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Agenda dynamics in the European Union : the interaction between the European Council and the European Commission in the policy domain of organized crime

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Policy-making institutions often differ on what issues to attend on their agendas and how to handle such problems. These differences are induced in part by the designs of institutions. This is how it happens at least in national political systems, as has been extensively demonstrated (e.g. Jones and Baumgartner, 2005; Baumgartner et al., 2009). But how does it occur in the European Union (EU)? Our knowledge on how political institutions in this political system act and react in agenda setting and the policy process is still limited. The EU can be seen as a unique political system, but whether it really differs from countries in how it attends policy problems is an empirical question (Carammia et al., 2012:43).

Some scholars have argued that the EU has a “peculiar institutional constellation” not found in any country (Lelieveldt and Princen, 2011:53). When we observe its institutional framework, a puzzling phenomenon becomes evident: two EU institutions³ perform a similar role in agenda setting. The European Commission⁴ shall

³ A so-called EU institution is a political body established by the Treaties and is central in EU policymaking. According to the Lisbon Treaty, in force since 2009, the European Union has seven institutions: the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, the Court of Justice of the European Union, the European Council, the European Central Bank, and the Court of Auditors (art. 13). When the European Coal and Steel Community was created in 1952 with the Treaty of Paris, only the first four institutions were considered. However, they had different names: High Authority, Common Assembly, Special Council, and Court of Justice, respectively (art. 7). In 1958, when the European Economic Community was established with the Treaty of Rome, the names changed. The terms were similar to the current ones (art. 4). Later, the other institutions were established by following treaties. For instance, the European Council was introduced in the Community framework by the Single European Act in 1987 and appointed an EU institution by the Lisbon Treaty. Thus, acknowledging that changes have happened over time and in order to make the argumentation in this study simple, herein these political bodies are called by their current names and referred to as ‘institutions’. Also for the same reasons, herein the previous European Community and Communities are referred to as ‘European Union’, which was established in 1993 by the Maastricht Treaty.

⁴ Herein referred to as ‘the Commission’.

“take appropriate initiatives” to promote the general interest of the EU, according to the Treaty (TEU:art. 17). Likewise, the European Council “shall define the general political directions and priorities” (TEU: art. 15). In this sense, the Commission is the formal agenda setter, as it has the responsibility to initiate policy proposals, and the European Council is the informal agenda setter, as it is in charge of providing political guidelines. When we continue observing other EU institutions, we also identify duplicate functions in further stages in the policy-making process⁵, such as in decision making where the European Parliament⁶ and the Council of the European Union⁷ have “jointly” a legislative role (TEU: art. 14, 16). Thus, perhaps the point that the Commission and the European Council have a similar function in agenda setting is not the most striking feature *per se* because we know that the EU is “a complex system of overlapping jurisdictions” (Majone, 2002:380). The institutional setup of the EU has been designed in such a way that the functions of its political institutions are not clearly separated and most roles are shared, in order to balance different interests (Lelieveldt and Princen, 2011:53–55).

The actual puzzle is the overlapping role of the Commission and the European Council *together with* the fact that their institutional designs are different. Considering the internal organization and characteristics of these institutions, we can identify that they are different at least in two ways. They have distinct political attributes (one institution has considerably more political authority than the other) and information-processing capacities (one institution can handle many more issues simultaneously than the other). To provide some clarity on this observation, the Commission has a lower political profile than the European Council, which is “the highest political body in the European Union” (Alexandrova et al., 2012). In addition, the European Council has very limited resources to process issues in comparison with the Commission, which has a much broader agenda capacity. These constraints are not entirely surprising, given that organizations in other political systems are largely designed with limitations to avoid monopoly of power (Jones and Baumgartner, 2005).

In short, the European Council and the Commission⁸ have a similar role, but are equipped with different institutional resources. How do these differences impact

⁵ Roughly speaking, four stages can be distinguished in the policy-making process: agenda setting, decision making, the budgetary stage, and implementation. For more precise phases, see for instance Hogwood and Peters, 1983:8.

⁶ Herein referred to as ‘the Parliament’.

⁷ Herein referred to as ‘the Council’.

⁸ Note that hereafter, when both institutions are discussed together, most of the time the European Council will be mentioned first and, consequently, the Commission second. This sequence is done to keep a similar structure throughout the manuscript.

the way they behave in agenda setting? Do the institutions set the agenda differently, according to their different designs? Or do they do it in the same way, according to their similar roles?

