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From Coherence to Coheritization:
Explaining the Rise of Policy Coherence in EU External Policy

Abstract

Over the past decade, the external policy of the European Commission has become increasingly entangled by the notion of policy coherence. Previously 'siloed' policy areas such as trade, agriculture, and development are increasingly approached as challenges only effectively resolved by addressing their positive and negative interlinkages. While the EC is critical of fundamental incoherencies between different policy areas, it simultaneously calls to harness synergies between them. To explain this ambiguous approach, we combine insights from speech act theory and cultural political economy. We aim for methodological triangulation by employing an explanatory narrative, social network analysis, and expert interviews. We argue that the Commission's approach towards coherence can be understood as an attempt to reshape the actor landscape around the discourse on coherence. By gradually pushing out the most outspoken actors, the Commission seeks to discursively resolve the inherent contradictions of reconciling free trade and development of the Global South.

Keywords: Policy coherence; EU external policy; semiosis; critical political economy; trade; development

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Introduction

Over the last decade, the European Union's (EU) external trade policies have become increasingly entangled by the notion of 'policy coherence' (for development [PCD]) (Carbonne, 2008; Orbie, 2012; Sianes, 2017; European Commission, 2015). In a nutshell, coherence strives to reconcile a broad range of diverging policy goals in the area of development aid broader with commercial and security policies (European Commission, 2018). In the words of the European Commission (EC): '[Coherence] is fundamental if the EU is not to take with one hand what it gives with the other, but rather integrate development objectives into its trade, agriculture, environment, migration and asylum, and security and defense policies so that these policies contribute to and do not undermine development' (EC 2005: 13). At the same time, 'development can only take place under certain economic conditions (free trade and market economy)' (Siitonen, 2016: 5). Problematically, many policy goals which are subsumed under 'coherence' are at odds with the idea of unrestrained free trade: It is, for example, not possible to prevent labor migration if markets in developing countries are flooded with products from Europe, because this is 'kicking away the ladder' for industrial development in the Global South (Chang, 2002; Marois & Pradella, 2015). This renders efforts towards coherence paradoxical: if the EU's insistence on free-trade as a non-negotiable precondition for external relations is fundamentally at odds with interests in the South, coherence cannot be reached. If so, why is the EU pursuing it?

From a critical political economy perspective, the EC's emphasis on free trade can be well explained. Under the guise of a coherent policy, development goals can be subverted by commercial and security interests with the ultimate goal to interlock countries in neoliberal models of growth (Siitonen, 2016; Thede, 2013). However, what has not yet been explained by critical perspectives is the fact that the EC explicitly acknowledges the potentially negative consequences of free trade. This overt problematization of the downsides of capitalist expansion goes beyond simple co-optation and, at least at first glance, gives room for actors which cannot reasonably be expected to embrace the mantra of free trade.

To understand why the European Commission actively endorses substantial criticism on its external commercial policies without departing from the actual free trade policies themselves, we have to develop an understanding of discourses which goes beyond the traditional understanding of cooptation. It seems to us that we would have to interpret the notion of 'coherence' as a discursive power tool to channel potentially dissenting voices into a direction in which free trade is an *inevitable* part

of EU foreign policy. In this vein, we suggest to understand coherence as 'coheretization', i.e. a speech act (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) which discursively transforms not only the debate, but also the *landscape* of relevant actors so as to gradually push out fundamental criticism against free trade and unequivocally equate development with trade. To understand why the EC increasingly utters this speech act, we draw on insights of Cultural Political Economy (Sum & Jessop, 2013). From this literature, we derive an understanding of the EC as an *agent* which contributes to the pressures of a global capitalist accumulation structure while at the same time serving as an *institution* which legitimizes the very same pressures by restructuring the networks of political actors.

The article is structured as follows: first, we outline the theoretical account. Second, we briefly describe the research strategy. Third and finally, we analyse the discourse and power constellations around EU trade and development policy since the 2006 European Consensus on Development.

1. Theoretical discussion

In this section, we outline our theoretical account, which aims to explain the contradictory way in which the European Commission has shaped the discourse and actor landscape around its external policies. We first discuss the relation between speech acts and social change, arguing that speech act theory successfully captures the recursive relation between language and tangible reality. However, it does not provide an explanation for why some speech acts enact social change while others do not. We use cultural political economy to fill in this gap in Section 2.2. Thereafter, we outline the expectations for our case.

1.1. Speech act theory and social change

The analysis of language as an expression of power and political contestation has a long tradition in the social sciences. In social constructivist perspectives, it is argued that language can be used for framing, but can also lead to rhetorical entrapment when actors are pushed to 'practice what they preach' (Schimmelfennig, 2001). In critical political economy, the role of language is discussed as discursive power, i.e. the necessity of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic actors to articulate, contest, and reproduce their social struggles through discursive means. Hegemony in the traditional sense thus not only relies on material dominance, but also on the intellectual, discursive, and alleged moral supremacy of a hegemonic bloc of actors (Cox, 1983; van Apeldoorn, 2004).

Problematically, both literatures fail to capture how language constitutes agency. While they consider an actors' ability to make strategic use of linguistic tools, they tend to underestimate how language shapes the structures that actors operate in. To overcome this weakness, we need speech act theory. According to speech act theory, language is performative and one can – intentionally or unintentionally – change a state of affairs by simply making an utterance (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). Hereby, the utterance not only impacts the state of affairs, but also defines the horizon of future possibilities.

A speech act consists of three steps: the locutor utters a certain set of words (the locutionary act) with a purpose (illocutionary act) that has a certain effect on the interlocutor (perlocutionary act). When an actor utters a speech act, it not merely reflects the state of affairs, but actualizes or changes it. Hence Austin's famous assertion that 'saying it can make it so' (Austin, 1962, p. 1). Speech acts open up a space of contingency because the locutor's utterance (denotation) is paired with a certain connotation. For instance, when a development-oriented NGO says that the EU's external policies should be 'coherent', 'coherence' may hold a different connotation than when a transnational corporation says so. At the same time, the realm of possible meanings is not infinite, as 'coherence' is restricted to the material world of policies that already exist. In sum, speech acts are neither bijective (one-dimensional) nor arbitrary (open to all imaginable connotations), falling somewhere in between.

Speech acts can change the connotations ascribed to denotations (such as 'coherence') over time. But not all attempts at reshaping the connotation realm succeed. Austin (1962, pp. 14–15) refers to the clauses for success and failure as *felicity conditions*. Felicity conditions describe the context-dependent rules for why speakers gravitate towards their illocutionary motivations and why only some speech acts are successful. Unfortunately, speech act theory does not provide a systematic account on how speech acts interact with the social world (Balzacq, 2005; Pratt, 1986).

Crucially, the felicity of speech acts depends on conditions outside the speech act itself (Balzacq, 2005). However, speech act authors implicitly depart from a nominalist ontology (Hare, 1970; Noonan, 2008, pp. 577–578) that inhibits examination of the speech act's social context. This ignores broader social structures that go beyond understanding the felicity of any single speech act. Problematically, by only conferring meaning to linguistical utterances, 'why' questions can never be fully answered, since all extra-linguistic social contexts remain disregarded. Consequently, the theory cannot explain why a discrepancy exists between the pairing of an infinite number of conceivable connotations with only a finite number of denotations, nor why spatio-temporal fluctuations exist over

what can be said where and when.

To overcome this limitation, we suggest to turn speech act theory on its head in the Marxian sense: speech acts do not actualize some abstract set of ideas into an extra-linguistical reality, but rather a material and extra-linguistical reality structures thoughts and meanings through speech acts. We will use the concept of *semiosis* to theorize the relation between speech acts and their social context. In this light, the connotational realm created by speech acts prefigures the space for sense- and meaning-making (Flores Farfán & Holzscheiter, 2011, p. 141). The world we live in is prestructured and always filled with meanings. As such, we must make sense of it before attempting to transform these patterns of meanings to our own predilection (Fairclough, Jessop, & Sayer, 2003; Sum & Jessop, 2013). In the next section, we use cultural political economy (Sum & Jessop, 2013) to con- ceptualize how actors use speech acts to transit from sense-making to meaning-making.

