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BRIEF

EP-EUI Policy Roundtable Evidence And Analysis In EU Policy-Making: Concepts, Practice And Governance

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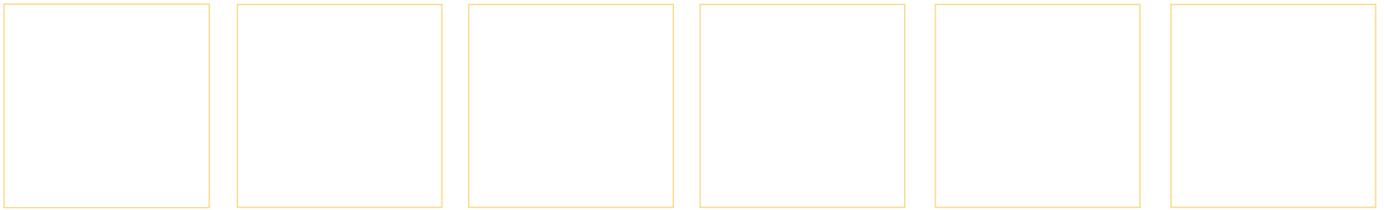
Villa Schifanoia,

Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies,

Florence, 7 November 2016

The **EP-EUI Policy Roundtable on Evidence and Analysis in EU Policy-Making** was co-organised by the Global Governance Programme (GGP) of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies (RSCAS) and the Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) of the European Parliament on 7th November 2016, in Florence. It brought together practitioners and academics who discussed recent developments in evidence-based policy-making together with Professor **Ioan Mircea Paşcu**, Vice-President of the European Parliament (EP) and Professor **Renaud Dehousse**, President of the European University Institute (EUI), who jointly provided the concluding remarks of the event. The scientific coordinators of the roundtable were **Wilhelm Lehmann**, EP Fellow at the EUI and **Gaby Umbach**, GlobalStat/EUI.

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The roundtable focused on the European Union's (EU) popular legitimacy that, even more so after the UK referendum, depends to a large extent on its effective capacity to deliver good outcomes as a policy-shaper and law-maker. In order to increase both the legitimacy and effectiveness of its action, in the past decade the European Commission (EC) had continuously stepped up its efforts to integrate stakeholders and concerned citizens in the preparation of new legislation. This practice went back to its *White Paper on European Governance* (2001).

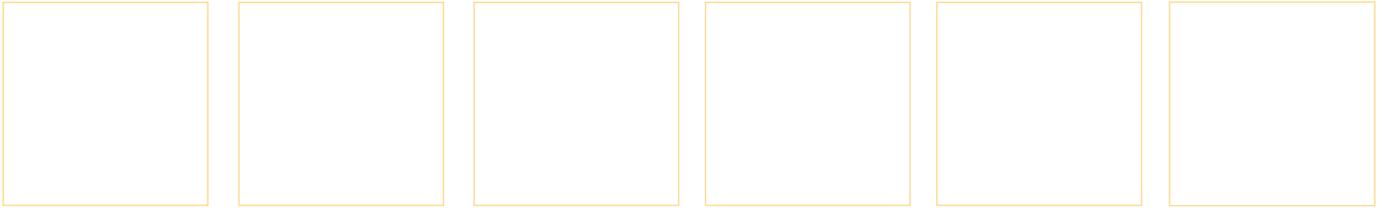
Concurrently, the EP had, from its side, built up several instruments to scrutinise the Commission's activities, using its own independent sources of evidence and expertise. Within the preparatory and scrutiny processes of both the EC and EP, policy proposals, legislative acts and implementation arrangements were increasingly assessed and evaluated on the basis of factual evidence and statistical data. Such evidence-based monitoring was increasingly recognised as a complex steering mode in itself that resulted from changing governance patterns due to Europeanisation and supra-nationalisation. In this view, the related policy-making reflected the need to re-structure the interaction of political actors of different institutional origin and political levels. It represented an influential policy instrument at the border of the politics and policy dimensions of the EU's multilevel legislative process.

The event took stock of the recent developments in the Parliament's involvement in this sort of evaluation of European governance, including various tools of impact and implementation assessment, scientific evaluation and the policy-oriented use of large data resources. Against this background, it provided fresh ideas on how to further develop adequate tools for setting priorities, including critical assessments of the limits of empirical and data evidence in defining new policies. The measurement practices presented during the different panels were in this sense providing examples of how to inform policy development by supporting a deeper understanding of the challenges to be addressed by EU Member States (MS).

PANEL 1: PLANNING AND ASSESSING EU POLICIES – PRACTICE AND PRACTICABILITY

The first panel discussed concrete examples of evidence-based assessment tools to inform policy-making and legislation within the EU. Starting from the policy-related assessment on different areas, the given examples highlighted the use of data to evaluate EU Member States' (MS) compliance and progress.