Research has traditionally looked at the nature of EU institutions as intergovernmental or supranational organizations (e.g. Moravcsik, 1993; Marks et al., 1996; Pollack, 2003). In this sense, the European Council and the Commission have been commonly studied in terms of the distinct interests they represent, whether from the member states or the EU as a whole, respectively. These studies have looked at the implications of the collaboration schemes between the different types of institutions for EU integration. However, work on the differences in their institutional designs and the effect on how they attend policy issues is scarce (Alexandrova, 2014, 2017). We know little about the impact of the architectures of the two institutions on agenda setting. Existing studies have mainly observed the information-processing capacities of the European Council (Alexandrova et al., 2012; Elias and Timmermans, 2014; Carammia et al., 2016). There are agenda-setting studies on the Commission in other areas such as framing (e.g. Rhinard, 2010; Daviter, 2011), but little work has explored the effect of its design on this stage in the policy process (Princen, 2009). Research has hardly compared the patterns of the institutions. Therefore, there is gap in the EU policy-making literature because we practically lack knowledge on how similar or different the logics of the Commission and the European Council are in setting the agenda. This is important to know also because these processes have implications for policymaking.

Further, another intriguing feature of the EU's setup is that, while the individual roles of the two institutions are officially established, their interplay in agenda setting is not formalized. This contrasts with the case of the other EU institutions whose interactions are regulated by the Treaty. For some unknown reason, the designers of the EU have not officialized the relationship between the European Council and the Commission. The Treaty only indicates that, "[i]n carrying out its responsibilities, the Commission shall be completely independent (...) [and] shall neither seek nor take instruction from any government or other institution, body, office or entity" (TEU: art. 17). But whether this is meaningful for the Commission's relationship with the European Council is unknown. We do not know whether these institutions are expected to interact in the first place and, if so, how this is supposed to occur.

In the meanwhile, scholars have argued and speculated about the way the relationship between the institutions happens, pointing to all directions. Some authors have claimed that the European Council exerts important control on the Commission (Werts, 2008; Ponzano et al., 2012). Others have argued that the Commission is

independent (Marks et al., 1996; Nugent, 2001), suggesting that it is influential. A different stream in the discussion has considered that their interaction is reciprocal (Alexandrova, 2014; Bocquillon and Dobbels, 2014). So far there has been little empirical research done on their interplay to endorse the points in the discussion (e.g. Princen and Rhinard, 2006; Bocquillon and Dobbels, 2014; Alexandrova, 2017). As has been noted by scholars, “research that systematically analyses the relationship between the Commission and the European Council, before and after Lisbon, is scarce”(Bocquillon and Dobbels, 2014:21). The few systematic studies available have been limited to analyze their interaction during only some years in this century (Alexandrova, 2014, 2017; Bocquillon and Dobbels, 2014). However, there is no research that covers their behaviors over a longer period of time that can inform the academia on the underlying trend of their interplay.

Consequently, most of what scholarly work has been doing is practically to imagine situations. This is tricky because continuing like this can eventually make us fall into “the trap of the ‘Nirvana Fallacy’” (cf. Demsetz, 1969; Cram, 2002), in which we compare the real world to a world that does not necessarily exist, the Nirvana, and then arrive at the conclusion that the real world is somehow deficient. It is thus important to explore in detail and discover more about the actual dynamics between the institutions. This is also relevant to do because the logics of the interaction of the European Council and the Commission have consequences for the formation of EU policies and shifts in them.

These properties of uncertainty on their relationship result in many questions: How do the distinct designs of the European Council and the Commission affect their relationship in agenda setting? To begin with, do the institutions interact through time? If so, how does their interplay happen? Who follows whom? Or do the institutions influence each other?

Ultimately, the questions on their individual and interactive dynamics lead us back to the original inquiry that ‘opened the appetite’ for conducting this research on the peculiarities of the EU. Although it is clear that the EU system entails distinctive features, it is not assumed that this system completely works in a unique way. This work conceives the EU ‘uniqueness’ as a continuous concept rather than a binary one. The question is thus about *to what extent* —instead of *whether*— the EU acts uniquely. As a result, the study profits from earlier theories and insights on processes observed in national political systems. This situation makes possible to compose a theoretical approach for the study of agenda dynamics in the EU and facilitates the interpretation of the findings.

1.1. The Agenda Dynamics Approach: addressing a big puzzle in EU agenda setting

Motivated by this combined puzzle in EU agenda setting, the project analyzes how the attention of the European Council and the Commission to policy problems develops over time and compares their behaviors. Moreover, it investigates how the institutions relate to each other in the long run. It is a study on the effect of their institutional designs on the way they set the agenda.

The main goal is to reveal their underlying dynamics and explain the processes. Two types of EU agenda dynamics are considered and studied in this project: the intra-agenda dynamics, or the logics occurring in the agenda of each institution; and the inter-agenda dynamics, or the logics between the agendas.