1.2. *Cultural political economy as a framework of action*

Cultural political economy is a variant of critical political economy that emphasizes the impor- tance of discourse, language, and meanings (Sum & Jessop, 2013, pp. i–iii). Key is the notion of semiosis, which can be defined as 'the ensemble of social processes by which meanings are produced, circulated and exchanged' (Thwaites et al. quoted in Sum & Jessop, 2013, p. viii). The contradictions within capitalism are seen as the dialectical force that defines the contingency space within which actors produce, reproduce, and contest meanings that subsequently (re-)shape the material realm.

Contradictions in capitalist accumulation produce crisis-tendencies that periodically lead to over-accumulation, a situation where it is impossible for the industrial sector to entirely absorb surpluses in labour and capital (Harvey, 2004). Capitalism can only be rescued against itself as long as the sur-pluses can be injected geographically into the economies of the developing world and/or temporally as long-term investments (Harvey, 2004). For instance, in trade policy, the impetus to liberalize and remove non-tariff barriers functions to create a predictable and stable climate for the foreign invest-ments necessary to facilitate capital accumulation abroad. In the European context, this means that free trade policies open up external territories to temporarily station surplus capital and to reduce the labour surplus by facilitating exports, increasing the demand for labour within the EU.

From new 'spatio-temporal fixes' emanate differing ways in which actors react to and cope with their role in reproducing capitalism. In this sense, the inherently contradictory nature of capital-

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ism kick-starts the semiotic engine by acting as an underlying social and economic foundation that structures and provides direction to always on-going sense- and meaning-making processes.

In the 'mills of capitalism' (Polanyi, 2001), the constantly ongoing grinding of connotations ultimately serves to stabilize capitalism despite its inherent contradictions. Meanings which may go against prevailing premises are either filtered out or reconfigured in a way that they do not fundamentally challenge the status quo. This semiotic process entails the deployment of three *strategic selectives*, which can be further distinguished: The structure of global capitalism predefines what can 'reasonably' be said and imposes *discursive selectives* on any actor in a capitalist system. The actor in turn will be inclined to adapt itself to these structural conditions. It uses *actorial selectives*, which means that its speech acts are formulated in a way that the landscape of socially acceptable interlocutors (actors) remains limited to those whose positions can at least be reconciled with the capitalist structure. That does not necessarily mean that these actorial selectives would directly lead to a homogenous group of interlocutors. Quite to the contrary, space needs to exist to accommodate and incorporate moderate criticism to retain a sense of legitimacy with the broader public. Actorial selectives lead to a clustering of several networks of actors with different nuances of similar understandings, comparable to the bloc parties in the former self-proclaimed communist regimes. Their already delineated meaning-making deliberations create the conditions for *institutional selectives* which sustain and (in a long-term perspective) even reinforce the overall capitalist structure (Poulantzas, 1978, p. 130).

Figure 1 summarizes the theory by showing the semiotic cycle in full effect. Prior to actors producing speech acts, discursive selectives preordain (but not predetermine) the illocutionary forces actors can give to their speech acts (sense-making). Importantly, not every meaning or connotation can be paired with a denotation. Next, it shows how actors produce speech acts that can subsequently succeed or fail to alter the structure informing the formation of new speech acts, dependent on actorial and institutional selectives (meaning-making).

1.3. Expectations for our case

In sum, social change is always on-going and always informed by results of prior sense- and meaning-making cycles. Speech acts thus (re)shape the discursive, actorial, and institutional space in which actors either contest or rescue capitalism from its inherent contradictions. In the context of policy coherence, the European Commission plays a Janus-faced role. On the one hand, it serves as an

Figure 1: Speech act theory and critical theory united
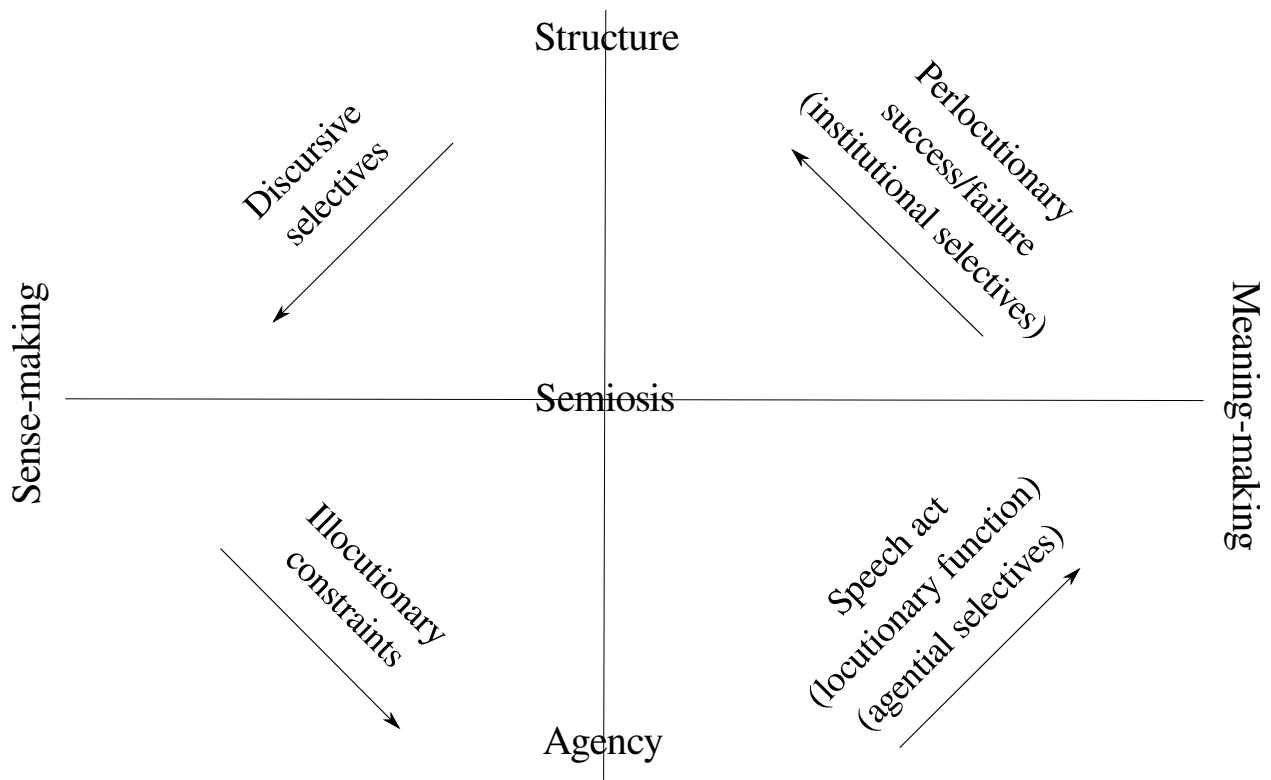
agent which devises the instruments for the 'spatio-temporal fix' and ensures their applicability via free trade negotiations with developing countries. In this perspective, the Commission is subjected to the pressures of global capitalism, but also exposed to its criticism. On the other hand, the EC is an institution to mold potentially diverging demands from various actors (member states' governments, EP members, corporations, civil society groups) into a consistent policy approach. Finally, it has to legitimize European free trade policies in the eyes of a broader societal audience.

Against this background, the notion of 'policy coherence' functions as an overarching organizing narrative on development because it simultaneously exists as a discourse among the development community (Sianes, 2017; Concord, 2011) and as a social- and institutional practice executed by the Commission (Verschaeve et al, 2016: 50). The Commission can use this discursive and institutional space to gradually transform the *actor landscape* around policy coherence. With its stakeholder meetings and public consultations concerning coherence, the EC transforms discursive selectives into actorial selectives. When actors seek to partake in debates on what policy coherence can mean, they must – at least tacitly – accept the underlying connotations concerning coherence, otherwise their reactions would remain meaningless in this pre-structured discourse. For instance, if one of the as-

sumptions is that development may not hinder free trade, this rules out the participation of the most fundamentally anti-free trade actors.

