

What's for Sale?

An analysis of the Immigration Policy Agendas of EU Institutions. The Venue-Shopping Explanation Revisited.

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Paper prepared for the SISP Annual Conference, September 16-18 2010, Venezia
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Abstract

A powerful explanation of European integration in immigration matters, the venue-shopping metaphor has been employed to understand the emergence of an EU level for policy-making in immigration as the result of efforts by domestic policy actors to circumvent domestic constraints to their goal of controlling immigration. This explanation has proven very effective in accounting for the *timing* (early 1980s), *form* (intergovernmentalism) and *content* (security-oriented) of EU policy-making on immigration. Yet the EU framework for policy-making in immigration, and the institutions and policy actors taking part to the policy process, have undergone important changes in the last decades. Recent analyses found evidence of non-securitarian and even overtly 'expansive' EU immigration policy-making. It is an argument of this paper that there is no need of 'new' theories to account for this policy change. Based on the content-analysis of policy documents of the main EU institutions involved in policy-making in immigration, the empirical analysis of policy agendas of EU institutions moves from venue-shopping explanations and goes further to elucidate the consequences of changes in the institutional design – that empowers venues with competing agendas – and their impact upon the EU immigration policy process.

Keywords: European Union; immigration policy; policy agendas; venue-shopping

Introduction

A relatively recent field of intervention for the European Union (EU), immigration is a top-level issue in the EU political agenda. Early forms of cooperation in immigration emerged outside of the EU treaty frameworks in the mid-1970s and were later incorporated in the EU formal remit. Through progressive institutional changes, the EU structured a supranational level for policy-making in immigration. European integration in the politics of immigration raises a number of questions. Some are linked to 'classic' issues of European integration: why did European states decide to pool their sovereignty in a domain so tightly related to their sovereignty? Why did they slowly but steadily move towards a fully 'supranationalised' institutional framework for policy-making in immigration? On the other hand, more related to the focus of this paper, European integration in immigration has also sparked a debate about the policy consequences of European integration in immigration: what kind of immigration policies does the EU produce, and why? To what extent does the metaphor of Fortress Europe catch the reality of EU policy-making in immigration – or, to put it differently, is there a 'securitarian bias' in the emerging EU immigration policy regime? Is it possible to cast realistic projections of the future path of Common Immigration Policy?

This paper seeks to contribute to the understanding of EU policy-making in immigration through an empirical analysis of the policy agendas of EU institutions. More specifically, the focus is on how changes in the institutional design affect agenda-setting processes through the empowerment and functional specialisation of distinct policy venues with competing agendas. It will proceed as follows. The next section will provide an overview of the evolution of the framework for EU policy-making in immigration, and summarise the coordinates of the related scholarly debate. The explanation of the agenda-setting approach to the analysis of EU policy-making and of the data employed in this essay will follow. The second part of the paper discusses the findings of the analysis, that are reappraised in the conclusion.

EU integration and policy-making in immigration

Cooperation on migration-related matters emerged in the mid-1970s, outside of the formal remit of but with strict relations to the EU institutional framework (Bigo 1996). The notion of 'intensive transgovernmentalism' employed to depict the functioning of cooperation in Justice and Home Affairs (Wallace 2005: 87-89), describes the "extensive network [...] which operated both outside and under the overall authority of the European Council on several political and executive levels" (Lavenex and Wallace 2005: 460). Early transgovernmental cooperation between domestic security officials from the ministries of justice and home affairs and police forces had two notable outcomes. "Securocrats" (Geddes 2008: 187) could establish a 'policy monopoly' (Baumgartner and Jones 1993: 6-9) and secure control over the immigration policy agenda at the supranational level. It was during this pre-institutional stage of EU cooperation in immigration that "technocrats linked European integration, migration and security issues by underlining the criminal activities associated with free movement" (Guiraudon 2000: 260). In linking migration to security concerns they could establish themselves as the actors best equipped to deal with such matters. Beside agenda-setting and framing effects, transgovernmental cooperation also had 'harder' effects, as this network facilitated the conclusion of important intergovernmental conventions – namely the Schengen agreement (signed in 1985) and the Dublin convention (1990) (Hix 2005: 353).

It was not before the Treaty of Maastricht in 1993, however, that migration issues became 'matters of common interest' to the European Union. When Member States (MSs) first endowed the EU with competencies on extra-EU immigration, they were concerned about not to give up full control over decision-making in such a sensitive field. The depth of political integration was thus constrained both 'upstream', by limiting the participation of supranational institutions (the European Commission and Parliament) to decision-making to slightly more than a formal involvement, as well as subjecting decisions in the Council to the unanimity rule; and 'downstream', by providing for special and mostly unbinding legislative JHA policy instruments and virtually excluding the intervention of the European Court of Justice.

Subsequent revisions modified, gradually but radically, the institutional framework for EU policy-making in immigration. The Treaty of Amsterdam (1999) moved immigration matters to the 'first pillar' and subjected them to 'supranational' policy-making rules. Yet a number of derogations were decided for a transitional five-year period: the European Commission gained the power to draft legislation, but shared it with MSs; the European Parliament (EP) was only to be consulted; the unanimity rule still applied to decision-making in the Council. With the adoption of this sort of 'mitigated intergovernmentalism' (Longo 2005), immigration and asylum were "communitarised, [...] but they were not supranationalised" (Geddes 2003: 137). However, after the expiration of the transitional period the MSs gave up their 'safety nets' (Stetter 2000) and provided for a full shift to the community method.¹ With the notable exception of legal immigration, supranational institutions are now fully involved in immigration policy-making. The European Commission has the monopoly on policy formulation; and the Council of Ministers votes by qualified majority with co-decision powers granted to the European Parliament.

Guiraudon (2000) provided a sophisticated explanation to explain the timing (early 1980s), form (intergovernmental), and content (security-oriented) of cooperation on migration and asylum, thus linking the evolution of the institutional framework to the processes and outcomes of policy-making. Drawing on theories of agenda-setting and venue shopping (Baumgartner and Jones 1993), Guiraudon (2000) hypothesised that European cooperation on immigration originated from efforts by law-and-order officials to overcome domestic constraints – posed by national courts (Joppke 1998), interest groups (Freeman 1995, 1998), and competing ministries and bureaucracies – to their goal of restricting immigration. Venue shopping consists in the resort by policy actors to those venues which are deemed most suitable for the achievement of specific policy goals (Baumgartner and Jones 1993: 31-35). Europe as the locus of the integration process was offering a variety of venues. The supranational venue, insulated from constraining institutions and pro-immigrant actors, was suitable for transgovernmental cooperation between non-elected security officials to develop in a secretive and unaccountable fashion (Bigo 1996). Indeed, particularly prior to the more decisive incorporation of immigration politics within the institutional framework of the EU, a cooperation developing around multiple fora for transnational coordination was an ideal opportunity for bureaucracies which were increasingly losing power vis-à-vis national courts (cfr. Hix 2005: ch. 11), with the latter actively defending immigrants' rights and advocating the respect of international humanitarian conventions (Guiraudon and Lahav 2000).

The venue-shopping explanation has been crucial to the understanding of early configurations of European integration in immigration. Yet it seems to be challenged by recent institutional and policy developments. Intergovernmental approaches have problems in accounting for the 'communitarisation' of EU immigration policy-making and the increasing centrality of supranational institutions (Uçarer 2001). Moreover, the 'escape to Europe' argument faces limits when one wants to explain longer-term policy consequences of EU

¹ See Council Decision 2004/927/EC, providing for certain areas covered by Title IV of Part Three of the Treaty establishing the European Community to be governed by the procedure laid down in Article 251 of that Treaty.

integration in immigration. Scholars are indeed questioning the notion of 'fortress Europe' based on evidence of non-restrictive or even overtly 'expansive' outcomes of EU immigration policy-making (Boswell 2007; Lavenex 2006b; Favell and Hansen 2002; Geddes and Guiraudon 2004; Geddes 2008). It seems that 'securitisation' of immigration (Huysmans 2000) is not the uncontroversial consequence, but rather one of different possible policy outcomes of EU policy-making. There is the need to go 'beyond fortress Europe' if it is even true that "European integration may have some rights-expanding and regulation-inhibiting effects" (Geddes 2008: 63).

