe[s] in personal meetings, convincing people by talking to them" (I11:30). ESI's Brussels representative, too, finds "a busy politician is best reached in a personal meeting where you try, in half an hour, to convince him [or her] of a recommendation" (I12-Stiglmyer:28); "informal avenues are more likely to be successful if you want to inject a particular idea into policy-making", IFRI's leader agrees (I23-Pertusot:42).

We have seen that EU think tanks, small to large, do much more than publish. The interaction repertoire ranges from informal meet-ups to large-scale conferences. Yet their isomorphic - often similar-styled - seminars and workshops are the most conspicuous format to mingle with core constituencies. These results largely confirm, update and qualitatively triangulate Boucher's observation, over a decade ago, that "seminars and conferences form the backbone of discussion and dissemination work" of EU-gearred institutes (2004:30). Perez (2014:154), in a paper based on a curious sample of "EU think tanks" - including a network, TEPSA, but not GRIP or PLS - shows that as of 2012 EU officials of the Commission or European Parliament make up the most frequent speaker type. She sees their "fora as transaction cost reducers" and agrees with Stone's earlier description of institutes providing a "neutral territory where people feel comfortable and have an opportunity to mingle" (Stone 1996:126).

Perez (2014) sees a need to study if institutes' intermediary role is of particular relevance at transnational level, were - as Stone points out - public opinion formation is dispersed and participation in policy-making resource-intensive (2008:32). Finally, regarding European institutes' public- or elite orientation, spatially speaking they "rarely venture outside national parallels to, for instance, the Washington 'beltway' or Parisian 'boulevard périphérique'", or Brussels for that matter, and are often not as open or accessible as their own rhetoric suggests (Stone 2007:268). Boucher equally gets the impression of a "fairly narrow circle of policy- or decision-making elites in their vicinity" which institutes in Brussels engage with "much more than with less conventional types of actors or even the general public" (2004:32). This is seen critically by some interviewed civil society representatives, such as the European Movement International's leader (see I76-Pinto:26-28); it has led some to speak of a "public sphere as 'missing link'" (Dialer/Füricht-Fiegl 2014). Yet is it realistic to expect comprehensive public outreach of think tanks active at the EU level? And, more fundamentally, how innovative can they truly be as thinkers and as conveners?

### *So what for innovation?*

Politicians, policy-makers, businesspeople, journalists, academics and the interested public often look to think tanks for good ideas, debate or for meeting relevant people. The EU level is no exception, and think tanks play a part in raising high expectations: ICG, for instance, proclaims it “pulls together some of the brightest, most engaging minds from around the world to tackle some of the most complex issues of our time” (SC 2014). Such high-praise rethoric around innovation is the rule. Creativity is even elevated as a definitional criterion for the label by GGI’s director, to whom “coming up with a mix of new, innovative ideas...that, in a nutshell, is a think tank” (I2-Koops:10). Yet, as we saw in the case of CEPS’ Ideas Lab, new interaction styles can be process- next to ideational innovations: “what we’re trying to do is to structure the debate, to bring in different voices”, as a CEPS unit head puts it (I1-Blockmans:48).

Let us briefly unpack the “innovation” concept applied to the field. Unlike in a for-profit environment, EPC’s director finds it “very difficult to really identify what innovation is in this context” (I5-Zuleeg:38). To ECIPE’s director, “it’s impossible to be innovative in everything you do. That is imposing impossible standards on think tanks” (I22-Erixon:48). An interviewed Commission official “wouldn’t associate the word ‘think tank’ with innovative, to be clear” (I24-Müller:30). And yet, “think tanks often have the ambition - stated like this or differently - to ‘think outside the box’”, Boucher observes from his job at a European foundation (I26:26); his thesis is that:

*“Think tanks cannot be that creative because there is a very thin line between being sufficiently creative - or perceived to be creative - to get policy-makers and the media interested and funders exited, but you can’t be too radical, because then you’re seen as a fun, interesting, whacky place, but you are not a credible think tank.” (I26-Boucher:28)*

It helps to conceptually separate innovations from inventions: the former “improve on existing ways...of doing things, whereas inventions change the way things are done” (Padgett/Powell 2012:5). Innovation research reveals that recombinatory innovation (see Chapter 2) is persistently found at margins, not at the center of different sectors. EU think tanks’ ties (see Chapter 8) place many of them at high risk to be innovative, in this view. But innovation also occurs from organizations that have the stomach to take risks (Bess/Dee 2008), to move outside environmental expectations, so to speak successfully ignoring coercive isomorphism. To illustrate, Stanford University can try to completely reinvent its library, whereas a provincial college would raise more eyebrows than applause (and cannot escape its “iron cage”, DiMaggio/Powell 1983).

CEPS had the guts to pull off a “meta-conferences” for EU think tanks with its Ideas Lab as a central field player; a smaller, lesser known peripheral institute might have encountered incomprehension if it were to attempt this, or a severe lack of interest.

As a CEPS interviewee finds, next to in-house research a think tank “relies on its network and ideas that you can tap from elsewhere as well in order to be an incubator of ideas, which then hopefully results in...new avenues for thinking” (I1-Blockmans:48). “Fresh thinking, you can look at it in two ways”, Carnegie Europe’s leader says, “concrete, even technical ideas...on how to resolve a very specific issue - that’s innovation in a narrow sense. Or you can define innovation in a wider sense, a way of thinking about stuff...in a broader and perhaps more philosophical way” (I59-Techau:24). In practice, innovation is a tall order for any sector (Boucher 2004:29). Most interviewed EU think tankers were quick to acknowledge practical limitations.

The most productive interview question for elaborations on this was as follows: “Many critics say ‘Well, the think tanks don’t really think! What they do is recycle the same old policy ideas over and over, essentially selling old wine in new bottles’. How would you react to this?” The answers to this open-ended but provocative item were mostly both clever and telling: “My first reaction is: old wine is often the best”, ECDPM’s director laughs; “to a large degree they’re right”, he adds, elaborating that:

*“Our world is built on repetition of ideas, there is lots of overlap...What I learned from innovation research is it’s only five percent new, 95 percent is what people do anyway, but [now] they do it slightly differently...I am not one of those who say the idea has to be original and never thought of. In the face of history, that’s ridiculous.” (I17-Engel:26, 32)*

In this line of thought, there lies recombinatory potential in recycling existing ideas. New mixes become possible by matching old parts in new ways, as in doing jigsaws. Authors on recombinant innovation also emphasize effects of community beyond our frequent image of the lonely genius, of collaboration rather than “soloism”, a view in which innovators are not smarter, but better connected (see Kleiner 2004). This fits well with how think tankers experience their work: rather than “capturing the political imagination” (Stone 1996) with inventive visions, they see added value in shaping or adapting ideas and agendas. “One cannot always reinvent the wheel” (I1-Blockmans:48), a CEPS unit head says; Bruegel’s secretary general agrees “it is a mistaken idea to think that the role of think tanks is only to come up with new ideas. There really aren’t that many new ideas left, and that might not be what the policy environment needs. My observation...is policy ideas kind of fall out of the zeitgeist”

(I19-Dann:42). In “the example of old wine in new bottles”, EPC’s director finds, “there is a justification for doing that...repackaging, relaunching...is not negative” (I5-Zuleeg:38); another interviewed wine connoisseur (in a figurative sense) sums up: “sometimes fresh wine is not the best, old wine is more serious” (I29-de Marcilly:28).

Open Europe’s Brussels leader invokes Hayek’s (1949) views on intellectuals: “think tanks are second-hand dealers in ideas. There is a truth to it” (I11-Cleppe:26). For an SWP researcher who pursued her PhD on the side of Brussels think tank life, “it is very rare that a researcher or person in general develops completely new ideas”; like many graduate students are told, “if you say so, often you’re not knowledgeable about what has been written or said before” (I16-Lauenroth:24). SWP director Volker Perthes finds a think tank “has to have...an ‘Irritationsfunktion’, you have to irritate a bit political mainstream thinking”, but within bounds of what is acceptable (I3-Reljic:40). E3G’s interviewee also elaborates recombinatory innovation in detail:

*“It’s recycling from another sector, not necessarily promoting a same idea over and over, but just looking at what works and what hasn’t worked. It can be looking at other sectors, other geographies, or just trying to fix what didn’t work at a previous time. From an advocacy point of view, it makes sense because it makes it easier to sell an argument...if there is experience on it...It would be silly not to deal with old ideas.”* (I36-Dufour:52)

In practice, this can mean “looking for trans-border solutions on many issues”, as EWI’s interviewee says; it runs an own “policy innovation unit, to look at new issues...or explore the possibility for new avenues” (I25-Mäder-Metcalf:14, 22). ESI’s fieldwork approach is also noteworthy in its attempt to escape the elite bubble: “we really try to do research on the ground”, its Brussels leader declares, whereas at many think tanks “people sit in their institute, speak the local language, read the newspapers and, based on that, write reports. We don’t want that. We want to...speak to real people and see what normal citizens say about issues” (I12-Stiglmayer:24). In convincing a large Austrian foundation of this approach, among other constituencies, ESI has taken to produce documentaries next to writing policy reports and meeting decision-makers in Brussels and beyond, in a case of process and product innovation.

Maybe context conversion expresses recombinant innovation mechanisms best: rather than being isolated analysts - akin to the ivory tower image of independent academics - EU think tankers can innovate through open-minded, given-and-take, symbiotic relations with core constituencies, reminiscent of Granovetter’s (1973) weak tie argument; there is no automatism of capitalizing on relational opportunities (see Chapter 8); often, it can lead to embedded conformity, at times to novel agency.

## Independence: EU think tanks' hybrid sectoral borrowing and distancing

EU think tanks do not only face frequent public accountability questions related to financial independence, or how their funding situation affects their work. It is also debated to what extent their lot actually inhabits an own field - the overarching conclusion to which this dissertation points - or, as Medvetz argues for US institutes, not truly “organizations of a...discrete ‘type’, but a constitutively blurry network” of actors (2012:23) hanging loosely between the societal spheres of academia, politics, business and media. At the organizational level, then, the issue is to what degree the institutes do manage to wield relative autonomy. At individual level, this translates to the question of whether the EU think tankers are merely scholars wearing a different hat, political “men of conviction” outside the state, lobbyists in disguise, journalists in a different guise - or something altogether different, namely a selfmade profession.

Table 16 roughly sorts the potential activities think tanks can engage in at EU level (or elsewhere) by sectors and institutional logics they would be associated with.

**Table 16.** Institutional logic-related activities, outputs and roles of (EU) think tanks

Logic	(EU) think tank activity	Output example	Illustrative role	Lead role
Academia	• engage in policy research and analysis	• discussion papers	• “researcher”	“expert”
	• master technical data processing tasks	• statistical datasets	• “data scientist”	
	• take stock of existing policy expertise	• books or web archives	• “reservoir”	
	• assess or compare policy alternatives	• policy- or country reports	• “analyst”	
	• monitor policy implementation process	• evaluation projects	• “consultant”	
Politics	• issue policy recommendations or options	• policy briefs	• “advisor”	“advocate”
	• offer venue of informal political exchange	• backchannel diplomacy	• “diplomat”	
	• backup pre-held views or diffuse agendas	• policy transfer processes	• “legitimizer”	
	• advocate principled beliefs or worldviews	• public campaigns	• “campaigner”	
	• develop political programs and fellowship	• political platforms	• “ideologue”	
Business	• assess market- and political opportunities	• brainstorming sessions	• “innovator”	“entrepreneur”
	• engage in forward thinking or forecasting	• scenario workshops	• “visionary”	
	• offer third-party contract research services	• research projects	• “contractor”	
	• brief businesses or do executive education	• business breakfasts	• “instructor”	
	• back industry stances on pending decisions	• closed meetings	• “lobbyist”	
Media	• create counter-expertise for policy debates	• media campaigns	• “spin doctor”	“pundit”
	• explain research or react to current events	• newspaper op-eds	• “commentator”	
	• give interviews, offer quotable sound bites	• talk-show appearances	• “interviewee”	
	• provide a platform for external expertise	• policy journals or blogs	• “editor”	
	• organize public debates on ongoing issues	• panel discussions	• “moderator”	
Generic	• enable topical and professional networking	• policy summits	• “convener”	“broker”
	• enable cross-sectoral dialogue or solutions	• high-level task forces	• “networker”	
	• train employees, support staff development	• brown bag lunches	• “employer”	
	• act as career springboard or talent pipeline	• intern- or fellowships	• “recruiter”	

Table 16 also gives publication or convening output examples, tentative role headings and corresponding lead roles think tankers cast themselves in. Based on the extensive interviews conducted and coded for this dissertation, this is inspired by Medvetz' (2007, 2009, 2012) hitherto unique work on how US think tankers make sense and talk about their ambiguous roles. He finds simultaneous institutional borrowing and differentiation from the "anchoring institutions of academics, politics, business and journalism" (2007:24), that "merging disparate styles is a ubiquitous theme" in think tanker discourse - captured by the metaphor of a "vaudeville act" (2009:556) – which led to mixed "unique professional rules of functioning" for the US field (2012:132).

So far there has been no in-depth examination of EU think tankers in this sense: To what extent do they portray themselves as academic experts or political advocates, as idea entrepreneurs or media pundits? Do their financial and human resource mixes translate into patterned public personas, who selectively adopt or even blend roles? Put differently, how do they verbalize relations with parenting or neighboring sectors, invoking their symbolic resources? And "so what" for their professional autonomy? On one hand, pronounced public- or private resource dependencies (see Chapter 6) would lead us to expect isomorphic identities to the predominant funding stakeholder - that is, talking like a bureaucrat, or thinking like businesspeople. On the other hand, however, the EU level's many access points or mixed funding of institutes like CEPS might enable similarly amalgamated identities, mastering and juggling various logics.

For the US, Medvetz convincingly shows how "hybridity of the policy expert's professional identity has its analogues at higher levels of social organization" (2007:24), but unfortunately he refrains from systematically connecting this to the conceptual approach of institutional logics beyond using Bourdieusian vocabulary (see Chapter 2). Next to his account of think tankers' relations with the four sectors, he cautions - in line with his hybridity point - that disentangling roles is valuable but potentially deceptive since in practice think tankers' role enactment, or indeed their professional ethos, is built on the goal of mastering or juggling all four sectoral styles (2009:556). Upon a closer look, he finds what may at first appear as an (equal) "quadruple bind" turns out to have a "bipolar structure: mastering opposition between intellectual credibility on the one side and temporal power on the other" (2009:557). As we will see, many EU think tankers are similarly torn between the academic and political world, and make references to business or media idioms, too. As in the US, the think tankers' profession and field is increasingly taken for granted.

*How do EU think tankers draw on or dissociate themselves from academia?*

In his analysis of US think tankers in action, Medvetz has shown how their stance towards academic realms tends to be one of acute ambivalence (2009:558), a “special relationship” where institutes’ professionals both heavily draw on symbolic resources afforded by academic credentials and feel an inner need to stress how differently they operate compared to the ambition or deficits of “traditional” academia as we know it. Similar dynamics play out in EU think tanks’ field, but a continental, more scholarly think tank tradition (Kelstrup 2016) moderates to which extent being “too scholarly” is seen as a flaw (see Medvetz 2012:156). While there is strong isomorphic pressure to not too obviously deviate from - at least rhetorically - accepted norms of scholarly conduct, we again see differences between scholarly-, platform- or advocacy think tanks active in the front region of the organizational field, the EU hothouse Brussels.

SWP serves as a case in point for how scholarly think tanks portray themselves as deeply moulded by the institutional logic of academia: as explained, publications rather than events are its principal activity, and the conviction prevails that “a good paper has to rely on empirical data, has to take into account even opinions you don’t like”, SWP’s Brussels head finds, “if you come to a conclusion which is not of your liking, you have to be frank enough to say ‘This is also a possibility’” (I3-Reljic:56). The three SWP interviewees do not tire to stress its “detailed internal peer-review” (I16-Lauenroth:17); that all outputs “undergo strict peer review, quality review” (I3-Reljic:42). In its strategic communications, SWP highlights it was “evaluated by the German Council of Science and Humanities” (SC 2014, see Wissenschaftsrat 2006:47), in a clear case of citing a reputed, in this case national, stamp of approval.

Next to an internal feedback culture, akin to how graduate schools and faculties are supposed to work, SWP think tankers however also stress they do not research for research’s sake and seek to ensure political relevance: “we have to explain inside the house why something is relevant” (I16-Lauenroth:14). For instance, “studying the effects of the French revolution on eighteenth century Italy, it would be hard to convince your peers that this is really of political relevance today” (I10-Brozus:16). Thus, strong leanings towards scholarly sensitivity of SWP experts, many of whom hold PhDs (see Chapter 7), are infused with an urgent sense for political relevancy.

It is hard to miss intensive use of academic vocabulary talking to think tankers. To illustrate, ECIA’s staff “regularly engages in public lectures” (SC 2014); Egmont runs a “peer-reviewed journal” in a “spirit of total academic freedom” (SC 2014);



EIPA organizes “summer schools”, has a “library specializing in publications on EU policies” (SC 2014); RAND Europe partners with University of Cambridge for a “Science Festival” (SC 2015) and RAND Corporation has its own “Pardee Graduate School” where its Brussels leader teaches as so-called “professor” (I35-Hoorens:19).

In fact, Weaver’s (1989) catchword of a “university without students” (see Tolchin 1983), much-used in the think tank literature to capture their alleged essence, was brought up frequently by the think tankers themselves: “the good old one is it’s a university without students” (I2-Koops:10), or - in a telling alteration - rather a “university without teaching”, a CEPS expert states more precisely (I47-Behrens:10). Because “actually we do have students”, one senior CEPS fellow remarks as he is interviewed during the author’s CEPS-embedded fieldwork, noting “you’re placed at CEPS, and we have twenty PhD students, of which you are one!” (I46-Emerson:16).

While EU think tankers stress their roles as “researcher”, “analyst” or “expert”, there is considerable agreement that ideal think tankers transcend an academic logic:

*“You get rid of the jargon and of all the things that make us good academics, right? ‘On one hand, on the other’, ‘Let’s have seven arguments to prove a point’, ‘Let’s make sure we show all references, read all material’...All of this is useless in the think tank world. You need to be able to summarize it on a beer mat, or two pages maximum, to get through to policy-makers. But: you have to know the issue like an academic!” (I2-Koops:26)*

Think tankers, in this vein, can take on a “difficult topic, boring topic, and make it uninteresting” (I57-Pelkmans:54). For academics, this might well amount to “a kind of vulgarization of academic knowledge for policy digestion, putting it in brutal terms” (I38-Schrefler:11). Serving as “really a bridge between academia and policy-making” is a frequently repeated rationalized myth (see Stone 2007) in EU think tanks’ field. It is understood by CEPS’ head of the economic policy unit as a two-way rather than one-way street: “we play a key role not only in putting in easier words the messages coming out of academic work, but also contribute to and support the academic work” (I48-Alcidi:34). This amounts to a double translation- as well as grounding function. Like Bruegel’s interviewee (I19-Dann:48), she cites the 2008 financial crisis as a proof point for think tanks’ supplementary or even academia-correcting function: it “represented a crisis of the main paradigm used in economics...Was academia really useful? The think tanks said ‘We are close to policy-making, we are in real life, so we’re the ones who can really support policy-making’” (I48-Alcidi:28). In this sense, Bruegel too “had a very good crisis” as “interest in what we did, how we responded to what was going on...just bloomed” (I19-Dann:48, see Coman 2018, Chapter 5).

A think tank “is not theory-producing...we are looking into what’s going on out there in reality” (I3-Reljic:28). In this much-invoked demarcation from ivory tower clichés, a “university teacher doesn’t have to talk to anyone, he reads books and writes a new book - but a think tanker is part of the debate” (I10-Brozus:14). A CEPS fellow adds:

*“Most issues you discuss in a think tank are not discussed in textbooks, or in academia. I feel this when I speak with professors. Sometimes they live in a world that doesn’t exist! They don’t know how it works in practice...But you need to master the practice, to talk with practitioners - it’s a know-how you don’t find in books.”* (I39-Valiante:17)

Think tankers, by extension, also “need to be more diplomatic...you cannot be an extremist” in the sense of writing up and aggressively communicating ideas that are radically different from the political status quo (I39:21). Especially at CEPS, a unit head elaborates, “you’re essentially demand-driven...Academia has the freedom to do basic research...What a think tank proposes is a new solution to a problem that is already there” (I38-Schrefler:11). Think tanks are “boundedly rational. It starts from the real world...what policy-makers feed in...is our starting point” (I7-Vanhercke:36). A catchy summary would be “the think tank is called upon to be as bold as possible within the limit of being realistic. This is the role of the think tank” (I33-Allio:55).

A CEPS colleague finds that this “takes a certain mentality”, namely that “you want to publish - but not to win the Nobel Prize. That’s another track. You need good analysts, with a fine, subtle pen - yet these don’t necessarily want to be famous academics. Of course, they’re always in this tension”; again, Brookings Institution is invoked as an exemplary institute that managed to attract experienced analysts “who could really write, really bridge between academia and policy” (I57-Pelkmans:16). “Unlike research organizations or universities, it’s focused on policy” (I20-Islam:10). Plus, ECDPM stresses, “mastering the practice” often includes going beyond policy, and gaining “a keen sense of the challenges of the policy-to-practice link” (SC 2016).

We have seen how academic credentials are used to signal seriousness, bestow credibility and give weight to policy ideas or recommendations (see Chapter 7, Stone 2007:275). At the same time, think tankers frequently have a latent or open disdain for how “traditional” academia is perceived to (mal)function, mirrored by academics’ contempt of the think tankers not living up to being “real academics”. For example:

*“Among economists, it’s quickly ‘Woah, the economics from a think tank, that’s not really economics, doesn’t get published in the American Economics Review.’ Well of course not ...because then it’s useless. Rather than being use-ful, it turns use-less. That doesn’t mean [journal] articles are useless in general, but they are useless for this!”* (I57-Pelkmans:16)

The advocacy think tank Open Europe's leader finds even harsher words to criticize what he sees as public funding-induced excesses: "A lot of economics, these papers, they're out of control", for him, "they lost any touch with the real world, they are not doing their job"; interestingly, his proof point would be that "no private donor would ever pay for what they're doing at the university. Not because it's something that is not going to be valuable, it has mainly to do with the fact that universities are almost completely publicly funded that you have these kinds of excesses" (I11-Cleppe:54). ECIPE's director strikes a more moderate note, in that "one of the legs is in academic life, in research, if you work in a think tank you need to understand the virtues and cultures of academic discourse" (I22-Erixon:14). Nevertheless, several interviewees say that adverse incentive systems in academia led to a desire to part with academia.

Think tankers from scholarly institutes regularly highlight "I have an academic background, I'm still with one foot in academia", often elaborating along these lines:

*"Writing...peer-reviewed articles is a routine that is not necessarily fulfilling. It's nice to see your name quoted in another person's article or book. It doesn't necessarily fulfil you with the feeling that what you proposed as an idea or as analysis makes a difference in the real world...Research outputs have to matter for society!"* (I1-Blockmans:52, 74)

Similar to this CEPS unit head and part-time university professor, GGI's leader says "I love my academic work, I love theorizing...but it's a bit self-absorbed...and I like jumping between different spheres" (I2-Koops:18). "I liked doing a PhD", ECDPM's director agrees, "I love research...But I hate not being practical. One of the reasons I left the university was that...people said 'You are too practical', and I said 'Well, I take that as a compliment. But if that's not what the university wants, then maybe I should do something else'" (I17-Engel:24). "At a certain moment when you do research in a university", another interviewee brings up a similar epiphany situation, "you ask yourself 'How am I going to use my research skills?'" with a practical or a social commitment, she argues, a think tank becomes attractive as "this is a place where you can use your research skills within a social commitment" (I66-Jepsen:23).

Vice versa, another EU think tanker makes plain, "if a scholar wants to do real academic research, nothing stops him [or her] from going to the academic world" (I15-Giuli:12). Asked directly if they view themselves as an academic, most exclaim "I don't consider myself an academic, that's for sure!" (I23-Pertusot:14). Scholarly think tank interviewees' answers are more nuanced: Egmont's interviewee likes to "play in both worlds...There is a bit of a false, an artificial divide between the two"

(I42-Biscop:19). ECIA's leader similarly believes that "as academics, we ought to be public intellectuals...we have, as specialists...a moral if not a political duty to engage, to contribute, to give back" to the public (I4-Teti:24) - noblesse oblige, so to speak. This image of think tankers as highly educated and yet practical action-minded professionals is perceived to be in high demand on the part of the media and politics:

*"The attitude of academics sometimes is 'I couldn't possibly go on the radio! Because what can you say in thirty seconds? My research is so complex'...When you say 'I'm an academic', you get this glazed-over look from policy-makers who say 'Oh, we're going to get another disposition' [...whereas] we try to respond to the needs."* (I4-Teti:14, 20, 34)

Carnegie Europe's Brussels leader also remarks that "the kind of shy academic who is a genius in his field but finds it awkward to talk about it...is uneasy about interviews with the media, or will just not touch social media whatsoever - because it's evil - is not [the type of person] I need", he says, which would rather be someone who is "a content producer first, but...also a comms person. Not everyone needs to be a genius, to go out there full time and with gusto, but you need [to be] at least not reluctant to do it" (I59-Techau:24). In this view, a willingness to cross over is a must.

Next to transcending "academically spoilt" sectoral fears of contact, this ideal-typical image goes, think tankers are functionally more versatile beyond research too, often in line with their seniority and not categorically unlike academics' experiences: "at the beginning I could really concentrate on more academic work", an SWP expert reports, "but over time, when you develop competence...you get more involved"; the result is a "simple equation: you have less time for more traditional academic work, you do more consulting, talking to people, organizing conferences" (I10-Brozus:24). As Egmont's interviewee puts it, "after the PhD you have no more time for research. Somehow all your time disappears doing other things" (I42-Biscop:12). In fact, EPC's director agrees, "a large part of my day is about connecting people...Whether that's members, stakeholders, going to debates...that's probably 90 percent of my normal working day"; for him, this means that "writing and some of the background work, I usually do that at night, because that's when I have the time to do it" (I5-Zuleeg:60).

EU think tankers do not tire to stress a comparative advantage over traditional academia. But it is not homogenous or static: as a CEPS interviewee observes there is a general "realization that research outputs have to matter for society"; in his view, academia "need not necessarily compete with think tanks...But it could, in domains where they overlap" (I1-Blockmans:74, see Drezner 2015:643 and Pautz 2011:423).

*How do EU think tankers borrow or stand back from the political sphere?*

We have seen that EU think tankers both seek to behave as “experts”, invoking their academic credentials, all the while insisting that they are no ivory tower scholars, out of touch and out of synch with policy-making realities; instead, political proximity or a role of acting like a political “advocate” is repeatedly cited as integral to their jobs. Akin to the dictum that “science has no purchase over politics unless it also speaks to the interests of those who operate in that realm” (Hall 1989:391), the political sphere attains nearly equal importance as the field of academia for Brussels think tankers. While this is similar to what Medvetz (2009, 2012) describes for US think tankers’ role of “political aides”, EU think tankers are arguably even more isomorphic with a public sector (or EU) logic, given their comparatively higher share of public funding. At EU level, what Medvetz calls a “certain self-subordination to political demand” (2012:143) translates into a sort of anticipatory obedience or genuine pro-EU outlook.

To illustrate, interviewees of the centrally located institute CEPS both highlight non-partisanship and a generally Europeanist approach: as in other institutes’ case, a “rule we have in the house is that there is no CEPS view” (I48-Alcidi:25). However:

*“The general mission of CEPS is Europe... so you are to some extent pro-European... Why do you come to CEPS? Because you care about Europe, you care about European issues. As long as you move within this parameter, it’s absolutely fine.” (I39-Valiante:15)*

This organizational stance of staying above the daily political rough-and-tumble is common among scholarly or platform think tanks as a way to illustrate independence. GMF’s Brussels head also stresses “we do not have a house line”, yet its *raison d’être* is “creating a sort of mood or vibe about...transatlantic cooperation” (I53-Lesser:14). “What we do is always as an individual”, an SWP interviewee says, “there is no such thing as a joint SWP opinion” (I16-Lauenroth:34). Even the advocacy-oriented Open Europe, on its website, says it is “a non-partisan and independent policy think tank” (SC 2015). Its Brussels head does, however, stress “we have been campaigning quite a bit in the past... trying to influence the debate”, mind you as an organization (I11-Cleppe:10). In short, EU think tanks of all types walk a thin line between being viewed as remaining above the political fray and influencing policy-making debates.