The central research question is: *How can the agenda dynamics in and between the European Council and the Commission be explained?* Three sub-questions help address this main inquiry. The first one is: *What are the intra-agenda dynamics of the European Council?* The second sub-question is: *What are the intra-agenda dynamics of the Commission?* And the final is: *What are the inter-agenda dynamics of the European Council and the Commission?*

The theoretical lens to address these questions and explain the behaviors is the Agenda Dynamics Approach (ADA).⁹ This study proposes and applies this framework for the analysis of the intra- and inter-agenda dynamics of the European Council and the Commission. ADA is a conceptual model constructed in this project for such purpose. It revolves around the credence that the designs of the institutions impact their individual and interactive dynamics in agenda setting. The theoretical framework will be described in detail in Chapter 3. For now, let us address in a general way important features of this research and central components of ADA.

1.1.1. Placing the research in context

The notion of dynamics is central in this project. This is a widespread term in the study of policymaking. Although commonly used, its meaning is practically assumed in academia, as there is no established definition. It has been often used as a sort of label to refer to changes, whether more incremental or more abrupt, in the policy process in a period of time. For instance, the term ‘policy dynamics’ is present in

⁹ The term ‘Agenda Dynamics Approach’ has been previously referred to in the agenda-setting literature (Chaqués-Bonafont et al., 2015:137). However, it has not been used to denote a theoretical framework. It has rather been (part of) a title to introduce an analysis on the development of policy issues in the context of Spanish politics.

the titles of classic books on public policy (e.g. Rose, 1976; Hogwood and Peters, 1983). Similarly, the term ‘agenda dynamics’ has been assigned to books on policy agendas that explain the evolutionary processes experienced by more particular countries, such as Spain and Canada (S. N. Soroka, 2002; Chaqués-Bonafont et al., 2015). Thus, even when dynamics is an abstract concept, we intuitively understand what it means. However, it is important to have a working definition in this study. The definition draws from its use in the literature and scholarly work that has claimed that a dynamic perspective in the study of public policy involves “temporality and change at different scales” with the aim to understand and explain policy evolution (Kay, 2006:3). On this basis, dynamics is the way policy processes develop over time.

The study analyzes the agenda of policymakers in the European Union, also known as the EU political agenda.¹⁰ There is, however, no such thing as a single EU agenda. This is an abstract concept that refers generically to all the agendas of the EU institutions, but in reality each political body has its own. It is enough to acknowledge this condition when we *talk* about EU agenda setting. But this situation becomes inadequate when we want to *analyze* the policy process because not all political agendas are the same. Generally speaking, two types can be distinguished in domestic systems: the “governmental” agenda and the “decision” agenda (Kingdon, 2011:1–4).¹¹ In the European Union, the European Council and the Commission are governmental agendas, while the Council and the Parliament are decision agendas. It is fundamental to make a distinction between the types of agendas, as the actual arrangements pushing issues on the governmental agenda may differ from the mechanisms regarding the decision agenda (Princen, 2009:22). It thus would be misleading to conceive the existence of one global agenda dynamic happening EU-wide. The truth is that “governmental and decision agendas are affected by somewhat different processes”, as argued by Kingdon (Kingdon, 2011:4). Therefore, it is important to notice that this research is about the dynamics of the EU governmental agendas.

A broad conceptualization of agenda setting is conceived in this study. It entails a formal and informal connotation (cf. Pollack, 1997:121). Setting the EU agenda is about the mandate given to a political institution to do so and about the actual ability to commonly place an issue on the agenda. While the Commission is “Europe’s main agenda-setter” (Hartlapp et al., 2014:14), a wide definition is considered because, as Princen has claimed, “[i]t would be a misconception (...) solely to equate agenda-

¹⁰ Herein referred to as ‘political agenda’ and ‘policy agenda’ interchangeably, unless otherwise specified.

¹¹ The former agenda includes the issues that get attention from policymakers and outsiders closely related to those policymakers (Kingdon, 2011: 3). The latter agenda consists of the narrower group of issues that moved further and are to be decided (Ibid: 4).

setting in the EU with the activities of the Commission" (Princen, 2007:23).¹² And, at the same time, Werts has argued that "the European Council has developed itself as the *agenda-setter* of the Union, taking the major political initiatives" (Werts, 2008:191). In effect, as claimed by Alexandrova and colleagues, this institution is "the top informal agenda setter in the EU" (Alexandrova et al., 2016:611).¹³