Policy Agendas and the analysis of EU immigration policy

The analysis of EU agenda-setting dynamics can improve the understanding of both policy-making and integration processes (Princen 2009: 3-6). This is especially relevant to the study of the EU politics of immigration where "little attention has been given [...] to the variety of actors and venues where immigration policy is shaped, elaborated and implemented" (Lahav and Guiraudon 2006: 207-208), and there is a paucity of research on the "policy inputs behind outputs" (Lahav 2004: 10).

Policy agenda research seeks to explain "how new ideas, new policy proposals, and new understandings of problems may or may not be accepted in the political system" (Baumgartner and Jones 2006). Agenda-setting processes are responsible for the way policy problems are defined (Stone 1989; Kingdom 1995; Rochefort and Cobb 1994; Majone 2006), which in turn affects the range of policy responses that will be deemed adequate to deal with them. Institutions (Schattschneider 1960) and 'policy images' together determine the scope of participation to policy processes (Baumgartner and Jones 1993: 25-38; Princen 2009: 9-12). Political systems offer a variety of venues to actors interested in influencing the course of public policy. This is especially the case in multi-level polities (Marks et al. 1996), where purposive policy actors meet different access-point to influence agenda-setting processes (Peters 1994, 2001).

The EU immigration policy process in the 'transgovernmental phase' emerged out of, and was dominated by, a policy monopoly established by domestic security officials. From a bottom-up perspective, those actors were venue-shopping 'vertically' (Guiraudon 2000) to escape domestic constraints. Transnational cooperation later becomes the embryo of the subsystem responsible for the politics of immigration at the EU level. When immigration policy was formally added to the EU competencies, the subsystem of transgovernmental security actors was subsumed in the EU system, when a Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) formation in the Council of Ministers was created (Guiraudon 2000 and 2003; Lavenex 2001; Lavenex and Wallace 2005). Yet while the EU deepened cooperation in immigration, new supranational venues for policy-making in immigration were established and/or empowered. Other Council formations, most notably the Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) and the General Affairs (GENAFF) Councils, now discuss

immigration issues. There are also specialised sub-units in the European Commission (in particular the DGs Freedom Justice and Security, and Employment and Social Affairs) and in the EP (notably the committees on civil liberties, social affairs, external relations and development). The Court of Justice has gained more penetrating judicial powers.

What once was a form of “secretive transgovernmentalism” (Guiraudon 2003: 277) has progressively attracted attention by high-level governing institutions. It makes a big difference whether or not ‘macropolitical’ actors direct their attention toward policy issues (Baumgartner and Jones 1993). When this happens, opportunities arise for new actors to mobilise around competing policy images, and for policy monopolies to be disrupted. The overall picture now shows a greater pluralism in the EU immigration decision-making arena (Lavenex 2006b: 1287). The structuring of an EU level for policy-making implies that opportunities for vertical venue-shopping are complemented by room for ‘horizontal venue-shopping’ at the supranational level (Princen 2009: 26-28). The greater pluralism of the policy arena is expected to foster a more competitive policy process, with multiple access-points and less predictable policy agendas (Peters 2001).

In sum, institutionalisation and supranationalisation seem to have changed radically the background for EU policy-making in immigration. This is consistent with recent research challenging the established image of a ‘fortress Europe’ (Geddes and Guiraudon 2004, Lavenex 2006b, Boswell 2007, Geddes 2008) and finding evidence of new, more ‘expansionist’ frames against the established securitarian frame (Huysmans 2000). Yet the extent and the likely impact of this change are still unclear. It is an argument of this paper that, despite new evidence challenging the ‘venue-shopping explanation’, a new theory is not needed. Rather, there is the need to assess empirically the way changes in the institutions and actors dealing with migratory matters impacted upon venues where EU immigration policy is elaborated, discussed and decided, and on the effects of changing institutional design on agenda-setting processes.

Data

With the aim to reconstruct EU immigration policy dynamics, several types of policy documents issued by EU institutions in the period 1975-2007 have been analysed following the method of the *comparative agendas project* (Baumgartner et al 2006; John 2006; cfr. Baumgartner, Jones and MacLeod 1998, Baumgartner and Jones 1993, Baumgartner et al 2002). This project codes policy agendas by applying a unified coding scheme with some 20 ‘major topics’ codes plus more than 200 ‘subtopics’. I constructed an immigration policy major topic with 7 subtopics: visa; asylum; entry of immigrants; illegal immigration,

expulsion, return; border control; immigrant integration and rights; labour migration; plus a “general” category for combination of subtopics.²

The scheme has been applied here to code relevant documents from the main EU institutions involved in immigration policy-making, that makes for a total of 858 observations (see table 1). Two different sets of variables are analysed. The first set is aimed at tracing immigration policy dynamics (Bardach 2006, Baumgartner and Jones 2002) in terms of variation in the attention of single EU institutions to the issue of immigration. Attention is understood here as the relative share of immigration issues on the whole agenda of single institutions.³ The second set of data has been generated based on the content of policy agendas, categorised according to the subtopics illustrated above.

The next section presents the results of the analysis. It will first trace changing levels of attention toward immigration as a whole, and then pass to the in-depth analysis of the content of the EU immigration policy agendas. Findings are compared across EU institutions and along time. The aim is to dig into the main EU venues for policy-making in immigration, in order to expose to empirical control the foundations of the venue-shopping explanation, and understand whether and how changed policy and institutional conditions can be reconciled with existing theories: is the attention of EU institutions biased toward selected issues? Do ‘issue monopolies’ (Jones et al. 1993) emerge around policy venues? Why, where, and around what issues? How do the changing institutional design and inter-institutional balance affect agenda-setting processes in EU immigration policy?

The time period covered has been divided so as to reflect the four main stages of EU cooperation/integration in immigration. There is first the non-institutional phase of transgovernmental cooperation (phase one) starting in the mid-1970s. The intergovernmental stage (phase two) begins after the Treaty of Maastricht in 1994 and ends in 1999, when the Treaty of Amsterdam becomes executive and the transitional phase (three) of ‘partial supranational’ begins. The last, supranational stage (four) goes from 2005 to the end of the period covered by this research.

² This coding scheme is a more direct derivation of the French (Baumgartner, Brouard, Grossman, Lascoumes, Navarro, Riou, *Agenda France. Liste des codages des rubriques*, March 2009), Italian (Borghetto and Carammia, *Italian Policy Agendas Codebook*, October 2009) and EU work-in-progress versions of the codebook (Gerard Breeman, Sylvain Brouard, Marcello Carammia, Sebastiaan Princen, Arco Timmermans, Anne Rasmussen and Petya Alexandrova, *European Union Agendas Project Codebook*, version 1.7, June 2010), where a major topic is dedicated to immigration. More precisely, ‘entry and stay of immigrants have been divided in three subtopics: ‘entry of immigrants’, ‘visa’, ‘immigrant integration and rights’. Moreover, a ‘border control’ subtopic has been added. These choices were motivated both by the specific features of the EU as a political system and the purpose of a more intensive analysis of immigration policy agendas.

³ This is calculated as the percentage of documents dealing with migration matters on the total of the (same kind of) documents issued by the same institution in a given time-period. Values have been standardised [$z=(x-\mu)/\sigma$] to permit comparisons between different institutions.

Table 1 List of documents coded

<i>Institution *</i>	<i>Period covered **</i>	<i>Type of documents coded</i>	<i>Number of documents coded</i>	
European Council	1975-2007	Conclusions of the Presidency	99	
European Commission	1975-2007	COM documents	53	
Council of Ministers	Justice and Home Affairs	1996-2007	Meeting minutes	73
	Employment and Social Affairs	1996-2007	Meeting minutes	56
	General Affairs	1996-2007	Meeting minutes	228
European Parliament	1979-2007	Written questions presented by MEPs	349	

* All relevant documents have been coded for each institution, with the exception of the Parliament where only a sample of parliamentary questions has been analysed. The sample has been retrieved from the EU record (available at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/registre/recherche/RechercheSimplifiee.cfm?langue=EN>) by entering the word “*migr*”, which generated a list of all questions whose title contained such words as migration, immigration, migrants, immigrants, etc.