In this light, the Commission's public consultations are of utmost importance. They define the discursive selectives that preordain the possible connotations ascribable to 'coherence' and channel or filter the broader societal debate, which is ultimately needed to legitimize the EU free trade policy in the eyes of a wider public. When making sense of the consultation process, actors organically structure themselves along several 'connotational networks'. Over time, however, we can expect the semiotic process to narrow down the contingency space for public dissent, especially if structural (capitalist) imperatives grow stronger. However, the European Commission will remain careful to stabilize the perception of an open debate in order to retain its legitimacy vis-á-vis critical actors. Actors who oppose the shrinking connotational space of the EC speech act will be forced to either adapt their own understanding to the interpretation of the EC or to exit the debate altogether. This holds equally true for radical defenders of free trade and those who fundamentally doubt whether free trade can be reconciled with other political priorities (human rights, development, etc.). In the end, we can expect a gravitation towards a center which stabilizes the EC as an institutional selective to ensure the existence or even expansion of the global capitalist structure.

Thus, in light of the theoretical framework, we see coheritization as a linguistic power tool to increase the publicly perceived legitimacy of European free trade policies despite their inherent tensions with other policy goals which may be at odds with the logic of capitalist expansion.

Based on this interpretation, we identify five idealtypical connotations ascribable to coherence. *Coherence by default* entails the assumption that trade enhances the development of less industrialized countries without negative externalities. *Coherence by design* does not see fundamental contradictions between policy areas, but stresses a role for coordination to make the most of possible synergies. *Coherence as an institutional problem* emphasizes the negative but deems any challenge solvable with sufficient political will. *Coherence as a fundamental problem* critically assumes that coherence (for development) is only possible with large sectorial sacrifices (e.g., abolishing existing international trade and intellectual property regimes). Finally, *Coherence as impossibility* goes even further by claiming that trade and non-trade policy areas are impossible to reconcile because free trade is exploitative by default.

The crucial test is to see how actors have employed the ideal types/connotations ascribable to

coherence over time. Based on the theory, we concretely expect a semiotic 'race to the middle', where the more radical connotations are increasingly supplanted to ensure that free trade (capitalism) as such cannot be challenged.

2. Research strategy

We investigate the expectation outlined above by making use of methodological triangulation (Downward & Mearman, 2006: 2). We employ an explanatory narrative (Klauk, 2016) to structure the overall analysis. The time-period under investigation focuses on the years 2006-2017 as these are the formative years for the (re-)emergence and expansion of policy coherence. To paint a full picture, we also briefly discuss the period leading up to 2006, starting with the 1957 Treaty of Rome. We draw on primary (policy) documents, scientific, and grey literature. Next, we employ semi-structured expert interviews. These reveal to a fuller extent latent motivations, preferences, structural constraints, and procedural details (Rathbun, 2008). Six interviews have been conducted, including with (senior) members of the European Commission, NGO representatives, and Member State officials. The interview partners were promised anonymity which we ensure by not revealing their names or specific institutional affiliation.

Finally, we use *discourse network analysis* (Leifeld, 2017: 2). Discourse network analysis is a hybrid approach that combines content analysis and social network analysis. It outputs network graphs that we use to describe the structure of the discourse around EU external policy to infer from this how actors influence each other over time. This approach is ideally suited to analyze how the Commission has shaped the discourse and actor landscape around its external policies, because political discourse is inherently a network phenomenon (ibid.). The basis of the approach is to code documents that reveal the positions actors take within a discourse at a particular moment in time.

For this article, we make use of three public consultations organized by the European Commission: on the establishment of a European Consensus on Development (2005), on a post-2015 agenda (2012), and on how to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (2016). We opt for public consultations, because they create a communicative interface between the European Commission and a wider audience of societal actors which may be critical of its free trade policies[3]. While this selec-

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[3]It is not by accident that free trade is the most prominent issue among the consultations which have been held by the EC over the last 15 years. This indicates that the EC feels a particular need to legitimize its initiatives in this field.

tion prevents us from having a closer look at the debates among the "insiders" of European foreign policies, it sharpens the focus on the legitimation strategy which is needed to make EU policies acceptable by a larger public. To code the statements, we employ the Coherence ideal types. Codes are framed as binaries that actors can agree or disagree with (Leifeld et al, 2018). As such, a statement is interpreted as either an expression of agreement or disagreement with the five Coherence ideal types.

3. Analysis: The Rise of coheritization

The analysis starts with a brief outline of EU external policy from its inception (1957) to the formation of the European Consensus on Development (ECD) in 2006. Thereafter, it focuses on the structure of EU discourse on trade and development and its relation to the expanding institutional responsibilities of the European Commission. We will show how the discursive grounds whereupon one can discuss Coherence are shrinking to the middle, and how this results in a transformation from a permissive to a constraining consensus on development.

3.1. *From illocutionary enablement to illocutionary entanglement*

Discussions on the interactions among and contradictions between external (trade) and development policies go back to post-WWII discussions (Tinbergen, 1952: 68; Hydén, 1999: 64-73). It has long been argued that internal and external policy areas such as trade, migration, finance, security, and monetary policy negatively impact development of the South (Prebisch, 1950; Amin, 1976: 185-190; Lang, 2011). This ultimately comes down to the inevitable (transnational) tension between accumulation and legitimation (Offe, 1984), which has always required stabilization in the form of decommodification schemes such as non-reciprocal access to Northern markets. In the 1970s and 1980s, this resulted in the New International Economic Order, a body of Southern countries that sought non-reciprocal improvement to their terms of trade (Ryner & Cafruny, 2016: 198), and in the first Lomé Conventions (I, II) that provided generally favorable EU-side concessions to developing countries (Hoebink, 1999; Hurt, 2003: 160; Elgström & Pilegaard, 2008: 367-370).

In this sense, the fragmentary nature of the global capitalist system has been a device of illocutionary enablement, as it has provided space for fundamental criticism. After the demise of credible alternatives to capitalism, actors made use of this possibility. The mid-1990s and early 2000s were marked by so-called alter-globalization campaigns and the Jubilee 2000 debt campaign (Buxton, 2004;

Grenier, 2012). Although these campaigns ultimately failed to fundamentally transform the global political economic order, they nevertheless shifted the connotation of Coherence to an increasingly problematic nature. This arguably motivated the Commission towards a reluctant acknowledgement that incoherent and/or contradicting external policies ought to be addressed; the foundations for the speech act 'policy coherence' to – at least tacitly – acknowledge the inconsistencies in the Commission's external policy, were laid.

But why did the EC produce the coherence speech act? To fully understand, we argue that an inextricable link exists between coherence and the burden of growing competences in shaping external policy. As an agent increasingly concerned with capital accumulation, the EC must necessarily also increasingly concern itself with legitimation. The Commission's flagship area of external relations is surely its trade policy. Although the Commission's remit for pursuing trade relations formally did not exist prior to the Treaty of Lisbon, the movement towards it was initiated in 2001 with the Treaty of Nice (Devuyst, 2011: 650-651). This places the 2006 European Consensus on Development at a moment when the Commission has, for the first time, actively faced responsibility for the contradictions in the multilateral trading system by interacting with the global South.

Discursively and (albeit to a lesser extent) institutionally, the Commission in the late 1990s advocated a 'third-way' approach to free trade policy under the mantra of 'managed globalization', a term coined by then trade-Commissioner Pascal Lamy. Although essentially neoliberal in nature, Lamy's managed globalization emphasized that free trade does not produce favorable social, economic, and environmental outcomes for all by default (Meunier, 2007). As such, strong international institutions guided by normative ideals of equality and sustainable development were required to make globalization work for everyone (ibid: 911). Lamy succeeded in making his 'managed globalization' the core rhetoric of EU trade policy, and the EU vigorously defended it in WTO negotiations (ibid.).

After Nice, however, the EC changed its speech act. Peter Mandelson, who succeeded Lamy, introduced the 'Global Europe Strategy' that stressed the importance of market creation abroad and competitiveness at home (Orbie & De Ville, 2011: 8). The emphasis on former colonies and special preferences also shifted to a more general focus on the EU's commercial and economic interests (Bollen et al 2016: 282). Meanwhile, references to neoliberalism's downsides had vanished. Arguably, now that the Commission became more actively involved in EU trade policy, a burgeoning responsibility to find spatio-temporal fixes for European capital and labor surpluses arose. The

more overtly neoliberal direction of EU trade policy since 2006 can be seen as a consequence of this changing reality. In effect, however, the Commission had to increasingly operate as an enforcer to the downsides of free trade policy.