SWP’s Brussels leader sees think tankers’ struggle for political proximity and relative remoteness (rather than aloofness) from those with political power as follows, drawing on the metaphors of a medieval court jester or contemporary shadow boxer:

*“I see think tanks as court jesters, Hofnarren (laughs), in a positive and negative sense. A Hofnarr, if he is intelligent, can provide a mirror to rulers, tell them what they really are. But it takes an awful lot of talent to be humorous and honest. So many are simply boring ...Or you can try to be a shadow boxer, this sparring partner in the ring, where you don't really hit your opponent but indicate with your fist where his weak point is. This irritating function makes you valuable...by not being afraid to irritate the powerful” (I3-Reljic:36)*

The modern-day “rulers” EU think tankers in Brussels are most closely in contact with are EU officials, next to member state policy-makers and other IO bureaucrats. “When we have done task force, I cannot remember a single time when we couldn't involve the Commission”, EPC's director proudly invokes its political access and the symbolic resources that come with such partnering up with politics (I5-Zuleeg:38). Many other EU think tanks prominently signal their partnerships or projects awarded by esteemed international organizations like the EU institutions in their strategic communications material: IEEP has “many projects funded by the Commission” (SC 2014), for instance, and “CEPS also goes for [its] tenders“ (I32-Born-Sirkel:32), even if “project-handlers...are not necessarily top policy-makers” (I1-Blockmans:38).

Endorsements of high-level politicians are another valued symbolic currency. For example, José Manuel Barroso, Commission president at the time of research, is quoted as praising EPC's “important contribution to an open and dynamic debate in Europe” in its annual report (SC 2014); he is depicted lavishing even more praise on Lisbon Council as “a valuable partner, an ambassador also in pushing for a smart, sustainable, inclusive...and reformed European economy fit for the globalized world” in the institute's annual report that year, in which his European Council counterpart Herman van Rompuy is also quoted next to him applauding that “few think tanks in Brussels have as strong a focus on innovation as Lisbon Council” (SC 2014).

After his Council presidency, van Rompuy has since become EPC's president. Such international stamps of approval may in no small part play a role for the symbolic resources and fundraising successes of the Lisbon Council, EPC and other notably Brussels EU think tanks. But while they can capitalize on political proximity, being seen as “too close for comfort” (I57-Pelkmans:44) can bear reputational risks. However, especially small institutes like PLS stand to gain from political association. Its director calls the Commission “more than a target audience – they are partners”:

*“When I say ‘partner’ it means we need information from...the Commission ...But we also want to influence European decisions, to inform the Commission. We have individual contacts with European civil servants...with persons from...different EU institutions, to exchange, and to be the place where the dialogue can be organized .” (I34-Stokkink:32)*

The last point of staging a dialogue for political stakeholders outside their often more rigid bureaucratic working environments is highlighted by several other interviewees. It is what led EWI's Brussels leader, an ambassador-at-loan to EWI seconded from Germany's ministry of foreign affairs, to become fascinated with think tanks, to see "what you can achieve...which you cannot - or achieve differently - in a government organization"; in her assessment "one of the assets of a think tank...is the amount of flexibility, the amount of creativity you can have - fewer rules, less red tape" (I25-Mäder-Metcalf:12). Open Europe's leader prizes its allegedly free-minded reform-the-EU stance but distances himself from acting just like political aides: their impact, in his view, is often a "misconception", which he elaborates in the following terms:

*"If you're in the heart of politics, of power, you have surprisingly little wiggle room. You have limits of political correctness, of the coalition deal, of what your..party allows. You can't just go out and say anything. You have power, a little bit. In a think tank...you have zero direct power, but a lot of intellectual freedom to give your opinion."* (I11-Cleppe:24)

Pressed as to how far this applies to a business-funded advocacy tank, his stance on independence was that "we're not hired by our donors to comment on how they look, we're hired by them to comment on how the EU looks...it is not the goal in the first place, to be independent of our donors, we have to be independent in commenting on the EU" (I11:18). Thus, private capture - uncritically adopting businesses' logic and aligning with their interests - is much less a concern than public sector capture here.

ICG sees an important function of what we could call disintermediation in its or other institutes' informational yet politically-g geared dual role as expert-advocates:

*"Our work can be thought of as short-circuiting traditional lines of communication to policy-makers. The information-gathering apparatus of a government...or large IO is often a cumbersome, pyramid structure of authority...If someone working at an embassy...learns some critical bit of knowledge, he can tell that to his ambassador [who] can send it back home...where it is digested by desk officers and senior staff until, maybe, it gets kicked up to a deputy minister or the foreign minister herself...ICG provides information directly to mid-and top-level decision-makers...[It] cuts out the middle men."* (SC 2014)

This depiction is echoed by a CEPS senior fellow who remarks that EU institutions are "condemned to work with all of the member states, with all the heavy workings of the Council, particularly in the foreign policy area's unanimity business"; in his experience, they typically have clear ideas about where they think policy ought to go but are blocked by member state disagreements. Think tanks "understand perfectly well what the business is, but would have no such constraints" (I46-Emerson:35-36).

This raises a general point related to the time horizon of think tank work: they can have an “early warning function” (I3-Reljic:84) for decision-makers caught up in the busy status quo. In principle, at CEPS “everything is forward-looking”, a unit head stresses, “but...on crisis-related issues...some papers will have an expiry date of about a week. Some other papers...will have a longer validity” (I1-Blockmans:44). “We need people who are beyond the curve, and beyond us”, a Commission adviser says about this potential informational edge (I37-Ioannides:48); EUISS’ leader adds that “rather than forward-thinking...it is lateral thinking” which matters; as he elaborates:

*“Because officials are so taken by the daily routine or so involved in concrete dossiers, they don’t have this little distance in looking at things...[It is] not simply looking at 2030. Nobody today can be a crystal-ball gazer. It’s more the angle how we look at things, a little bit more detached, more analytical about what should be done, perhaps looking at trends. But not twenty years from now. One or two would be enough”* (I41-Missiroli:18)

CEPS’ “thinking ahead for Europe” slogan similarly does not refer to “thirty year foresight; ‘thinking ahead’, in Europe, means half or one year...The market beyond one year is very small. It’s a different discipline” (I13-Egenhofer:32). Despite the ambition to see “challenges of tomorrow...we’re not looking through crystal glasses”, another leader agrees (I32-Born-Sirkel:12). “It’s a mix of being able to respond to short-term policy calls, and balance it with more long-term work that doesn’t pay”, as a research fellow at CEPS puts it; this implies a think tanker “has to be someone [...with] ability to judge when you are going too far into following short-term issues rather than focusing on long-term work”( I39-Valiante:45). ECIPE’s director stresses “policy-making is a marathon, it’s not short-distance”, adding that a problem he has with policy-makers, sometimes think tanks, is “they far too often try to just respond to events and become reactive, not understanding that if you want to affect change, you need to hold on to an issue for several years...even for decades” (I22-Erixon:48).

Egmont’s interviewee also finds “you cannot just jump from a topic to another, you will have just very superficial things to say, nobody will listen” (I42-Biscop:32); neither are think tankers “here to say ‘In 2050, we will have this or that’”, another interviewee opines, exclaiming “if I speak about 2050, here [in Brussels] no one will talk to me. They will say ‘He’s a thinker’, no one wants to discuss with a thinker. Maybe with a glass of brandy. But this is not a professional!” (I29-de Marcilly:28). And, relating back to the innovation theme, GGI’s director reports that while “we try to have outside-the-box meetings...at the end of the day it’s in direct not contradiction, but competition with producing timely advice to be implemented” (I2-Koops:26).



Next to EU think tankers' "special relationship" with academia, their dual drawing on or diffidence towards the political sphere is also clear from the interview material. They navigate a role continuum from scholarly expert to political advocate. Just like hiring practices or educational similarity are mechanisms of normative isomorphism (see Chapter 7) and we see coercive isomorphism due to public funding (see Chapter 6), most think tanks at EU level must stay "politically relevant", "tuned into" existing political agendas and, in turn, have adopted a broadly similar Europeanist outlook. Advocacy think tanks like ECIPE or Open Europe stress freedom from EU funding, yet do not similarly problematize private financing or the potential of private capture. Scholarly think tanks stress their non-partisanship, scientifically informed "external" information or irritation function for decision-makers. Platform think tanks are most comfortably "in the thick of it", partnering with public sector organizations and IOs in attempts to bridge knowledge and power, rather than speak truth to those in power. Let us now turn to how think tankers' business- and media relations factor into this.

*How do think tankers associate and dissociate themselves from business?*

EU think tanks' professionals are well-versed in academic ways of doing things, and their activity firmly rooted in filtering for political relevance, sensitive to timeliness. Yet they are also - more or less - exposed to the business sector (see Chapter 8), and they themselves operate in what can be seen as - more or less - competitive markets: for financial and human resources, for consultation or training services, or attention of core constituencies, for example. Next to their roles of experts and advocates, they therefore frequently find and cast themselves in entrepreneurial roles as well. This often leads them to use language which resembles lobbyists', marketing experts' or consultants' idioms, even if this is less pronounced in the interview material than the conspicuous use of academic- or political-leaning vocabulary. And again, there seem to be differences between the more scholarly-, platform- or advocacy EU think tanks.

The publicly funded, scholarly SWP's stance on corporations is a critical one: in a brochure, it notes "corporations have sometimes more difficulty to understand and accept that SWP, in contrast to consultancies, does not do research on demand", adding that "the private sector is used to buying outside knowledge and expertise according to their concrete needs and does not, in Germany, have much of a tradition of funding independent political thinking" (SC 2014). Its French counterpart IFRI, with a corporate member base, experiences less reservations and openly claims that it

“offers a unique platform for businesses, many of which are leading players in IR” (SC 2014). ECDPM’s strategy similarly recognizes “important roles of private sector development...in developing countries” (SC 2015); Egmont’s website encourages “companies interested in sponsoring [it] through tailor-made corporate membership” to make contact (SC 2014); ERF boasts with a list of “unique set of benefits” like access, reputation and nature of its expertise for corporate-only members (SC 2014).

It is not uncommon for think tankers to speak of their stakeholders as “clients”: “nowadays we dare to call them ‘clients’”, OSE’s director remarks, “even though we are not consultants” (I7-Vanhercke:28). For EIPA, EU institutions “are actors, clients we might call them” (I9-Guggenbühl: 36), and its annual report highlights quality certifications for its training services in a business-like manner: with the “renewal of ISO 9001:2008 and CEDEO”, it signals customer satisfaction (SC 2014). In a similar vein, EU think tanks prominently cite good results in McGann’s annual ranking (see below). “I like that business approach”, a CEPS senior research fellow says (not referring directly to the ranking), and “judging from how we have developed, I think we’re doing okay in the quality competition” (I13-Egenhofer:18). Bruegel’s secretary general also makes no secret of the fact that the central think tank “would welcome more competition in the think tank world at a European level” (I19-Dann: 60).

As a think tanker, “you have to be happy to sell your idea like an insurance person, going from house to house offering products”, GGI’s director finds, “you need a media presence, to market your ideas, be happy to network, to sell your idea” (I2-Koops:26). “It’s not just about having ideas, then writing them down”, Egmont’s interviewee agrees, “you also have to sell them” (I42-Biscop:20). After all, “ideas by themselves are rarely persuasive but require individuals and organizations to act entrepreneurially” (Stone 2000:211). For Open Europe, press is the primary focus, whereas for scholarly institutes like OSE, the director sighs “we have to do it. If you don’t, you’re dead” (I7-Vanhercke:18). SWP’s prevalent academic mindset often runs counter to having a knack for self-marketing: “we have people absolutely not interested in marketing at all what they work on”, even as some are (I10-Brozus:26).

The core business role of think tank leaders is encapsulated in the entrepreneur: “I think this has really increased in the last years”, GGI’s director observes, “you see in economically constrained environments more drive of individuals or small groups to say ‘You know what, if I can’t find a job at a think tank, I just form my own’”; in his view, entrepreneurial spirit is fuelled by contemporary “decreasing costs to set up

an organization, Skype calls, network-based organizations - you don't need brick and mortar any more" (I2-Koops:56). However, such love for the craft is moderated by lucre, or at least a mundane fact of having to make a living (see Fruchtermann 2011). For instance, "financial incentives to keep a good researcher within a think tank like CEPS are really low...the average time of people at CEPS is about two to three years. Most of them leave, go to the Commission or other places where they earn more", which often leads to frustration among those "staying the course" (I39-Valiante:13).

In his analysis of the US "policy expert as business entrepreneur", Medvetz (2009) also notes how prevalent such salesmanship references or - less mentioned - innovation jargon is. In his view, often privately funded US think tankers strike a "Faustian bargain - taking money from donors and, while maintaining the guise of policy objectivity and seriousness, doing the bidding of the lobbyist" (2012:146). Others lament that "deep lobbying" practices "corrupt think tanks" as accomplices within an underground or "second economy of political influence" (Clemons 2003). Predictably interviewed EU think tankers dislike being portrayed in a simplistic way. They comfortably admit how much entrepreneurial spirit it takes to be a successful think tanker, yet vocally dissociate themselves from lobbyism, as their reaction to the EU's ETR, formerly called "Lobbyist Register", already showed (see Chapter 6). To illustrate, FoE's policy director is eager to emphasize how unique the think tanks are:

*"We're not here to sell a product, to sell a policy. Consultants do that, PR firms do that, lobbyists do that. We are not a lobby..not Oxfam, or CARE [International], not Burson Marsteller - we are a think tank. And a think tank brings together different points of view, confronts them, and then people go and make up their own minds ."* (I20-Islam:20)

This platform think tankers' clear rethorical demarcation is softened by colleagues from other institutes: "lobbying is a broad concept" for GGI's director, not only "tied to economic interests, you can have political lobbying, philosophical lobbying" (I2-Koops:14). As we have seen in the discussion of think tankers' innovativeness above "repetition matters" (I5-Zuleeg:38); and of course, "part of lobbying work...is about repeating and repeating and repeating - if the other side repeats, you have to repeat your thing...you insist and insist, and gradually, step by step, you can change things" (I62-Philipponnat:45). In fact, FoE's benign self-description is under fire from the "think tank watchdog" institute CEO, which worries that think tanks become just another instrument in EU lobbyists' toolbox (2011). CEO's leader singles in on FoE in explaining how think tanks can be used as an instrument in lobbying campaigns:

“think tanks like FoE are playing an important role in lobbying...helping companies, basically, to present their message to decision-makers”; asked for concrete examples, he says “anyone who has been to one of their events, surely in the past, would see Shell there on the panel, and they paid for the event, a debate on climate policy. Or a mining company sponsors an event on African development” (I63-Hoedemans:18).

Some EU think tanks have taken to strategic scenario thinking methodologies, inspired by Shell’s private sector future-of-energy “war games”. For example, IES’ founder participated in Shell’s “Global Scenario Project” at its London headquarters (I71-Kingham:37), E3G’s Brussels leader is also well-versed in business simulations (I36-Dufour:30). “You also see consultancies that do some think tank-like work”, as Boucher (I26:12) points out: they have “discovered the public sector as a client and ‘colonized’...fields with their specific kind of knowledge” (Rudolph/Okech 2004). For instance, Pautz (2008) notes, McKinsey and Roland Berger Strategy Consultants played a crucial role for national governments’ reform efforts, or the advent of New Public Management concepts (2010:422). For the US, Drezner goes as far as asking whether “traditional think tanks” are withering as consultants take their place (2017). “One big competing group is consultancies”, CEPS’ head of the climate unit feels, “they provide really technical to-the-point output we cannot match, especially if the deliverable has to be done in a short timeframe” (I61-Fujiwara:16). With now over hundred employees, adelphi in Berlin - a spin-off company of Ecologic Institute - is an example of such a consultancy that can challenge institutes’ comparative advantage.

#### *How do EU think tankers approximate or distance themselves from media?*

Aside academia, politics and business, the conducted interviews also give meaning to the structural network ties to media organizations we have observed (see Chapter 8). Medvetz (2009, 2012) finds that federal-level US think tanks in the American capital increasingly perfected the role of a media pundit in its round-the-clock media context. At EU level, however, think tankers operate in absence of a comparable media frenzy. There is an entire literature on deficits or opportunities of a “European public sphere”. While a media logic is an important ingredient in EU think tankers’ work, institutes’ symbiosis with the media varies. To continental scholarly think tanks such as SWP, media pick-up is no priority; large US-origin institutes invest more in media work; and advocacy think tanks like Open Europe fully focus on fast-moving media impact. The more public rather than elite in orientation, the more they resemble media outlets.

At SWP, “media work is just kind of an outreach activity”, an interviewee confirms, typically “media asks for an opinion by someone at SWP, not the other way around” (I10-Brozus:14). At GGI, the situation is similar: “people call us, The Economist called us up, surprisingly...and we have been in Euronews, some radio, but it would still be a very long way to move into a good media presence” (I2-Koops:24). “According to such and such, a think tank’, is a phrase familiar to readers of any newspaper”, also at EU level, “not least The Economist. Sharp quotes, intriguing facts and bold new policy proposals are attributed to [them] (as is plenty of rubbish)”, the besaid magazine itself reflects (The Economist 2017). Academics and activists debate whether journalists, even of esteemed media actors like BBC, too carelessly cite them; online petitions demand that their funding is always mentioned (Lewis/Cushion 2017, Change.org 2018, Avaaz.org 2018). Such petitions say “the BBC should be more transparent about funding of think tanks they unqualifiedly quote as experts” (I54-King:61) and do not go unnoticed by Brussels correspondents.

At the same time, in the words of the editor-in-chief of European Voice (now Politico), time pressures and demands on Brussels correspondents’ work mean that:

*“Think tanks themselves are becoming much more pseudo-journalists. The journalistic world is sometimes saying ‘This is not just my view’...We are borrowing credibility... Think tanks would like to think they are trading in information. But they are trading in politics, they are trading in spin, sometimes trading in hype. Yes, there are ideas there. But I don’t think we as journalists are solely interested in information!”* (I54-King:26)

In distancing themselves from the role of purely academic experts, EU think tankers agree that one needs to “know how to write to make people interested, not confused, to make an argument easy to swallow...good journalism can help you” (I3-Reljic:48); “journalism is a good basis” even if the oft-touted “difference is research for a think tank is much deeper” (I12-Stiglmayer:24); but “between high-quality journalism and high-quality think tank research, the barrier is almost non-existent”, SWP’s Brussels leader, an ex-journalist says, “it’s a matter from which side you come” (I3-Reljic:48).

In fact, as our human resource analysis revealed (see Chapter 7), journalists-turned-EU-think tankers are not uncommon. “I recall a period when think tanks were proliferating” in Brussels, one interviewed editor-in-chief says, and “a journalist friend of mine said ‘Think tanks are the new rock’n’roll!’ as he watched journalists moving into think tanks” (I54-King:20). Particularly in the “Anglo-Saxon think tank world, you see that many journalists have switched from being journalists to being analysts, policy people”, FoE’s interviewee, herself a “converted” journalist, says, in

“it’s an easy conversion to make...from journalist to being policy-oriented” (I20-Islam:30). She is convinced FoE’s newspaper “op-eds are read across the board, because they’re different...because we still have our own authenticities” (I20:44-46).

The lead role of a media pundit well-versed in academic analysis or discourses expresses itself in being sought-after commentators, news- or broadcast interviewees. Perez (2014) counts approximately 1,000 annual media mentions for Bruegel, 600 for CEPS and 100 for platform think tanks EPC, FoE or advocacy think tank ECIPE (her data is as of 2012). Like many EU think tanks, CEPS keeps track of publication downloads, averaging 63,000 a month, or about 3,000 a day as of 2014 (SC 2014). Similarly, at Bruegel “we also have reports how many people visit the website; how many receive e-mail updates; how many Twitter followers we have” (I19-Dann:56).

Reporting media uptake and digital dissemination is also important for smaller institutes. To illustrate, EFD “appeared in prestigious media outlets” (SC 2013), PLS annually reports how social media outreach steadily grows (SC 2014). Such references point to the symbolic resources afforded by achieving visibility in media. However, it is the largest and best-endowed of the sampled Brussels EU think tanks that are most ambitious when it comes to media work. The Bertelsmann Foundation, regularly present at the member state level in Germany’s press and media landscape, proudly points to “extensive media relations work” as a recipe for success (SC 2014).

For US think tankers, Medvetz (2009) finds that writing in plain language and shorter, ever-more compact output material has become an increasingly valued skill. Indeed, the US-rooted Carnegie Europe’s director, a German national, was the most vocal interviewee when it comes to the importance of adopting the “media mindset”:

*“When an interview request comes, I expect from [staff] that their default position is to say ‘Yes’. They can always say no if they don’t have time or if they say ‘On this specific topic, I really don’t know’, but the default position should be ‘Yes, I am accepting this’. That is very important. You need people who are at least not reluctant. If they are talented, and it turns out they are really great at it, that’s a bonus.”* (I59-Techau:36)

Blogging and active social media usage are two related - and hotly debated - themes. Again, in the eyes of OSEPI’s interviewee, Carnegie Europe “is really good at that. They’ve got a really good policy blog [called] Strategic Europe” (I69-Campbell:40), edited by former International Herald Tribune, Financial Times and The Economist journalist Judy Dempsey. Carnegie Europe’s director explains when it “brought this strategic Europe idea to this town, it worked quite well. People were hungry, and people liked the idea of a much more outward-looking perspective” in this issue area;

he adds that operationally speaking, multiple use of Carnegie's global content supply meant "we could punch above our weight from day one, we could bring a lot more content to the table than we could produce ourselves in Brussels" (I59-Techau:22). In his view many "think tanks have a blog, but it's often a stepchild of what they do. We turned it into a major element of our work...we brought the blog, regular website and social media into concert" (I59:24). However, as OSEPI's interviewee observes:

*"Other more traditional think tanks have difficulty making that step from think tanking to communications. I think those that do will get most traction. If you're a traditionalist, you will be concerned - does it mean you're dumbing down the message? I think it is up to the think tanks to hold on to the integrity of the initial message."* (I69-Campbell:40)

ECDPM's head of communications agrees. "Content is king", she assures, "we never dumb down anything" (I28-Julian:18). However, ECDPM prizes audiovisual outputs. In explaining this media strategy, she lists functional reasons: "one is people like it. People are people in the end, they like to see graphic things and photos and videos and podcasts and infographics", she says, adding "the second reason is Google likes it a lot, so it helps us move up on the search engine's search" (I28:36).

For CEPS' CEO, "we certainly could do better on the communications side... But it remains difficult...we don't necessarily have enough finances to cover that" (I45-Lannoo:36). CEPS' communications head notes that it is hard to compare CEPS or EU think tanks to their US counterparts "when it comes to communications, and in terms of the importance attached to it" also budget-wise; he explains that the Center for American Progress, for instance, devotes ten million dollars out of its roughly thirty million dollar budget in 2014 to communications only, more than CEPS' total funding (I43-Incerti:20). To him, whether or not CEPS should run its own "blog is a perfect case in point, we have been discussing the idea...for more than two years. I always resisted this idea...on grounds that we don't have the kinds of people who can do it, who have the will or time to do it...You need editing and money" (I43:34).

However, during the Ukraine crisis - Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea - CEPS director Daniel Gros asked senior fellow Michael Emerson, a Russia expert and former EU ambassador to Moscow, if he liked to react in a timely blog format. In our interview, Emerson recalls a conversation with a Russian professor: "I asked 'Are you writing something on Ukraine now?', and she says 'No, I've got to wait for things to settle down'. That's one position. The other position is you can't wait", and so it was decided over a weekend that CEPS "would start a blog" (I46-Emerson:30).

CEPS' communications leader opposed the blog on the grounds that "we really still had to think this through...people weren't ready for it"; so the blog was taken down; then, as Ukraine's crisis escalated, days after it was put back on again; "we decided that the blog would only be a Ukraine blog and only by Michael Emerson...I think by now it's dead again" (I43-Incerti:34, as of July 2014 CEPS website still had a section for "Michael Emerson's blog", as of 2018 a merely monthly updated "blog" is online).

CEPS' blogging experience is emblematic of EU think tanks' uneasy stance towards social media more generally. For instance, the scholarly moulded IFRI did not "have any blog, no IFRI blog" (I23-Pertusot:32) at the time of research, but its African- and security studies units have since taken to blog on Wordpress (SC 2018). ESI-enlisted foundation funds to produce time- and resource-intensive documentaries, many EU think tank events are now livestreamed, with idiosyncratic Twitter feeds. However, a shift toward video producing is nascent at best in the organizational field. "Competitors tell us very openly that those videos get very few hits", CEPS' head of communications says, "it can be good to have the image of a modern and in-keeping-with-time think tank, but it's not really adding much in terms of visibility or impact", he is convinced (I43-Incerti:20). The scholarly Egmont's interviewee similarly finds:

*"Facebook, Twitter, even blogs, I often have the impression they are incestuous networks. People on Twitter read each other, but does it serve a point? I'm not so convinced...Who are people who read blogs? It's people who write their own blog. Who are people who comment on blogs? Not people who are dealing with the issues, because they're dealing with the issues, and they don't have time...I remain in dubio about this."* (I42-Biscop:34)

Thus, media outlet's Brussels correspondents are still a "constituency of important interlocutors in our job" (I44-Grevi:26); and, as Atomium stresses, newspapers are essential for "increasing dissemination of research to the public at large" (SC 2014). Yet, as the digitally literate Lisbon Council's annual report points out, EU think tanks' media environment changed dramatically over a decade: "as recently as 2005, in the memorable words of Thomas Friedman, columnist for the New York Times, 'Facebook didn't exist; Twitter was a sound; the cloud was in the sky; 4G was a parking space; LinkedIn was a prison; an application was something you sent to college; and for most people Skype was a typo'" (SC 2013). But already by April 2016, in the author's count, nine out of ten of the sampled 85 EU think tanks were on Twitter (93 percent), LinkedIn (89 percent) or Facebook (87 percent), testimony to the three social or professional social networks' near-universal adoption in the field.



Large institutes seek to capitalize on this trend: ICG says it “never aspired to become a news agency, but as old news sources fell away, [it is] increasingly seen as a primary source of information” and makes “growing use of social networking tools” (SC 2014). Accordingly, the field’s demand rises for “social media-savvy people. A lot of us think we know how to function on social media. We don’t...200 followers is nothing” (I69-Campbell:46). Carnegie’s leader underlines the need for “operational staff...the support staff is important, to help scholarly staff develop the appetite for it” (I59-Techau:18). Scholarly and media work are often mistakenly seen as antagonistic, in his opinion, but both would be necessary to transcend merely journalistic punditry:

*“Your short comment is taken seriously because people know you have a big enough brain to also do bigger things. You’re not just a pundit who has an idea every day and shoots it out for the effect of it...The analysis is 50 percent of what we do. The other 50 percent is getting it to audiences...It’s a wrong logic, ‘you put it out and it’ll find its way. It’s not how it works...You have to be quite aggressive about [media outreach].” (I59-Techau:34)*

Advocacy think tanks, notably Open Europe, have taken such advice to heart. It rather assertively portrays itself as a “go-to source for real-time analysis” on UK- EU affairs, to “cut through the chatter” with its blog for “intelligence and action” (SC 2018). Its interviewee explains it actively uses Twitter-enabled disintermediation: “I remember the days when you didn’t have Twitter”, he says, “you were much more dependent on Reuters, DPA [German press agency], for example, but now if we find something in German media, we publish it on Twitter and all journalists can just pick it up if they want to, and often do”; it turns a think tank into a sort of digital amplifier, in Open Europe’s case for facts or voices in tune with its politico-ideological outlook; and helps it transcend geographical boundaries or penetrate national-level discourses:

*“If we think it’s important, we publish it on Twitter, we also translate these quotes, we link to the Handelsblatt [German business newspaper] piece, and then some journalist from a Portuguese or French or British newspaper can perfectly pick it up. So Twitter gives you potential, as a think tank, it makes you into more of a media outlet.” (I11: 34)*

As GMF’s Brussels leader observes, if we abandon our definition for a moment “anyone today can be their own think tank - just start a website, a blog, start tweeting about policy issues. Is that not think tank activity? They’re virtual think tanks” (I53-Lesser:13). Or rather such virtual activity is incorporated into the activity portfolio of established institutes: for instance, FoE runs a primarily digital Europe-wide policy journal called Europe’s World; in 2010, EWI launched a blog-like Nextgen platform, crowdsourcing content from younger generation foreign policy professionals under

30 years old through online essay contests with the goal of connecting them with its experts (SC 2018). It also issued a so-called EWI Compass app for smartphones in 2014, promising users “looking for advice, partnership or a soundbite [that] experts are just one tap away”; by March 2014, it was downloaded 3,000 times (SC 2014). Yet this media innovation did not last long - the app is no longer listed on app stores.