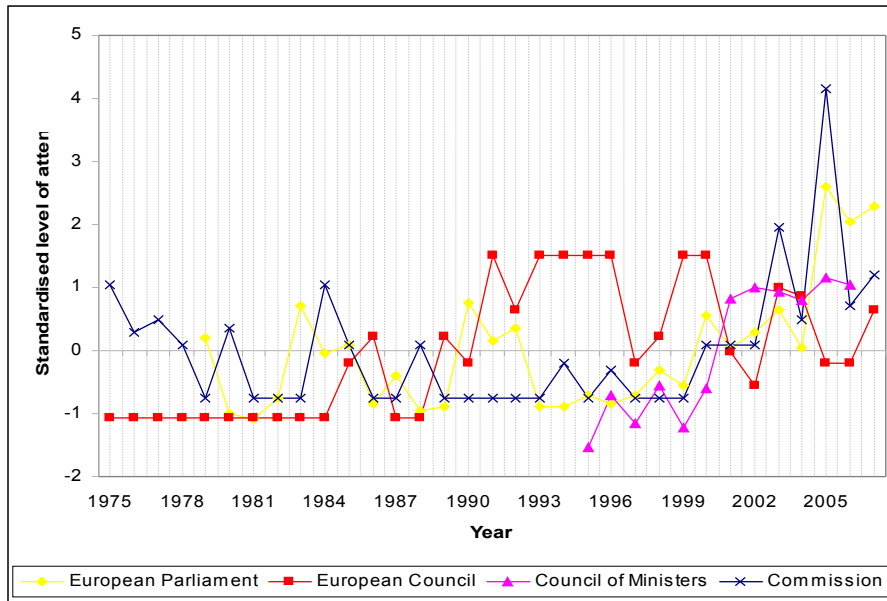
** The aim was to cover as long a time-period as possible. All European Council conclusions and European Commission ‘COM documents’ have been coded. Parliamentary questions have been coded starting from 1979, the first directly elected parliamentary term. Meeting minutes of the Council of Ministers are publicly available only starting from 1996.

Findings

EU institutions and attention toward immigration

Picture 1 shows (standardised) annual changes in aggregated attention to immigration within the agendas of the main EU policy-making institutions: European Council (EC), European Parliament (EP), Commission (COMM), and Council of Ministers (CoM). Data about the EC show that until the 1980s the highest-level governing institution of the EU devoted little or no attention to immigration. This is the ‘pre-institutional’ phase of cooperation, when transgovernmentalism was in place and the policy monopoly held by ‘securocrats’ prospered in the shadow of attention from competing domestic actors. In the same years, the EP and the Commission were in turn devoting some attention to immigration. Either institutions did not have power in immigration at that period. Their interest toward immigration problems was the consequence of different reasons. Members of the European Parliaments (MEPs) are closer to the moods of their constituencies, thus the more intense ‘questioning’ to European institutions in a period when the EP did not have policy-making powers probably reflected varying salience in their home countries. Conversely, increased attention by the Commission corresponds to a failed attempt in the mid-1980s to add immigration to the formal remit of the UE and stimulate policy activity accordingly.⁴

⁴ See COM (1985) 48-1, Communication from the Commission to the Council: Guidelines for a community policy on migration; and COM (1985) 48-2, Draft Council resolution on guidelines for a community policy on migration. Cfr. Geddes (2008: 122)



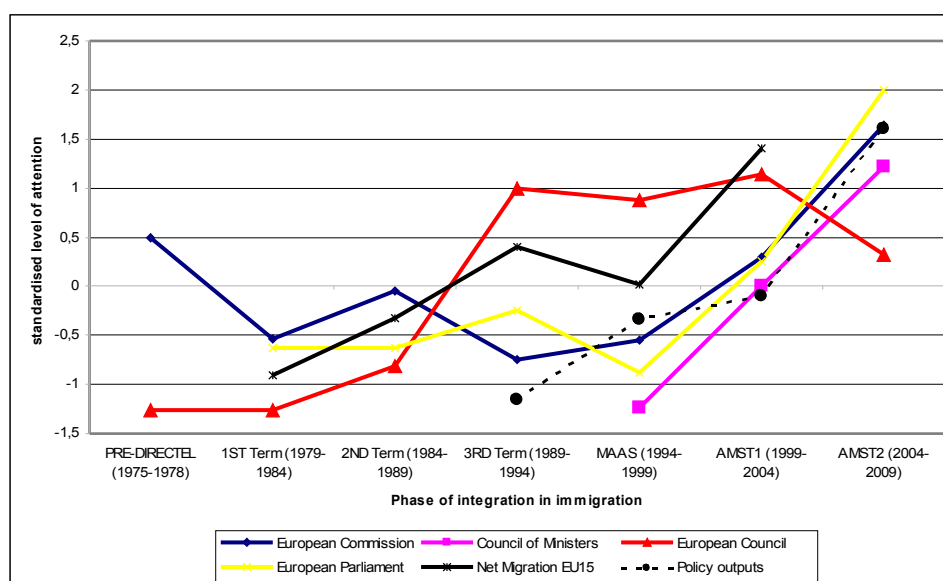
Picture 1. EU institutions and attention toward immigration

On the whole, however, the first half of the 1980s have been years of scarce attention from the European Council and intermittent attention by supranational institutions. Attention from the three institutions whose data are available for that period shifts in the mid-1980s, when the SEA and the Schengen agreements are stipulated. The attention-shift in the EC agenda is thus easily explained. Data about the EP and the Commission are instead indicative of an early burst of attention toward immigration diffused throughout the whole EU system, even among those institutions that were excluded from decision-making processes.

Beginning in that period, and throughout the 1990s, attention from the European Council shifts to levels higher than supranational institutions. EU immigration policy enters was entering a ‘constituent’ phase. Supranational institutions still devote some attention to immigration, but less than they did in the previous decade. This is consistent with the intergovernmental mode of governance initially decided for EU immigration politics that marginalised supranational institutions. It is worth noting that while policy documents about immigration are virtually absent from the Commission agenda in the intergovernmental phase, migration was more salient in the EP during the negotiation of the Maastricht treaty, when the EP was signalling its dissatisfaction for being excluded from decision-making (Hix 2005: 371; Geddes 2008: 172-173). Things change in the early 2000s when, in correspondence with the beginnings of supranationalisation, attention from supranational institutions increases dramatically to levels higher than the EC. Data about the Council of Ministers (CoM), available from the 1990s, also show a rise in attention toward immigration, which accelerates dramatically after the adoption of the Treaty of Amsterdam.

Changing levels of attention are more clearly shown in picture 2, where they are aggregated at time intervals of five years. Note that the intervals represent parliamentary terms, but the last three also correspond to the last three phases of integration in immigration: intergovernmental, transitional/pre-

supranational, and supranational. We clearly see that attention to immigration from supranational institutions is higher than that of the EC until the mid-1980s. Subsequently, macropolitical attention shifts markedly, in a period when the institutional foundations of the EU immigration regime are laid down, and the EU immigration policy subsystem disrupted and rebuilt. While remaining at a relatively high level, attention from the EC then decreases if compared to both supranational institutions and the Council of Ministers. There is some convergence among levels of salience in EU institutions along time. This points to the increased relevance of immigration in the whole EU political system, but is also related to the more even distribution of policy-making powers among EU institutional venues – a sign of ‘maturation’ of the EU governance of migration which is reflected in agenda-setting processes.