It is in this light that the return of policy coherence should be assessed. Although PCD was instigated in the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, it was not systematically embraced until 2006 (Forster & Stokke, 1999; EC, 2006). The (re-)embracement of PCD thus occurred simultaneously with the launch of Global Europe. The enthusiastically neoliberal Global Europe strategy contradicts the critical tone and market-correcting impetus of PCD. Why does the Commission produce such dissimilar yet overlapping initiatives at the same time? In our view, PCD expresses a continued acknowledgement and attempt to legitimize neoliberalism's shortcomings. However, due to the Commission's growing responsibility to facilitate capital accumulation abroad, combined with northern member states pushing for liberalization in the Council (Bollen et al 2016), the EC is no longer able to directly express this view through its trade policy, and hence rather opts for a more comprehensive 'whole-of-government' approach.

All things considered, the (re-)emergence of PCD should thus be seen in this light: the increasing challenge to balance its accumulation with legitimation to the broader public pushed the Commission to utter the speech act 'policy coherence' to acknowledge the inconsistencies in its external policy. Although PCD allows critical actors to voice their concerns, Coherence as a speech act entails illocutionary entanglement because avenues for fundamental criticism are subsequently closed off. On the one hand, the limited acknowledgement that policy coherence for development should be achieved cannot reasonably remedy the underlying inherent contradictions in capitalism. On the other hand, the European Consensus on Development does not fundamentally criticize the EU's commitment to liberalization policies. In the word of the ECD (EC, 2005: 35):

> The Community will assist developing countries on trade and regional integration through fostering, equitable and environmentally sustainable growth, smooth and gradual integration into the world economy, and linking trade and poverty reduction or equivalent strategies. The priorities in this area are institutional and capacity building to design and effectively implement sound trade and integration policies, as well as support for the private sector to take advantage of new trading opportunities.

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Civil society actors will find it hard to leverage fundamental criticism against European external policy when coherence should be achieved without radically departing from liberalization policies. Indeed, some NGOs specifically eschew from the Commission's policy coherence framework because it does not allow them to fundamentally criticize the downsides of free trade policy (interview 5). In this logic, the ECD should present a full shift to the center connotations of Coherence and function as a framework that presents coherence as neither something that is neither achieved by default, nor as something impossible. Thereby, we have gone from illocutionary enablement to illocutionary entanglement.

3.2. Policy coherence as a semiotic machine

This section analyses how the actor landscape around EU development policy has evolved since 2006. As outlined above, the ECD entails an illocutionary entanglement because it impedes actors from radical departures of the centre connotations of Coherence. Key to this section is how actors beyond the European Commission have initially positioned themselves within the discursive framework of Coherence. This positioning happens within the context of the EC's public consultations. In line with our theoretical argument, of crucial importance is the wording of the questionnaires and green/white papers surrounding the consultations, since they are speech acts that constitute the contingency space within which actors may voice their views on EU external policy. The 2005 consultation did not have a fixed questionnaire and instead was based on an issues paper that provides significant room for different interpretations of 'coherence' (EC, 2005, pp. 3–5). However, free trade is from the outset posited as an ex-ante conditionality for development: 'Trade is a powerful tool to foster economic growth, necessary for achieving development and poverty reduction objec- tives in developing countries' (EC, 2005, p, 5).

Figure 2 shows a *one-mode* congruence or co-occurrence network. This network graph draws the relation between actors (hence the one-mode) based on the (weighted) number of connotations they share. It shows us that in 2005, three clusters of actors existed. The grey cluster at the left top left represents actors more critical of the meaning and possibility for coherence to arise. Many agree that Coherence constitutes a fundamental problem for industrialized nations. On the other hand, the darker cluster is characterized by seeing coherence as an instrumental rather than fundamental problem. Finally, actors belonging to the light cluster are even more optimistic and believe that Coherence

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**Figure 2:** Co-occurrence network based on 2005 consultation
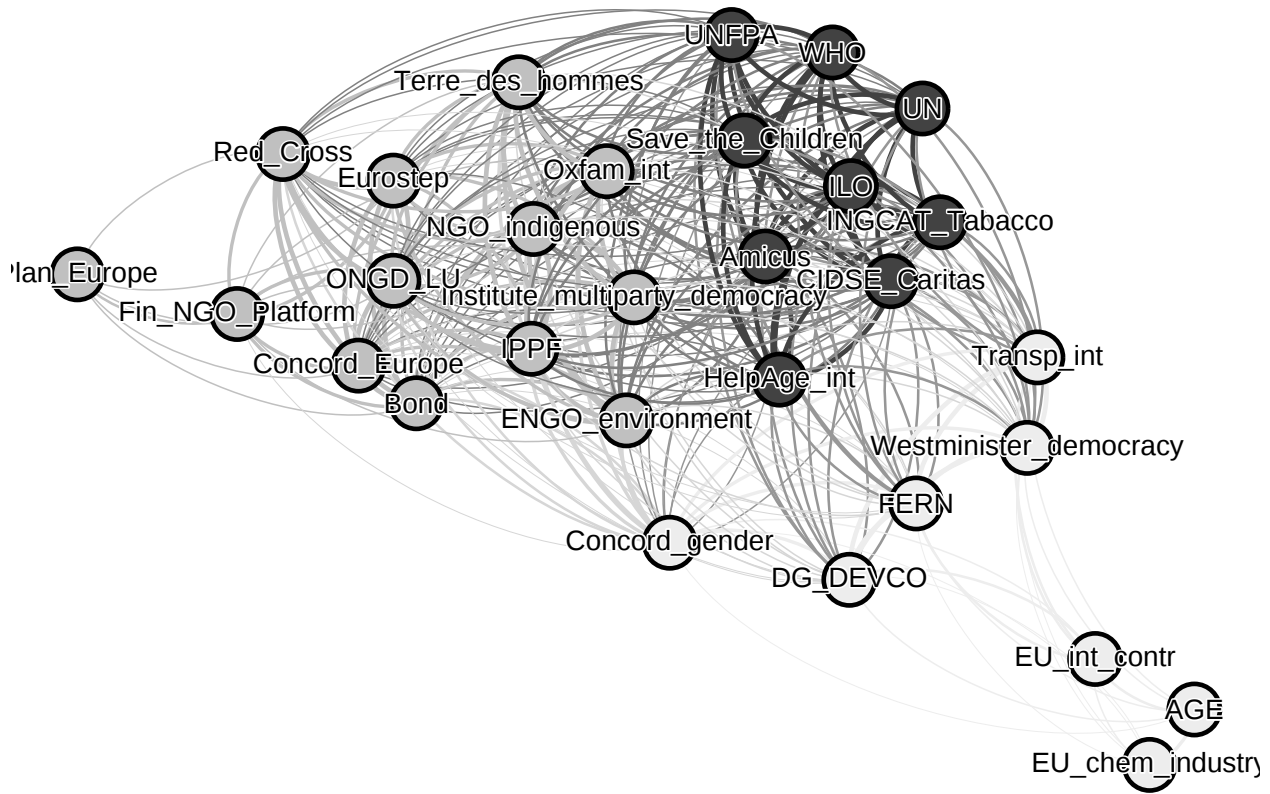
can be attained through design choices, although some actors ambivalently indicate that it is also more of a problem than an opportunity, hence the dispersion in this cluster.

Figure 3 further unpacks the different clusters. The *two-mode* affiliation network shows the relation between *actors* and *concepts* (hence the two-mode). Clusters in this network have the same color-coding as in the co-occurrence network. Agreement between actors and concept is indicated by a straight line, whilst disagreement is indicated by a dotted line. We can see that the 'critical' actors (e.g., Eurostep) indeed view Coherence as a fundamental problem, but also sometimes as an institutional problem. Often, organizations signal problems in our current model of (economic) development as fundamentally flawed, but their solutions are of a rather instrumental nature. Interestingly, some contributions explicitly denounce the Commission's intent to 'synergize' areas such as aid and trade, out of fear that aid policies might be subverted by the latter.