In the absence of a strong transnational media landscape, EU think tanks took to “content partnering” with leading EU news outlets like Euractiv or EU Observer (see I70-Vincenti:21, I75-Kirk:28). They tend to hold more sway in this specialized and national media scenes than - generally much better resourced - academics. Of course, in our day and age, any assistant professor can e-mail his latest brainstorm to a dozen newspaper editors - in theory (deMuth 2007). But the truth of the matter is that “think tanks are happier to produce stuff in an interim form”, they are typically “producing more along the way to the final conclusions than in the academic world”, while “academics are sitting on stuff that could be used by journalists” (I54-King:36).

In this vein, asked if the EU think tanks are pushing universities out, another editor-in-chief from EU Observer reaffirms EU think tanks’ comparative advantage: “I don’t think they’re pushing universities out, because universities were never there! You cannot push somebody out who was never in” (I75-Kirk:9). In the meantime, “with academia you need to read the abstract, when you go through the summary you ask ‘What do I get from here?’”, Euractiv’s editor-in-chief says, but as a journalists often one still has “to go through the report, because the summary is not focused enough...It’s very time-consuming”, so think tanks are more attractive, even if in drawing on them risks “that you become superficial”, she thinks (I70-Vincenti:36). In practice, however, this concern is typically overridden by media’s institutional logic:

*“Journalists will use anything that’s going...Most Brussels-based correspondents struggle to get their articles into a newspaper. That’s what they’re about, fighting for space, fighting for the attention of their section editors...If they can use the output of a think tank to help them achieve that goal, it may well be because think tanks are quotable. It doesn’t mean what think tanks produce is necessarily of enduring value.”* (I54-King:32)

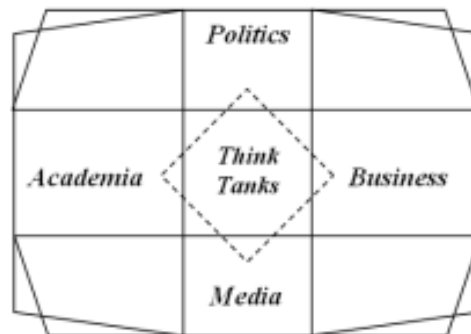
“We rarely go to academia for just a quick quote or a quick reaction to something”, Euractiv’s editor-in-chief affirms as well; for instance, coming back to the case of the Ukraine crisis and Russia’s annexation of Crimea, she illustrates that typically journalists’ instinct will be to “go to the think tankers to get this, not to the specialists on Ukraine at Oxford University, it’s not how we work” nowadays (I70-Vincenti:22).

*So what for independence?*

A detailed analysis of EU think tankers' sectoral borrowing-differentiation dynamics helps reveal the action underpinning financial, human resource and network patterns identified throughout the previous chapters. Our analysis of EU think tankers' autonomy vis-à-vis neighboring fields (depicted again in a reduced way in Figure 50) has paid close attention to the individual level beyond organizational level dynamics. We explored how in their own legitimacy claims or strategic impression management, interviewed EU think tankers both rhetorically borrow but also distance themselves from the institutional fields and -logics of academia, politics, business and the media. But to stop here would be to miss a central insight emerging in the interview material - that there is an isomorphic trend towards a professional identity of a "think tanker" active at EU level, which blends and, in turn, transcends the four sectoral allegiances.

**Figure 50.** Stylized social topology of think tanks' interstitial organizational field

Note: Simplified version based on Medvetz 2008, 2012; see Chapter 2 for a more finegrained version.



Similar to what Medvetz (2008, 2009, 2012) notes for US think tankers, employees of institutes active in Brussels and beyond try to walk the line in what appears to be a four-sided pursuit of academic, political, entrepreneurial and media authority. Upon closer inspection, their pendulum of professional sensitivities swings more heavily to either side of a thinking-to-doing continuum, from a more academic to political logic. However, as we have analyzed, this janus-faced professional hybridity is also infused with - more or less heavy - doses of an entrepreneurial business stance or journalistic inclinations. Hiring practices are a first key mechanism for selecting versatile staffers motivated to continuously try to bridge between scholarly spheres and policy realms. On-the-job socialization is a second mechanism behind blended individual identities, institutionalizing an organizational field of increasingly isomorphic EU think tanks whose versatile professionals manage to mesh institutional logics to a striking extent.

How do EU think tankers themselves verbalize their quest for hybridity, this blending of sectoral skill- and mindsets, of institutional logics, idioms and ideas? Akin to Medvetz' observation of US think tanks' "ambivalent autonomy" (2012:154) the interviewed EU think tankers also do not try to compartmentalize various roles but claim a distinct role for themselves. It is in this vein that CEPS "swims in all the waters" (I1-Blockmans:20); that at EIPA "we consider ourselves having a foot in the academic and a foot in the professional-operational world...There is a legitimacy in being this in-between", the institute's representative says (I9-Guggenbühl:30); FoE similarly attempts to operate right "between the policy world and the world of practice" (I20-Islam:12); and when asked if he sees himself as an academic or hands-on practitioner, EPC's director proudly proclaims "I see myself as a think tanker, which is a different beast altogether. It's an enormous privilege to... lead a think tank, especially a European think tank at a time such as the current one", he says, "it's a unique role, it can be a difficult role...but it's a very interesting role" (I5-Zuleeg:32-34). Such references to professional hybridity are the rule, no exception. GGI's leader tries to summarize the ideal-typical image of EU think tankers like this:

*"I think it was Hugo Brady [a CER senior research fellow] who told me 'You have to think like an academic but write like a journalist and talk like a diplomat.'" (I2-Koops:24)*

The binary version of this shorthand description is echoed by Bertelsmann Foundation's interviewed Brussels leader: "without embodying both roles, that of a diplomat and of a true expert...you will not survive in this position" (I26-Fischer:26). "You need a certain type of people", a senior CEPS fellow believes, and even if "there are many bright minds in universities, the very, very large block of them is completely unfit to work in a think tank"; indeed, his ideal-typical image almost sounds like NASA's astronaut or test pilot recruitment rhetoric: "it takes a special mentality, degree of initiative, an eagerness and skill", his high-praise rhetoric goes, a "fascination with how policies should be made. On one hand you are critical. On the other, you must also respect that policy-making is difficult" (I57-Pelkmans:16). For IFRI's Brussels head, "you need to be 'polivalent' - I don't know if that word exists in English - to be hybrid, able to do different tasks, on different schedules, in different timelines. You need to be able to do a lot of things" (I23-Pertusot:28) – thus, to turn your hand at multivocality for robust action (Padgett/Ansell 1993:1263). ECIPE's head invokes Ralf Dahrendorf's idea of straddling various societal spheres:

*“Think tank life, for me, combines...different areas of professional life...To use a term by the former rector of the LSE: he was asked ‘What do you call yourself as an academic? You can be a professor...But really, what do you call yourself?’ He said ‘I’m a straddler’ ...who stands at a crossing, with legs in different areas. One leg is in academic life...if you work in a think tank...But you also need to understand policy and...journalism...A think tank not only allows you but forces you to be active in all those lives.” (I22-Erixon:14)*

Even if all abilities do not have to come together in every single employee – we saw that a hybrid think tank can emerge through amalgamation of its human resource mix (see Chapter 7) - not everybody can, but ideally should, live up to these expectations, ECIPE’s director opines; in his experience “there are quite few people who do that. It is one of the reasons for which we have grown slowly since we started”, he says, for “when we take in staff, we want to have people who we know truly ‘get it’” (I22:50). ECIA’s interviewee similarly stresses that in its hiring practices, “what we care about is the attitude, if [applicants] are willing to engage, if they’re willing to have dialogue with stakeholders” (I4-Teti:50). When interviewees’ high expectations of newcomers are confronted with how they view their own performance, however, modesty sets in.

“There is what a head of office should be, and what I am, which are two very different things”, E3G’s Brussels leader laughingly exclaims (I36-Dufour:22); “I’m a real specialist in that I prefer not to speak of something I do not know”, another interviewee says (I73-Boussois:32); and think tankers are certainly not omniscient or free from error, far from it the interviewee of *Confrontations Europe* makes clear, “we have to listen to others, to question our own thinking. We are not working ‘en chambre’, we try to understand what’s going on” (I18-Baud:32). “I might be wrong”, a CEPS expert expresses his willingness for self-criticism, “research I do isn’t always good. There might be areas I have not researched enough...I contact [CEPS members financing a project] and we have a discussion. I want to understand what is wrong with my research. And then I make my judgement call” (I39-Valiante:23).

ECDPM’s communications head stresses its marked service-oriented mentality: “our job is to give the right information to the right people at the right time in the right form” (I28-Julian:18), a variation on Lasswell’s communications model (1948). ESI’s interviewee similarly emphasizes that “usually, once we have research, we also try to use different channels to get it across...There are people who prefer to watch short videos instead of reading a policy brief; there are people who like podcasts; there are people who like infographics. So we try to cater to all these preferences” (I12-Stiglmayer:28). This is echoed in T&E’s communication leader’s remark that “I am a strong believer in the fact that a picture is worth a thousand words”; in this view

“science- and evidence-based arguments...can go hand in hand with more beautiful - at least visually more compelling or engaging - materials. I don’t think the fact that you make something a bit more sexy undermines the content or the substance” (I55-Muzi:32). Of course, we also saw how EU think tanks often fall short of such visions of channel- and format versatility, either consciously or because they fail to price in these artful ambitions into their project designs, facing very mundane funding issues. SWP chooses not to “have multi-media content. We do not make videos, podcasts” (I3-Reljic:22). For Carnegie Europe, a “primary focus...must always be on the deeper kind of research, a profound understanding of the problem”; even if it attributes equal importance to “blogs, tweets, the short-term content...you can’t create visibility without content. Content needs to be your first priority always” (I59-Techau:34).

As we explored, the isomorphic belief in the field in terms of formats is that “to be considered a “proper” EU think tank, you need at least two products: you need publications, and you need events. You can’t just have one or the other, the two are absolutely necessary” (I23-Pertusot:10). It is in this duality of thinking and doing that some EU think tank staffers have taken to calling themselves “think-and-do-tankers” (see Chapter 4). “Trough publications, events, social media or a lively blog, Bruegel has carved out a unique discussion space”, its strategic communication material reads, with “dual focus on analysis and impact” (SC 2014). “The great thing about working in a small organization”, Bruegel’s secretary general points out, “is that you have the opportunity to do a number of things that perhaps are outside your comfort zone, for which you have no experience, simply because resources dictate that” (I19-Dann:48). If university academics also stage events but are defined by research; if INGO staff also engage in research but are defined by advocacy; then EU think tankers, it turns out, are indeed defined by by mastering a wide array of activities in versatile venues.

Similar to the key finding regarding EU think tanks’ financial resource mixes - independence of money really stands in for relative autonomy from funding sources - their hybrid professionals’ institutional leeway of action - or independence of mind - is a function of their institutional imprinting via previous and on-the-job socialization. Yet we must avoid the fallacy of both economic as well as institutional determinism in analyzing EU think tanks in action (see Chapter 2), moulded by but not fully iron-caged by sectors. Medvetz convincingly raises similar points when he warns of what he calls “the literalist fallacy of adopting uncritically the folk categories that circulate among policy experts and implicitly conflate these with social reality”, something I

try to avoid throughout this study of EU think tanks, and, on the other side, a fallacy of “narrowly structuralist accounts rendering think tanks as instruments of economic or political power”, of which we steered clear by triangulating data with interviews; “a thoroughgoing account must reconstruct both the system of institutional forces in which think tanks are embedded and the structural bases, distribution and use of folk categories that circulate in this setting” (Medvetz 2007:36-37). It is clear from the interviews that think tankers in Europe, just like think tankers in America, find it crucial to build up and protect an academic reputation to not be seen as lobbying firms or interested organizations. However, in-house research production happens at lower levels than in the US, due mainly to limited funding, so academic credentials play a big role, next to symbolic resources afforded by think tankers’ political access.

EU think tankers’ increasingly isomorphic and often profoundly hybrid identity is a case study of how “specific idiolects develop which are shared across sites and speakers” in a straddling self-making process where any individual think tanker, to paraphrase Ulrich Beck’s main theme of individual-level reflexive modernization, “must therefore learn...to conceive of himself or herself as a center of activity, as the planning office with respect to his or her biography, abilities, orientations, relations” (Beck 1992:55). In their often blended rather than compartmentalized lead roles of scholarly expert, political advocate, business entrepreneur, media pundit and broker (recall Table 16 above), what we observe is a process of intensified individualization:

*“Disembedding, removal from historically prescribed social forms and commitments in the sense of traditional contexts of dominance and support...the loss of traditional security with respect to practical knowledge, faith and guiding norms (the ‘disenchantment dimension’); and re-embedding, a new type of social commitment (the ‘control’ or ‘re-integration dimension’.” (Beck 1992:128)*

Interviewees interestingly describe their own process of becoming a “think tanker” as making a “jump” on several occasions: “I decided to jump” (I18-Baud:32), says one, “it’s a big jump from being academic to being a think tanker” another (I20-Islam:30). Similar to social entrepreneurs’ hybrid weighting of whether they are in it “for love or lucre” (Fruchterman 2011), the issue what attracts or motivates EU think tankers is fascinating. After all, in one sense they truly remain absolutely free: to quit the job. However, year after year, day after day, hundreds of Brussels think tankers keep at it.

What incentivizes and drives think tankers to perform as hybrid professionals? More than the salary levels, the interviews point to individual reputational capital – the non-pecuniary side of think tankers’ pay - as well as teamwork or their missions.

Much of EU think tanks' communications material and interviewees' references revolve around the attractive peer group and normative merits of institutes' missions. "There is this great mix of people from different backgrounds who are exceptionally willing to collaborate across disciplines", Charlene Rohr, RAND Europe's longest-serving employee (since 1993) says, "people are drawn to the mission statement. It's not just a sentence written on a piece of paper. People we recruit are passionate about influencing policy. We don't do this for intellectual interest [but] because we think it could be important" (SC 2015). GMF's president also says "I love GMF's mission ...it's a terrific group of people...working on transatlantic relations" (SC 2014). In that sense too, "independence stands for multi-dependency" (I25-Mäder-Metcalf:16).

Compared to his previous jobs, Carnegie Europe's leader (who joined from DGAP and since went on to direct the Europe program at GMF) says "this one is probably the most fulfilling, attractive environment I've been in so far. I have large independence over three elements making you the boss of an organization, which is personnel, budget and content...And in terms of the inner culture of what you can and cannot do, this is probably the best job I will ever have" (I59-Techau:32). The more advocacy-oriented employees of EFD stress their normative drive and conviction that "freedoms we take for granted in Europe were hard won...we are passionate about protecting, defending these values" (SC 2013), and Lisbon Council repeatedly makes reference to its economic and social renewal imperative for the future EU (SC 2014). "We do it for the general public", claims GGI's director (I2-Koops:18); you "work - it's a bit cocky but - for the greater good, for the EU's general interest", says S&C's interviewee (I8-Leblanc:14). CEPS' CEO similarly proclaims that ultimately "why you grow in such an organization is because you are an idealist" (I35-Lannoo:32).

"Frankly, it's not because you become a millionaire that you stay here", CEPS' head of the regulatory policy unit stresses, "otherwise you can do the same thing for PricewaterhouseCoopers, for the triple of the money, we agree" (I38-Schrefler:24). In CEPS' director's experience "many come because they get the human capital here, they stay between two to five years, then earn a living in a much more comfortable way" (I52-Gros:36). "They use CEPS as a gym - a training center - to then enter EU institutions", a research fellow says; so beyond public-benefit rethoric "there is a lot of individual egos in the work of a think tank. It's important that you keep these egos strong and alive, because the financial incentives...are really low" (I39-Valiante:13). Whichever their motivations, the field continues to involve hundreds of think tankers.



## **Impact: EU think tank metrics, measurement and philosophies of success**

What does it mean for think tanks to have “impact”? Both scholars of think tanks and think tankers themselves often struggle to come to grips with this perennial question. This section deciphers the varied dimensions of (EU) think tanks’ multi-dimensional influence concealed behind this seemingly straightforward yet in practice vexed issue. The aim is not to contribute a surefire proof of how specific institutes in specific situations impact policy-makers or policy in any concrete domain (see Chapter 1). Rather, the goal here is to explore the broader bandwidth of think tanks’ impactfulness beyond the demanding - yet often futile - search for the “holy grail” of policy impact, that is to widen our view of their overall socio-structural significance (see Chapter 2). Moreover, the interest here is in how the interviewed Brussels EU think tankers, as knowledge-workers facing relatively complex task environments, assess if and how their work ultimately matters with various success metrics or performance indicators.

This is not to say that more causal, mechanistic studies are not worthwhile - far from it, much can be learned by studying single think tanks’ efficacy in policy areas. But to decipher how multifaceted the nature of EU think tanks’ roles and functions in EU multi-level governance is takes this project’s mapping approach and the chapter’s focus on their cross-sectoral novelty and relative autonomy to its logical conclusion: namely that, as in US think tanks’ case, they “are neither invariably key contributors to all public policy issues nor are they devoid of influence” (Weidenbaum 2010:134). The sphere of impact depends on the level of analysis, whether we look at how single EU think tankers’ activity makes a difference at the individual level, at the effects of an institute’s work at organizational level, or at EU think tanks’ field-level functions.

Finally, the meaning and intricacies of measuring impact depends on how high up on Sartori’s conceptual “ladder of abstraction” (1970:1040) we choose to study it. At the lowest level, this could mean how a specific think tanker idea A (say an issued policy recommendation) has impacted a policy actor B, in turn changing a process C; at a higher-up abstraction level, how a think tank’s continuous stream of outputs (say publications or events) shape public discourse or executive thinking in a policy area; and ultimately, we might discern how an entire think tank scene (say EU think tanks) has socio-structurally reconfigured the financial, human and informational resources available in specific governance settings, be it at national or at the transnational level. In short, the overarching question is about the significance of think tank contributions more broadly speaking rather than narrowing this only to direct impact on legislation.

*How do scholars studying think tanks try to conceptualize their impact?*

The issue of whether and how precisely the activities of think tanks matter for policy processes, government action as well as regional or global governance are the crux of much academic literature on these organizations - and of their practitioners' ongoing discourse or self-reflection, for that matter - as indeed it probably should be. And yet we continue to know precious little about influence of think tank activity at EU level. Sociologically, this boils down to the question of social self-efficacy of institutes and their professionals. Politically, it boils down to their relative access, clout and power.

Most academic scholars of think tanks find "one of the most vexed questions is whether or not they have policy influence" (Stone 2007:154), and are quick to add that is vexingly hard to demonstrate empirically or in practice (Abelson 2002, 2009). The problem with screening only for direct, discernable, short-term impact on policy, however, is that it might well be "in the *longue durée* that think tank policy analysis and activity has achieved wider social relevance in shaping patterns of governance or moving paradigms" (Stone 2007b:156). Also, as Medvetz argues for US think tanks:

*"Apart from their struggles to influence policy outcomes, [the think tanks'] policy experts inhabit a 'meta-space' of competition over the relative values of the forms of authority used in this struggle."* (2012:163)

In other words, even if think tanks - be it in the US or at the EU level - rarely make crucial contributions to policy- or decision-making, or exert paradigmatic influence over policy thinking (although such cases are documented and they occasionally do, in fact, shape domestic or transnational policy outcomes), their existence "as cogs in the wider machineries of governance" (Stone 2007:154) can still be very important. As quasi- or pseudo-academic not-for-profit organizations, their presumed status as innovative boundary-spanners or independent civil society actors can afford authority.

In political theory (highest-up on the ladder of abstraction), authority is a more basic notion than power, encompassing a continuum of political to epistemic authority (Zürn et al. 2012); also in political philosophy, citing Joseph Raz, "having authority can mean having permission to do something as well as having the right to grant such permission. But it also signifies an expertise that is considered trustworthy" (1990:2). In this vein, an EU think tank with widespread epistemic authority, for instance, would "not need to persuade people in all instances" because it may very well not be "the quality of the argument, but the quality or reputation of the person or institution which is decisive" (Zürn et al. 2012:86). Thus, simply speaking, two very different

forms of power can accrue to think tanks: both the power to set premises, to define norms or standards that shape behavior (March/Simon 1958), or critical interventions (Domhoff 1987) to help elites define appropriate models or policy (Katz 1975) which go unquestioned for years to come. Naturally, their work can also simply functionally or aesthetically convince policy- and decision-makers taking it into account. It is in this sense that scholars of policy advisory systems continue to understand think tanks as “external” actors supplying evidence-based content to policy-making processes (Craft/Howlett 2012:91, 2013); it risks overseeing their insider status, how they also direct expertise to audiences beyond politics, to media or businesses (Kelstrup 2016).

For Medvetz, “the most contentious point...is the implied counterfactual” vis-à-vis the academic sphere - that “in absence of a highly developed space of think tanks in the US, autonomously produced social scientific knowledge...would have played a greater role in shaping the terms and conditions of policy debate” (2012:211). EU think tanks’ comparative advantage to academia has been discussed in detail above. Medvetz’ argument for the US is that think tanks’ ubiquity and taken-for-grantedness drowned out voices of social scientists at universities in policy processes (2012:225).

Abelson adds to Medvetz’ view that today “policy-makers want policy briefs, not lectures from the professoriate. The unlimited value [of] social science research... motivated Carnegie, Brookings and Hoover to establish think tanks at the turn of the twentieth century. Ironically...the discipline they valued most has been marginalized by the very institutions they created”, as he puts it, lamenting that “scholars still know very little about how to evaluate the impact of think tanks” and, similar to the line of argumentation about think tanks’ wider social significance pursued here, cautions that “rather than fixating on how much or little influence think tanks wield, we should try to determine what value or contribution institutes make” (Abelson 2017:98).

Earlier books on US think tanks - still the most-studied organizational field - vaguely conclude that their impact is often “diffuse or intangible” (Smith 1991:229) and “power in Washington cannot be measured precisely, yet think tanks surely have a good deal of it” (Ricci 1993:135). We can usefully distinguish more precisely that think tanks’ multifaceted influence happens at a policy, discursive or structural level. Conceptually speaking, as institutionally embedded agents, think tanks active at EU level can frequently act as dynamically constrained legitimacy or impact maximizers. Again, prior studies’ often exclusive focus on the first level of atomistic direct policy impact poses an undue narrowing of what the think tank phenomenon is also about.

*What are Brussels EU think tankers' success metrics or impact definitions?*

For interviewed EU think tank leaders and staffers, quite naturally the ultimate impact of their work is not delimited - often not even primarily geared to - impact on policy. Asked open-endedly “When do you consider what your institute does as successful?” most think tankers start off by listing outputs or outcomes of their work, point to a rather multi-faceted impact definition, and quickly delve into philosophical points about how difficult it is to precisely measure, pin down or even assess performance. It is what we would expect from ambiguously hybrid professionals exposed to varied institutional logics. After all, their institutes are subject to multiple accountabilities, facing not only real risks of mission drift but also profound performance uncertainty in complex task environments (Anheier 2014, Ebrahim et al. 2014, Spear et al. 2009). Again, differences between scholarly-, platform- or advocacy institutes shine through.

“Think tank work, like government work, is not like producing tires or Coca-Cola”, EWI’s Brussels head reflects, as boosting “production and therefore benefits by a certain percentage if you do this, that or the other...works in the economy, in the manufacturing sector, but doesn’t work in the sector...we are in” (I25-Mäder-Metcalf:28). Carnegie Europe’s interviewed leader expands upon this identical point:

*“This is not about selling cars, where you know each quarter how many cars you’ve sold and that’s your impact. We will never truly know...and culturally this is often a problem for people, because you never see the tangible results of your work.” (I59-Techau:42)*

Continental European scholarly EU think tanks, like SWP or ECIA, find expectations of direct policy impact donors or the public may have for them are often overdrawn: “I can’t say we are having an impact directly on EU governance”, the head of SWP’s Brussels office rejects this image, “this would be really overbearing. It’s not the case, just like in Berlin. We produce stuff, but you have to be aware that political decision-making is based on different thinking than the thinking in a think tank” (I3-Reljic:10). ECIA’s senior fellow Andrea Teti finds people setting the bar so high unrealistic too: “They somehow expect that policy-makers say ‘Yes, we changed this policy because Dr. Teti told us to’” (I4:46). A CEPS interviewee similarly points out “being close to policy-makers does not mean that they do what you say. And I think that’s the wrong measure of success. Think tanks shouldn’t govern the EU – no – thank you very much!” (I57-Pelkmans:58). Political proximity rather than decision-taking is sought.

Still, the smaller scholarly GGI’s director says, “it is clear we would like to influence, at the end of the day, policies” in Brussels, and that “those policies should

take into consideration...ramifications if you look beyond narrow national interests” (I2-Koops:14). For CEPS’ director, too, “success means...we contributed original policy ideas, that they have been listened to, and ideally one or two also acted upon” (I52-Gros:66). Leaders of platform think tanks tend to stress a procedural rather than contentual direction of impact, “to influence policy-making processes” (I5-Zuleeg:10) EPC’s head says, or help “facilitating implementation”, his ECDPM counterpart adds; to him, “influence [is] making a knot somewhere” connecting various stakeholders: “I always say we have a bias”, he smilingly remarks, “in favor of the quality of the policy process. It should produce results and include the right people” (I17-Engel:18).

To structure discussion of at which policy-making stages interviewees find EU think tanks are most influential, a simplified policy process depiction - from problem definition and agenda-setting to decision-making to implementation and monitoring - was shown as stimulus (see Sabatier 2007, Jann/Wegrich 2009, see Chapter 3). A general consensus is that while in theory they can be active and effective across all cyclical stages, institutes have most impact in formative phases of problem definition or agenda-setting. “We’re certainly all over the place”, a CEPS interviewee says, but usually “earlier than towards the end” (I1-Blockmans:61). EPC’s director elaborates:

*“What you try to do...is anticipate topics where...at some point there will be a real need to have a discussion...before it becomes a legislative proposal. That’s where I think we can have the greatest influence...The key lies...rather at the early stages.”* (I5-Zuleeg:44)

It is important to remind ourselves of the non-linear nature of real policy processes, and useful to distinguish their political and technical policy streams (Kingdon 2011). Some trained political scientists interviewees alluded to this policy process literature: “I always make a difference between that there is a sort of basic content network you have to keep going”, ECDPM’s director declares, “I always say it’s the pea soup: you need to have a soup, you need to put energy in it, it needs to be close to boiling point. And you never know where the blurb comes - the real exposure - but you have to be ready to be there when the blurb comes” (I17-Engel:10). “Everyone says they want to set the agenda”, GGI’s director observes, “but it’s very difficult” (I2-Koops:40). In reality, in SWP’s Brussels head’s experience, non-linearity usually means “problems happen - and then you have to deal with them, if you are a politician” (I3-Reljic:38).