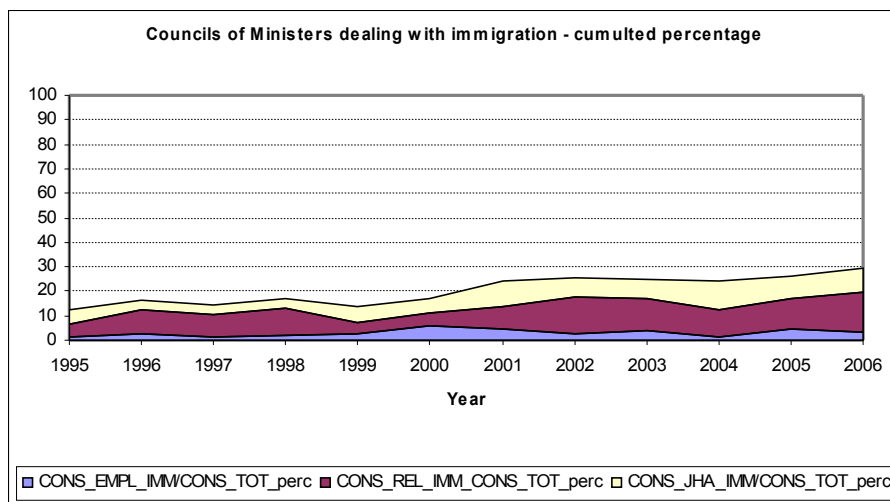
Picture 2. Immigration and attention by EU institutions (time-periods)

Picture 2 complements the analysis of attention with some interesting data about trends of immigration in the ‘EU 15’. While these data would deserve a closer scrutiny which goes beyond the scope of this paper, the apparent correlation between trends in immigration and levels of attention by EU institutions is striking,⁵ and seems indicative of a fairly good level of EU responsiveness to exogenous challenges.

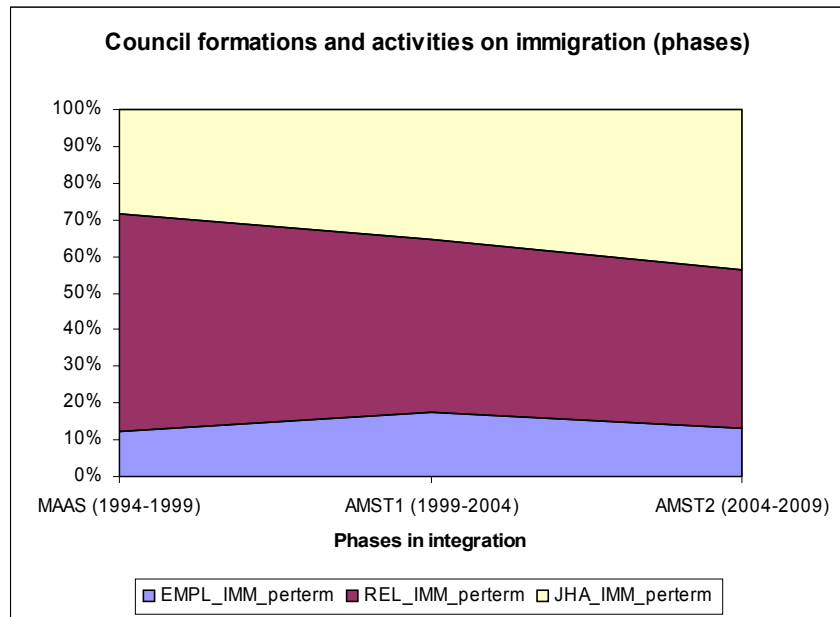
The next section delves into the content of the agendas of EU institutions. Before passing to that, pictures 3 and 4 permit a quick look at policy dynamics within the Council of Ministers. The Council of Ministers is

⁵ It is worth noting that the EC seems to follow a dynamic different than other actors. Its attention peaks before other institutions, and then is kept at a relatively high level for quite a long time before a relative decrease in the last period. There could be two competing explanations. One could hypothesise that the EC agenda is less correlated to the external environment and more to endogenous processes (Princen 2009: 23-28). On the other side, data could also indicate a sort of ‘threshold effect’ in the increase of immigration, which made EC attention peak in the early 1990s in conjunction with the institutionalisation of the EU politics of migration. After that period, attention by the EC was kept at a disproportionately high level from ‘inverse’ institutional friction (Jones and Baumgartner 2005; Baumgartner et al 2009), but also because that institution was the forum of a broad debate about the form and content of a new policy area. Once the policy-making arena was fully institutionalised, lower EC attention to immigration in comparison to other institutions could be explained with reference to cognitive constraints which makes it hard for issues to keep centrality in the agenda of high-level political institutions.

functionally organised in several sectoral ‘formations’. It makes a difference whether one or the other formation takes upon itself responsibility in immigration policy-making, as different ministers and bureaucracies are expected to have different approaches towards policy problems. We can conceive of Council formations as distinct institutional venues in themselves, processing issues according to their own ‘institutional biases’. When officials from domestic JHA ministries ‘venue-shopped’ at the EU level, they did so to avoid not only the constraints posed by domestic courts but also the competition of rival bureaucracies (notably Social Affairs ministries, cfr. Guiraudon 2000 and 2003). Pictures 3 and 4 show, respectively, the rise of immigration activities in relation to all Council activities, and the relative involvement of different Council formations (EMPL, GENAFF, and JHA) throughout the three phases within the institutionalised stage of EU immigration policymaking. What we see is first of all an impressive increase in the share of Council activities on immigration which in the turn of a few years rises from slightly more than ten to almost thirty per cent of the whole Council workload (picture 3). If we give a look at what we might call the intra-institutional share of immigration activities within the CoM (picture 4), further trends become evident. Throughout the period 1995-2007, the JHA Council increases its share from less than 30 to more than 40% of Council activities; while the GENAFF decreases its involvement from a 60% to slightly more than 40%. The involvement of the EMPL Council, which never reaches a 20%, is instead relatively minor.



Picture 3. Share of Council meetings dealing with immigration on the total of all Council meetings.



Picture 4. Relative share of Council immigration activities in the JHA, EMPL, and GENAFF Council along the three phases of EU integration in immigration.

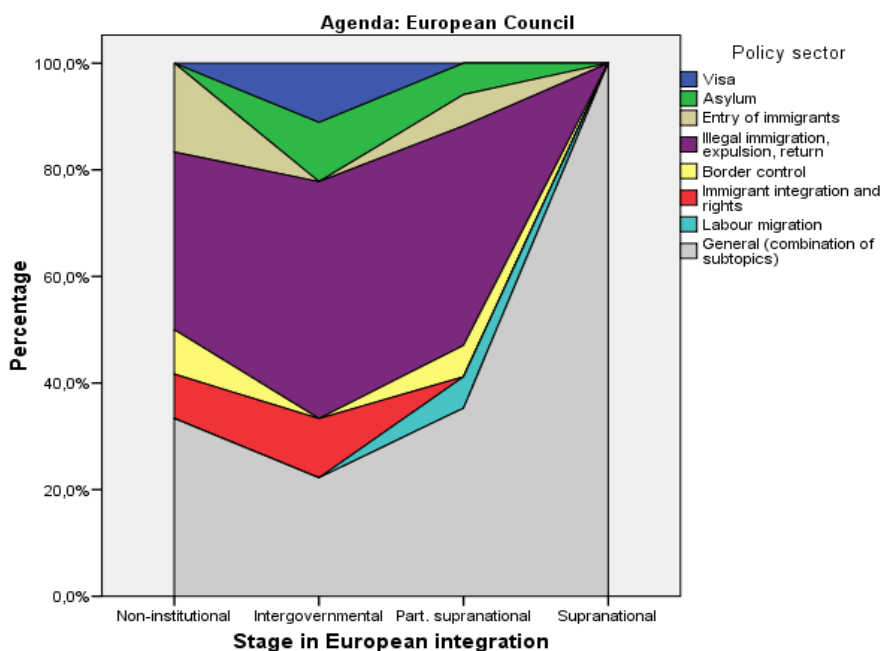
This seems to suggest some division of labour, with the JHA formation increasing its centrality in Council activities on migration to the detriment of the RELEX Council, with a stable but residual share for the EMPL Council. To understand whether this is just the result of a functional division of labour or, rather, it may have substantive effects on the EU politics of migration, it is necessary to move toward a more detailed analysis of the content of immigration agendas. This is done in the next section.