What these images tell us is that in the run-up to the European Consensus on Development, a substantial group of skeptical civil society actors existed. However, even the most critical actors did

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Figure 3: Affiliation network based on 2005 consultation
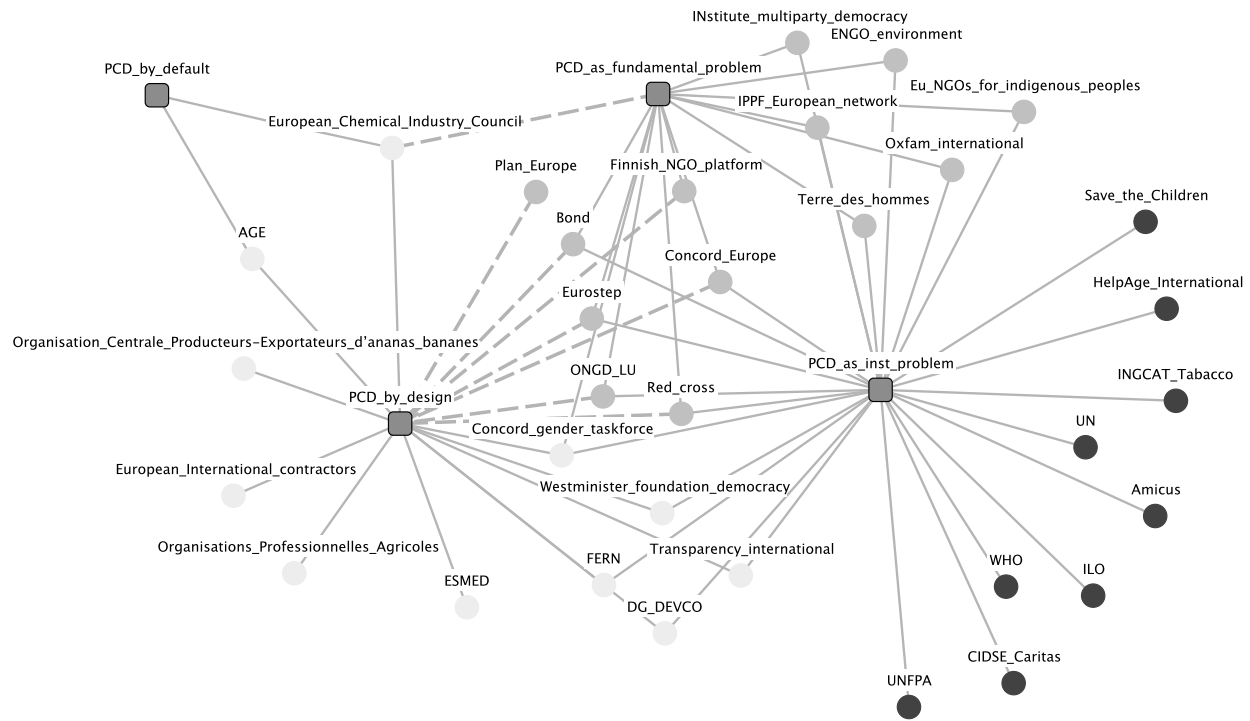
not rule out the possibility to reconcile commercial and non-commercial policies. At the same time, very few actors outright equated development with neoliberal economic development (Coherence by default). This all but confirms the suspicion that the ECD induced illocutionary entanglement. As such, one can expect the discursive and actorial selectives of coherence to act as a semiotic machine that pushes all actors to the semiotic center.

3.3. Towards a permissive consensus on development

The re-emergence of PCD is an interesting fact in itself, but equally important is that it occurred in a very specific way that gives primacy to the positive sides and potentials for synergies over potential negative effects between policy-areas. To illustrate this, we take the bi-annual reports on PCD released by DG Development/DEVCO (up until 2015[4]), as these are the main indicators of progress concerning the PCD agenda. The first report was released in 2007 and maintains the somewhat critical nature of the ECD by 'naming-and-shaming' Member States whose policies exerted the most egregious incoherencies with development goals (Furness, 2016; EC, 2007). At the same time, the

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[4]After the 2017 revision of the European Consensus on Development, it was decided to strategically evaluate the Commission's reporting on PCD and postpone reporting until the evaluation is completed (EC, 2018).

report refocuses the definition of PCD:

> "The European Union (EU) concept of Policy Coherence for Development (PCD) aims to build *synergies* between those policies and development objectives. This in turn will increase the *effectiveness* of development aid" (EC, 2007: 3, emphasis added).

Whereas the original 2006 ECD documentation made no reference to coherence in any other way than a 'do-no-harm' approach, this document places the emphasis not on the negative (preventing incoherencies) but on the positive (building synergies). As such, '[PCD] evolved from a criticism against existing practices towards a new organizing narrative for development debates.' (Verschaeve et al, 2016: 50). A key motivation for the Commission to emphasize the positive over the negative is the belief that 'we [various DGs] do not have conflicting agendas' (interview 2).

The way forward indeed entailed a gradual increase in focus on the more positive 'synergetic' side of coherence (EC, 2011; Verschaeve et al, 2016). This is also reflected in the Commission's relation with civil society organizations, which it characterizes as symbiotic: 'we need each other' (interview 1). Because civil society organizations generally have a more critical approach to EU (external) policy, they show points where the Commission can acuminate its (instrumental) approach to coherence. Civil society organizations participating in the PCD framework perceive PCD as an important frame of reference that they can use to read the Commission's policy output against the grain (interview 3). This creates a necessity to go along with the discursive and institutional boundaries as defined by the Commission. The resulting mutual dependency thereby strengthens the already on-going transformation that excludes the most fundamental proponents and opponents of free trade, a fact that is supported by some human rights NGOs withdrawing from PCD post-2005 and some critical NGOs explicitly choosing to not engage with PCD altogether (interview 5).

In line with the emphasis on the opportunity to 'synergize' coherence, the 2012 consultation pro-vides far less room for dissent. In contrast to 2005, the 2012 consultation is based on a fixed ques-tionnaire. Moreover, the wording clearly gives primacy to certain forms of development that are only possible under a profit-oriented private logic: 'How could a new development agenda involve new actors, including the private sector and emerging donors?' (EC, 2012, p. 42, emphasis added). Fig-ure 4 clearly shows the effects on the actor landscape. First, the number of actors in the network has dramatically increased. This is explained by increased interest in PCD and the fact that NGOs

are often part of umbrella organizations but still hand in individual replies. Second, the three groups (critical, 'mainstream', and positive) are still present, but in an altered configuration. Importantly, the net- work now revolves around a core of two groups each flanked by another subgroup. The two large clusters represent actors who predominantly refer to Coherence as an institutional problem or as a matter of design. The more outspoken positions, are relegated to relatively minor (sub) clusters. It is the 'middle' classifications of Coherence that are central to the network; the flanking clusters have not increased much in size, even though a substantial number of additional organizations have contributed vis-à-vis 2005. As such, this network provides support for the expected shift to the semiotic centre.

Figure 4: Co-occurrence network based on 2012 consultation
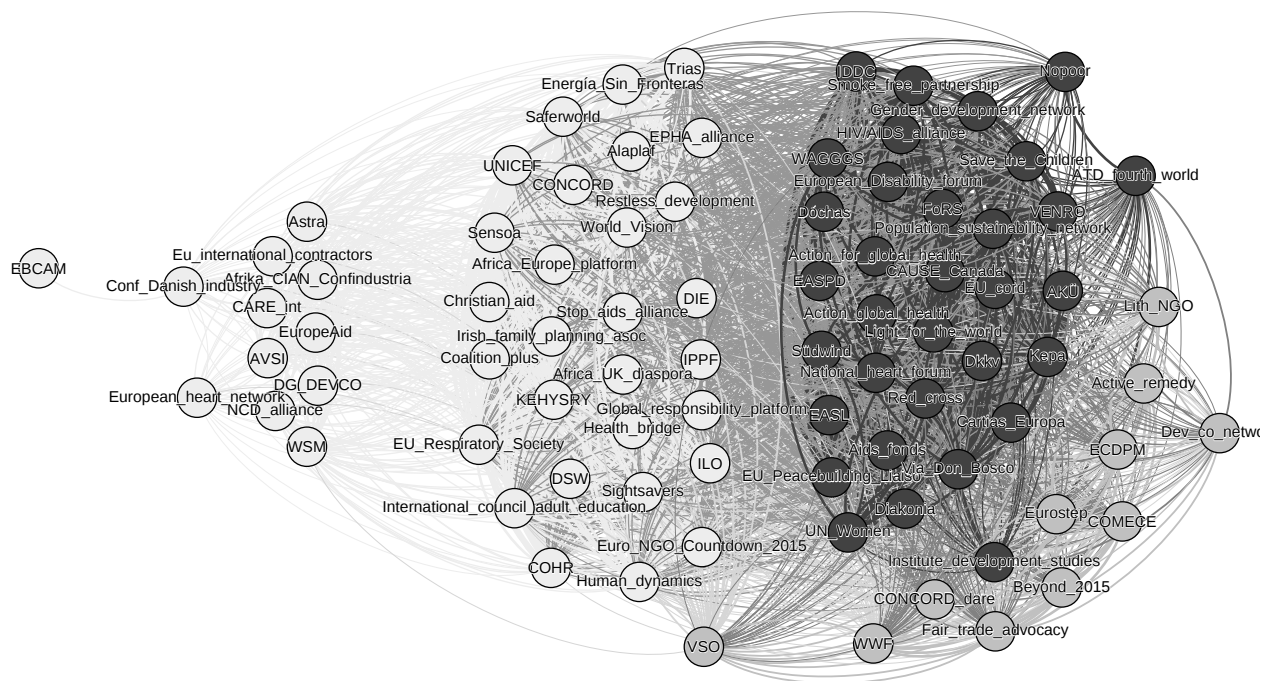
The affiliation network (Figure 5) further shows how the increase in actors (both in absolute and relative terms) that now define Coherence as a design matter. It also shows that the number of actors who think Coherence is a fundamental problem has not increased by much, in spite of the large increase in contributions overall.