But EU think tankers concur that institutes are often at their most powerful when they exert discursive influence - shaping terms as wordsmiths, ideas as experts, entire policy concepts and narratives. Coining concrete terminology and policy ideas

is something single think tanks might well be able to frequently pull off on their own. However, their contributions to longer-term shifts in policy or governance discourses - long-lasting “atmospheric influence” (James 2000:163) - is more likely achieved as one part of wider think tank networks, epistemic communities or discourse coalitions.

“When we see ownership [of ideas] taken by other groups, for me that’s impact, that’s success”, one interviewee of a trade union-affiliated think tank says, adding that for her, being cited without attribution, “copy-paste ownership without our name on it is the best impact, the best influence, the best multiplier effect” (I66-Jepsen:18). This is reminiscent of Foucault’s (1977) assertion that the role of intellectuals’ ideas is most weighty when most invisible and their usage not self-conscious, or Gramsci’s concept of networked organic intellectuals as “permanent persuaders” (1971:9, 334). “Often, it’s also laying the ground for something which is developing”, one Brussels SWP analyst points out (I16-Lauenroth:24). For E3G, “it can just be changing the mentality, bringing in a narrative, getting a policy decision made...or making policies not as bad as they could have been” (I36-Dufour:54) – damage control, to to speak.

Whereas scholarly institutes claim to prioritize quality of their policy research or advice, and platform think tanks the quality of policy processes they accompany, interviewed advocacy think tanks prize shaping public opinion and media portrayals. While most of Brussels’ established EU think tanks promote European integration, making a case for the expansion of pan-European solutions to many policy problems, challenger Open Europe seeks “to play into the pan-European moods, so that there is a pan-European feeling the EU needs reform” (I11-Cleppe:56). Free trade-advocating ECIPE’s director is also keen on shaping “the larger policy narrative”, as he explains:

*“You try to set an agenda, or to frame an issue...in an area where few people are active, so we have a chance to furbish an issue...What matters in decision-making is power, strength, money, jobs won or lost. We have nothing to compete with in that process. The only thing we can compete with is in the extent to which we can do a clever analysis, and deliver a clever agenda or a clever framework for others to work with.” (I22-Erixon:34)*

The Financial Times has listed Erixon among its top 30 “prime influencers of policy and legislation in Brussels, both in public and behind the scenes” (Pignal et al. 2009). Of course, ECIPE’s work say on fostering global trade by reviving the Doha Round or the proposed TTIP trade agreement between the EU and US at the time of research are just examples how relatively small institutes try to be influential opinion formers. “If you have a sufficiently radical, innovative idea that changes the discourse, opens up the range of options at the right moment, that can be very influential”, Boucher

agrees, “because suddenly the whole policy debate can structure around it” (I26:32). Yet this image presumes ideas somehow pop up to have a sweeping impact whereas - as EWI’s Brussels vice-president notes - think tanks often “push things into a certain direction...providing a space for people to meet and discuss...Whether it’s a smashing success or it’s gradual - it may be A meets B and from there derives another activity - is a different matter” (I25-Mäder-Metcalf:28). This framing of ideational change is aptly captured by Keynes’ notion of the “gradual encroachment of ideas” (1936:383).

Ultimately, what shimmers through interviews is that unlike political scientists’ first instinct to check for impact merely defined as directly shaping policy outcomes, field participants describe a direction of impact that is characterized by longer timeframes, accounting for indirect and cumulative effects. As OSE’s director sees it, “through a very big detour, through informal meetings, through events and publications, through multi-media, what we do in the end trickles down at many levels - at the European level, national level, regional or local level” (I7-Vanhercke:38). Structurally speaking, EU think tanks’ presence and action, say at EU level, also affects neighboring political, academic, business or journalistic fields.

Beyond policy participation, the “element of socialization” (I41-Missiroli:20) - of their hired professionals, EU officials or other interlocutors they interact with - fulfils a network function of elite transfer or cross-sectoral mingling (Wilhelm 2009). “In a very small modest way, it’s about creating spaces for actors who otherwise feel uncomfortable if they meet in another context” (I2-Koops:44), GGI’s leader remarks. The symbolic or material “buy-in” of think tanks’ core constituencies into their work ultimately serves another more mundane benchmark of organizational performance, namely sheer survival: “one criterion of success is continuity”, EIPA’s interviewed Brussels representative reminds (I9-Guggenbühl:36); his E3G counterpart elaborates “it’s the one-million dollar question, ‘success’ - is it getting us closer to the goal” or does activity merely help “justify and renew the funding?” (I36-Dufour:54). The two directions of impact are related, however. For instance CEPS’ successful “branding and reputation...could lead to reinforced corporate membership” (I46-Emerson:56).

Given that the sample of identified EU-focused public policy institutes includes Chatham House – whose founding dates back nearly a century – and only FRIDE has disbanded at the time of research, we can safely say that however diverse or different these institutes may be, they have virtually all managed to stay afloat at the EU level, finding not only continued financial but also human-, symbolic or network resources.

*How measurable, quantifiable and attributable is EU think tank influence?*

When it comes to the causal attributability, operational measurability and the extent to which one can quantify influence of think tanks at EU level, there is a consensus among interviewees (just like among academics studying them): it is hard in practice, impossible for some, and yet it has to be done in the face of accountability pressures. “Can you, should you, do you measure the influence of your work?”, the think tankers were asked towards the end of interviews. Most listed output or outcome indicators - indirect proxies of potential influence - but readily acknowledged the basic dilemma:

*“It’s the nuclear question, and it comes at the end (laughs)...You look at numbers: how many people come to your events, download your stuff, how many unique visitors you have on your website, followers on Twitter or Facebook, things like this. This gives you a little bit of an indication...but it is never a full measure of impact.” (I59-Techau:42)*

Carnegie Europe’s director is far from the only think tank leader admitting difficulty: “it’s difficult to measure”, CEPS’ director reacts (I52-Gros:66), “devilishly hard to measure” (I57-Pelkmans:58), one colleague agrees; to Bruegel’s secretary general, “it is extremely difficult to work out how effective or what our impact is” (I19-Dann:56); “difficult to - not even measure but just - assess”, says another director (I44-Grevi:24). Some interviewees go even further in their measurement skepticism, or even fatalism: IFRI’s Brussels leader thinks “it’s impossible to gauge the influence of think tanks” (I23-Pertusot:38); “I wish I could, the problem is you can’t”, as a CEPS fellow puts it (I39-Valiante:45), echoed in his colleagues comment that “the beauty of success, of impact is it’s not measurable [but] you can try” (I13-Egenhofer:28); GGI’s director finds “if you think you can measure it, you must be kidding yourself” (I2-Koops:41).

And yet, the think tanks’ collected strategic communications material is full of prominently placed, visually highlighted reporting regarding performance indicators. Of course, “there is an inevitable amount of puffery in the claims of individual think tanks, especially when they are raising money or reporting to supporters”, perhaps an incentive to also inflate one’s own role, just as has been observed for US think tanks (Weidenbaum 2010:134). As EPC’s director explains, “realistically you have to try” to measure what work think tank work does in the world, even if “you can’t. Clearly, we have a responsibility towards funders, to try to show what we do” (I5-Zuleeg:38). “It’s tricky to measure it”, CEPS’ corporate and external relations head feels, “still we all know the old saying ‘What you measure is what you get done’” (I32-Born-Sirkel:36). It is a core tenet of Seele’s practical advice to think tank managers (2011).



In fact, the degree of self-reflection the measurement topic provokes goes to show just how central a preoccupation with metrics has become in the organizational field. Even the smaller but particularly larger EU think tanks often try to meticulously keep track of their outputs, and outcomes, even as societal impact tends to remain elusive. Output indicators include the number of annually published publications, events held, media or parliamentary testimony appearances, expert group or network participation as well as meetings with decision-makers or advisory roles taken up for various IOs. Outcome indicators, then, encompass evidence of how awareness is raised about an issue, how decision-makers or publics are educated or how a think tank's mission or vision is otherwise furthered as a result of such outputs and behind-the-scenes action, say when policy ideas or traces thereof are actually taken into account by politicians or international bureaucrats; some would add publication downloads, social- or mass media visibility, academic journal citations, prizes awarded or funds raised to this list.

Beyond functional benefits of finetuning operations (as learning organizations), institutes with public or private funding place a premium on tangible, visible metrics for symbolic reasons, to meet accountability standards and raise reputational capital. A prevailing, isomorphic management mantra is to measure what is measurable, and find ways to make measurable what is not - bearing in mind the reservation that not all one can count necessarily counts, and not all that ultimately counts can be counted. Unlike small civil society initiatives relying purely on volunteers' civic involvement, EU think tanks - even the smallest - have salaried employees and full-time managers, so we would also expect higher levels of rationalization (see Hwang/Powell 2009). Unlike firms with typically a single bottom line - short-term profit of shareholders - think tanks navigate between multiple bottom lines not pinned down in one number.

“Apart from the occasional reference, explicit reference to a policy brief or special report produced by a think tank in an official document of the EU”, which a CEPS interviewee brings up as one “measurable indicator, otherwise it's very fluffy, it's very hard to quantify” (I1-Blockmans:56). For instance, media coverage too is “very tangible” (I55-Muzi:24) and appearances now easier than ever to digitally track. Still, strictly speaking, “what is measured is not impact but output” (I7-Vanhercke:38) and outcomes - if the term impact is reserved for “significant or lasting changes in people's lives, brought about by a given action or series of actions” (Roche 1999:21). Establishing think tanks' causal power - their work's cause-and-effect relationships - is a thorny issue in the EU's open governance architecture, which is no closed system.

Again, the interviewed EU think tankers were usually very aware of the intricacies of retracing stringently causal evidence of their influence in a given process or situation. “Nobody can claim to be the father of good ideas, but everyone does”, jokes one, “whereas bad ideas have no fathers” or mothers (I33-Allio:37). To give an example, FoE’s policy director extols how crucial its work on Asia or EU-China ties has been:

*“I can tell you with no modesty that when it comes to the Asia program at FoE, we can measure success when we’ve seen the change of policies on Asia. We have raised awareness on Asia, I think we’ve done it more than anyone else has.” (I20-Islam:10)*

But such retrospective claims leave unaddressed the problems of multicausality and equifinality - policy change, say regarding China’s EU trade rapprochement, can and is likely to result from an interplay of many actors’ aspirations; awareness of an issue like this is a result that could have been achieved in myriad other ways, even if FoE’s contribution were to be mechanistically discerned as central in *ceteris paribus* terms. As OSEPI’s interviewee shares, therefore “‘contribution, not attribution’, that’s how we report it internally” (I69-Campbell:20). Yet public portrayals, say in think tanks’ annual reports, are usually causally much more self-confident, for strategic reasons.

In fact, however, all of this still assumes institutes are outside agents impacting governance and policy processes. But of course, this necessitates the willingness of policy- or decision-makers to engage and listen to them (Wessels/Schäfer 2007:202). Moreover, the image is further complicated, or turned on its head, when the insider status think tanks can attain due to a proximity to politics, notably EU institutions, is taken into account: as one interviewee pointedly says, “that’s a fundamental dilemma of the whole advisory-consultancy industry...Are you simply acting as a sounding box for ideas or decisions that have already been made, or do you have any influence?” (I4-Teti:46, see Young 2011). Put differently, are EU think tankers external experts influencing the Commission, for instance, or audiences relaying the official message?

While “being in high demand” (I3-Reljic:64) can be a sign of quality, it is also a possible indication of perceived mouldability. As OSE’s director freely admits, the research of both private and perhaps particularly publicly financed EU think tanks typically does not start from scratch but is formed with pre-existing ideas of funders: “You have a meeting with those people and they tell you ‘We want to do this or that ...These are the parameters” (I7-Vanhercke:28). So as we discussed above regarding think tankers’ innovativeness, there is a clear possibility of “a mental self-adjustment, where the type of language you use, the conversation you have with the funder about

what the funder would like to research defines the agenda”, in Boucher’s experience too, “without necessarily ill intention, it is integrated in the research terms” (I26:16). In an interesting twist, platform think tank ECDPM - strong on facilitation rhetoric - says it often does not acknowledge impact “as impartiality is essential in our work”:

*“We cannot formally acknowledge ECDPM’s true ‘impact’ on policy processes which are ...in the realm of states, multilateral institutions and professional bureaucracies...ECDPM prefers to see itself as a facilitator and broker of information, enabling institutions to fulfil their own goals, rather than itself ‘impacting’ their direction.” (SC 2015)*

EPC’s director alludes to this reasoning as well: if EPC’s work “is being looked at in EU institutions, it is having an impact...But I will never be able to say that has been based on our innovation” (I5-Zuleeg:20). “If policy-makers take our advice over their own advisers’ or staff’s advice, great”, GGI’s director agrees, even if “there are very few occasions where we can honestly claim that” (I2-Koops:40). In the end, one interviewee sums up, “it would be wrong for think tanks to think they can impact decision-making; it’s not about impacting it, it’s about influencing it” (I33-Allio:37).

Still, the large EU think tanks professionalize impact measurement: “we spend quite a bit of time trying to do that”, RAND Europe’s leader explains, “we have a whole research area on research impact” (I35-Hoorens:36), mainly geared to clients. Bertelsmann Foundation, next to institutional support of Germany’s Phineo, a non-profit advocating a stronger impact orientation for third sector initiatives, is also “investing quite a lot of time in-house on the question how to measure and quantify social impact”, its interviewed Brussels head notes (I27-Fischer:47); in fact, Phineo’s “Social Impact Navigator” (2014) guide sat right on his desk the day of our interview; it is meant as a practical compass to help initiatives assess outputs (activities happen, target groups are reached and accept offers), outcomes (people change) and impact (society changes), essentially one adaptation of the logical model developed by Carol Weis and since refined by others (1972, see Knowlton/Philips 2013 for an overview).

Most EU think tank leaders, however, say they ultimately resort to gut feeling or qualitative testimonials rather than elaborating if-then impact links: “you can feel it” (I36-Dufour:54); “you have a feeling it may have caught on” (I1-Blockmans:52); “it can be described not always in figures or numbers, but in effect” (I25-Mäder-Metcalf:28). EPC’s leader feels “the clearest indicators of impact are conversations... with policy-makers” (I5-Zuleeg:54). ECIPE’s director says his “biggest satisfaction” is if they just listen, even if policy impact is a different kettle of fish (I22-Erixon:22).

### *So what for impact?*

This to my knowledge most in-depth elaboration of how think tankers themselves see the intricacies of gauging their impact shows that many see it as an art, not a science. The interviewed think tank leaders fall back on a broad spectrum of success metrics, but emphasize direct policy impact on existing or pending legislation much less than most academic scholars studying them. Instead, discursive influence within formative phases of policy processes and their structural significance for wider governance are stressed. Having said that, as in the academic literature on think tanks, those active at EU level have made cautious forays into measuring and quantifying impact, or rather (it turns out upon closer inspection) keep a tally of outputs and try to track outcomes. I find a parallelism between a pervasive skepticism and the feeling of obligation to measure or demonstrate success for these knowledge-intensive institutes that need to raise financial and symbolic resources amidst profound performance uncertainties.

“We have talked about this a lot of times, and in 2036 we will still be talking about this”, a senior CEPS researcher alludes to the perennial nature of these issues, “so wisdom is there your guide, and not ‘Oh, we have to measure something because otherwise it can’t be true’” (I57-Pelkmans:27). Carnegie Europe’s leader recapitulates:

*“In the end, think tanks have to live with the fact that they can’t measure impact. If they start to agonize too much about it, that’s a problem, because they will get into a hunt for something they can never actually hunt down...quantifying something you can’t quantify. Organizations that rely on donations and fundraising find themselves in a very unthankful - in the end impossible - dilemma that they need to prove their impact, but they can’t. But the money they get depends on whether they can...It’s a vicious circle!”* (I59-Techau:42)

As for many of his colleagues, the most promising way out boils down to gut feeling: participating in the game of measurement while cultivating a sense of self-confidence in one’s own work’s value: “Do all the metrics you can, but in the end...trust yourself ...I advice all organizations to not loose sleep - or not loose too much sleep - over measurability, or immeasurability, of impact. It’s a race you cannot win” (I59:42).

Based on a similar philosophical stance on the impact conundrum, Bruegel has developed an institutional solution, a triennial external “impact review task force” mainly composed of a handful of professors to see whether and how its work matters. It also “decided to talk to policy-makers directly to ask them ‘Do you know Bruegel? Have you read a Bruegel paper? Were you influenced by Bruegel?’”, its secretary general explains, “in fact that has been a better assessment of how effective we have been, because we are getting this direct feedback from policy-makers” (I19-Dann:56).

Indeed, it is hard to overstate that whatever their arduous efforts in policy research or convening, eventually EU think tanks' "getting through" depends on the demand side as well: stakeholders' open ears (and purses), say bureaucrats' willingness to listen, politicians' readiness to have skin in the game of championing sensible policy ideas, journalists' providing them with a platform or businesses' appreciation of their events. In fact, this is often overseen to a striking extent in much of the literature on research uptake (mostly focused on academics' political influence), which frequently suggests that a key adjusting screw to maximize research impact is just better communication. The next penultimate chapter examines exemplarily for the European Commission how and why its officials across different DGs and job types draw on EU think tanks.

For now, the quintessence on the crucial "So what?" question about think tank impact is that without getting bogged down in efforts to measure direct policy impact, we must also come to grips with the wider structural significance of these institutes and the coalesced or competing institutional forces which are embodied within them. Abelson invokes the metaphor of a pendulum, evocative of swinging back and forth between in-house intellectual production and external advocacy in a pluralist context:

*"The need to be relevant and to be seen to be relevant pulls them towards advocacy; awareness that the value of their stock in the marketplace of policy ideas will suffer if the research and analysis on which this advocacy is based is substandard pulls think tanks back to [...generating] policy-relevant research and advice...If the scene in Brussels is subdued and understated, that in Washington D.C. is glitzy and loud."* (2018:13)

By extension, ongoing trade-offs between public visibility or backstage effectiveness are ingrained in think tanks' atomistic and collective pursuit of success or legitimacy. Qualitative "case studies of think tanks...can help shed light on the many factors that facilitate or frustrate their ability to achieve desired outcomes" (Abelson 2018:198). But it is equally important to improve our knowledge about their structural resources and role enactment. Interviewees from the think tank and other sectors agree that EU think tanks have carved out a niche for themselves, assisting the EU's international bureaucracy or multi-level governance in important if not always demonstrable ways. Institutes like CEPS are "part of the furniture, or the establishment", an interviewee puts it, they "have become a regular feature in the wider debate on EU policy issues in Brussels"; even if their presence is now taken for granted, he ponders that were they to disappear "I certainly think the EU institutions would miss them dearly" (I1-Blockmans:71). In Brussels but also across country capitals, EU think tanks organize an infrastructure of policy reflection, hybrid professionals and cross-sector convening.

Their influence in concrete governance settings can be quick and direct, but more commonly comes into effect only over longer time spans and happens indirectly. One think tank leader alludes to Keynes' dictum on how economists' ideas resonate: "of course it's Keynes saying...that people today are probably influenced by the ideas of some dead economist. Now I don't think that any dead think tanker has quite got to that level or perhaps will", he laughs, "you will probably not change a policy line over night...but perhaps you plant a seed, you plant an idea, an angle" (I44-Grevi:20). In its book "Waging the War of Ideas", influential advocacy think tank IEA explains:

*"Sorting out what we do...and how it impacts on public opinion and policy is not easy. It's like tossing a stone into a pond and then tracking every single ripple, including the ones that disappear."* (Blundell 2003:75)

This metaphor, not further elaborated, nicely captures that impact is rarely isolated in just a water bottle, so to speak, but ripples through the wider waters of governance; think tanks' efforts can either sink like a stone, contributing to its informational basis; but, as in stone skipping, depending on the angle aimed at they can also travel farther and faster with multiple points of impact, each with its own waves, before sinking in; yet in each scenario, the appearance and traceability of impact is of a transient nature. While institutes' work can occasionally produce a big splash of attention and go viral, most of the mundane consequences remain more hidden under the surface, unfolding in think tank- or policy networks. Such networks' causal power is notoriously hard to determine (Ball/Exley 2011). Stone speaks of a process of "attrition and infiltration, with versions of traces of network ideas being written into state documents...although probably the greater part of network effort is 'wasted'" (2000:219) or not very visible.

A notion of "collective impact" (Kania/Kramer 2011), however, is still nascent in the field (see Chapter 8). As we have seen, there is continuous communication, but limited available funding for longer-term collective impact initiatives; they have built transnational think tank networks, say TEPSA, the Brussels Think Tank Dialogue, but with a limited backbone support infrastructure; and beyond their usually broad Europeanist outlook, common policy stances and joint advocacy efforts still appear to be the exception; there is no one measurement of success, but ranking think tanks is popular. Thus, Kania and Kramer's original "five conditions of collective success" (2011) are only partly met, but arguably already more than for think tanks in the US. Several interviewed EU think tankers lament cultural inhibitions to collective efforts. "Think tank cooperation where you would have a common position of think tanks, I

haven't seen", EPC's director reflects (I5-Zuleeg:52). For Bruegel's interviewee, the institutionalization of the field is far from finished: "as a collective, we have more work to do in terms of defining who we are, what our role is in the democratic process, what our values are", he observes, "and how people can be reassured that what we say is based on evidence even though we have to get funding from somewhere" (I19-Dann:62). There is no common code of conduct about what good and bad think tanking is, no equivalent of All European Academies' "European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity" (2017). For the moment the rankings fill this void.

It was noted that the annual "go-to think tanks" survey (McGann et al. 2018) has become something of a tournament ritual for EU think tanks' organizational field. As Abelson sees it, the benchmarking exercise institutes' "equivalent of the Oscars, Emmys, Tonys, Grammys, and Golden Globe Awards all wrapped up in one", and while their yearly public release "may not afford think tank directors an opportunity to schmooze on the red carpet", a good placement in the ranking can be worth its weight in gold from a think tank's reputational and visibility perspective (2018:197). The latest ranking shows that "Washington is still the busiest, but the think tank scenes in London, Berlin and Brussels are very active, with dozens of major research institutions and advocacy organizations jostling to be heard" (Abelson 2018:2), even as the methodological basis of the perception-based take continues to raise eyebrows.

"The beauty contest... is what we call it, but I wasn't going to say that to you", Bruegel's interviewee laughs, explaining "we have an ambiguous attitude toward it... It's better than nothing but...it's a beauty contest! Of course, secretly we all want to be recognized objectively for our beauty, but we also want to be recognized for our brains" (I19-Dann:68). Academic criticisms of McGann's ranking (Seiler/Wohlrabe 2010, Buldiowski 2010, 2011, Mendizabal 2012) list intransparency, definitional slack and "get out the vote" type gaming as well as a biased sample as methodological faults rendering results less reliable, or worse invalid. These methodological faults do not go unnoticed in the think tank world - as one CEPS researcher puts it drastically: "if you see how that ranking is accomplished, I just become sad" (I57-Pelkmans:58). At the same time, Abelson points out, "reputational measures of influence have a long and respectable history in political science" since community power studies (2018:9, see Fischer/Sciarini 2015:61-62), and help capture constitutively elusive phenomena. He finds McGann "may still [offer] the best ranking of think tank influence" (2018:9).

Meanwhile, other rankings sprung up around the time of research: the UK's monthly Prospect Magazine, for example, issues own qualitative rankings since 2014 in which an expert jury reviews institute performance, similar to Bruegel's task force. As in McGann's University of Pittsburgh ranking, Bruegel has been among awardees. In fact, it showcases the glassy trophy prominently in its library where the interview conducted for this project took place. "It is clear we are successful, we have impact, and we gained some respect", its secretary general proudly concludes (I19-Dann:56). Another ranking developed by think tankers from CGD (Clark/ Roodman 2013) finds "quality is subjective, particularly when research is normative or shaped by ideology" and chooses to single-mindedly focus on ranking think tanks by their public profiles (factoring in social media fans, website traffic and number of websites that link to an institutes' website and news media citations, readily retrievable off-the-shelf metrics). Interestingly, the aggregated profile scores are also adjusted for think tank expenses; US think tanks like Brookings Institution and Heritage Foundation rank high whereas similarly large think tanks like GMF or RAND find themselves towards the bottom.

Finally, several other commentators also place a premium on being cited in the classical mass media, say global news sources such as BBC News, The Economist, the Financial Times or national lead magazines like Der Spiegel (Ruble 2000, Posen 2002, Trimboth 2005); Kelstrup has taken to studying their Google News hits (2017). It seems that when public visibility and not general reputation is rewarded, advocacy think tanks do comparatively better than established- and platform ones. Of course, as Rich observes, there is also no automatism from visibility to influence (2004:103). Several interviewees, especially RAND Europe's representative, were eager to stress that it is easy to confuse high public visibility with high impact in corridors of power: "A lot of impact remains hidden under the surface" and is not captured by rankings, he argues, "it's just implemented by policy officers we work with...behind-the-scenes sounds a bit dodgy or secretive...it simply never reaches or percolates the public eye or media...a lot of the work is simply not so interesting for the wider public" (I35-Hoorens:58). For EPC's director too, "the public channel matters, but...the long-term sustainable impact...is much more about the kinds of things which people don't see", he says, "the meetings, the lunches, the workshops, the task forces" (I5-Zuleeg:44). Still, E3G's Brussels head maintains, "a lot of think tanks and NGOs have to do much more [visibility-oriented activities] also just for funding reasons - even if you do amazing work in the background and you are very good at influencing", she



stresses the need for self-marketing fundraising, “if no one knows you’re actually the one doing it, it is going to be difficult to get the funding renewed” (I36-Dufour:36).

Ensuring future funding is by far the most-cited challenge EU think tankers see on the horizon: “the challenge is sustainability in the next years” (I8-Leblanc:46) for small institutes like S&C; to EPC’s chief “the funding model for most think tanks is under threat” in the medium term; also in the long run, GGI’s director thinks, a key challenge potentially frustrating impact is “finances, finances, finances - many think tanks that could rely on steady incomes, steady inflows have to rethink their strategy. They will have to rethink their funding base, they are forced to go for project-funding, which - by the way - will also force them to cooperate more” (I2-Koops:56).

However, think tanks’ pathways to influence can simply not be solely captured by money, publicity, data on tweets or Google hits: for instance “Bruegel’s influence on policy-makers, its reputation as one of the world’s top think tanks in international economics are [also] based on...intimate transactions between its experts and leading corporate and public officials and much less on media footprint” (Abelson 2018:11). In one sense, metrics like website download statistics are “brutally clear information” (I46-Emerson:44), as a CEPS senior researcher remarks; but, as his colleagues add, “download rates of publications...show how many people have downloaded it, but not necessarily read it” (I47-Behrens:34); downloads - or attention more generally - is “also driven by the use of magic keywords in the title...or you’re dealing with a topic that is trendy at the moment, and so people are interested in that” (I39-Valiante:45).

All this is why academic accompanying studies of think tanks remain of the essence. The argument here is that beyond EU think tankers’ individual influence as borderland professionals or institutes’ efficacy on their own, it is also their cumulative interplay at the crossroads of sectors and disciplines (at the organizational field level) which must enter our understanding of this organizational form’s multifarious impact. Ironically, the rankings’ and think tanks’ own incessant talk of their innovativeness, independence and impact may spread cynicism among core constituencies, namely if expectations are raised too high for what can realistically be expected from a motley bunch of experts working at relatively small or medium-sized not-for-profit institutes amidst a plethora of other voices active in EU multi-level, continent-wide governance. At the same time, as the quote attributed to anthropologist Margaret Mead cautions: “Never doubt a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has”. And think tanks clearly can and do matter.

## **European Commission officials‘ surveyed usage of EU think tanks’ work**

This last section presents results of the author’s survey conducted end of 2014 with a representative, random sample of European Commission officials (N=671) in three job categories - advisers, directors or unit heads, and policy or desk officers - across all the policy-involved Commission departments or services (see Chapter 3 or Appendix 4). The behavioral and attitudinal question items focus on whether and how Commission employees actually draw on EU think tanks’ work within their own working routines. To gauge the frequency and nature of reported usage, they are asked how often they consider EU think tanks as information sources; why they typically do or do not do so; and, based on a list of EU think tanks in Brussels or beyond sampled for this project, which three institutes have “among the highest reputation” within their departments (in a sense of being a trusted source of expertise, good ideas, or simply well-known).