The policy agendas of EU institutions

Let us first proceed along the line of reasoning of sectoral specialisation. The idea would be that some EU institutions take a more ‘generalist’ approach to immigration and deal with more (virtually all) policy sub-field; while other institutions have a stronger functional bias, and concentrate more intensively on specific immigration policy sub-sectors. With the aim to trace changes along different stages of European integration in immigration, the content of agendas will be shown in relation to the four main phases isolated above: transgovernmental, or pre-institutional (mid-1970s until the Treaty of Maastricht in 1993); intergovernmental (1994-1998); partly supranational (the transitional five-year period before revisions introduced with the treaty of Amsterdam became fully operative, 1999-2004); fully supranational (after Council decision 2004/927, extending the co-decision procedure to migration policies, and granting the exclusive power of proposal to the Commission, 2005-2007).

Figure 5 shows the immigration policy sub-fields dealt with by the European Council along the four time periods (cfr. Table 2 in the annex). The EC as the macropolitical institution is expected to deal with multiple aspects of immigration policy. Understanding the policy sectors dealt with by the EC is also important because this institution shares formal agenda-setting powers with the Commission. During the pre-

institutional phase, two thirds of the EC immigration agenda were equally allocated between illegal immigration and ‘multidimensional’ immigration policy documents, i.e. documents dealing with a combination of immigration subtopics. One fourth of the EC pre-institutional agenda dealt with the entry (16%) and rights (8%) of immigrants. Finally, only 8% of EC conclusions dealt with external border control, which in fact was a relatively minor issue in the pre-Maastricht EU agenda. The change in the EC agenda after the Treaty of Maastricht is noteworthy.



Picture 5. European Council and immigration subtopics

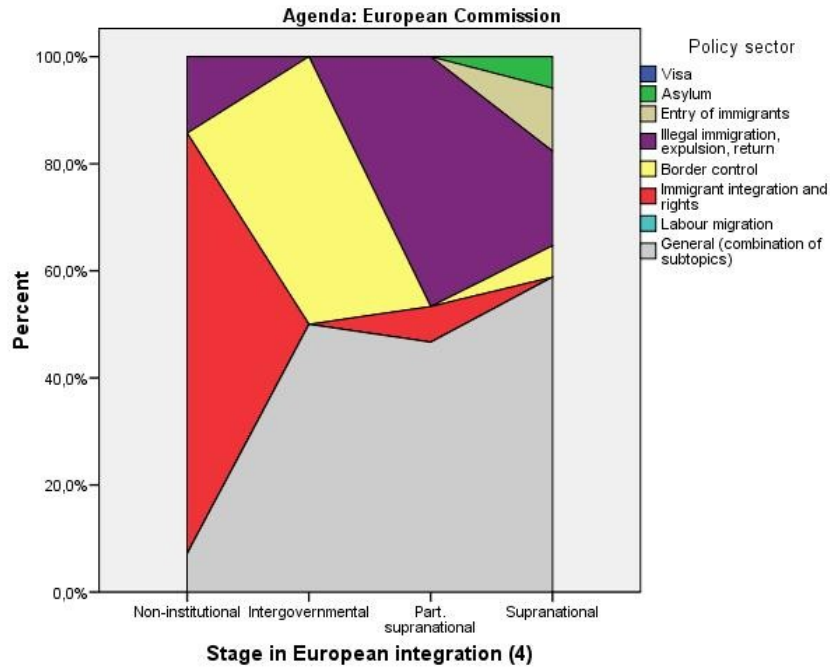
There is first of all more differentiation, with two new sectors entering the EC agenda: visas and asylum issues. This is not surprising if one considers the high salience of asylum problems in some important MSs (and notably Germany) in the early 1990s. Second, there is a decrease of documents dealing with a combination of sectors – an unexpected finding for a ‘generalist’ institution as the EC – and a parallel increase in the salience of illegal immigration, which increases to cover almost half of the EC immigration policy agenda in the intergovernmental period. If this is summed up with visas and asylum issues, the sectors related to the entry of immigrants cover almost three quarters of the EC agenda in the intergovernmental period. The evidence seems to point to the agenda of the European Council in the intergovernmental phase as dominated by control-related aspects of immigration.

Things change again during the next two phases of EU integration in immigration, that see an increase in the share of EC conclusions dealing with multiple sub-fields – which in the supranational phase cover the whole EC agenda. This is the consequence of two distinct dynamics. On the one hand, starting from the meeting in Tampere in 1999 that set the guidelines for the emerging migration policy, the European Council takes a more wide-ranging view of immigration as a truly multifaceted phenomenon which needs a comprehensive response. This is epitomised by the ‘global’ or ‘root’ approach to migration, formally

endorsed by the Brussels meeting of the European Council of December 2005. On the other hand, this is consistent with a broader change in the EU as an institutional environment for policy-making in immigration which becomes more 'mature': macro-level institutions focus on a broader array of policy sectors, but delegate to more specialised institutions the implementation of their guidelines. While the immigration policy process becomes more supranational, it is especially to the European Commission and Council of Ministers that we must focus the attention to better understand the trajectory of agenda-setting processes.

The agenda of the European Commission (picture 6, cfr. table 3 in the annex) displays substantive changes along the different periods too. In the pre-Maastricht phase, it was almost monopolised (78%) by issues of immigrant integration and rights. At that time, however, the Commission dealt almost exclusively with intra-EU immigration, i.e. with circulation MSs' citizens within the EU territory. The remaining of 'COM documents' dealt with illegal immigration (14%) and with combination of multiple issues (7%). The intergovernmental post-Maastricht phase is one of rather limited activity for the Commission, marginalised from the policy process. It issued nonetheless two important documents: one general communication about 'immigration and asylum policies'; and one proposal for a Council decision ('joint action') introducing the Odysseus programme for the management of external borders.

In the transitional phase following the Treaty of Amsterdam the Commission gained the power of initiative (though jointly held with the Council of Ministers), started an intense policy-making activity on immigration matters, and issued some fifteen documents. The approach was a pragmatic one. On the one side, paralleling the concerns of MSs, almost half of the documents had to do with illegal immigration and return. On the other side, the Commission sought to widen the agenda of EU migration policies to promote a broader notion of immigration by presenting an equal number of documents dealing with multiple immigration topics. Only one document, however, had to do with immigrant integration and rights. As it has been noted, while it was being involved in the politics of immigration, the Commission took a moderate position and sought to develop "credible policy ideas" to convince Member States it was worth delegating her more power in next institutional reforms (Hix 2005: 370; Cfr. Geddes 2008: 362).



Picture 6. European Commission and immigration subtopics

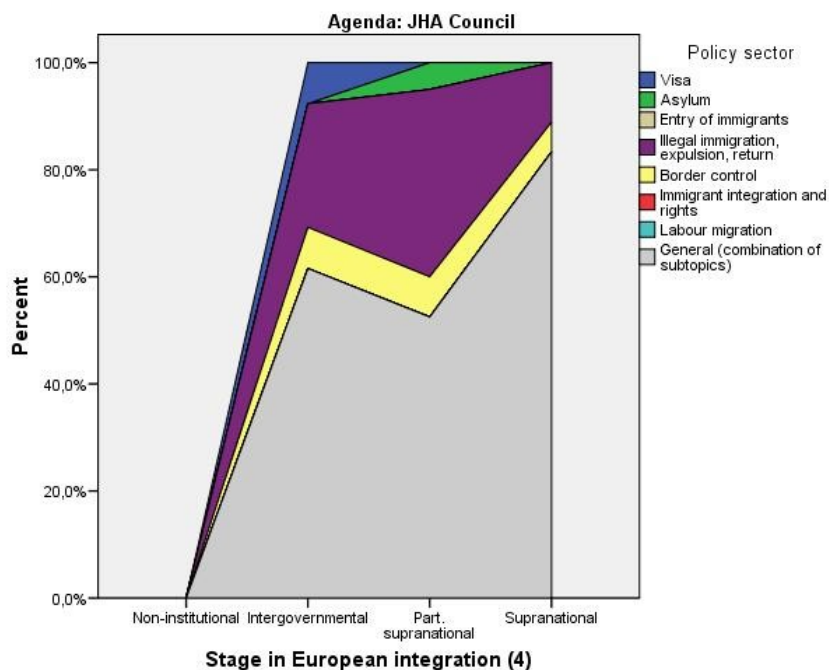
In fact, after the expiration of the transitional period and the passage to supranational governance, the Commission gains the exclusive power of formal legislative initiative. It then takes a more proactive approach, as clearly shown by the changes in its policy agenda. COM documents become more and more multi-sectoral (almost 60%). Whereas documents dealing with illegal immigration decrease dramatically, the entry of immigrants makes its appearance in the Commission immigration agenda. Only two documents deal with asylum and external borders. On the whole, we see that while it gains centrality in the policy process, the Commission takes a more assertive posture toward immigration, resulting in the differentiation of policy sub-topics covered (with relatively lower prominence of documents dealing only or primarily with immigration-control measures), and an increase in the share of policy documents presenting a multi-sectoral approach to migration.