When reviewing the substantive nature of the contributions more closely, it becomes clear that the Commission's approach to Coherence has affected the position and participation chances of civil society organizations. Since 2005, their role has become increasingly ambivalent. Many NGOs have

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Figure 5: Affiliation network based on 2012 consultation
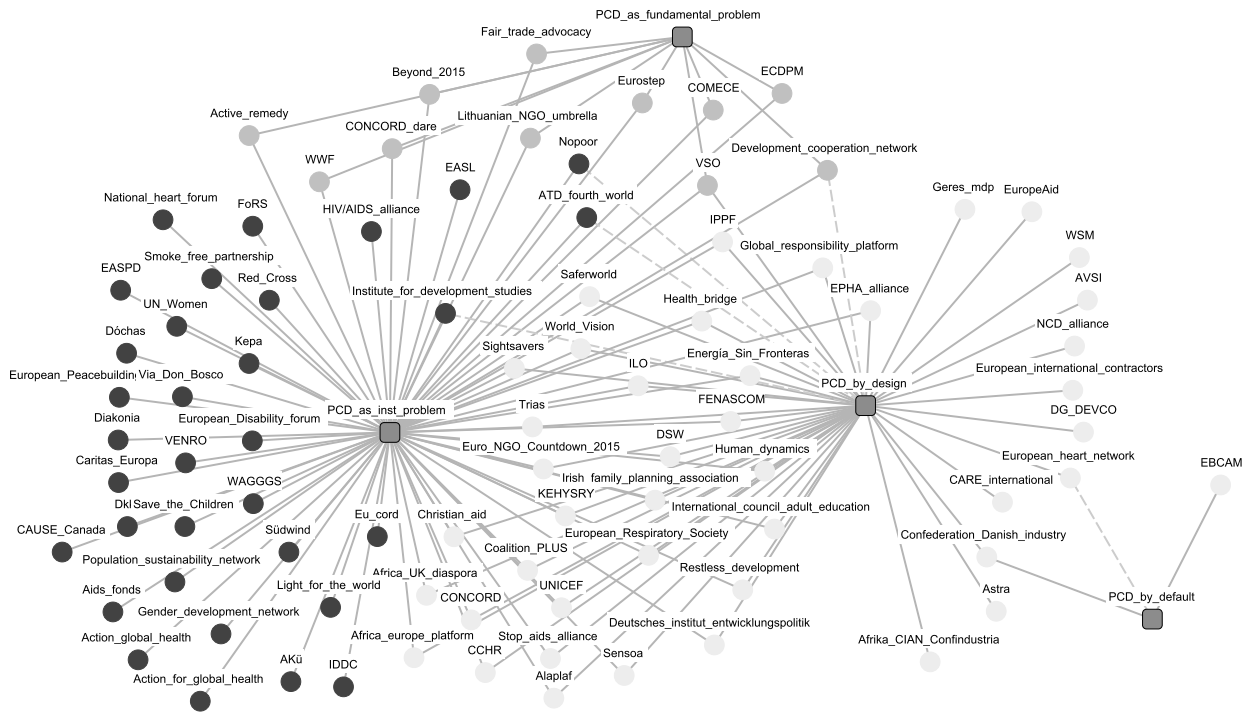
accepted the underlying idea behind coherence (i.e., that all policies are interlinked), and their criticisms are framed with this in mind. This is especially apparent in their contributions to the 2012 consultation, where many organizations criticize the MDGs for their 'siloed' approach, i.e., their sequestered nature in relation to other goals (e.g., World Wide Fund, 2012: 4; EuroNGOs & Countdown Europe, 2012: 3). Moreover, their critique on EU external policy and effectiveness of aid policies is usually framed in terms of attaining PCD (CONCORD, 2009). On the other hand, many CSOs have been less accepting of the idea that incoherent policies can be made Coherent by design.

In conclusion, post-2012 the Commission's approach to PCD has given rise to a 'permissive consensus' (Down & Wilson, 2008). Strictly speaking, fundamental (but not radical) criticism surrounding EU external policy remains possible. However, the discursive and institutional structures (i.e., the consultations) dissuade actors from these trajectories.

3.4. From permissive to constraining consensus

More recently, the permissive consensus on external EU policy has become more restrictive and constraining. This is evidenced by several concurrent developments. Firstly, by the final consultation under review, asking how the Agenda 2030 should reshape the EU's approach to PCD. Concurrent

with the expectation that we should have gone from coherence to coheritization, little space was possible for anything but acknowledgement that coherent external policy is based on free trade. In its green paper based on the consultation DG DEVCO is very clear:

> The EU and its Member States will coordinate development cooperation programs with trade policy tools in support of the implementation of the provisions in trade agreements relating to trade and sustainable development. (EC, 2016, p. 14).

Figure 6 shows how the network's topology has evolved to only incorporate two clusters. The biggest cluster is now the positive 'dark' cluster, which is made up of actors who predominantly perceive Coherence as a design opportunity (Figure 7). The light cluster is made up of actors who see Coher- ence as an institutional challenge. It is less homogenous and rather consists of various subgroups based on their specific sets of preferences. Crucially, very few actors in the 2016 consultation outright referred to Coherence as a fundamental problem, with reform proposals to global economic frameworks becoming sparser and less radical.

A similar depolarization occurred in the design-cluster, where fewer actors agreed with the concept of Coherence by default. As such, the road towards the semiotic center has continued from 2012. However, there is no complete co-optation, nor is it entirely one-sided. As visible in Figure 7, many NGOs still offer a perspective that is distinct and removed from the pro-design cluster. That being said, their perspectives have coalesced into a discourse that is less fundamentally critical. At the same time, co-optation has also occurred with free trade advocates, since fewer actors agree that Coherence is actually achieved by default.