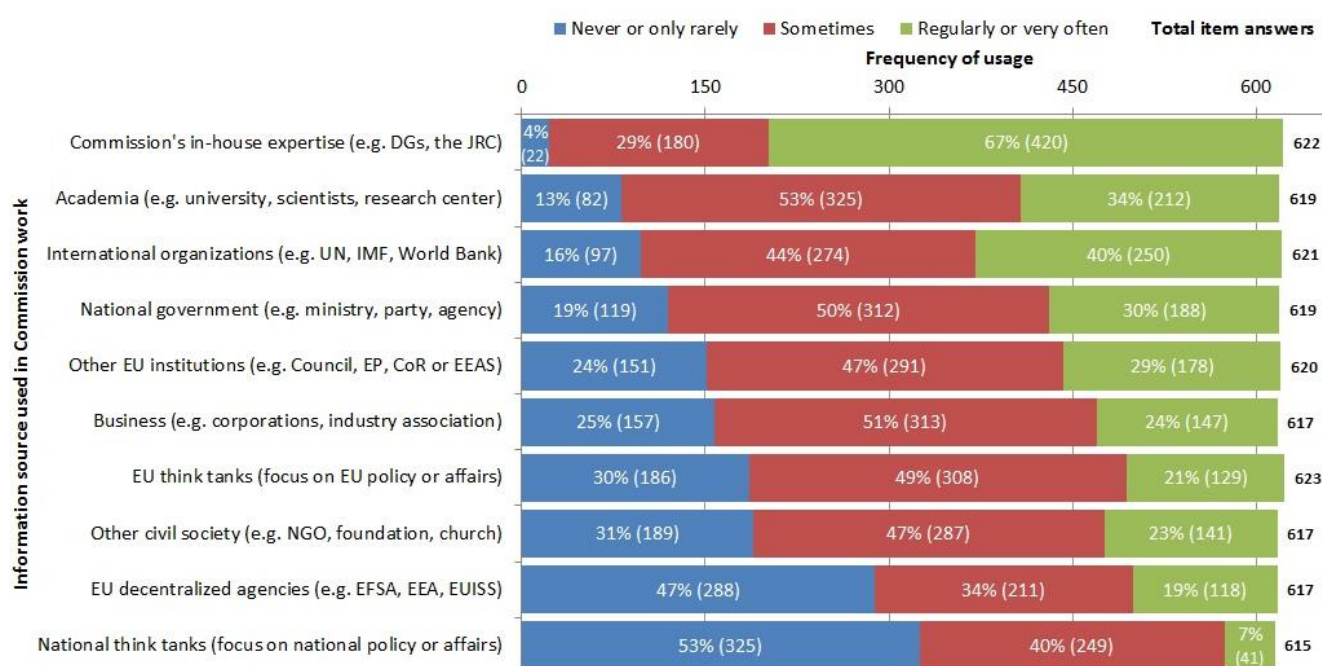
The motivation behind this last integral empirical component of the dissertation was to transcend think tankers’ own claims or beliefs about their relevance or impact by “asking the other side”, namely the potential demand side of the people working at the EU’s de facto executive body. The interview data has already brought this alive (see above). We also saw that many Brussels institutes draw substantial portions of their revenues from EU funds (see Chapter 6); the Commission interviewees openly said that EU think tanks are frequently viewed as audiences or even “extended arms” of the international bureaucracy’s own agenda rather than crucial “external advisers”. Thus, the survey explicitly asks for symbolic next to instrumental uses of expertise, operationalizing the knowledge utilization literature’s insight that civil servants just as likely draw on experts’ credibility to lend authority to their preferences or signal how sound their decisions are than to improve actual policy (see Boswell 2008, 2009).

### *How often do EU think tank contributions inform the Commission’s work?*

A first finding is that EU think tanks are far from the only - or most frequently used - sources Commission staff use to inform their work. In fact, what is often not realized is that the European Commission employs over 3,000 people (83 percent hold a PhD) in its own Joint Research Council (JRC) - a science and knowledge service with DG status that spans six sites in Belgium, Germany, Italy, Netherlands and Spain - with around €330 million annually at its disposal for scientific or technical advice across all research areas “to help [it] achieve its political priorities” (Commission 2018).

**Figure 51.** Commission official-reported usage of information sources (N=623)

Note: Based on answers from approximately 623 (92 percent) out of the overall 671 respondents (48 individuals did not answer this question or all specific items, so there is 8 percent item non-response).



“How frequently do you use the following sources to get information you need for your Commission work?”, sampled policy-involved Commission officials were asked. Virtually all respondents (96 percent) sometimes - two thirds regularly or very often - draw on the in-house expertise, be it from DGs or JRC, as can be seen in Figure 51. Nearly nine out of ten officials say they sometimes - a third regularly or very often - use academic research in their work. Over eight in nine report other international organizations such as UN, IMF or World Bank as information sources for their work; here, the group of regular or very frequent users is also particularly large (40 percent). Between 80 to 75 percent sometimes to very often draw on national governments, other EU institutions or businesses (including corporations and industry associations).

EU think tanks appear in seventh place: half of all Commission officials do come in contact with their work sometimes; less than a fourth draws regularly on it; nearly a third of officials never or only rarely consult their work. As information sources, they are used just as often as any other civil society organization such as NGOs and foundations. However, it could be argued that being used on a par with the many more much larger INGOs active at EU level included under the civil society umbrella category, this level of attention where it can truly matter is no small feat for the comparatively much smaller organizational field of EU-focused policy institutes.

Seven out of ten Commission officials use EU think tanks' work at least occasionally. Another survey finding shown in Figure 51 is that national think tanks are strikingly absent as information sources for the Commission's transnational workforce: under one in ten officials uses them regularly or very often in Commission work (as compared to 21 percent for EU think tanks), 40 percent sometimes (compared to 49 percent), and over half - 53 percent - never or rarely (30 percent for EU think tanks).

The survey is designed and the sampling stratified with meaningful differences according to people's job position in the different Commission departments in mind: directors may be too much above the fray of think tanks' nitty-gritty policy inputs whereas advisers or policy officers lower in the hierarchy may be more aware of them. Does this expectation correspond to the officials' actual (survey-reported) behavior?

In fact, a more nuanced picture emerges: the small group of advisers draws on the institutes most often or intensively (48 percent sometimes, 38 percent regularly), followed by directors or unit heads (52 percent sometimes, and 26 percent regularly), but policy or desk officers least often (48 percent sometimes, 15 percent regularly). So nearly four in ten staffers in a policy or desk officer position never or only rarely refer to EU think tanks' contributions in their daily Commission work, while this is the case for just two and one in ten directors or unit heads and advisers, respectively (clearly, the think tanks' work does not "penetrate" to Commission officials equally).

EU think tanks are also used differently across DGs for informational purposes. Among the DGs with almost 20 cases and above, we can distinguish three clusters: nearly half of the officials of the environment-related DGs MOVE, MARE, ENV and DG SANCO draw on EU think tanks at least sometimes or regularly to very often; it is true for around or over two thirds of staffers from DGs like ENTR, EAC or EMPL and CNECT or REGIO; finally, eight or nine out of ten DG ECFIN, MARKT and DEVCO officials or cabinet members occasionally or frequently use EU think tanks (again we see that indeed there are definite differences across the surveyed DGs, too).

This pattern corresponds to the amount of Brussels institutes in topical niches: the environment-focused T&E, Ecologic Institute, E3G or IEEP form a small group, a larger number of institutes works on business, employment or regional policies and EU economic, financial, internal market or development policies are tackled head on by scores of Brussels think tankers, not least by central players Bruegel and CEPS.

To contextualize, we can extend the perspective to all sources informing DGs' daily work: in the first cluster of least intensive EU think tank users, the top source of

information is the Commission’s in-house expertise. Virtually all staff of such DGs make use of it on occasion or constantly, as frequently as national governments (DG MOVE and SANCO), business (DG MARE) or academia (DG ENV); the DG cluster of quite regular EU think tank users also mostly uses in-house expertise, followed by academia (DG EAC), governments or IOs (DG EMPL, REGIO) or business (DG CNECT), but EU think tanks are significantly more often used than national institutes; in the last cluster of the heavy-users of EU think tanks’ contributions, their work is nearly as frequently consulted as Commission in-house or academic expertise and governments or IOs (notably DG MARKT, but this also applies to ECFIN, DEVCO).

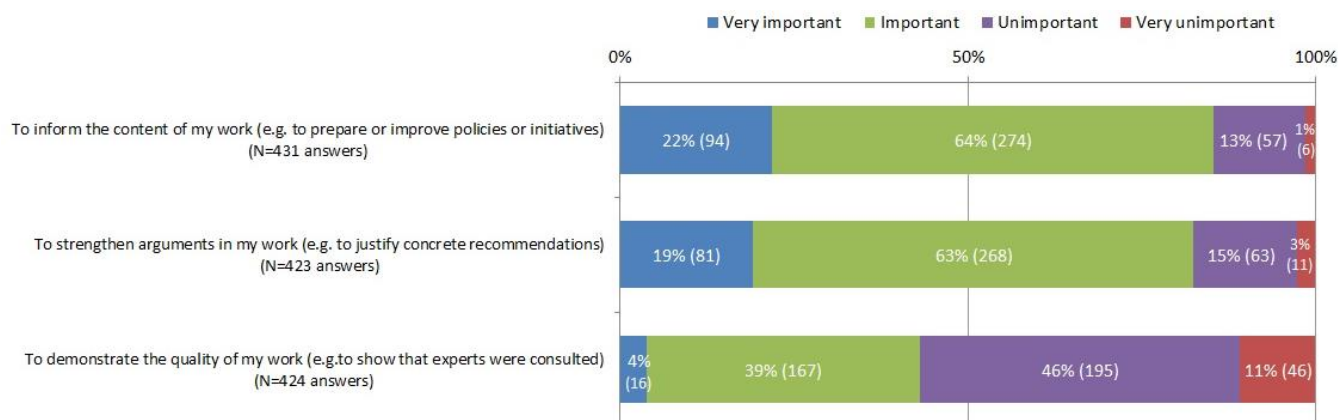
There was no significant difference between male and female respondents when it comes to the frequency of drawing on EU think tanks as information sources. The usage pattern by age group is also similar, although the findings suggest that the older Commission officials are, the more often they use EU think tanks in their work: while over 60 percent of respondents in their thirties draw on them sometimes or regularly to very often, this was the case for around 70 percent in their forties or fifties, and for 85 percent of those Commission respondents aged sixty and above.

*For which reasons do Commission officials (not) draw on EU think tanks?*

The surveyed Commission officials were asked for what reasons they specifically use institutes in their work, or why – if this was the case - they typically do not. “Let us just concentrate on EU think tanks”, the question wording went, “how important are the following reasons if you do draw on them?” Figure 52 below shows the results, which can be interpreted as an impressive empirical confirmation of Boswell’s work. Commission officials themselves readily acknowledge that next to instrumental use of

**Figure 52.** Reasons for drawing on EU think tanks in Commission work (N=426)

Note: Based on answers by over 426 (97 percent) of 437 respondents sometimes or regularly to very often drawing on EU think tanks (11 did not answer this, so item non-response here is only 3 percent).



- in this case think tank - expertise, symbolic or political use is far from uncommon. The top reason was “to inform the content of my work (e.g. to prepare or improve policies or initiatives)”, which 86 percent of respondents said was important or very important when they draw on EU think tanks’ work. The argumentative function of backing up existing political positions - the phrasing was “to strengthen arguments in my work (e.g. to justify concrete recommendations)” - comes second, with 82 percent of survey participants picking this reason as either important or even very important. Symbolic utilization of EU think tank knowledge was comparatively less important; however, 43 percent acknowledged this to play an important or a very important role.

Very clearly, EU think tanks’ work is also being used to increase the legitimacy of Commission decisions or to lend additional credibility to the EU institution’s work next to informing policy processes at the developmental or implementation stages. So EU think tanks fulfil multiple functions for the Commission as a political organization in Boswell’s sense, including instrumental, substantiating and legitimizing functions - to inform policies, but also to signal that experts are consulted (Boswell 2008, 2009).

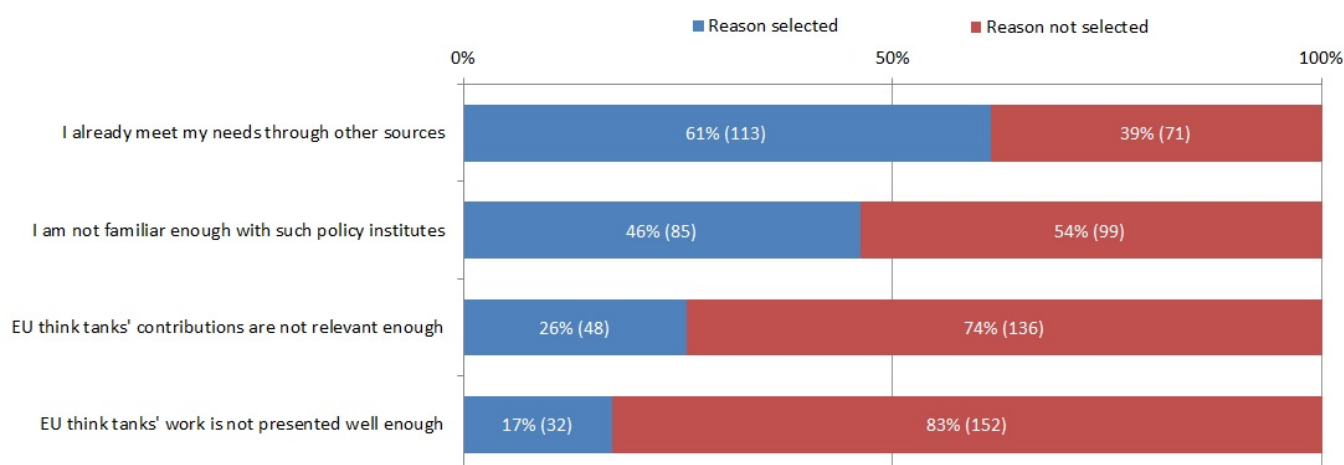
Of course, there are other reasons beyond the rather stylized, standardized ones: 71 Commission officials (16 percent of who replied here) typed in a different reason. However, many of these could be subsumed within these three functional categories. Several respondents used the open textbox to comment that they find EU think tanks are a “good source of information” or - in the words of a DG ENTR policy officer - “to get a feel for other policies and feed in external analysis and reasoning”.

This fits the idea of instrumental usage, as do remarks such as “to get new ideas” or - as a senior DG CNECT adviser put it - “to probe ideas before preparing policy or elaborating arguments, to trigger new ideas”. A second set of typed in reasons expresses a search of support for preexisting hunches or political positions: a DG EMPL policy officer draws on EU think tanks to “provide arguments for speeches”; a DG DEVCO director writes “to reinforce evidence-based analysis” and a DG CNECT director shops around to “quickly (informally) validate policy options”.

Legitimizing or “just for show” usage is not mentioned in the open responses, possibly also because of a certain social desirability attached to it. Interesting other replies included “acquiring broader cross-policy advice” or “to get broader and more critical views” as well as “to go into detail in a given subject area”. One policy or desk officer in her sixties or older from DG REGIO even wrote that as a Commission official, she feels obliged as “it is my duty to reflect opinions of several institutions”.

**Figure 53.** Reasons to not or rarely use EU think tanks in Commission work (N=184)

Note: Based on answers by 184 (99 percent) of 186 respondents who said they never or rarely draw on EU think tanks (33 persons who saw this question did not answer, so item non-response is 15 percent).



Turning to Commission officials who said they tend not to draw on EU think tanks (see Figure 53), they were asked “Why do you never or only rarely use them in your Commission work?” Multiple answers and open entries were possible. By some margin, the top reason was “I already meet my needs through other sources”, which 61 percent of the respective respondents selected. Unfamiliarity with EU-focused think tanks is also common: nearly every other bureaucrat who saw the question item (46 percent) chose “I am not familiar enough with such policy institutes” as a reason.

Much research uptake literature emphatically argues civil society organizations and particularly think tanks must continuously stress their own relevance or improve how they present their work if they seek to penetrate the short attention spans of their target groups, in this case international civil servants and busy bureaucrats at EU level. However, in surveyed officials’ estimation these factors are of secondary importance: a fourth (26 percent) found “EU think tanks’ contributions are not relevant enough”, and not even a fifth (17 percent) answered “their work is not presented well enough”.

Other reasons for not using the EU think tanks were detailed by 27 (15 percent) of survey participants who indicated they never or only rarely use them in their work. Again, several of these answers can be subsumed in the standardized answer options. Interestingly, the issue of irrelevance most often surfaces in policy officer comments, for instance by two DG AGRI staffers who find EU think tanks “not relevant for my tasks” or say that “at my level I have no need to use them”. Another frequent refrain of Commission staff working on very concrete dossiers is that EU think tanks are not sufficiently specialized to enter their work: “They are not particularly relevant in my

area of professional interest”, one DG SANCO director writes, and another male policy officer colleague of his similarly expresses that they are “not much related to my line of work, i.e. security (law enforcement)”. To the contrary, a DG JUST policy officer finds think tanks’ work to be “very specific on topics unrelated to my work; I find the discussion of topics on unrelated subjects quite closed (i.e. high entry cost)”.

Several entries raise quality concerns about institutes’ work, which is too “often based on unclear or unreliable data and evidence” in the eyes of a DG CNECT policy officer, with “no critical discussion of data sources”. A DG ECFIN director agrees: “Not always objective, not always unpolitical and going too much with the wind”, he finds, “to maximize attention or funding”. In a similar vein, “I do not need ‘blue-sky’ inputs”, one DG EAC adviser chimed in, “rather comprehensive surveys of the state of the art in a particular field”. A lack of impartiality or innovativeness arises several times: institutes’ work is “often much too ‘expected’” for one DG CNECT adviser; she finds they “do not provide innovative perspectives”, and does not draw on them. “Evidence of bias, a lack of objectivity [is] apparent” for a senior DG ENV director; a junior department colleague also sees “lack of impartiality”; even more pointedly, one DG ENTR policy officer is convinced that “they are often lobbyists in disguise”.

Few survey participants blamed think tanks’ communication for their disregard when it comes to considering their work: “Think tanks tend to e-mail you what they are working on at present”, one DG MARE director points out, however, “and that does not necessarily coincide with what I might be working on”. Another DG MOVE director finds EU think tanks and their legitimacy hard to box: “they do not represent any relevant stakeholder, they are neither public authorities nor civil society or industry concerned by our policy-making”, she writes, adding that in her experience “their contributions tend to duplicate what we already get from other sources”.

These points on think tanks’ unique contribution and target group orientation come together in two further remarks stressing how Commission work environment is no exemption to nowadays’ complex information overload: “Information in Brussels is already very (too?) abundant”, one policy officer writes, so “think tanks, in my opinion, need to prove their added value and impartiality”. A DG MOVE policy officer similarly reflects that “even though it might be interesting and beneficial to my work, unfortunately I do not have time to read additional materials. Plus, if top management is not persuaded about results of an interesting study”, says she, “it seems pointless to bring innovative ideas to my work (in a top-down system)”.



*Which EU think tank formats do Commission officials typically turn to?*

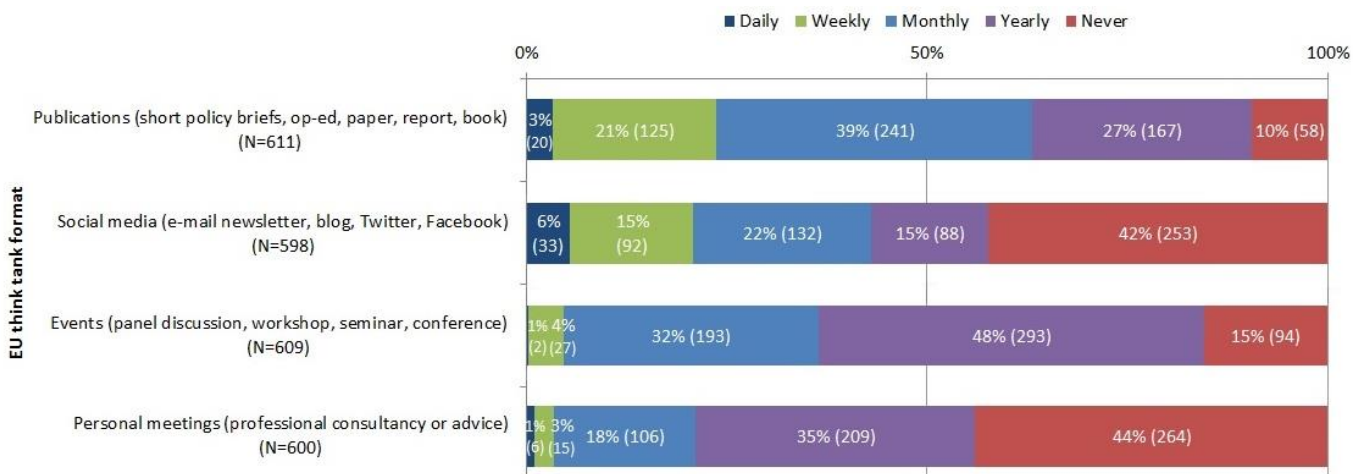
“EU-focused think tanks do many different things. How often do you usually turn to their following formats?” This question was posed to all Commission officials filling in the author’s web-based questionnaire after a mid-survey motivational slogan that read “Now there are only two questions left - bear with us, we appreciate your effort”. And 90 percent of Commission participants who got to this point diligently answered. Figure 54 shows how often publications, events, personal meetings and social media contributions of EU think tanks are actually used, according to Commission officials.

The printed word - everything from short policy briefs to reports or books - is still the most frequent form how the Commission’s bureaucrats stay in touch with EU think tank’s work: we see that a quarter check EU think tank publications weekly or daily, six out of ten at least every other month, and nine out of ten at least yearly. Under half of Commission officials follow EU think tanks on social media, including e-mail newsletters, blogs or Twitter accounts: under one in ten surveyed persons is in daily contact through this channel, four in ten “tune in” to their social media channels monthly, confirming many think tankers’ own doubts about effectiveness (see above).

While intervals of time passing between attending institutes’ events are even longer and EU think tanks’ weekly event visitors are an absolute minority, a third of Commission officials does participate in panel discussions, workshops, seminars or conferences organized by EU think tanks on a monthly basis. In fact, from a yearly perspective over eight out of ten Commission employees attend such events each year. This is the case for two thirds when it comes to personally meeting EU think tankers,

**Figure 54.** Frequency of EU think tank formats used in Commission work (N=605)

Note: Based on answers from approximately 605 (90 percent) out of the overall 671 respondents (66 individuals did not see or answer this question or all specific items, so item non-response is 10 percent).



for instance in the context of professional consultancy or advice. However, less than a fourth of surveyed officials are in monthly or even more frequent contact with them.

Which hierarchical Commission levels do EU think tanks reach regularly with different contribution formats? According to the survey - stratified by job position - advisers turn out to be the most regular recipients of all their different output formats, followed by directors or unit heads; again, low-level officials are least regular users. For instance, eight of ten of the surveyed advisers consult EU think tank publications at least monthly, followed by directors (seven in ten) and policy officers (six in ten). Seven out of ten advisers follow their social media outputs at least monthly, again followed by directors and policy officers (four in ten, respectively). And while nearly six out of ten advisers attend EU think tank events at least monthly, it is less common among directors (four in ten) or policy officers (three in ten) to participate this often. Personally sitting down or seeking advice with EU think tankers on a monthly basis is the exception for Commission advisers (only three out of ten do so at least monthly), even more so among directors and unit heads as well as policy officers (two in ten).

*Are there national- or EU think tanks Commission staff have worked with?*

The survey conducted also asked Commission officials the simple yes or no question “Have you ever worked for, served on the board or are otherwise affiliated with what could be called a national or EU-focused think tank?”, following up about the names. Of the 646 - 96 percent of the overall 671 - respondents who answered this question, it resulted in only 15 entries matching the author’s list of national or EU think tanks, with a total of just 17 policy institute affiliations by Commission respondents (27 other entries referred to Commission or EU member state advisory groups, for-profit consultancies, national or international NGO but not specific think tank affiliations).

DG AGRI officials typed in affiliations to the EU think tanks Notre Europe and PISM as well as two national institutes; a BEPA adviser was involved with the EPC, IAI and Bonn Centre for International Conversion (BICC); a cabinet member with IEP when it was still based in Bonn; a DG COMP staffer with RAND Europe; a DG JUST official with CEPS; and one from DG DEVCO with ECDPM; all other isolated think tank entries referred to specific national institutes. It is clear from this approach that the survey results do not allow for claiming a wide-ranging “revolving door” phenomenon. In fact, CV-based career coding sheds more light on it (see Chapter 8). Commission officials usually sit saddle fast in their international bureaucrat job; a less than tenth is formally linked with an EU think tank before or next to their career.

*Which are the most reputed EU think tanks within the Commission DGs?*

The last survey question tried to elicit EU think tanks' reputational standing among the different Commission job categories and DGs. Surveyed officials could select up to three of the EU think tanks in Brussels or beyond sampled for this project from a drop-down list or type in choices (the interactive survey tool automatically suggested options for ease of answering; respondents could also type in an "other think tank")<sup>8</sup>.

The question phrasing was: "From your memory or the list below, please select up to three EU-focused think tanks you feel have among the highest reputation in your Commission department or service". An additional note explained: "The order does not matter here, and 'reputation' means that a think tank is generally seen as a trusted source of expertise, good ideas, or simply quite well-known". This last survey question is thus meant to capture both the recognition value plus quality judgements.

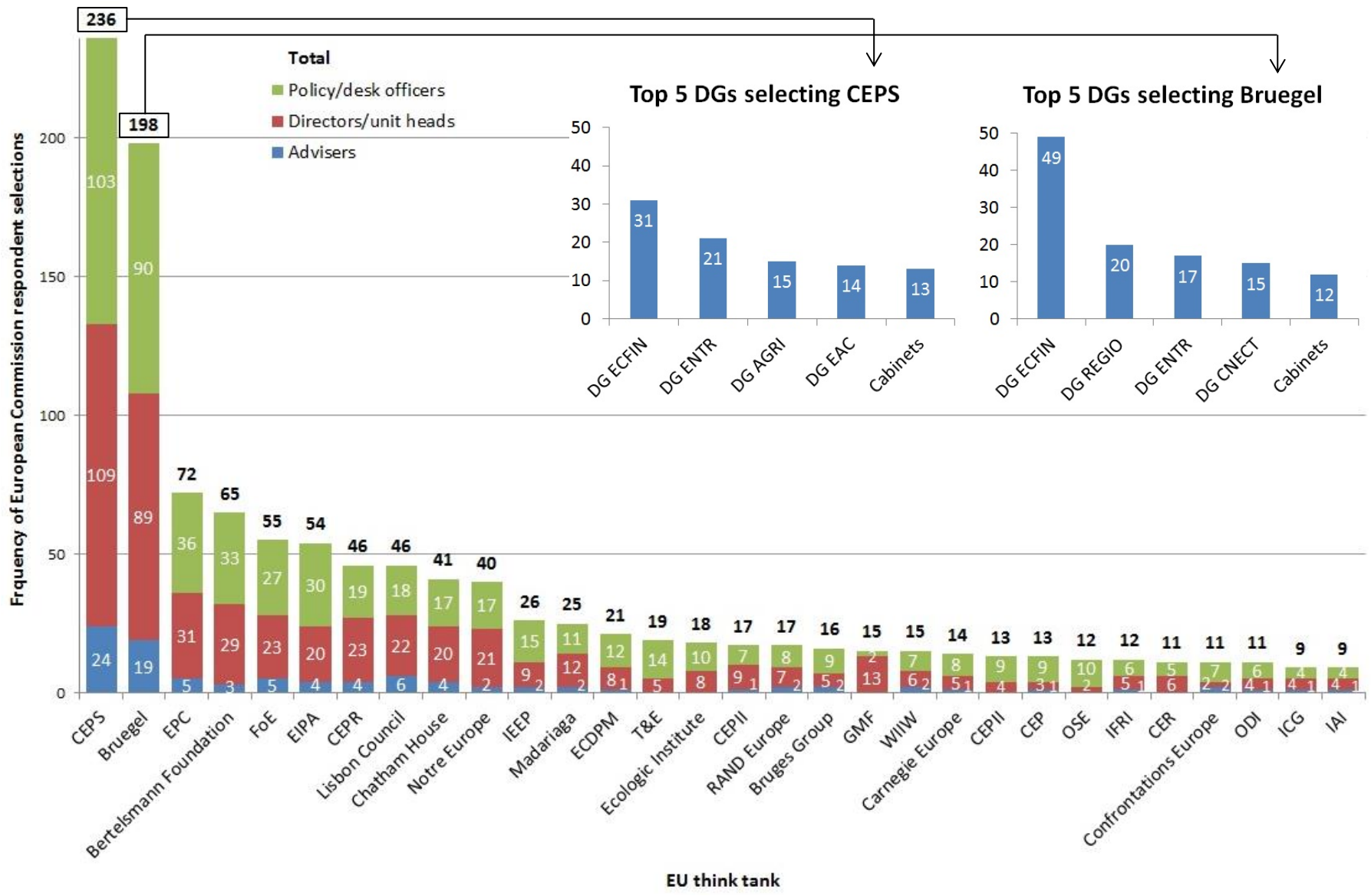
Figure 55 below shows top 30 EU think tanks selected as those "with among the highest reputation" by Commission advisers, directors and policy or desk officers. In terms of total "nominations", generalist CEPS comes out on top (236 or 16 percent of all 1,457 selections made), but it is closely followed only by the specialist Bruegel (with nearly 200 or 14 percent out of all selections). As in the previous chapter's networks, these two institutes are central players, also for Commission officials in all positions. Together, they account for nearly a third (434 or 30 percent) of selections made. The small bar charts in Figure 55 "zoom in" which top five DGs select them: CEPS and (slightly more so) Bruegel are held in high esteem within DG ECFIN, DG ENTR (CEPS scores slightly higher here), and equally among the cabinet members.