With regard to Council of Ministers' agendas we expect to meet with two major findings.⁶ First, and consistent with the ministerial-like institutional structure of the Council, we expect to find an appreciable level of specialisation between sectoral Council formations – at least at later stages of EU integration in immigration. Second, as the CoM is located further to the policy cycle – and despite institutional frictions limiting the transmission of information (Baumgartner et al 2009) – some evidence should be found of at

⁶ Whereas the European Council and Commission agendas tell us of agenda-setting and formulation activities, the analysis of the minutes of Council of Ministers' formations with a stake in immigration policy has a partly different analytical significance. The agenda of the Council of Ministers is in fact more indicative of decision activities. The policy cycle metaphor must not be used in a too rigid form, however. The policy agenda of the EU is formed through complex interactions to which all institutions more or less formally take part. Moreover, it was not before the supranational phase of the EU immigration policy regime that the Council gave up its power of formulating legislation. However, the Council of Minister is the institution which decides on single policy outputs; hence the analysis of its agenda is also important to understand whether and how policy agendas are likely to be translated into actual policy decisions.

least the broad tendencies of the EC and Commission agendas to spill-over into the agendas of the Council of Ministers. As is shown below, there is indeed evidence of sectoral specialisation, if not even the emergence of issue monopolies (Jones et al. 1993) in the JHA and EMPL policy agendas. Rather less so in the agenda of the GENAFF Council: this, however, is consistent with the nature of the GENAFF as the Council formation dealing not only with external relation issues, but also more generally with all those issues where diplomatic agreement is needed.

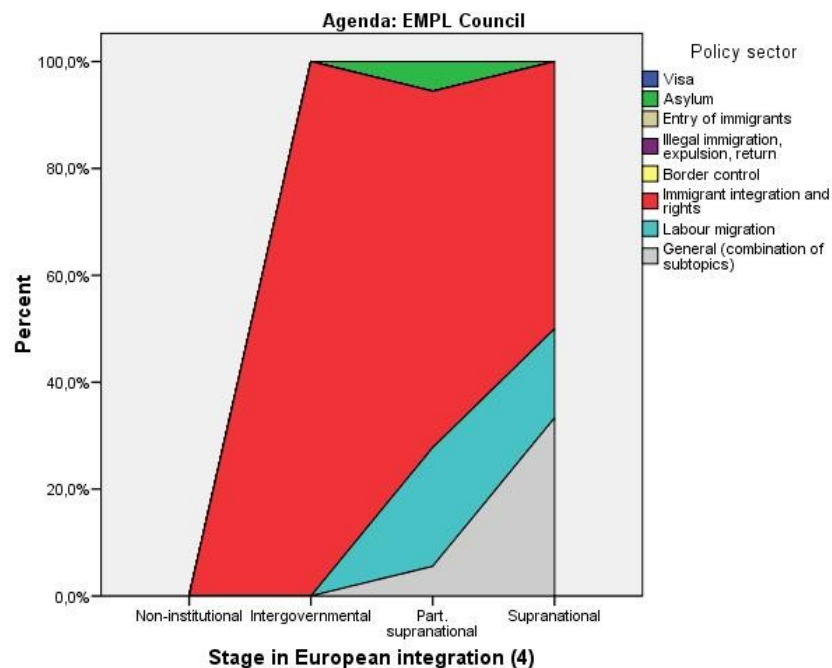
The JHA Council is the Council formation most directly concerned with policy-making in immigration. Consistently, a substantive (and growing) part of its meetings deals with multiple sub-sectors of immigration policy. There is, however, a marked bias in its policy agenda, which is manifest in those meetings dealing with specific policy sectors where the concern for immigration-control measures overshadows the rest of the agenda. Only four sectors can, in fact, be clearly distinguished in the JHA agenda: illegal immigration and return, visa, asylum and border control issues. The first one, in particular, remains the main object of the greatest part of those JHA meetings where it was possible to isolate a major theme of discussion; and it does so throughout all phases of EU integration in immigration policy-making (see picture 7; cfr. table 4 in the annex). There seem to be signs of a broader approach to immigration based on multi-sectoral measures, which in the supranational phase become dominant in the JHA Council agenda. It is possible, however, that multi-sectoral discussions of immigration result from a combination of 'security' immigration topics, what is not entirely clear from the data.



Picture 7. JHA Council and immigration subtopics

Similar considerations in the form, yet opposite in the substance, hold for the EMPL Council. This Council formation has a rather narrow agenda too but, in dealing almost exclusively with issues of immigrant

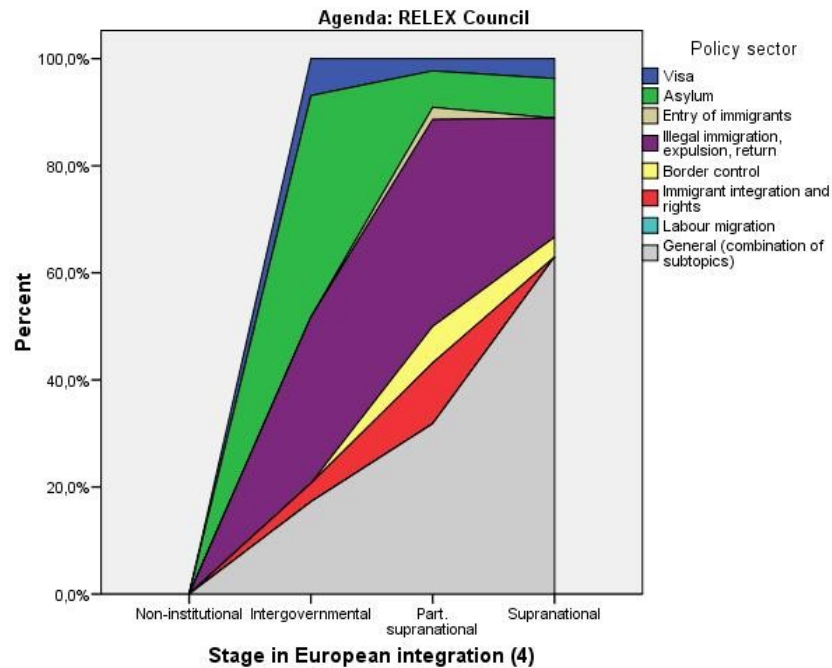
integration and labour migration, it shows the reverse bias (picture 8; cfr. table 5 in the annex). Even in the EMPL Council, however, we see a trend toward a more encompassing approach to immigration, with multi-sectoral meetings becoming more and more important. This is paralleled by an interesting dynamics internal to the EMPL Council: along the three phases, the share of meetings where migration issues are discussed increases from one third to the 70% of all EMPL meetings. Rising intra-institutional salience testifies an increasing interest and policy activity on migration. It is worth noting that the existence of an EU venue where issues of immigrant integration are central is highly significant. Even more so if one thinks that, while the EMPL share of overall Council activities on immigration policy is relatively minor (see pictures 3 and 4), this is an institution which is important in setting not only the governmental agenda where issues are discussed, but also the decision agenda of “issues that are up for active decision-making” in the EU (Princen 2009: 22).



Picture 8. EMPL Council and immigration subtopics.