In this context, the practice of measuring fiscal sustainability to assess public sector solvency at European level was also explained. The example focused on the European Commission's *Fiscal Sustainability Report* and discussed its multi-dimensional indicators to measure the MS's financial performance under the European semester. This innovative approach focused on different time scales targeting short-, medium- and long-term challenges to public budgets and hence capturing fiscal stress signals also in the short run. The panel provided insight into strategic approaches towards data communication as well as data literacy and outlined European institutional practice in these areas. Examples of inter-institutional co-operation in view of the modernisation of dissemination of comparable statistics within the EU MS were given. Together with modern tools of data visualisation, open data initiatives were particularly recommended to help individuals upgrade their statistical literacy, which was perceived as a key instrument for citizens' empowerment to monitor and control policy-making and policy outcomes. The panel finally turned to measurement practices that aimed at assessing the 'uncountable', such as social justice, through aggregation of measurable objects. As such, the presentation offered insights into the approximation to social reality through statistical data and proxies. The analysis revealed that particularly in cases in which reality cannot directly be translated into input, output or outcome indicators a concise understanding of key concepts behind that reality is required in order to successfully translate intangible ideas into measurable realities to feed evidence into policy-making.



All the discussed cases highlighted the need for elaborate and neutral assessment tools to inform evidence-based policy-making in a comprehensive way while avoiding oversimplification and distortion of reality when reducing complexity to inform politics and the wider public.

PANEL 2: LEGITIMACY AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY-MAKING

The second panel focused on the impact of evidence-based policy-making as a rather recent development in contemporary EU politics. It dealt with important normative questions of the support of public authority through evidence-based processes and their legitimacy, for instance in the context of initiatives such as the European Commission's 2015 *Better Regulation Agenda*.

Reflecting the role of science in this area, scientific outcomes that entered the political arena via academic debates were assessed as tools to improve policy-making by offering insight into best practices, foresight activities as well as examples for more efficient and effective policy alternatives. This aspect was asserted to enhance transparency and legitimacy of decisions. At the same time however, disagreement remained about the role of academics in the process of policy-making. While some participants supported a stronger translation of research results into policy advice through academics themselves, others underlined the role of researchers as neutral brokers and providers of evidence who remained outside the political arena, abstaining from actively proposing policy alternatives in order not to undermine the accountability of legitimate decision-making.

Panel 2 additionally focused on the institutional practice of evidence-based assessment of EU policies, which was viewed to increase the democratic quality and legitimacy of EU policy-making 'from within'. Over time, different forms of impact assessments at EU and national level contributed to increased transparency of policies, policy impact as well as policy outcome and offered reliable insights into 'what worked at EU level and what didn't'. Although

no flawless evaluation devices, these monitoring cycles of policy processes and content therefore helped to improve the quality of policies and to trace accountability for policy outcome.

PANEL 3: THE 'EVIDENCE TURN' IN EU POLICY PLANNING AND LEGISLATION – PANACEA OR MIRAGE?

The third panel took stock of data analysis and indicator-based processes on a much broader scale and turned towards 'governance' consequences of evidence-based policy-making. The panel started with observations on the connection between politics and policies in evidence-based policy-making. Some difficulties were related to an increased interest in policy quality and policy innovation, which was, however, contrasted by a low interest in the quality of political processes; few political incentives exist to increase the quality of decision-making and bureaucratic practices. Medium- to long-term return periods of qualitative improvements in politics, such as the move from output to outcome assessments, were identified as main obstacles for increased attention on evidence-based reforms of decision-making processes.

Adding a different perspective to the discussion of 'governance' consequences of these new instruments, the panel turned towards evidence-based policy-making and interests. The analysis of inter-linkages between expertise and legitimacy focused on the type of information required by evidence-based policy-making within the EU, the type of legitimacy championed in this process, and the type of information provided by interest groups to the EP. As a key takeaway it was underlined that the EP could benefit from incentivising additional diversity across committees and procedures, that the increase of EP research and policy analysis activities could support capacities to process evidence, and that a closer look is required to analyse the distribution of information and evidence within the EU's multilevel and multi-actor political system.



General ideas on stakeholder participation to increase legitimacy in evidence-based policy-making followed, underlining key problems of a conceptual definition of the term, quality, nature and creation of 'evidence' in multilevel policy-making, in which overlapping cycles and interactions of policy-making (between supranational legislation and local implementation) can be identified. Moreover, the limits of pursuing evidence-based policy-making and the actor-quality of policy-makers were discussed, differentiating between 'policy-makers' and 'influencers' within political 'networks of decision-making' and discussing links between rational and 'irrational'/emotional decision-making. Tensions between 'policy-based evidence' and 'evidence-based policy-making' were also discussed in this context.

The panel concluded with observations on a purportedly slow process of change in the culture and functioning of EU institutions over the past 15 years in relation with evidence-based policy-making. The European Commission was seen to have been most directly affected by these changes, the European Parliament only partially, and the Council of the EU was affected very little. Cultural change could most clearly be witnessed in the increased attention given to different stages of the policy cycle. Road maps, advanced consultations of interests, ex ante impact assessments and a stronger focus on monitoring national implementation of EU legislation are key elements of this trend. As, however, institutional systems have a tendency to resist change, one of the key problems of evidence-based policy-making is bureaucratic inertia, which limits the potential for accepting new developments and ideas. In view of this pattern of inertia, and revisiting the title of the last panel, participants were split on whether evidence-based policy-making represented a panacea or a mirage, or whether it was neither a panacea nor a mirage but rather one of several legitimate principles and practices of good governance.

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