With some distance, the platform think tanks EPC and FoE plus Bertelsmann Foundation follow on the heels of CEPS and Bruegel among the top five most selected EU think tanks. According to the survey results, they are among the best known and most reputed institutes across Commission DGs of the EU's de facto executive body. The high placement of the Bertelsmann Foundation is particularly noteworthy here, since it is the first think tank here not primarily based in Brussels, and outdoes SWP, which does not appear among the top 30 despite being "Europe's largest think tank" in the foreign policy domain (SC 2017). With 40 or more selections, EIPA, CEPR, Lisbon Council, Chatham House and Notre Europe appear more relevant or eminent for Commission officials, and complete the top ten of most often selected institutes.

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<sup>8</sup> Thus, if a participant started typing "Br" the web-based survey automatically offered "Bruegel" and "Bruges Group" as possibly relevant options, similar to Google's automatic search completion. Long think tank names on the list included abbreviations for ease of recognition when answering this item.

**Figure 55.** Top 30 EU think tanks selected by Commission staff as those with among the highest reputation, by job position (N=1,457)  
 Note: Based on answers from 532 (80 percent) of overall 671 respondents (71 had existed survey by this point; 68 did not answer, so 10 percent item non-response).



Taken together, these top ten most frequently selected institutes are chosen 854 times (59 percent of a total 1,457 selections) as the EU think tanks which surveyed officials feel have among the highest reputation in their Commission department or service. The platform think tanks EPC and FoE are particularly often invoked by DG ENTR, CNECT, REGIO or SANCO staff (EPC also by cabinet members, FoE by DG RTD).

Bertelsmann Foundation, on the other hand, is mostly cited by DG EMPL plus EAC staff, befitting its recast image of championing labor market or education policy at EU level, which is different from its perceived profile in Germany (see Chapter 5). While EIPA's selections are relatively spread out across 20 DGs - it can indeed claim "strong ties and a network with the European Commission" (SC 2018) through many training or research activities - over half of CEPR's "nominations" are by DG ECFIN and most for the Lisbon Council yield from the also technology-focused DG CNECT. The selections of Chatham House and Notre Europe span a variety of different DGs.

By and large, this sequence of most-invoked think tanks remains unchanged if we consider respondents' gender as well as age. Only 45 participants entered other think tank names manually. These included no already listed ones and were typically national institutes or NGOs rather than EU think tanks in this project's definition, which speaks for the good cognitive "functioning" of this survey question in practice.

One DG EAC director, for instance, considers the German "Ifo Institute (CESifo)" to be among the best-reputed in her department, and a DG TAXUD director cites the UK-based microeconomic "Institute for Fiscal Studies" (both are national think tanks). Other mentions include associations: a DG RTD director brings up "Association of Space and Defence" (Aerospace and Defence Industries Association of Europe, an umbrella structure of EU firms and national associations).

Only one - more junior - DG AGRI policy or desk officer used the write-in box to remark that she does "not know any of those" listed institutes. But Commission officials are generally aware of the EU think tanks as a special class of organizations, evidence which further corroborates the argument that they make up their own field, and are also seen to inhabit their own organizational field by this core constituency. This last section has been an attempt to triangulate EU think tankers' own claims of how innovative (and thus useful as an information source), independent (and thus trusted as authoritative experts) and impactful (and thus used) they are where it truly matters, namely at the European Commission as the EU executive governance organ. Next to rankings, survey research can be useful for gauging think tanks' actual usage.

## Chapter 10

# Conclusion: (EU) Think Tanks as a Field of Study and Practice

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### Introduction

This dissertation offers a first in-depth, multi-method study of the organizational field of EU think tanks and their hybrid experts active at EU level in Brussels and beyond. Throughout, the aim was to carve out a conceptual space to study this transnational scene of policy institutes significantly or fully geared to EU- or related global affairs; to find empirical entryways to assess their structural resources – mapping institutes’ financial, human but also symbolic resource mixes – from an institutionalist lens; and to explore EU think tanks’ inter-organizational and cross-sectoral network relations, qualitatively triangulating their main underlying label, legitimacy and role dynamics.

### **EU think tanks form an organizational field raising core research puzzles**

The overarching argument is that EU think tanks – knowledge-intensive actors in complex task environments at the crossroads of varied sectors or logics of action - have come to make up an own organizational field. Its central players Bruegel, CEPS or EPC (and more peripheral ones like Lisbon Council, Open Europe or PLS) are now taken-for-granted actors for core constituencies at the EU level, be it interlocutors at EU institutions, corporate members or EU media outlets’ Brussels correspondents. However, as argued, their self-professed innovativeness, independence and impact ought not to be taken for granted by academics studying them. Instead, these research puzzles of EU think tanks’ novelty regarding their organizational forms and practices, relative autonomy in terms of money and mindsets, and their metrics of success and ultimate societal significance have been systematically scrutinized and explored here.

The resulting organizational demography of the field’s history and current state has pushed the conceptual and methodological frontier of research on think tanks and their networks. It revives Stone’s (2000) research agenda on transnational think tanks, upgrades existing accounts of EU think tanks (Sherrington 2000, Boucher et al. 2004, Ulrich 2004, Ladi 2005, Missiroli/Ioannides 2012, Perez 2014, Kelstrup 2016), aligns European with the latest advances in US scholarship (Medvetz 2012, McGann 2016, Rastrick 2018), and establishes this organizational field of networked institutes with

hybrid experts active beyond nation states as a prime site for institutionalist analysis. The compiled evidence confirms that think tanks and their self-proclaimed experts – as one particular breed of transnational actors – have become established players not only in America, or inside EU countries, but at EU level, too. Over past decades, EU think tanks have come to form and inhabit an organizational field marked by a common pursuit of transnational policy research and (a “European specialty”) cross-sectoral convening activities for dialogue and brokerage. This makes them a fascinating but at the same time tricky not-for-profit field raising key research puzzles.

The data suggests the EU’s multi-level governance architecture offers a wide range of opportunities for a sizeable number of EU think tanks to survive and thrive. However, the EU think tankers also face considerable obstacles, struggling to be seen or heard as experts with an authoritative claim to knowledge or platforms connecting otherwise disparate actors. From an institutionalist perspective, they can be fruitfully studied as dynamically constrained agents trying to maximize legitimacy and impact, but within the constraints of fundraising, operational and leadership challenges. Their originality, leeway of action and role enactment are subject to isomorphic pressures: coercive rules and rituals of academic-, EU- or corporate agenda conformity, mimetic diffusion of models and practices amidst goal ambiguity or performance uncertainty (resulting from conscious copy-cat behavior or professionals’ previous socialization), and normative professionalization pressure to define occupational identity and styles. Further research can worthwhile compare these insights to other organizational fields. Another avenue of expansion is to systematically compare the field to US think tanks.

This conclusion analytically recapitulates the tackled empirical and knowledge gaps, the main empirical findings and conceptual chapter insights of this monograph, including data limitations and how they compare to initial theoretical expectations. It is important to bear in mind that while the presented results likely have high internal validity when it comes to Brussels as a central scenery of EU think tankdom, insights obtained for the sampled 39 Brussels institutes cannot be straightforwardly applied to the 46 identified EU think tanks in other member state cities, and that their external validity for nascent transnational think tank scenes such as at UN-, African Union- or ASEAN level, or of course for other knowledge-intensive organizational fields is up for discussion. Throughout, I tried to link this study to literature on the emergence of organizational fields, isomorphism, institutional logics or organizational studies more generally. However, it remains a single-author contribution, which can be built upon.

## **Studying novelty, relative autonomy and consequentiality of think tanks**

We started out surveying the main issues at stake when we talk about transnational think tanks and the EU. Organizational novelty, autonomy and structural significance of policy institutes were identified as research puzzles at the heart of a growing body of theoretical and empirical literature on think tanks. To make studying think tanks at the EU level amenable to empirical analysis, I chose to study explicitly EU-focused think tanks which, like nationally-focused (say US) counterparts, inhabit a productive tension field at the interstices between the public, private and the civil society sector.

The “innovation” puzzle relates both to their historical emergence or evolution, and to EU think tankers’ “risk” of having good ideas, so to speak, and the limitations frustrating their rethorically much-declared and expected innovativeness in practice. The “independence” puzzle rests not only upon the issue of institutes’ funding, which one needs to assess empirically rather than speculatively, it has been argued, but also to think tank staff and board members’ sectoral socialization or institutional loyalties. Finally, the “impact” catchword stands in for inevitable “So what?” questions about EU think tanks and their craft’s consequentiality, if and how they make a difference, be it for concrete public policy processes and outcomes, or in a socio-structural view.

While think tanks have emerged from the social scientific literature’s shadows, and become important research objects causing much fascination and preoccupation, the literature strand on the particularly intriguing phenomenon of EU think tanks has been neglected. It has suffered from definitional slack, often underspecified samples and a conspicuous lack of in-depth, systematic empirical research beyond case study evidence, practitioner counts and accounts, and often rather speculative commentary. Notre Europe team’s initial overview (Boucher et al. 2004) “remains one of the more extensive discussions to date” (McGann 2016:37) over a decade after its publication.

Research leaders like Jesper Kelstrup, Dieter Plehwe, Stella Ladi, Marybel Perez or, more recently, Christopher Rastrick since touched upon and made progress in advancing our understanding of think tanks’ activities geared towards the EU. But, based on what we do and do not know from the existing body of scholarship, this dissertation has identified and addressed EU think tanks’ historical emergence, their networked embeddedness, hybridity and actual usage by Commission staff as crucial gaps in the literature and our knowledge about think tanks’ past and present functions. They are well-placed to help offset European and global governance problems with trans-border, trans-disciplinary and cross-sectoral expertise and convening, in theory.



However, in practice there are complaints about their “unfulfilled promise” (Boucher et al. 2004) of boosting European integration, and regarding their indeed often elitary academic and professional training, funding, membership and corresponding outlook, calling into question their ability and willingness for “speaking truth to power” (Wildavsky 1979), for producing evidence-based factual and non-partisan orientation knowledge, breaking down sectoral silos on issues such as climate change, economic upheaval, digitization, demographic change, public health and political populism. Put simply, amidst talk of post-truth politics, think tanks epitomize the perennial question whether power of experts is democratic and if democracy can function without them. A “conflict between expertise and democracy is as old as Western political thought” (Thaa 2012:58), of course. And this parallelism of promise or peril is precisely what continues to draw us social scientists to the study of think tanks, as indeed it should.

Having said this, for any given think tank scene scholars are confronted with a “bewildering array of the good, the bad, and the outright bizarre” (Carothers 1999), as is the case for other not-for-profit organizational fields, and civil society generally. This is why the second chapter devotes space and thought to carving out a conceptual space for studying (EU) think tanks. After a brief foray into the term’s epistemology, which arguably stretches back to ancient Greece, departing from other authors’ more or less workeable efforts specifying think tanks, a working definition was developed: a think tank is a relatively autonomous not-for-profit organization regularly engaged in policy-oriented research, convening, advice or advocacy (with at least some staff). EU think tanks are significantly or fully geared to EU policy or related global affairs.

This definition was used for specifying the boundaries of EU think tanks’ field; it notably excludes affiliated think tank-alike entities, like political party foundations or INGOs (unlike in McGann’s annual rankings, the likes of Amnesty International or the German Friedrich Ebert Foundation and other actors are consciously excluded). While think tank types commonly used for “sorting” institutes into neat boxes were explained, I follow Medvetz’ topological rather than typological approach, interested in mapping think tanks’ relative autonomy and relations vis-à-vis neighboring sectors and their experts’ “ability to exist ‘in between’ types” (2012:19). However, deviating from Medvetz’ argument of a constitutive blurriness between societal sectors, I see no problem in acknowledging just to which extent these actors came to form an own, distinct - if not perfectly independent, but relatively autonomous - field at EU level, a thesis not made lightheartedly but pursued throughout this institutionalist study.

In focusing on EU think tanks, this dissertation tackles “blind spots” in the literature about the transnational activity and networks of think tanks in Europe, often missing in accounts of domestic think tank scenes or country-comparative work which can be prone to “methodological nationalism”. It challenges claims that it is always the case that “policy ideas have national origins and the way they are produced is largely determined by nationally specific institutions” (Campbell/Pedersen 2013:6). Instead, think tanks are central theaters, not just sideshows, of the functional privatization and territorial internationalization of modern expertise in European governance, I argued. At the same time, instead of curtailing the study to only “supranational think tanks” (Rastrick 2018), I sought to avoid the “methodological transnationalism” sometimes discernable in EU-, IR- or transnational studies by surveying the pan-European field of EU think tanks which are active in the transnational hub Brussels but also beyond.

This study argued and demonstrated that EU think tanks are a prime site for institutionalist analysis - “organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life” in DiMaggio and Powell’s seminal description (1983:148), which is not to say that their field is walled in and conflict-free, of course, far from it. Beyond pluralists’ and population ecologists’ emphasis on competition or critical and elite theorists’ focus on what is seen as democratically problematic, undue influence, it has been argued that an institutionalist approach is ideally suited for greater nuance - the field concept captures think tanks’ simultaneous commonalities and variations - while transcending the sometimes too sweeping and naïve assumptions of pluralists or overly cynical depictions and lumping together of think tanks by critical theorists.

The main theoretical expectations from an institutionalist vantage point are that during the emergence of organizational fields - in this case transnational think tanks - as a categorization process (Grodal 2007), we see label uncertainty, explanatory work by driven individuals mobilizing meanings or the “buy-in” of core constituencies, a subsequent co-evolution of closely linked financial-, human- or symbolic resources and crystallization of a core-periphery sorting process during field structuration, and, finally, identifiable isomorphism in structure, outlook and behavior for mature fields. Next to the “master hypothesis” of isomorphism, the interest was in think tankers’ educational or career credentials and resulting relational legacies and opportunities, with a view to their often hybrid roles, institutional logics and professional identity. Beyond studying only formal think tank networks, inter-organizational relations or using networks only metaphorically, this dissertation has aimed at a multi-level SNA.

Empirically speaking, a comprehensive primary database of EU think tanks has been contributed, with data or strategic communications material of 85 carefully identified EU-wide institutes, and in-depth financial and human resource information for 39 organizational case studies based or present in Brussels, including biographical data of N=2,080 think tank leaders, experts and board members. This desk-based research has enabled not only historical process-tracing and descriptive statistics for mapping the field, but was also used to carry out basic SNA to visualize think tanks' networks. Moreover, the author could use a CEPS visiting fellowship in Brussels for participant observation, conducted 80 semi-structured expert interviews with think tanks' leaders and their core constituencies at the EU level, transcribed and coded these for analysis, and fielded a standardized, web-based survey of randomly sampled Commission staff. (N=671 respondents, more than acceptable but still limited 24 percent response rate).

On this basis, the dissertation has tried to balance literature-informed deductive research with question-led inductive discovery of patterns of similarity or difference. Moreover, where possible it tried to triangulate quantitative findings with qualitative insights of the interviews to corroborate structural patterns with think tankers' views, so as to get a sense of how "in the short run, actors make relations; in the long run, relations make actors" (Padgett/Powell 2012:26). Of course, several methodological as well as theoretical delimitations of this dissertation are similarly noteworthy here.

Again, no rigorous comparison to federal-level US think tanks in Washington, D.C. was attempted, even though influence of an Anglo-Saxon next to a continental think tank tradition is revealed. Moreover, often readily apparent differences between more scholarly-, platform- or advocacy-oriented think tanks could be more refined, which may suggest compatibility of a topological approach with typological pursuits. And while the interview research was pushed to the point of theoretical saturation, I feel that the data could enable a more sophisticated SNA, beyond degree centralities. Of course, more in-depth examinations of important EU think tanks or their networks (beyond the historically retraced "case studies light") would have been possible, and surveying EU institutions like EEAS beyond the Commission would be worthwhile to see if there are systematic differences when it comes to usage of think tank work. Finally, EU think tanks' influence in substantive issue areas, notably in economic- or foreign policy domains, was not prioritized here, but is another avenue of expansion. And future research would benefit, as this dissertation has tried to demonstrate, from better linking think tank research to inter-disciplinary organizational institutionalism.

## **Field emergence and expansion, think tank clustering and label dynamics**

Chapter 4 confirmed Brussels as key city hub of EU think tanks' organizational field. However, it also revealed that the EU level's openings and obstacles for think tanks gave rise to an even greater number of institutes geared to the EU level active outside its de facto capital Brussels, in line with the organizational form's worldwide spread, notably in the UK (still an EU member at the time of research), Germany and France. Legally speaking, all 85 identified institutes have a not-for-profit status, and are thus subject to the distributional constraint in their typically EU countries of registration. Those located or present in Brussels display a striking spatial proximity to the EU institutions there, clustered just 1,3 kilometers (or 0.8 miles) from the Commission's Berlaymont headquarters. Testimony to a now matured field's categorization process, a majority of but not all Brussels institutes (72 percent) call themselves "think tank". The label variant "think and do tank" is used only by ECDPM, EWI and PLS, while strategic communications claims of non-partisanship, policy relevance and acting in the public interest are abundant. Clearly, something is to be gained in using the label.

In line with the expectations about emergence as a categorization process, we indeed observed label adoption by both existing and upstart players, label refinement (and isolated label abandonment, namely by RAND Europe "in a league of its own"), or label spill-overs into neighboring fields, which causes confusion and contestation. These findings on label dynamics are reminiscent of the automobile industry where early on the "only point of agreement...was that it could not be powered by animals" (Rao 1994:33) or the knowledge-intensive biotech industry, initially dismissed by Europeans as a mere continuation of 19th century science, say for baking or brewing, whereas Americans stressed the revolutionary nature of its recombinatory potential (see Markel/Robin 1985, Grodal 2007). Over time, commonly understood definitions of cars or biotech firms have narrowed, as in the case of think tanks. Specifically for EU think tanks, Notre Europe's first mapping (Boucher et al. 2004) and Commission officials' subsequent recognition of think tanks as stakeholders (Ioannides/Missiroli 2012) have been pivotal events of assigning a label to the field (Hannan et al. 2006).

Chapter 5 shed light on the EU think tank field's shadow of history, so to speak. It analytically retraced 85 institutes' pan-European founding and proliferation with a view to their striking simultaneous diversity and isomorphic organizational forms; their founders' entrepreneurial supply-side agency; as well as enabling constellations of initial constituencies' demand-side resources. A main insight from this historical

retelling of field emergence and evolution was the validation of a successive center-periphery structuration towards pro-EU focal or more peripheral Eurosceptic players. The final outcome and current state of Bruegel or CEPS' taken-for-granted centrality and many small institutes' languishing in comparative obscurity, or occupying niches, like political-activist TNI, social policy-gear OSE, PLS or advocacy Open Europe is the result of a historically contingent and no pre-programmed process. The same is true for the field's hovering between a public-spirited or elite-oriented outlook, focus on in-house publishing versus convening formats, specialist or generalist ambitions, and more scholarly atomistic as opposed to politically networked theories of change. Overall, think tanks' involvement in the European dream and project is an overlooked organizational and ideational side story to the history of European integration. It runs parallel to the more general growth of national think tanks in many EU countries and, of course, citizen initiatives, CSOs or INGOs making up global civil society beyond.

Since Chatham House's 1920 founding, transatlantic isomorphic imitation of elements in the US' think tank tradition - to create scientific spaces or public fora for studying and debating politically relevant foreign affairs and economic policy issues - was a constant, say when the German DGAP or SWP initially looked for blueprints. However, into the 1960s only ten of today's sampled institutes had been created. The organizational population doubled up into the 1980s - CEPS' establishment then as a "European Brookings" marks an important watershed for the field's ambitions - and doubled again until the mid-1990s, as environmental institutes like IEEP, self-styled "thinknets" such as CEPR, US-rooted EWI or RAND Europe joined the scene. EPC, followed by FoE, introduced and subsequently refined the platform think tank model.

By the end of the 1990s' "heydays" for think tank founders, over half of today's institutes with an EU-focus were up and alive, as market, reputational, transparency and accountability pressures kept growing. By 2000, it was two thirds, as Bruegel's ambitious specialist breakthrough within a crystallizing "Brussels bubble" succeeded. Transatlantic copying of GMF-enabled Peterson Institute for International Economics played a role; but the Franco-German axis' political buy-in to the think tank label's promise secured the necessary symbolic - soon financial - resources for a launch, and Bruegel's claim to centrality rests, in large parts, on its post-financial crisis work. The mid-2000s saw the creation and - particularly corporate - fundraising success of the reform-oriented Lisbon Council, Open Europe and free-marketeer CEP or ECIPE. ECFR pioneered a pan-European-, then Carnegie Europe a global think tank model.

Up to 2015 (the timeframe of analysis), only a few more institutes were created, as existing institutes' outlook turned ever-more global, then - in a birds eye view - more inward again, as the EU consensus on an ever-closer union became contested. From its initial baby steps or label dynamics, the think tank category has come of age at the EU level. But amidst abounding European and global challenges, renewed right-wing nationalist or anti-establishment populism in the new but also old EU member states, Brexit, and national political culture's drift to what was coined post-truth politics means EU think tanks must now ask anew where and what they stand for in our times, how they can continually renew necessary financial, human and symbolic resources. On all these fronts, I argued, their innovativeness, independence or impact is decided.

### **EU think tanks wield financial, human and relational resources: So what?**

Chapter 6 separately scrutinized the economic basis and restrictions of the subsample of Brussels think tanks, all of which except FRIDE (which ceased in 2015), survive. A main finding is that taken together, they wield half a billion euros revenues yearly, as of 2014, and approximate at least two billion euros in financial assets, which goes to show that even if the field's financial capacity is more limited than in the US, they still do draw together serious sums of money for their policy research and convening. A second result is that revenue and expenditure portfolios of institutes starkly differ. While four out of ten Brussels institutes operate with somewhere between €1 million (a professionalization barrier for such non-profits) to €5 million euros annual income, several make do with far less, while some - notably RAND or Bertelsmann Foundation - muster overall organizational budgets worth in the hundred millions of euros. As the balance sheet analysis also reveals, scholarly players like Bruegel or SWP and platform think tanks like ECDPM incur higher staff and overhead costs than program outlays, CEPS or many US-origin institutes expend more on program costs than staff.

CEPS - often denounced as "Commission-funded" by Eurosceptic challengers, UK journalists or suspected to be "bought by business" due to corporate members - actually turns out to have the field's most sectorally diversified, balanced revenues. It is the only analyzed institute approaching a fifty-fifty public- to private income ratio. Bruegel also musters mixed funding but relies even more heavily on nearly two thirds public sector money, at the time of study, and is similarly summoned to always assert that its business model amounts neither to country cooptation, nor to private capture. Nearly half of Brussels institutes were found to be mostly or fully privately financed,

a third relies strongly or only on public sector funding, notably from EU institutions. The sectorally more balanced-out ones are in the minority. For privately funded think tanks, the independence issue relates to whether corporate funds lead to intended or subconscious isomorphic alignment with specific corporate or industry interests. For publicly funded ones, it boils down to anticipatory obedience or conscious closeness to specific governmental and existing EU agendas. Upon closer inspection, members of even those EU think tanks with mixed funding tend to be the large and powerful, from European multi-national corporations to the big EU member state governments. This begs the perennial question if and how he who pays the piper also calls the tune. Interviewed think tank leaders are eager to dismiss criticisms of “pay to play” access and quid pro quo arrangements as unfair and boast of their institutes’ “independence”. As noted, however, this is understood very differently: as negligible or absent sums of public money by privately funded institutes, or vice versa by publicly funded ones. US-origin or advocacy think tanks influenced by Anglo-Saxon think tank traditions tend to fall into the former category, and continental or scholarly ones into the latter.

This rhetorical infighting about what constitutes a truly independent institute is a case in point for how financial resources are a key reputational concern in the field. Accountability pressures for funding transparency have risen in accordance - notably from the vantage point of the European Transparency Register which initially lumped think tanks together with lobbyists indiscriminately, to the think tankers’ dismay, and from the Open Society Foundation-funded Transparify initiative, rating transparency. In absence of an equivalent of the US’ IRS form 990 for tax-exempt organizations, I find a clear-cut split in my own assessment of EU think tanks’ funding transparency: half of the financially scrutinized Brussels institutes provide at least some detailed facts about their finances. But the other half makes no or only general data available. Those open about the finances, like Bruegel, tend to confidently declare transparency as a core value, while the smaller, less diversified and transparent institutes typically do not, which appear more preoccupied with donor rather than public accountability.

Beyond financial autonomy - because of or for whom they operate at EU level - this dissertation argues that EU think tanks, like most organizations, can only be as good or innovative as their human resources - their leaders, staff and board members. Chapter 7 answers the question who the “EU think tankers” are in hitherto unavailable nuance. One main finding from the CV database compiled on the think tankers from institutes based and present in Brussels is that they alone employ well over a thousand

staffers (nearly two thirds in expert and a fifth in a leadership or non-research roles), and convene over 800 relatively high-profile individuals in a board member function. According to European Transparency Register self-declared figures, there are around 500 EU think tankers permanently based in Brussels. This of course compares to at least 30,000 lobbyists as well as thousands of Commission officials working in town. Bruegel and CEPS, but also think tanks like Ecologic Institute, ECDPM and EIPA all have a workforce between 60 to 80 staff (the latter across multiple office locations). Several US-rooted Brussels institutes approach and Germany's SWP or Bertelsmann Foundation surpass the threshold of 100 as human resource-wise most potent players.