As expected, things are partly different for the GENAFF Council (Picture 9; cfr. table 6 in the annex). The policy agenda of this Council formation is rather more comparable to the agendas of the European Council and Commission than to JHA and EMPL Councils. It is first of all a more ‘generalist’ agenda, in that it deals with a plurality of migration issues – all of them indeed, except for labour migration. The broader trend toward a more and more comprehensive discussion of migration policies is confirmed. Apart from that, the most prominent sector in the GENAFF agenda is illegal immigration, with the notable exception of the intergovernmental phase, when asylum issues were central. This is scarcely surprising if one considers that political asylum was highly salient to foreign policy in that period of geopolitical shake-up (Geddes 2008) after the fall of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. Apart from illegal immigration and asylum, however, also

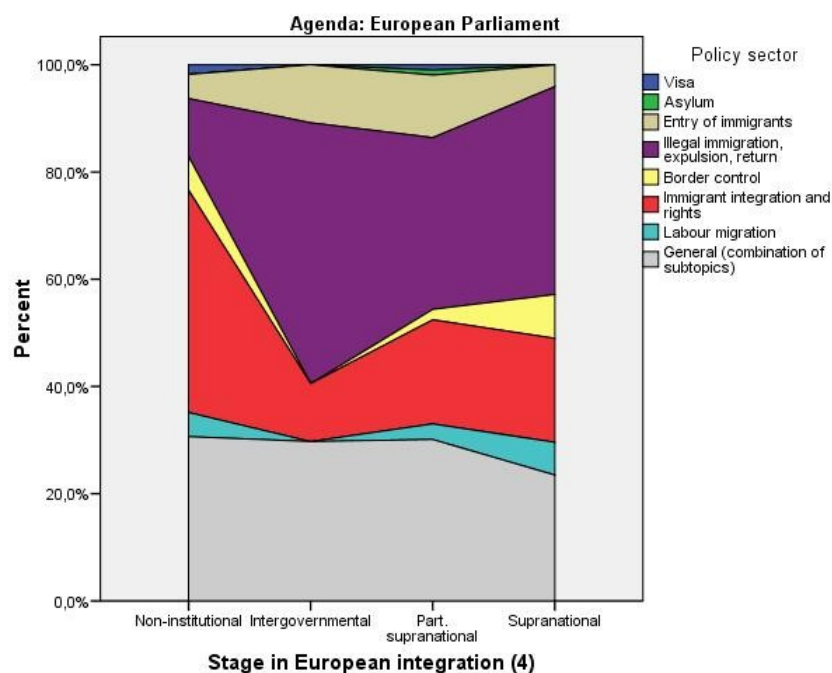
visa, entry of immigrants, border control, and fight against discrimination are present in the GENAFF agenda, confirming its status as the only ‘generalist’ institution within the Council of Ministers.



Picture 9. GENAFF Council and immigration subtopics.

Even though all immigration issues found access to the European Parliament agenda at some point in time, the greatest part is subject to a limited number of issues (picture 10; cfr. Table 7 in the annex). There is a fairly constant share of ‘multidimensional’ issues, ranging around one third of the EP agenda but decreasing to less than one fourth in the supranational phase. Yet the remaining of the EP agenda is dominated by two contrasting issues: immigrant integration and rights on the one hand, and illegal immigration on the other. This has different explanations. First, it has arguably to do with the methodological choice of this paper to take parliamentary written questions as a proxy for the EP agenda. While at the stage of policy decision the EP encounters strong incentives to find a common position to confront with the Council of Ministers for co-decision, parliamentary questions are better understood as a signalling game between single members of the EP on the one hand, and their parties and constituencies on the other. As such, EP questions are more indicative of the ‘governmental agenda’ of issues discussed by policy-makers, than of the ‘decision agenda’ (Princen 2009: 22), what is consistent with the finding of adversarial agenda-setting dynamics in the EP. The EP immigration agenda is not the only comprehensive immigration agenda in the EU; but it is so in a different way than that of other ‘generalist’ EU institutions such as the Commission and European Council. While encompassing agendas in the EC and Commission are the outcome of processes of deliberation in venues which are relatively more insulated from public opinion and party politics, the content of EP questions is more partisan. The two ‘hottest’ immigration issues – illegal immigration and immigrant integration – compete for prominence in this agenda. While it seems to have been the case that issues of

immigrant integration were dominant at the early stage of European integration, illegal immigration gained increasing centrality in the EP policy agenda along time. These data would deserve closer scrutiny, yet they seem to suggest that commonplace views of the EP as a pro-immigrant venue might be misplaced. Future analyses should devote a closer look at these findings, and investigate whether and how attention to selected aspects of migration in the EP relates to political partisanship and changing majorities in the Parliament; or, conversely, they are part of a broader trend which sees illegal immigration gaining centrality in the EP agenda to the detriment of immigrant rights. To the extent that such policy dynamics will spill-over to the decision agenda, they could have significant effects on EU policy-making – even more so now that the EP is fully associated to decision-making.



Picture 10. European Parliament and immigration subtopics.

The main expectation behind the exploration of EU immigration policy agendas was that while immigration became more salient to the European Union – which, in turn, developed more integrated forms of policy-making – increasing diversity would characterise its agenda. The findings seem to confirm expectations. They depict the image of the EU as a more competitive – somehow more ‘mature’ – environment for policy-making in immigration. Three broad claims can be made. There is first of all a general trend toward a wider immigration policy agenda for the EU. Whereas cooperation in immigration begun as an ‘escape to Europe’ in search of a safe environment for restrictive policy-making, non-securitarian aspects of immigration eventually found access to the EU agenda. This can be put in relation with the second argument that has to do with the effects of changing institutional designs on agenda-setting processes.

Leaving aside the question if institutional change was determined by domestic actors or, rather, a neofunctional dynamics pushed integration in immigration beyond their intentions (Margheritis and Maldonado 2007; Niemann 2008), the analysis makes clear that changes in the institutional design created and/or empowered institutional venues with different (when not overtly competing) immigration agendas. Whether migration issues are discussed in the European Council, Council of Ministers' formations, the Commission, or the European Parliament, is likely to make a difference as to what aspects of the problem will gain prominence.

Finally, while competencies have been allocated to distinct institutional venues, a complex architecture for EU decision-making on immigration has been structured. The analysis of policy agendas adds to the understanding of parallel dynamics of functional specialisation (between institutions laying out the broad contours of the EU immigration agenda on the one side, and more specialised venues in charge of concrete decision), the emergence and consolidation of issue monopolies (both between more 'biased' institutions such as the Employment and Social Affairs and the Justice and Home Affairs Councils; and within increasingly adversarial institutions such as the European Parliament), and tactical agenda-setting behaviour by institutions wishing to expand their policy competencies (the European Commission).

Conclusions

Moving from the venue-shopping explanation of EU integration in immigration, this paper carried out an empirical analysis of the immigration policy agendas of EU institutions. The findings corroborate the validity of established explanations, but point also to the relevant effects of changes in institutional design on agenda-setting processes. The analysis of changing levels of attention is consistent with the base argument of the 'escape to Europe' thesis, which sees European integration in migration as emerging out of efforts by domestic actors to control immigration. Yet the investigation of the policy agendas of the venues where immigration policy is made indicates that the change in the 'form' of cooperation has notable consequences on the whole immigration agenda of the European Union. While the framework for policy-making evolves from a trans- and inter-governmental toward a supranational mode of governance, the policy venues that are empowered focus their attention on different aspects of immigration.

The findings also suggest that there is a notable difference in the posture towards immigration of different EU institutions. This stands in stark contrast with the past configuration of the supranational immigration policy arena as one focusing mainly if not only on issues of migration control. On the one side, there are signs of 'maturation' in the way the EU as a political system deals with migration policies, with an emerging division of labour between higher-level actors and functionally specialised sectoral institutions. On the other side, while the environment for policy-making in immigration expands and gains internal differentiation, this mirrors in the policy agendas of EU institutions that become venues for discussion of

different aspects of migration. When policy venues increase and contrasting policy topics and images are discussed in the governmental agenda of a political system, there is broader scope for participation and issue competition. This is a dramatic departure from early European cooperation in migration, when the immigration agenda was monopolised by security actors.