Beyond the depolitization of PCD, the Commission has also hardened its tone towards those with fundamental criticisms to the consequences of incoherent policies. For instance, Trade Commissioner Malmström said to critics of trade liberalization: 'Populist techniques – over-simplified, dis- torted, and emotionally charged arguments – have certainly played a role in the opposition to many trade agreements, in Europe and elsewhere.' (Ask the EU, 2016, p. 3). Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker added in his 2018 state of the European Union Address: 'These [trade] agreements – so often contested but so unjustly – help us export Europe's high standards for food safety, workers' rights, the environment and consumer rights far beyond our borders.' (EC, 2018b, p. 3). These statements are indicative of a new turn the Commission is taking where it equates critics of trade liberalization

Figure 6: Co-occurence network based on 2016 consultation

Figure 7: Affiliation network based on 2016 consultation
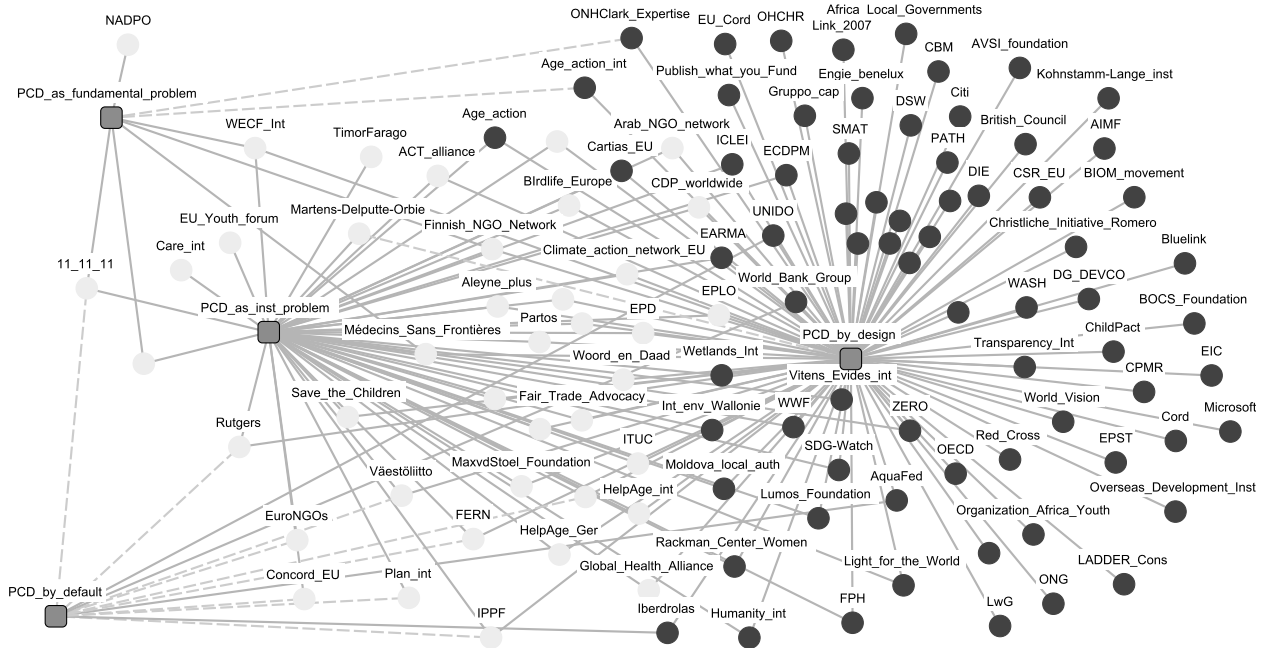
and incoherent policy outcomes to populists. The EC uses actorial selectives to nullify and rather authoritatively exclude critical voices from consideration. Thereby, the consensus on development becomes constraining rather than permissive. Although this illocutionary entrapment is a powerful sense- and meaning-making device, its real-world success remains to be seen in the wake of ever-more visible social, economic and political fractions in the European Union.

Conclusion

With this article, we have attempted to provide an explanation for why the European Commission claims to strive for something that is unattainable. Ultimately, we argue that the Commission takes up a Janus-faced role as an agent enforcing global capitalism and as an institution remolding the hereto-related critique for the sake of providing legitimacy. In effect, the Commission's approach to policy coherence does not allow actors to question the underlying neoliberal logic to EU trade policy. Although the Commission admits that incoherencies are possible, it fends off fundamental criticism because the relation between the EU and less industrialized countries is already defined as coherent to some extent from the outset. This makes it difficult or even impossible to explicitly address the inherent tensions between trade and development, at least as long as actors do not want to be shunned from

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EU-level policy-making. Thereby, we have gone from *coherence*, a narrowly defined discourse on the effectiveness of external policy, to *coheritization*, a broad discursive *and* social power practice that legitimizes free trade by integrating limited critique in broader external policies. We have illustrated this argument by showing how coherence materializes as a speech act which shapes and is shaped by actorial, discursive, and institutional selectivities within a contested capitalist world order.

Although briefly touched upon in Section 4.4, the Agenda 2030 and the sustainable development goals (SDGs) seem to have been key in reshaping and 'coheritizing' EU external development policy (Interview 4). Policy coherence for (sustainable) development plays a major role in the SDGs, and based on the Agenda, the European Consensus on Development was revised in 2017. Future research can clear up the role that European CSOs have played in spreading the notion of coherence to the SDGs, and the role that the SDGs have played in transforming coherence to a true whole-of-government approach.

Moreover, our research is limited to the extent that we did not examine the production of the speech act of coheritization itself. With our focus on its legitimizing function, we were not able to analyse the inherent tensions which have to be overcome within the semiotic engine itself: To what extent did DGs contribute to the production of the speech act, and to what extent did they dis- tort it? What is the role of the other European institutions in the process of semiosis? More research would certainly be needed to understand the internal dynamics of coheritization, which would also shed more light on the role of the EC as an agent.

Having said this, we would still argue that this article makes two theoretical contributions. First, it goes beyond the traditional notion of co-optation and shows how language can shape the material world by restructuring the landscape of actors. With this regard, we think that the inclusion of methods such as discourse network analysis allows for more systematic analysis of evolving actor and discourse landscapes. Second, we have shown that more recently, the Commis- sion started to favour polarization over integration with its speech acts on coherence. This depar- ture is especially relevant for recent theorization on neoliberalism's authoritarian turn. Critical authors rightly point out that increasingly, executive branches gain in power at the expense of leg- islative powers, while space for dissent is constrained through legal and constitutional actions (Bruff, 2014; Tansel, 2017). However, with this article we have shown that beyond institutional means, the Commission is also capable to induce social change by excluding social forces through semiotic processes. In other words: speech

acts play an important role in the evolution of capitalism.

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List of interviews

Interview 1: Member of the European Commission, DG DEVCO. Brussels, 3 April 2018.

Interview 2: Senior member of the European Commission, DG Trade; Member of the European Commission, DG Trade; Member of the European Commission, DG Trade. Brussels, 4 April 2018.

Interview 3: Development NGO representative. Gorinchem, 23 April 2018.

Interview 4: Member of the European Commission, DG DEVCO. Brussels, 3 May 2018.

Appendices

I Interview guide

Questionnaire:

The rise of policy coherence for (sustainable) development (PCD)

1 Policy coherence

- What were your government's / organization's motivations for establishing/promoting policy coherence?

- Why do you think the EU has embraced PCD as a tool to establish synergies between developmental and non-developmental policies?

2 The role of non-state actors (civil society, business representatives)

- How would you describe the role that non-state actors have played in promoting policy coherence?

- What is your impression of the role that non-state actors have played in expanding the notion of PCD across EU external policy?

- In the past decade, what were the most common positive and negative comments regarding PCD provided by non-state actors? Did the input differ per organization (e.g., civil society organizations, business)?

3 The role of other EU institutions

- To what extent has the EU contributed to the rise of policy coherence?

- To what extent do interpretations of policy coherence differ within the European Commission?

- To what extent do other organizations such as the European Parliament and Council refer to policy coherence?

- Do you perceive a difference in interpretation among the EU institutions?

- To what extent does the idea of policy coherence influence the day-to-day activities of the European Commission?

4 The role of International Organizations

- To what extent is the European debate on policy coherence influenced by the OECD?

- To what extent has the debate on the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) contributed to the European debate on policy coherence?

- To what extent has the EU influenced the debate on policy coherence in the OECD and the UN?

5 The future of policy coherence

- To what extent do you think the EU has been successful in establishing a coherent external policy?

- How do you envision the future of policy coherence?

Thanks for your cooperation!

II Coding sheet

A total of 225 position papers have been coded, totaling in a length of approximately 4000 pages[5]. Coding was performed semi-automatically. Based on inductive exploration, regular expressions[6] were added to the Discourse Network Analyzer software. Over time, this provided a Coherence 'vocabulary' of oft-used terms and phrases. The following regular expressions have been used:

- PCD
- PCSD
- Econom(y|ic)
- Synerg(y|ies)
- Trad(e|ing)
- Root [as in: root cause]
- Coheren(t|ce)

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[5]Including all the coded statements goes beyond the scope of even the appendix. Therefore, the researcher has made the coding from the three consultations available online: https://www.dropbox.com/sh/zxjb7zmb9smgrk4/AAC cAXCIsj80PGpSJqq7Id-Ka?dl=0.