It turns out that despite institutes' boasts about their people's diversity, nearly two thirds of all think tankers are men and barely one third women. Even more conspicuously, four out of five board members are - typically over 60 year old - men. In terms of nationality, most census-sampled think tankers are German (17 percent), US-American or French (each 13 percent), followed by Britons, Belgians or Italian-origin professionals, in line with the finding that German and Anglo-Saxon institutes employ most people. Regarding the nationality mix, about half the Brussels institutes have national-centric personnel (who can of course still be transnational in outlook), drawing over half of the crew from a "home zone" country, say the Ecologic Institute (Germany), E3G (Britain) or ECIA (Italian). As with financial resources, Bruegel or CEPS are more diversified in this vein, sourcing cross-European knowledge workers from around twenty countries. A solid third of the Brussels EU think tanks are truly "global village tanks", so to speak, say FoE (26 worldwide nationalities) or ICG (37). On a sidenote, if we take think tanks' rhetoric of building bridges quite literally, the fact that think tankers appear to speak three (rather than an average of 2,2 languages spoken by the general EU population) indeed indicates they are well-positioned to bridge between national academic literatures or policy discourses and EU agendas, particularly given that English is the lingua franca of Brussels' EU think tank world.

Beyond empirical headcounts, the theoretical insight is a striking isomorphism when it comes to field participants' educational as well as sectoral career credentials, in line with our expectations for maturing, knowledge-intensive organizational fields. Brussels EU think tankers are unvariably academically trained: a third hold a PhD or doctoral degree, six out of ten a Master's and just one out of ten a Bachelor's degree. What is more, almost 100 EU think tankers are also a college or university professor. The scholarly SWP, IFRI, ECIA or OSE have the highest doctorate attainment rates.



Overall, the top most visited universities are all part of academia's elite, including those offering among the most reputed public policy or political economy programs: LSE, Sciences Po, Oxford- and Cambridge University as well as Harvard University. EU think tanks have a penchant for hiring and involving prestigiously trained people. A third of their leaders or experts and well over a third of board members obtained a degree from such elite educational institutions. It does not mean they perform better. But the inherent symbolic resources increase an institute's economic or social fitness and, at field level, they help think tanks' category to appear effective and legitimate. Over half of EU think tankers are trained social scientists, close to a fifth studied law and around one in ten humanities or arts, business or, less so, the natural sciences. Political science - particularly if public policy, IR or European studies are included - is by far the top discipline pursued. Natural sciences are often absent from the mix.

Next to significantly resembling each other regarding academic formation, the EU think tankers' professional socialization is similarly isomorphic, it turns out. Virtually all staff and board members previously worked in the civil society sector, counting both academic or not-for-profit organization jobs, including at think tanks. Four in ten consulted with or worked for public sector organizations. Only two in ten had stints at for-profit businesses, including for-profit journalism and the professions. Thus, the civil society research or advocacy skillset is by far the most common aside previous professional "exposure" to political and business sphere institutional logics. Supporting the idea that resource dependency will intensify isomorphic resemblance, public sector experience is most common for significantly publicly funded institutes. And the scholarly players preferentially hire people with academic career trajectories. The EU think tank world is one where birds of a feather flock together, so to speak. But are these sectoral and organizational ties that bind the think tankers in practice?

Chapter 8 visualizes institutes' relational networks, which can be interpreted as one of opportunities (ties that give resource access or an informational edge) and as one of constraints (ties that bind materially and mentally). What becomes very clear from this social network analysis is that EU think tanks are no isolated islands but socially embedded actors in a center-periphery structured field. A fifth of Brussels institutes' personnel worked for one or more think tanks before, according to the CV data. Brookings Institution and Council on Foreign Relations in the US are the most central career hubs, particularly for US-origin institutes. But professional stints there are also common for CEPS, ECIPE, IFRI or SWP personnel. The outer layers of the

sampled think tanks' inter-organizational network are made up of not only European but globally dispersed foreign affairs or otherwise specialized think tanks. SWP and IFRI, EWI and GMF as well as EPC and FoE are important, centrally located hubs of high personnel flow degree centrality. Slightly over half ties are to national institutes, and half to sampled EU think tanks. The professional pipeline is not detached from country of origins' domestic think tank fields. But there is a striking amount of staff flows only between the EU think tanks - testimony to their field's institutionalization.

In Brussels institutes' interlocking directorate network, specific individuals like the ex-Commissioners Joaquin Almunia or László Andor, former Commission vice-president Etienne Davignon, EU High Representative for CFSP Javier Solana or the German chair of the Munich Security Conference Wolfgang Ischinger are found to sit on multiple institutes' boards, notably of the platform think tanks EPC and FoE. They have inside information on several institutes through overlapping memberships, which are interpreted as another potentially important mechanism for isomorphism. Moreover, over a fifth of CV-coded Brussels EU think tankers are also found to be a board member across nearly a thousand further for- or not-for-profit organizations. One key finding is that the top organizations are among the world's most influential fora, namely World Economic Forum, Trilateral Commission and Bilderberg Group. US-origin EWI and RAND Europe's personnel boasts the most board memberships (double of Bruegel or EPC's amount), a proxy of political connections and prestige. And although they are the minority in the sample, Brussels institutes' board members - a pattern frequently found in network research - are also best-linked to other boards.

Expanding upon Medvetz' (2012) pioneering or Choi's (2009) more advanced work on US think tank networks, this dissertation offers a most comprehensive study of the EU think tanks' multi-level network connections, to the best of my knowledge. These are not overly narrowed to only the formal think tank networks they establish. The emergence and relevance of formalized transnational networking groups like the Brussels Think Tank Dialogue, TEPSA or CEPS-led EPIN or ENEPRI as important "meeting spaces" for interaction, research synergies and joint fundraising at EU level and the field's mutual awareness of a common enterprise has also been explained.

But the network chapter also reveals that among the over two thousand non-profit entities Brussels EU think tankers have been professionally affiliated with, continental European elite or Anglo-Saxon ivy league universities are also top former employers. From this, we can infer that a significant proportion of think tankers was

culturally imprinted with either an appreciation of scholastic standards of excellence or, notably younger cohorts, governance outlooks transcending statist analysis grids. Of course, it is also possible that educational and professional exposure to “*crème de la crème*” elite universities like Harvard, LSE, Sciences Po, College of Europe or EUI induces an exclusive elitism or sense of entitlement rather than of “*noblesse oblige*”. And while professional ties to civil society research and advocacy entities such as Amnesty International are common, labor union experience is conspicuously absent.

Regarding public sector ties, the Commission is as by far the most dominant ex-employer for which nearly 350 Brussels EU think tankers have previously worked - this is the field’s highest number of career credentials for any specific organization; it can either be interpreted as unproblematic insider knowledge of how the EU works or lead us to wonder about mental “buy-in” or osmosis reducing critical distance to it. Finally, in the private and media sector, the BBC, Financial Times or The Economist are found to be top professional stations of Brussels think tanks, albeit at lower level, followed by consultancies like Deloitte, McKinsey & Company or KPMG as well as important financial players like Goldman Sachs or Deutsche Bank. In fact, after for-profit research and consulting experience, the banking and financial industry comes in second place, and turns out to be the top industry among sampled board members. All this leads us back to “So what?” questions on innovation, independence or impact.

Based on the qualitatively coded collected documents and interview transcripts, these were tackled in depth in Chapter 9’s analysis of EU think tanker roles in action. One finding is that on a continuum from in-house research to convening to advocacy, continental scholarly think tanks like SWP tend to stress the former (in a nutshell, “substance over visibility” is their behavior-guiding motto). Platform think tanks like EPC or FoE focus on convening (and crowdsource- or partner up more for content). And advocacy-oriented think tanks like Open Europe tend to prize media visibility. However, at the field level cross-cutting isomorphic pressures towards ever-shorter publication formats are found, as the information load for field participants increases and institutes’ touted complexity reduction potential is valued by core constituencies.

Think tankers typically do much more than publish. They interact beyond this. We tend to think of events as their main - most publicly visible - interaction formats. Indeed, one finding is isomorphism towards similarly-styled seminars and -for larger, central actors like CEPS - conferences convening field participants or constituencies. While Bruegel convenes multiple thousands of attendees at its events every year, it is

CEPS' "Ideas Lab" flagship conference (first organized in 2014 at the time of the author's embedded research stay there) which has most closely attempted to become a central annual "meeting point" for EU think tankers, EU officials, EU member state or business representatives as well as the Brussels correspondents of EU news outlets. But another insight is that most also engage in informal meetings or exchanges with EU level policy- and decision-makers, which are less publicity-attracting but equally consequential for political access or influence, in most interviewees' own evaluation. Ultimately, the choice of prioritizing public events or investing in informal meetings and mingling boils down to a trade-off between public visibility and political access.

So what for innovation? Politicians and bureaucrats, businesspeople, journalists, academics and the interested public often look to think tanks for good ideas, debate or to meet relevant people. The think tanks themselves help raise high expectations. But it is rarely if ever the case that their "innovation workshops", "learning labs" or "high-level task-forces" truly result in radical inventions. Rather, the unique location at the interstices of different sectors heightens their risk for recombinatory innovation, so to speak, for trans-border, cross-disciplinary, multi-stakeholder context conversion. Their often symbiotic relations to public, private or civil society sector organizations does mean that central players like Bruegel, CEPS or EPC can capitalize on weak ties or broker structural- and cultural holes, and help to diffuse policy ideas or paradigms.

At the same time, however, there is no automatism. Sectoral isomorphism of money (resource dependencies) and mindsets (intellectual loyalties) can also lead to embedded conformity with existing agendas, anticipatory obedience or risk aversion. To paraphrase an interviewee: think tanks can be bold only in limits of being realistic. They can, indeed, escape the iron cage of sectoral institutional logics. But, in practice, their rhetorical innovativeness can be eaten up by concerns for funding or timeliness. On the other hand, the more diversified their financial, human or symbolic resources, the higher the chance that they do come up with novel ideas or orientation knowledge, successfully bridging between the scholarly and political world, and between sectors. Regarding EU think tankers' hybrid identity, sectoral borrowing or self-distancing, a main finding is that the continental European think tank tradition moderates to what extent being "too scholarly" is seen as a flaw, as has been observed for US institutes, even though again there are differences between EU think tanks of varied orientation. Scholarly think tanks like SWP portray themselves as fully aligned to accepted norms of academic conduct and prominently invoke their scholarly credentials, all the while

insisting they are no ivory towers, out of touch and out of synch with policy realities. Platform think tanks are even less latent in an open disdain for “traditional academia” (mirrored in many academics’ accusation that think tankers are no “real academics”), and stress their comparative advantage in terms of staying close to the political pulse. Akin to observations about US think tanks’ closeness to Washington, D.C. politics, many EU think tanks are arguably even more isomorphically aligned to EU agendas, with EU funding - notably from the Commission’s FP7 or Horizon 2020 grants - and hiring practices leading to educational, professional homophily as main mechanisms.

Brussels advocacy think tanks criticize established players’ similar Europeanist outlook. Open Europe, ECIPE or ERF deliberately stress freedom from EU funding. Yet they do not similarly problematize their private financing or lobbying proximity. In fact, their thinking is most closely aligned to business sector interests and logics. Their Brussels leaders’ idioms or influence tactics rather resemble those of lobbyists, even if more atmospheric or media rather than specific legislation influence is sought. While other think tanks have taken to “content partnering” with EU news outlets like Euractiv or EU Observer, for advocacy think tanks media pick-up is the top priority.

So what for independence? Next to this dissertation’s financial scrutiny of the field, the qualitative analysis of Brussels EU think tankers’ role enactment in practice has produced the insight that - as reported in the literature on US think tankers - their professional identity plays out on a thinking-to-doing continuum. It hovers between the institutional logics of academia and politics, with business or media leanings too. There is an isomorphic trend toward an amalgamated rather than compartementalized professional identity of an EU level “think tanker”, blending and thus transcending these four socio-structural allegiances of the institutes’ neighboring or parental fields. Next to hiring practices, on-the-job socialization and think tanks’ mutual networking are central underlying mechanisms which seem to explain hybrid identity formation.

At the end of the day, what does it mean for think tanks to have an “impact”? Building on existing scholarly studies, practical advice and research uptake literature, this dissertation tried to come to grips with the tricky question from an institutionalist lens by, first of all, directly asking EU think tankers how they define and measure it, and, in a next and last step, surveying Commission officials about their actual usage of EU think tanks’ contributions. Both quite straightforward but rarely done attempts to gauge the knowledge-intensive, not-for-profit field’s consequentiality were telling.

In line with the institutionalist approach, the interviewed think tankers themselves were quick to acknowledge that direct influence on concrete policies - a “holy grail” many academic students of think tanks often futilely seek to causally discern - is just one but not the main piece of their multi-dimensional impact puzzle. In fact, it is their socio-structural significance within policy and governance processes that they tend to emphasize, be it liaising between levels, brokering between actors, or shaping policy agendas or discourses in the longer run, over the span of years, even decades. Continental European scholarly institutes like ECIA or SWP see ideas of direct policy impact donors, the public or scholars may have as overdrawn. Platform think tanks similarly point to their facilitation function of accompanying, not deciding processes. And advocacy think tank leaders emphasize their discursive and media influence, so to speak as wordsmiths or purposive experts contributing and shaping policy narratives.

Regarding causal attributability, operational measurability and quantifiability of think tanks’ impact at EU level, there is a consensus among think tankers (just like among the academics studying them) that this is often vexingly hard in practice, even impossible for some. And yet, they feel, it has to be done in the face of accountability pressures. Next to their strategic communications material’s inevitable puffery, there is a nascent isomorphic management mantra: what you measure is what you get done. But beyond functional benefits for finetuning operations (as a learning organization), the main finding is that institutes tend to place a premium on tangible, visible metrics - like publication downloads, event attendance or social media followers - for purely symbolic purposes, to signal being in high demand, aligned to the trends of our time.

So what for impact? Think tankers, especially their research leaders, remain in dubio about performance indicators. Still, there is agreement one must measure them. But as institutionalized organizations, they fall back on a broad spectrum of success metrics. Think tank leaders often invoke gut feeling, or trusting in one’s own work. Only Bruegel outsources a triennial, qualitative external “impact review task force”. The closest EU think tank’s field comes to a common benchmarking or tournament ritual is McGann’s annual ranking of worldwide think tank-alike entities. While many interviewees deride it as a mere “beauty contest”, a good result is prominently placed within institutes’ brochures, mentioned in annual reports, and signaled on websites. Often overlooked impact dimensions are their collective significance, their networks’ macro-structural relevance, how the think tanks affect activity in neighboring fields, and the “demand side” how core constituencies (say the Commission) will use them.

The author's representative, randomly sampled Commission official survey results shed first light on this last point. While virtually all Commission advisers, directors or unit heads, policy or desk officers regularly draw on its in-house expertise, only half of them say they sometimes come in contact with EU think tanks' work; about a fourth regularly; but nearly a third never or only rarely. They are used as information sources less than academia or other international organizations, but much more than national think tanks and on par with other civil society organizations like NGOs and foundations, which arguably is no small feat for their comparatively smaller field. Unlike expected, the policy or desk officers drew least regularly on EU think tanks, directors or unit heads more often and the Commission DG's advisers most intensely.

These survey results can be read as empirical confirmation of Boswell's work on the Commission's symbolic or political rather than just instrumental use of expert knowledge: while officials' top stated reason was to inform the content of their work, this was surprisingly closely followed by the argumentative function of legitimizing existing arguments or agendas (but purely symbolic utilization is less acknowledged). Thus, far from only being external actors potentially influencing executive thinking at the Commission, think tanks' substantiating and legitimizing function is attractive for its officials. This begs the question of reverse causality regarding impact. In other words, are the EU think tanks' merely an audience for spreading official messages? Most Brussels think tankers would vocally protest, or side with the mushrooming research uptake literature and blogosphere's preoccupation how to best "get through" to busy bureaucrats with shorter attention spans and cognitive information overload. But the survey finds these factors seem overrated and of secondary importance in the Commission staff's view: a mere fifth finds their work is not presented well enough.

If Commission officials do draw on EU think tanks, they typically turn to their publications, according to the survey data, which a quarter screen every week or day. Under half of the Commission's staff follow specific institutes on social media, also via e-mail newsletters, their blogs and Twitter accounts, perhaps more than expected. And formal meetings or informal mingling at their events are relatively frequent, too. Asked to nominate which are the EU think tanks with among the highest reputation in their respective DG, the central players CEPS and Bruegel are most often selected across the board (and particularly held in high esteem in DG ECOFIN or DG ENTR), followed - at some some distance - only by the platform think tanks EPC and FoE. Despite its limits, such survey research will be useful for gauging think tanks' usage.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Semi-structured expert interview guidelines

Note: Guidelines were tailored to each participant's and organization's background for specificity, but the main questions were asked to each interviewee. This is a shortened version for think tank leaders.

*[fill out a separate interview documentation sheet, read up on and prepare respondent's background]*

**LEAD-IN** (5 min) *[access location, shake hands, exchange business cards, clarify language question, small talk, take a seat, set up timer/notepad/digital recorder]* Let's begin. *[obtain informed consent]*

**INTRODUCTION** (2 min) Thank you for taking the time to talk to me - I know you must be busy. Do you mind if I record our conversation? It helps me remember what you said - and this is all used exclusively for scientific purposes. Let me briefly say again what this interview/my PhD research project is all about: the roles and impact of (EU-focused) policy institutes or "think tanks" at EU level. I am interested in your views/experiences on this topic. You can be frank with me: speak on behalf of yourself, not just the institute. Can I quote your name in my work? It helps make research more lively. Just say if anything is "off the record". Before we get started, is there still anything on your mind?

**[Definition]** How would you define "think tank"? I saw your institute does (not) call itself so. Why?

**[Comparative advantage]** Think tanks are just one type of actor among others at EU level. Compared to other sectors' organizations, say a university/lobby firm/consultancy, media or bureaucracy, where would you locate think tanks? Do they have a comparative advantage/drawback compared to these?

**[Independence]** Do you see most think tanks as independent? What does that mean for you? Some say the line between think tanks and lobbyists is blurring in Europe. How would you react to that?

**[Funding]** Let's talk about funding: How is main activity of your institute's work typically financed?

**[Emergence]** On your institute's origin: which motivations/whose leadership led to its initial creation?

**[EU-level]** How would you explain the big rise in numbers of EU-focused institutes over last decades? What is EU-focused think tanks' added value compared to nationally-focused public policy institutes?

**[Professional role]** Let's talk about your own role. How did you come to work at a think tank/in your position? What do you like most/least about your job? Do you see yourself as academic/practitioner?

**[Activities]** If we shift to what your institute does in practice, what are contributions' typical formats? *[show think tank output stimulus for further talking points]* What are the main characteristics of these?

**[Innovation]** Some say think tanks do not think, they recycle policy ideas ("old wine in new bottles"). How do you react to that? What makes an idea successful? How do you try to encourage innovation? Can think tanks "bridge" the worlds of academia/policy-making and broker between sectors or issues?

[**Authority**] In your experience, what makes for “experts” with an authoritative claim to knowledge at the EU level? Which EU think tanks do you feel have among the highest reputation here in Brussels?

[**Influence**] What would it mean for EU-focused think tanks to be “influential” in the issue areas or policy domains you most closely work on? Which think tanks do you consider particularly influential?

[**Stages**] Although more complicated in practice, we can say policy-making usually unfolds over three stages [*show policy stage stimulus*]. At which stage are you (or EU think tanks generally) most active?

[**Success metric**] Can you think of examples where your institute influenced a key policy decision or debate? If we take a step back, how would you define “success” of your think tank in the first place? Can you, should you try to measure - even quantify - your performance? How do you try to assess it?

[**Commission**] While think tanks interact with other EU institutions (European Parliament/Council of the EU/EEAS), would you say the Commission is a main interlocutor/target audience in your work? Which DGs/service are most relevant? How receptive is the Commission for your or think tank work? When Commission official do draw on think tank work, do you feel it’s mainly for gaining knowledge to actually improve policy or just to legitimate certain positions that are already held or decided upon?

[**Networks**] Apart from operating alone, think tanks form networks with each other or have partners. Are you part or aware of any such efforts? What do you see as the benefit/risks of such collaboration?

[**Significance**] Before we come to an end, I would like to zoom out and get your take on the bigger picture: Have EU think tanks become taken for granted as a regular feature of European governance?

[**Trends**] Last but not least: what are major trends where you see European think tanks heading in the future? What, if anything, do you feel would be lost without think tanks, would we wish them back?

**CLOSING** (1 min): Is there anything else you would like to tell me/comment on something we didn’t cover? [*snowballing*] Do you have any good suggestions who else I could speak to for learning more on this topic? Thanks for your time! It was extremely interesting and spot-on/useful for my research.

**PHASE-OUT** (open end) [*end recorder/pack up and leave, if possible stick around for informal conversations, complete separate documentation sheet, write up detailed field notes for better recall*]

## Appendix 2. List of interview participants (N=80)

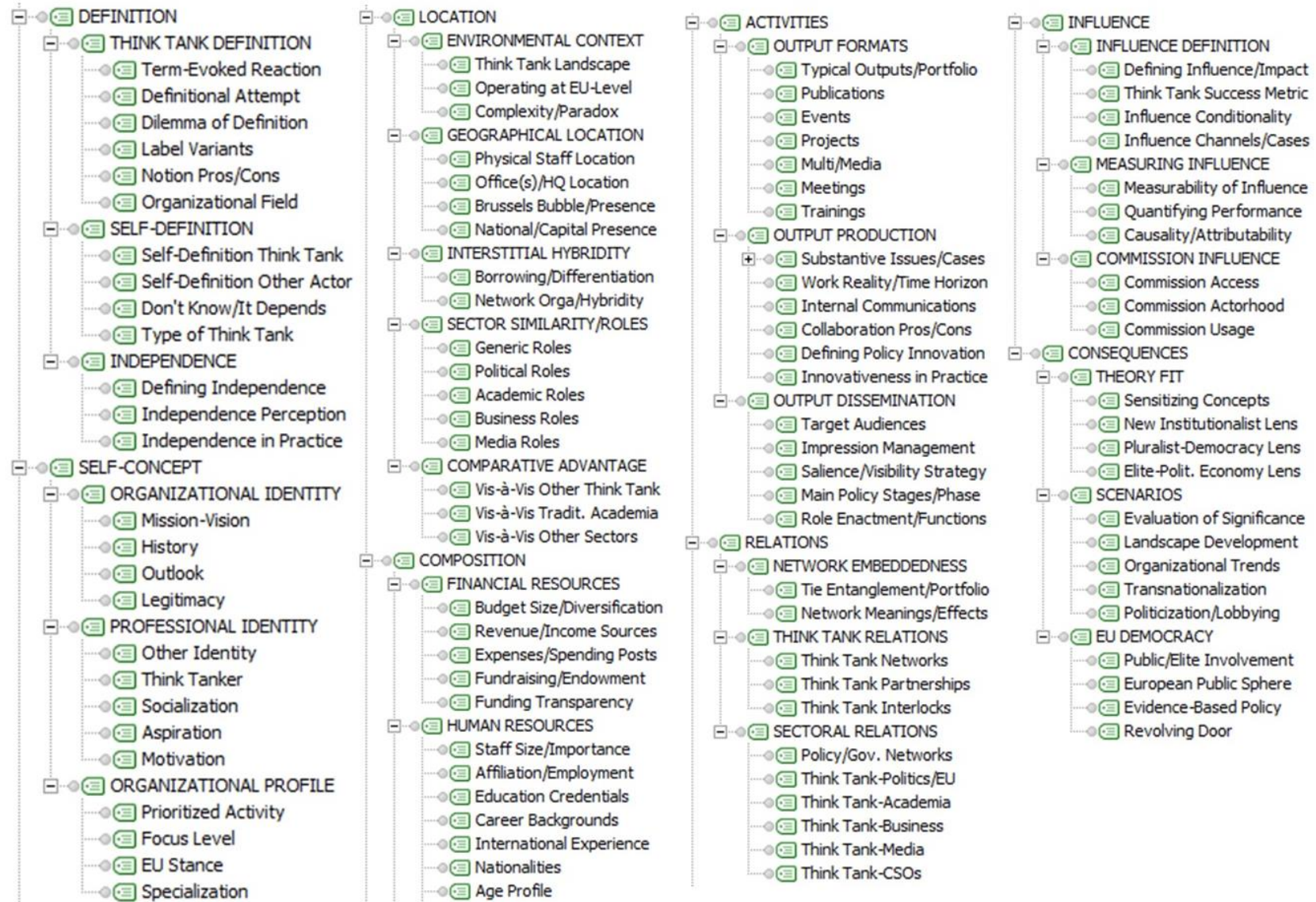
Note: In the dissertation's text, interview quotes are referenced by referring to their transcript numbers indicated in the table's left column (in the chronological order the interviews were conducted in 2014).

I #	Name	Organization	Position	Date (2014)
1	Steven Blockmans	Centre of European Policy Studies	Head of EU Foreign Policy/Politics	10 March
2	Joachim Koops	Global Governance Institute	Director	13 March
3	Dusan Reljc	German Institute for Interntl. & Security Affairs	Head of Brussels Office	13 March
4	Andrea Teti	European Centre of International Affairs	Director of Research/Senior Fellow	14 March
5	Fabian Zuleeg	European Policy Centre	Chief Executive Director	14 March
6	Claudia Baez-Camargo	Basel Institute on Governance	Senior Researcher	17 March
7	Bart Vanhercke	European Social Observatory	Director	18 March
8	Maxime Leblanc	Sports and Citizenship	EU Affairs Manager	19 March
9	Alain Guggenbühl	European Institute of Public Administration	Head of Brussels Office	19 March
10	Lars Brozus	German Institute for Interntl. & Security Affairs	Head of EU External Relations	19 March
11	Pieter Cleppe	Open Europe	Head of Brussels Office	19 March
12	Alexandra Stiglmayer	European Stability Initiative	Head of Brussels Office/Senior Analyst	20 March
13	Christian Egenhofer	Centre of European Policy Studies	Associate Senior Research Fellow	20 March
14	Myrto Hatzigeorgopoulos	International Security Information Service	Head of Brussels Office	21 March
15	Marco Giuli	Madariaga - College of Europe Foundation	Program Leader/Research Fellow	21 March
16	Anne Lauenroth	German Institute for Interntl. & Security Affairs	Analyst/former Head of Brussels Office	21 March
17	Paul Engel	Eur. Centre for Development Policy Management	Director	24 March
18	Marie-France Baud	Confrontations Europe	Head of Brussels Office	24 March
19	Matt Dann	Bruegel	Secretary General	25 March
20	Shada Islam	Friends of Europe	Director of Policy	25 March
21	Irnerio Seminatore	Institut Européen des Relations Internationales	President/Founder	26 March
22	Fredrik Erixon	Eur. Centre for International Political Economy	Director	27 March
23	Vivien Pertusot	Institut Français des Relations Internationales	Head of Brussels Office	28 March
24	Jan Marco Müller	European Commission	Assistant to Chief Scientific Adviser, BEPA	1 April
25	Beate Mäder-Metcalf	East West Institute	Vice-President/Head of Brussels Office	1 April
26	Stephen Boucher	European Climate Foundation	Director EU Climate Policies	1 April
27	Thomas Fischer	Bertelsmann Foundation	Head of Brussels Office	2 April
28	Melissa Julian	Eur. Centre for Development Policy Management	Head of Communications	2 April
29	Charles de Marcilly	Robert Schuman Foundation	Head of Brussels Office	2 April
30	Assya Kavrakova	European Citizen Action Service	Director	2 April
31	Lucy Thomas	Business for New Europe	Deputy Director	7 April
32	Kerstin Born-Sirkel	Centre of European Policy Studies	Head of Corporate and External Relations	7 April
33	Lorenzo Allio	European Risk Forum	Senior Analyst/Co-Founder	7 April
34	Dennis Stokkink	Pour la Solidarité	President	8 April
35	Stijn Hoorens	RAND Europe	Head of Brussels Office/Associate Director	8 April
36	Manon Dufour	Third Generation Environmentalism	Head of Brussels Office	8 April
37	Isabelle Ioannides	European Commission	Adviser/Think Tank Outreach, BEPA	9 April
38	Lorna Schrefler	Centre of European Policy Studies	Head of Regulatory Policy/Research Fellow	9 April
39	Diego Valiante	Centre of European Policy Studies	Head of Capital Markets/Research Fellow	9 April
40	Frederico Santopinto	Group for Information on Peace and Security	Director of Research	10 April
41	Antonio Missiroli	European Union Institute for Security Studies	Director	10 April
42	Sven Biscop	Egmont Royal Institute International Relations	Head of Europe in the World Program	10 April
43	Marco Incerti	Centre of European Policy Studies	Head of Communications/Research Fellow	11 April
44	Giovanni Grevi	Fundación para Relaciones Int.y Diálogo Exterior	Director/Head of Brussels Office	11 April

45	Karel Lanoo	Centre of European Policy Studies	Chief Executive Officer	14 April
46	Michael Emerson	Centre of European Policy Studies	Associate Senior Research Fellow	15 April
47	Arno Behrens	Centre of European Policy Studies	Head of Energy Unit	15 April
48	Cinzia Alcidì	Centre of European Policy Studies	Head of Economic Policy/Research Fellow	15 April
49	Mirte van de Berge	Trans European Policy Studies Association	Executive Director	15 April
50	Carlo Marzocchi	Council of EU	Head of Sector/Library Think Tank Review	16 April
51	Mikkel Barslund	Centre of European Policy Studies	Research Fellow/ENEPRI Coordinator	16 April
52	Daniel Gros	Centre of European Policy Studies	Director	17 April
53	Ian Lesser	German Marshall Fund of United States	Director Transatlantic Centre/Brussels Office	17 April
54	Tim King	European Voice	Editor-in-Chief	17 April
55	Nico Muzi	Transport & Environment	Head of Communications	17 April
56	Wendel Trio	Climate Action Network Europe	Director	17 April
57	Jacques Pelkmans	Centre of European Policy Studies	Senior Research Fellow	17 April
58	Karl von Wogau	Kangaroo Group	Secretary General/former MEP	17 April
59	Jan Techau	Carnegie Europe	Director	22 April
60	Tony Long	WWF European Policy Office	Director/Co-Founder	22 April
61	Noriko Fujiwara	Centre of European Policy Studies	Head of Climate Change/Research Fellow	22 April
62	Thierry Philipponnat	Finance Watch	Secretary General	22 April
63	Olivier Hoedeman	Corporate Europe Observatory	Director	April 22
64	Natalia Alonso	Oxfam International EU Advocacy Office	Head of Brussels Office	22 April
65	Constanze Adolf	Green Budget Europe	Head of Brussels Office	23 April
66	Maria Jepsen	European Trade Union Institute	Director of Research	24 April
67	Philippe Cattoir	European Commission	Head of Media Analysis, DG Communications	24 April
68	Peggy Sailer	Network of European Foundations	Executive Director	25 April
69	Neil Campbell	Open Society European Policy Institute	Head of EU Policy Development	25 April
70	Daniela Vincenti	Euractiv.com	Editor-in-Chief	25 April
71	Ronald Kingham	Institute for Environmental Security	Director	26 April
72	Brian Ager	European Roundtable of Industrialists	Secretary General	29 April
73	Sébastien Boussois	MEDEA Institute	Strategic Advisor to Director	29 April
74	Catherine Woollard	European Peacebuilding Liaison Office	Executive Director	7 May
75	Lisbeth Kirk	EU Observer	Editor-in-Chief/Founder	7 May
76	Diogo Pinto	European. Movement International Brussels	Secretary General	7 May
77	Friederike Gaensslen	European Network of Political Foundations	Project Manager	7 May
78	Carl Dolan	Transparency International EU Office	Director	7 May
79	Natalia Yerashevich	Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum	Director	12 May
80	Jorgo Riss	Greenpeace EU Unit	Director	14 May

### Appendix 3. Coding scheme for interview transcripts and collected documents

Note: Deductively developed, inductively refined coding scheme; the author coded in MAXQDA on the basis of a separate, detailed codebook for each listed code.