This is not to say that the European Union is becoming a pro-immigrant policy arena, nor that it ever will. A number of factors make this unlikely, not least the decision-making power of Member states in the Council and the high salience of immigration control in domestic debates, not to mention path-dependencies from past forms of cooperation. Yet the combination of institutional and agenda changes is likely to have an impact on policy-making in immigration. The EU environment is becoming more similar to domestic settings, with a number of institutional and normative constraints narrowing the potential for effective regulation of migration. Moreover, in the more wide-ranging governmental agenda a number of different aspects of migration are discussed. While some can gain an easier access to the decision agenda, evidence suggests that it will be unlikely entirely captured by issues of immigration control. Indeed, recent evidence shows that actors with a strong interest in immigration control are venue-shopping at supranational venues different than the EU (Lavenex 2006b; Thouez and Channac 2006). This is an ironic outcome if one thinks that European integration in immigration emerged out of the member states goal to limit immigration – the corollary of which is that states should proceed in integrating in so far as it would help them to regulate immigration. While this could suggest that neofunctional dynamics may eventually have pushed integration in immigration beyond the original intentions (Niemann 2008, Margheritis and Maldonado 2007), it also poses a big challenge to the EU political system where the gap is increasing between the expectations of its citizens and member governments on the one side and the actual capacity to deliver sound results on the other.

On a more theoretical note, this paper has shown the promises of an agenda-setting approach in elucidating unclear aspects of EU integration and policy-making. While adding to the understanding of EU immigration policy-making, the analysis opens the way to a number of exciting questions that future research could address. It would be interesting to contrast international migration dynamics to changes in EU attention systematically, so as to better understand the extent of EU responsiveness to challenges coming from the external environment, and how this relates to endogenous processes. Also, a deeper analysis of the policy images associated to immigration, and the positive or negative tone adopted, would fine-tune the understanding of the venues where migration policies are discussed. Finally, a focus on legislative outputs would permit to explain how competing immigration issues and policy frames make it to the decision agenda (or why they do not), and what venues are more empowered with this respect.

Annex

Table 2. European Council and immigration subtopics.

Agenda		Policy sector										Total
		Visa	Asylum	Entry of immigrants	Illegal immigration, expulsion, return	Border control	Immigrant integration and rights	Labour migration	General (combination of subtopics)			
European Council	Non-institutional	N	0	0	2	4	1	1	0	4	12	
		%	,0%	,0%	16,7%	33,3%	8,3%	8,3%	,0%	33,3%	100,0%	
	Intergovernmental	N	1	1	0	4	0	1	0	2	9	
		%	11,1%	11,1%	,0%	44,4%	,0%	11,1%	,0%	22,2%	100,0%	
	Part. supranational	N	0	1	1	7	1	0	1	6	17	
		%	,0%	5,9%	5,9%	41,2%	5,9%	,0%	5,9%	35,3%	100,0%	
	Supranational	N	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	
%		,0%	,0%	,0%	,0%	,0%	,0%	,0%	100,0%	100,0%		
Total	N	1	2	3	15	2	2	1	16	42		
	%	2,4%	4,8%	7,1%	35,7%	4,8%	4,8%	2,4%	38,1%	100,0%		

Table 3. European Commission and immigration subtopics

Agenda			Policy sector								Total	
			Visa	Asylum	Entry of immigrants	Illegal immigration, expulsion, return	Border control	Immigrant integration and rights	Labour migration	General (combination of subtopics)		
European Commission	Non-institutional	N	-	0	0	2	0	11	-	1	14	
		%	-	,0%	,0%	14,3%	,0%	78,6%	-	7,1%	100,0%	
	Stage in European integration in immigration	Intergovernmental	N	-	0	0	0	1	0	-	1	2
			%	-	,0%	,0%	,0%	50,0%	,0%	-	50,0%	100,0%
	Part. supranational	N	-	0	0	7	0	1	-	7	15	
		%	-	,0%	,0%	46,7%	,0%	6,7%	-	46,7%	100,0%	
Supranational	N	-	1	2	3	1	0	-	10	17		
	%	-	5,9%	11,8%	17,6%	5,9%	,0%	-	58,8%	100,0%		
Total	N	-	-	2	12	2	12	-	-	48		
	%	-	2,1%	4,2%	25,0%	4,2%	25,0%	-	39,5	100,0%		

Table 4. JHA Council and sectoral specialisation

Agenda			Policy sector								Total
			Visa	Asylum	Entry of immigrants	Illegal immigration, expulsion, return	Border control	Immigrant integration and rights	Labour migration	General (combination of subtopics)	
JHA Council	Non-institutional	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
		%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Stage in European integration in immigration	Intergovernmental	N	1	0	-	3	1	-	-	8	13
		%	7,7%	,0%	-	23,1%	7,7%	-	-	61,5%	100,0%
	Part. supranational	N	0	2	-	14	3	-	-	21	40
		%	,0%	5,0%	-	35,0%	7,5%	-	-	52,5%	100,0%
	Supranational	N	0	0	-	2	1	-	-	15	18
		%	,0%	,0%	-	11,1%	5,6%	-	-	83,3%	100,0%
Total		N	1	2	-	19	5	-	-	44	71
		%	1,4%	2,8%	-	26,8%	7,0%	-	-	62,0%	100,0%

Table 5. EMPL Council and immigration subtopics.

Agenda			Policy sector								Total
			Visa	Asylum	Entry of immigrants	Illegal immigration, expulsion, return	Border control	Immigrant integration and rights	Labour migration	General (combination of subtopics)	
EMPL Council	Non-institutional	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
		%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Stage in European integration	Intergovernmental	N	-	0	-	-	-	6	0	0	6
		%	-	,0%	-	-	-	100,0%	,0%	,0%	100,0%
integration in immigration	Part. supranational	N	-	1	-	-	-	12	4	1	18
		%	-	5,6%	-	-	-	66,7%	22,2%	5,6%	100,0%
	Supranational	N	-	0	-	-	-	3	1	2	6
		%	-	,0%	-	-	-	50,0%	16,7%	33,3%	100,0%
Total		N	-	1	-	-	-	21	5	3	30
		%	-	3,3%	-	-	-	70,0%	16,7%	10,0%	100,0%

Table 6. GENAFF Council and immigration subtopics

Agenda			Policy sector							Total	
			Visa	Asylum	Entry of immigrants	Illegal immigration, expulsion, return	Border control	Immigrant integration and rights	Labour migration		General (combination of subtopics)
RELEX Council	Non-institutional	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
		%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Stage in European integration in immigration	Intergovernmental	N	2	12	0	9	0	1	-	5	29
		%	6,9%	41,4%	,0%	31,0%	,0%	3,4%	-	17,2%	100,0%
	Part. supranational	N	1	3	1	17	3	5	-	14	44
		%	2,3%	6,8%	2,3%	38,6%	6,8%	11,4%	-	31,8%	100,0%
	Supranational	N	1	2	0	6	1	0	-	17	27
		%	3,7%	7,4%	,0%	22,2%	3,7%	,0%	-	63,0%	100,0%
Total		N	4	17	1	32	4	6	-	36	100
		%	4,0%	17,0%	1,0%	32,0%	4,0%	6,0%	-	36,0%	100,0%

Table 7. European Parliament and immigration subtopics

Agenda			Policy sector							Total	
			Visa	Asylum	Entry of immigrants	Illegal immigration, expulsion, return	Border control	Immigrant integration and rights	Labour migration		General (combination of subtopics)
European Parliament	Non-institutional	N	2	0	5	12	7	46	5	34	111
		%	1,8%	,0%	4,5%	10,8%	6,3%	41,4%	4,5%	30,6%	100,0%
Stage in European integration	Intergovernmental	N	0	0	4	18	0	4	0	11	37
		%	,0%	,0%	10,8%	48,6%	,0%	10,8%	,0%	29,7%	100,0%
integration in immigration	Part. supranational	N	1	1	12	33	2	20	3	31	103
		%	1,0%	1,0%	11,7%	32,0%	1,9%	19,4%	2,9%	30,1%	100,0%
	Supranational	N	0	0	4	38	8	19	6	23	98
		%	,0%	,0%	4,1%	38,8%	8,2%	19,4%	6,1%	23,5%	100,0%
Total		N	3	1	25	101	17	89	14	99	349
		%	,9%	,3%	7,2%	28,9%	4,9%	25,5%	4,0%	28,4%	100,0%

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