[6]A regular expression (regex) is a series of characters that functions as a search pattern. They can highlight signifiers such as words and phrases so that the coder is able to immediately identify the relevant parts in the text.

- Business

- MIC [middle-income country]

- ^ODA$

- (Private)

- (Harm)

- (Jobs)

- (Growth)

- Harness

- Opportunit(y|ies)

- Link(ed|ing)

- Silo

- Fai(l|lure)

- MDG

- Consisten(t|cy)

- (in|ex)ternal

- (un|in)equa(l|lity|lities)

- Align

- Ex-(ante|post)

- Globali(s|z)ation

Coding of the statements has occurred based on the following coding sheet. The Discourse Network Analyzer software (Leifeld et al, 2018) can code statements based on the following operators:

- Actor/organization
- Person [if applicable]
- Concept [the different Coherence ideal types]
- Agreement [yes or no]

What follows is the pre-determined rules for how the statements should be coded. The rules correspond to the idealtypical connotations, whereas the statements are the linguistic denotations. Every coding rule is illustrated with an example.

Coherence by default:

Y: The wording of the statement indicates that the actor perceives economic liberalization policies (e.g., opening markets to foreign trade and capital) to be unambiguously positively correlated to the interests of developing countries. No (institutional) adjustments on behalf of European countries and corporations are required.

Example: "The European Union should engage more wholeheartedly in general trade liberalisation instead of offering economically doubtful benefits to developing countries. General trade liberalisation not only generates economic growth in developing countries but also in the industrialised world." (European Chemical Industry Council, 2005: 2).

N: The actor clearly states that liberalization policies are not beneficial to the (development) interests of developing countries. However, the statement does not make specific recommendations for how to overcome this deficit.

Example: "There is no evidence that liberalisation necessarily leads to sustainable development and poverty reduction. Developing countries should not, therefore, be forced into liberalising unless they themselves choose to follow that route, and then only at the speed and to the extent they decide" (Bond, 2005: 1).

Coherence by design:

Y: The context of the statement makes clear that liberalization policies are not sufficient in and of themselves. However, the statement accentuates the positive side and frames incoherencies between different EU external policies as a positive-sum opportunity to be exploited. This can be done without major adjustments to EU and global liberalization policies.

Example: "The EU can strategically link its development, trade, climate and other policies to support partner countries in achieving the SDGs and promote the EU's strong commitments to sustainable development, human rights, democracy, the participation of civil society and good governance." (WWF, 2016: 12).

N: The statement clearly indicates that incoherencies between different policy areas are problematic and cannot be solved without more major or even fundamental adjustments to EU and global liberalization policies. However, it does not make specific recommendations for how the readjustment to

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the interest of developing countries should take shape.

Example: "There is a need for coherence of EU policies affecting developing countries, as stipulated in the Constitutional Treaty, and at the same time the need to assure that development policy is not made subordinate to other policy areas (trade, common foreign and security policy, agriculture)." (Finnish NGO Platform, 2005: 1).

Coherence as an institutional problem:

Y: The statement accentuates the negative side of incoherencies between EU developmental and non-developmental policies rather than the positive. Incoherencies are clearly framed as a problem. The solution to the problem, however, is still at the level of institutions; the division of labor between North and South (i.e., the multilateral trading system; investment regime, and global intellectual property rights regime) in itself is not questioned.

Example: "PCD must strengthen accountability in all decision-making processes and be responsive to the needs and concerns of the poor and vulnerable. The future framework must uphold equality and equity at the global level and also consider the impact of rich countries' policies in areas such as trade, climate change actions, agriculture. Therefore, this future framework support should also consider developing institutional mechanisms that prevent negative impact on poor and vulnerable people at all levels." (International Council for Adult Education, 2012: 7)

N: The statement emphasizes that Coherence is not problematic to the extent that institutional readjustments are necessary, but does not provide a concrete indication as to if and/or what action is required to attain coherence.

Example: No examples encountered in the consultations.

Coherence as a fundamental problem:

Y: The context of the statement exhibits fundamental skepticism as to the possibility to reconcile political and economic interests in the North and South within the current context of the global economic system. Fundamental reforms to North-South relations and sacrifices to Northern interests (e.g., debt cancellation, reforming intellectual property rights and the multilateral trade regime) are necessary to achieve coherence.

Example: "Without radical changes in developed countries' policies towards sustainable patterns of

consumption and production, policy coherence for sustainable development […] fair as well as environmentally and human rights friendly trade policies, access to technology, reform of the intellectual property rights regime and debt cancellation for poor countries, a new development framework will never gear us towards a sustainable future." (Eurostep, 2012: 4).

N: The actor's statement downplays the claim that incoherencies between EU policies are detrimental to the interests of developing countries. It does however not make clear where the actor stands with regard to what is (or is not) required to mitigate incoherencies.

Example: No examples encountered in the consultations.

Coherence as impossibility:

Y: The statement clearly indicates that even within the most radical reforms within the structure of global capitalism, coherence is impossible to attain, due to the fact that capitalism itself is inherently exploitative and dependent on exploitation of humans and nature to subsist, and therefore irreconcilable with broader goals such as human rights and environmental sustainability.

Example: No examples encountered in the consultations.

N: The statement emphasizes that coherence is indeed possible at all to achieve, without making references to how coherence should be achieved (assuming that coherence is not already the default state of affairs).

Example: No examples encountered in the consultations.

III Discourse network analysis: technicalities

Once the coding of the documents is completed, the results can subsequently be visualized. Discourse network analysis allows for two types of graphs: co-occurrence and affiliation networks. The former is a one-mode network that draws ties ('edges') between actors ('nodes') if they hold the same view (e.g., both agreeing on category X; both disagreeing on category Y). This process is carried out for all nodes until every node in the figure is connected to all possible nodes with which it holds ≥1 shared understandings. Additionally, thickness of the edge increases based on the number of concepts shared and the number of instances that a concept is mentioned in a document. Because of the vast amounts of information, the initial result in an unstructured image with countless edges between the various nodes. This reveals an important consideration for graphical network analysis. Although network

graphs can be powerful tools revealing valuable information about the make-up of a network and the (sometimes hidden) propensity of actors to agree or disagree, without careful management they can become messy and actually distracting rather than informative.

For this reason, the network must be visualized in ways that enable visual and intuitive analysis. To this end, one can make use of two instruments: (1) positioning of the nodes and (2) color-coding clusters of nodes. Regarding the positioning of the nodes, the graphs are drawn on the basis of the ForceAtlas 2 algorithm as described by Jacomy et al (2014). Without going into too much technical detail, the algorithm determines the (relative) position of nodes based on the 'force' between it and other nodes. Disagreement or a lack of any relation exert a repulsive force whereas edges function as springs that attract the nodes closer together. In other words: when actors are more similar, they are grouped together, and when they are less similar, they are distanced from dissimilar cluster(s) of nodes. On the topic of clustering, algorithms exist that can detect clusters of nodes or modularity within a network. This thesis employs the modularity algorithm as described by Blondel et al (2008). In brief, edge weights (i.e., the relative number of co-occurrences) are used to determine how many clusters exist within the network. Clusters are a powerful tool to enable an informed representation of the network. Finally, the resolution of the modularity determines the number of clusters in a network (Lambiotte et al, 2008). The higher the resolution, the lower the amount of clustering and vice-versa. Although resolution is partially determined by the inherent properties of a network (such as size), at part it also comes down to a choice made by the researcher. If the researcher feels that the clusters at any resolution do not accurately depict the actual network, the resolution may be changed. The researcher can subsequently use color-codes to enable easy distinction between the various clusters. The Gephi software package (Bastian et al, 2009) is used to visualize the one-mode co-occurrence network.

Beyond the co-occurrence network, discourse network analysis also allows for a second type of network visualization: a two-mode affiliation network. Here, agents are not directly tied to one another but rather tied to the concepts that they agree or disagree with. The affiliation network provides important complementary value because it shows at a glance the underlying make-up of the congruence network. In brief, it shows the concepts that actors agree and disagree with. To provide a more informative picture, nodes are color-coded based on the modularity algorithm in the congruence network. The Visone software package (Brandes & Wagner, 2004) is used to visualize the

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two-mode affiliation network. Together with the congruence network, the affiliation network reveals the (changing) make-up of discourse around EU development policy.