## Appendix 4. Standardized survey questionnaire for European Commission officials

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### Think Tanks and Your Commission Work



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Dear Participant,

you were selected to take part in a 5-8 minutes survey on think tanks and your Commission work. Please try to answer our 6 questions on the topic in one single session.

**What is this research project about?**

Think tanks are policy institutes offering research and recommendations. Today, many EU-focused think tanks are increasingly geared towards EU-level or global affairs.

How useful and relevant are EU-focused think tanks for your work? With your help, we explore this research question - and are interested in your views and experiences.

**Who conducts the research project?**


[Patrick Gilroy](#) (PhD candidate), supervised by Prof. [Helmut Anheier](#), Prof. [Jean Pisani-Ferry](#) (both Hertie School of Governance) and Prof. [Woody Powell](#) (Stanford University),


**Are my answers fully anonymous?**

Yes. Responses cannot be traced back to your person, are used exclusively for scientific purposes, and professionally protected by 1KA (on University of Ljubljana servers),

Just click "Next" below to begin now.

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Next 



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Before the survey begins, we need to know a few quick facts about you (be assured again that your answers are fully anonymous):

Which Commission DG/service do you currently work for?


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What is your gender?

Female  Male

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What is your age group?

below or 29 years  30-39 years  40-49 years  50-59 years  60 years or more

---

Have you ever worked for, served on the board or are otherwise affiliated with what could be called a national or EU-focused think tank?


Yes  No  Don't know


---

Really? Please type the name of the think tank(s) - feel free to briefly add what kind of relation you have in mind.

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Back Next 





This is our most detailed question: How frequently do you use the following sources to get information you need for your Commission work? (from 1=never to 5=daily)

	1: never or only rarely	2: sometimes	3: regularly or very often
EU think tanks (focus on EU policy and global affairs)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
National think tanks (focus on national policy or affairs)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Academia (e.g. university, scientists, research center)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Commission's in-house expertise (e.g. DGs, the JRC)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other EU institutions (e.g. Council, EP, CoR or EEAS)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
International organizations (e.g. UN, IMF, World Bank)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
EU decentralized agencies (e.g. EFSA, EEA, EUISS)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
National government (e.g. ministry, party, agency)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Business (e.g. corporations, industry association)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other civil society (e.g. NGO, foundation, church)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Let's just concentrate on EU-focused think tanks: Why do you never or only rarely use them in your Commission work? (multiple answers are possible)

- I am not familiar enough with such policy institutes
- I already meet my needs through other sources
- Their contributions are not relevant enough
- Their work is not presented well enough
- Any other reason? (type)



Let's just concentrate on EU-focused think tanks: If you do draw on them, how important are the following reasons? (from 1=very unimportant to 4=very important)

	1: very unimportant	2: unimportant	3: important	4: very important
To inform the content of my work (e.g. to prepare or improve policies or initiatives)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To demonstrate the quality of my work (e.g. to show that experts were consulted)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To strengthen arguments in my work (e.g. to justify concrete recommendations)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Any other reason? (type) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Now there are only 3 questions left. Bear with us - we really appreciate your effort!

EU-focused think tanks do many different things - how often do you usually turn to their following contributions? (from 1=never to 5=daily)

	1: never	2: yearly	3: monthly	4: weekly	5: daily
Publications (short policy briefs, op-ed, paper, report, book)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Events (panel discussion, workshop, seminar, conference)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal meetings (professional consultation or advice)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social media (e-mail newsletter, blog, Twitter, Facebook)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Anything else? (type) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>




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From your memory or the list below, please select up to 3 EU-focused think tanks which you feel have among the highest reputation in your Commission DG/service.  
(The order does not matter here, and "reputation" means that a think tank is generally seen as a trusted source of expertise, good ideas or simply quite well-known)

Select from list... 

Select from list... 

Select from list... 



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Our last question: Would you say any think tanks are particularly influential for your DG/service's work? Feel free to type how (not), or make any comment.  
(**"Influential"** is used broadly here: a think tank may regularly inform your department's work, its ideas catch on, or it has even impacted a policy outcome)



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**Thank you so much for your participation!**

You have now finished the survey. If you have any feedback or questions, please click on "End" below to directly get in touch via e-mail (gilroy@transnationalstudies.eu).

Have a nice day and all the best from Berlin,

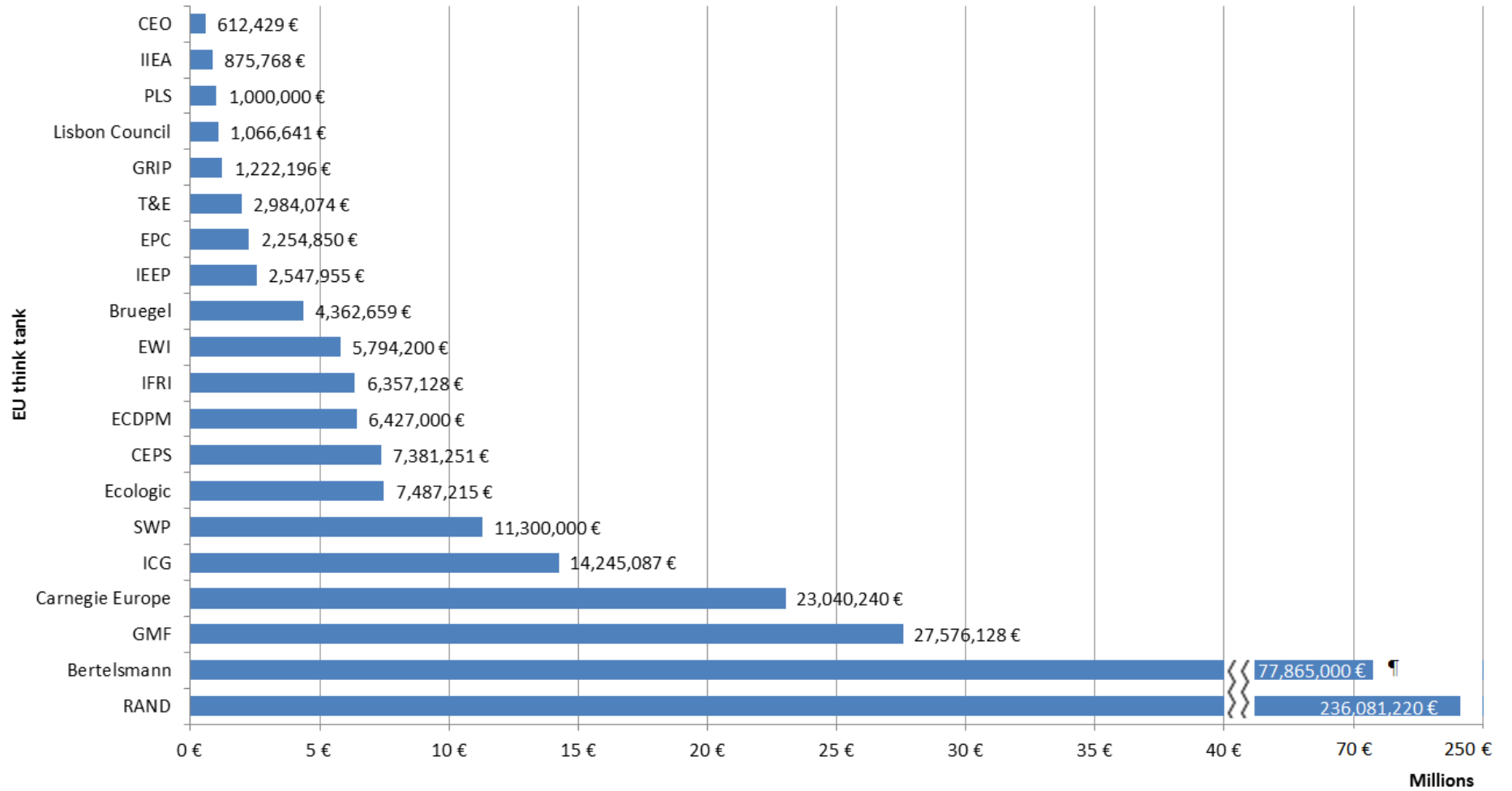
Patrick Gilroy (survey manager)

If you wish to be informed about the results of this PhD research project, just enter your e-mail address in the box below:

Back End

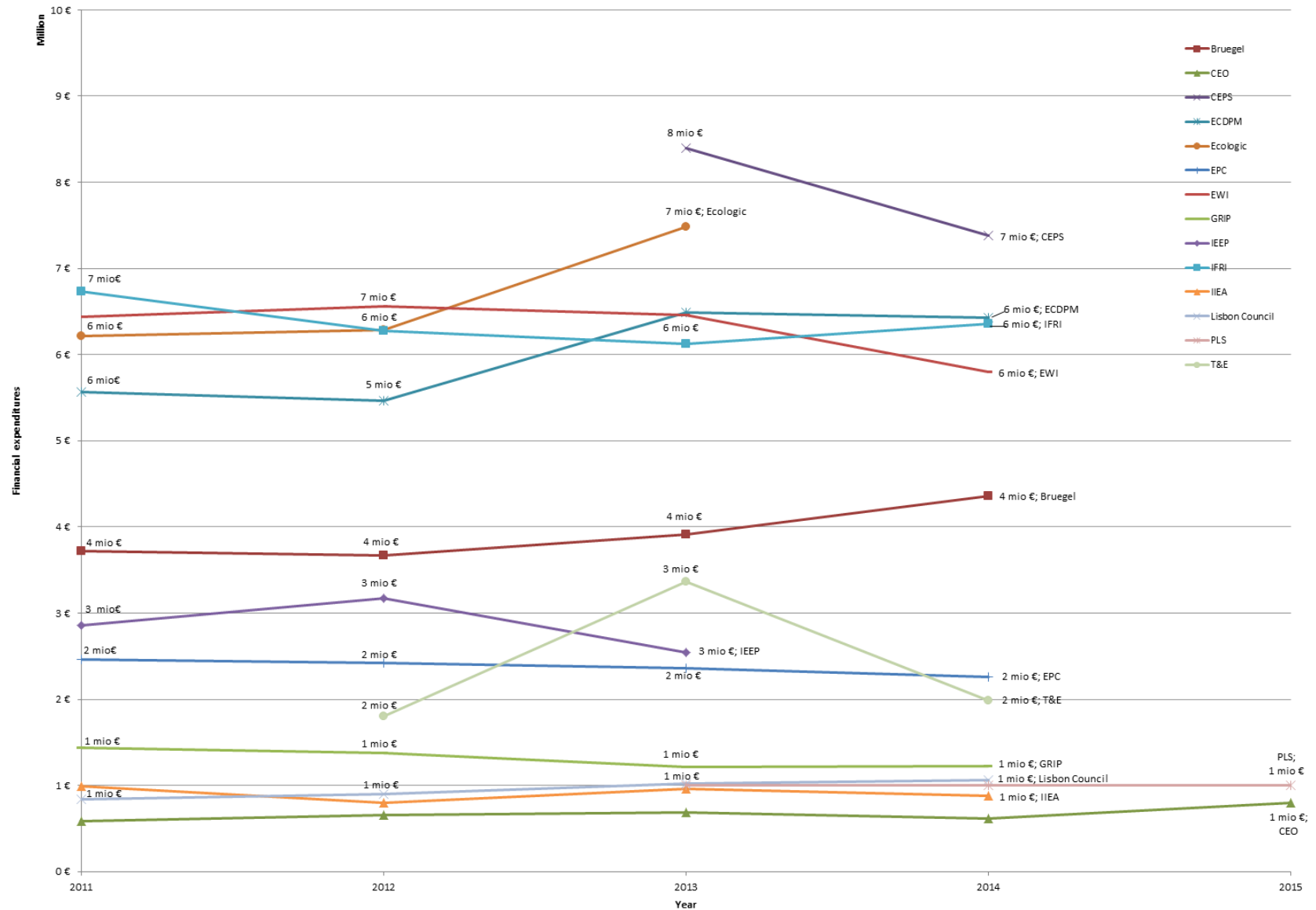
**Appendix 5.** Brussels EU think tank annual expenditures (for subsample of N=20)

Note: Expenditures data as of 2014; as noted in the text, expenses of the lowest-listed two institutes (overall organizations) far exceed a 40 mio € threshold.



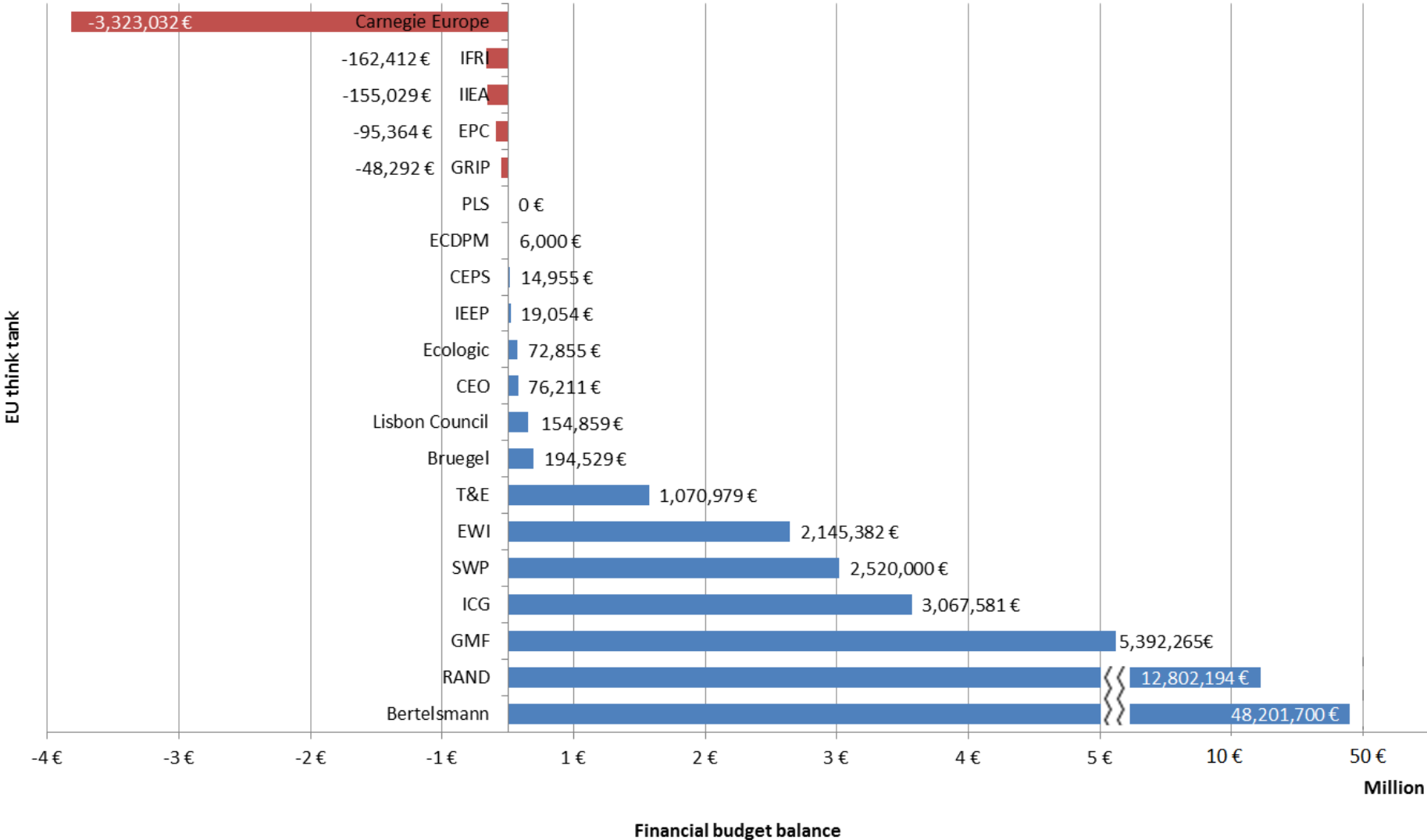
## Appendix 6. Expenditures of Brussels EU think tanks with under €10 million over time, 2011 to 2015 (for subsample of N=14)

Note: All amounts in or converted to EUR (e.g. from \$) and rounded.



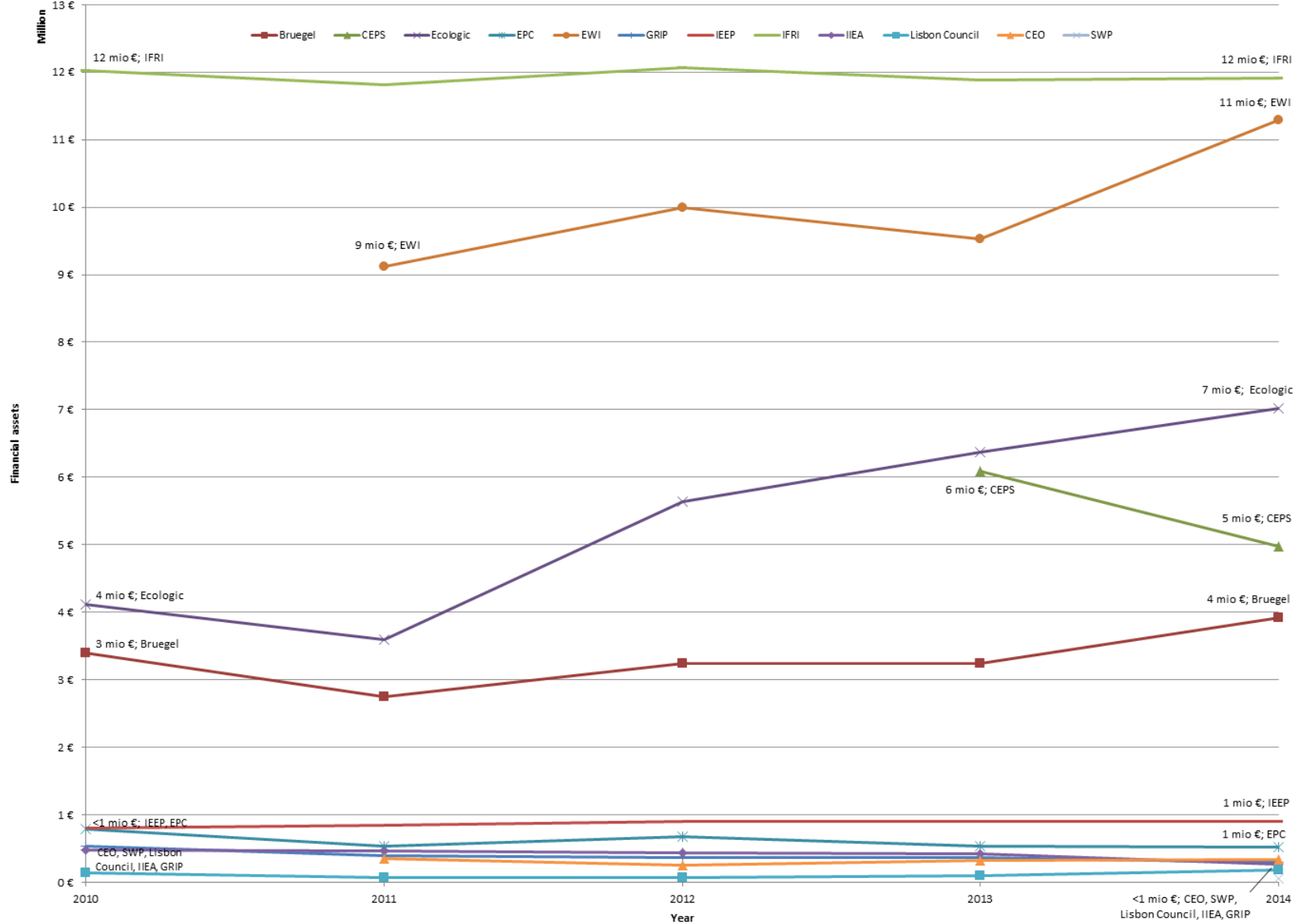
**Appendix 7. Budget balance of Brussels EU think tanks (for subsample of N=20)**

Note: Budget balance as of 2014; annual surpluses of the lowest-listed two think tanks far exceed a 5 mio € threshold (but overall, not just their Brussels offices).



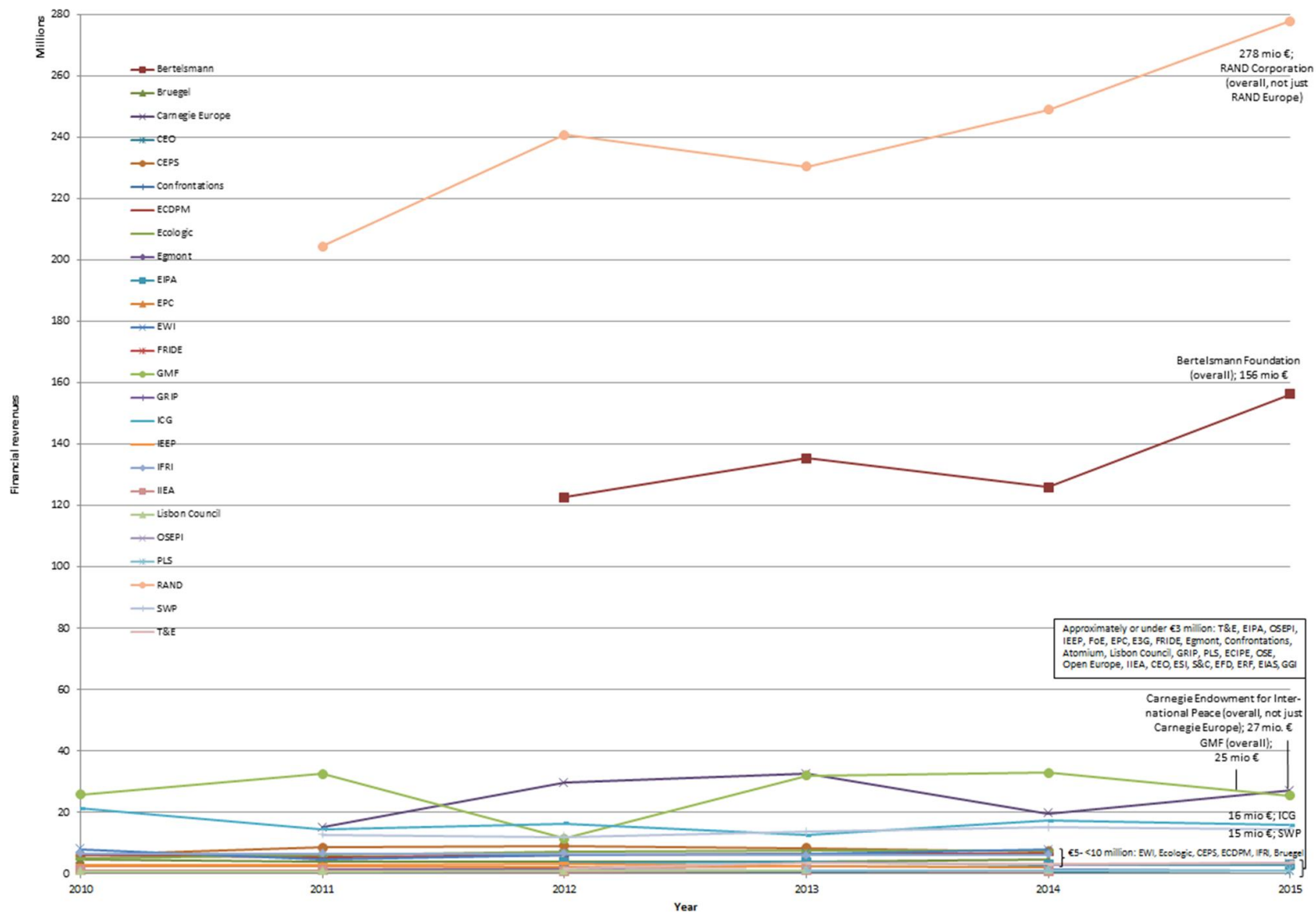
**Appendix 8.** Assets of Brussels EU think tanks with around or under €10 million over time, 2010 to 2014 (for subsample of N=12)

Note: All amounts in or converted to EUR (e.g. from \$) and rounded.



## Appendix 9. Revenues of 25 major Brussels EU think tanks, 2010-2015

Note: All amounts in or converted to EUR (e.g. from \$) and rounded.











## Appendix 12. Network of universities where Brussels EU think tank staff and board members studied at (N=1,929)

Note: Based on biographical data or CVs for 1,929 (93 percent) of 2,080 individuals across 39 Brussels institutes as of 2015; two-mode network (cutoff value  $\geq 2$  ties) of all -not just highest-degree university codes, visualized in UCINET/Netdraw with line strength, node labels and size displayed by degree centrality.