The project thus conceives both political institutions the key actors in the process. As Alexandrova has claimed, among EU institutions, "the two bodies are particularly relevant because of their position and powers" (Alexandrova, 2017:756). An important reason is that agenda setting in the European Union happens in two manners, according to the Agenda-Setting Routes Framework (Princen and Rhinard, 2006). One is by following a route in which issues 'crash from above' on the agenda, initiated by the heads of state or government in the European Council. The other way is the route where policy problems 'creep from below' on the agenda, placed by expert groups in the Commission or working parties in the Council. Further, while this Framework conceives that the Council may be involved in the latter route, the prerogative of this institution is primarily in the decision-making process. By contrast, the Commission "has an outstanding role in setting the agenda" (Hartlapp et al., 2014:2). This research thus considers the Commission the central political body in the route from below. Other EU institutions may play a part in the agenda-setting process, as will be described in Chapter 2, but they are neither intrinsically necessary nor obliged to perform in this stage in the policy process. In addition, as also explained in the next Chapter, the participation of citizens and the media is considerably less relevant than how it happens in national political systems. In the EU system, issues are commonly "raised and developed within the EU's policy-making institutions, without a direct link with the public agenda(s) in the EU" (Lelieveldt and Princen, 2011:211). This inside-initiative model characterizes EU agenda-setting dynamics (Ibid: 209–211). EU policymaking is thus essentially a political process.

¹² This research acknowledges that the Commission does not have monopoly of power in policy initiation in all policy domains. However, it is not in the scope of this study to go into a debate on this matter. For a discussion on this, see for instance Ponzano et al., 2012.

¹³ While the European Council is an EU institution since relatively recently and its development over time within the EU framework has been gradual, as will be described in Chapter 2, these conditions have not hindered its "great power" (cf. De Schoutheete, 2012:46). Moreover, although it commonly cannot take binding decisions in the legal sense, "[t]his has not prevented the European Council from carving out a niche for itself at the very heart of the EU" (Hayes-Renshaw, 1999:25). This body has practically acted as a fully-fledged institution over the years even in times without a Treaty-basis for its authority. In this sense, as argued by De Schoutheete, "[t]he European Council needs to be considered not only as an institution, in legal terms, but also as an essential locus of power" (2012:53). For these reasons, in this study the European Council is seen as an entity on its own, instead of part of the "Council hierarchy" as, for instance, Hayes-Renshaw has done (1999:23–26).

While the study sees the European Council and the Commission as the core agenda setters in the EU, it does not conceive that they take control of this policy stage. It recognizes that policymaking does not exist in a vacuum and that agenda setting involves many (f)actors in and around the process. Aware of this, this research examines the effect of other elements that may trigger the institutions to initiate issues on their agendas, such as focusing events, policy inheritances, and political signals, as will be explained in Chapter 5.

The two institutions are the main focus of the study. However, the project is not based on the classic institutional perspective where norms, interests or ideas are the typical drivers of how institutions shape and change preferences and interact (cf. Tsebelis and Garrett, 2000; Pollack, 2009). Instead, acknowledging that rules in the policy process exist (Jones and Baumgartner, 2005:19, 151) as well as different levels of institutional power among policymakers (Ibid: 17), the designs of the institutions are primarily studied as a crucial source of agenda dynamics. Accordingly, the organizations as a whole are studied, rather than the individuals within them.

1.1.2. Solving the puzzle: an overview of the theoretical framework and methods of analysis

The Agenda Dynamics Approach centers on the different political attributes and information-processing capacities of the European Council and the Commission. The two features comprise their institutional designs, as conceived in this project. More specifically, the European Council is composed of the political leaders of the EU member states. They handle the 'hot' issues in the EU and do it without the support of an organizational structure. The carrying capacity of its agenda is significantly limited against its wide political authority. By contrast, the Commission is formed by experts and administrators grouped in specialized departments, which deal with more particular problems. This arrangement allows this institution to have a broader agenda and thus deal with many issues at the same time. Its political profile in agenda setting, however, is lower than that of the European Council. It is argued that these features impact how the institutions act and react in setting the agenda.

Following the two types of EU agenda dynamics distinguished in this project, the Agenda Dynamics Approach consists of two parts: 1) the intra-agenda dynamics and 2) the inter-agenda dynamics. The theoretical framework argues that knowing the former dynamics of the European Council and the Commission promotes a better understanding of their latter dynamics. The first part of ADA is constructed deductively and the second inductively.

First, the intra-agenda dynamics part is mainly developed on central propositions of two agenda-setting theories: the Disproportionate Information-Processing Model¹⁴ (Jones and Baumgartner, 2005), and the Agenda-Setting Routes Framework¹⁵ (Princen and Rhinard, 2006). The former theory looks at the information-processing characteristics of institutions and the latter at their political features. Both frameworks originated in the mid-2000s. The Processing Model was conceived in its origins to study the policy process in the United States. Shortly afterwards, it started to be used to analyze European countries. By contrast, the Routes Framework was created for the purpose of studying agenda setting in the European Union and its political institutions.

ADA integrates both theories, which so far have been considered separately in the agenda-setting literature. The two lenses speak to each other when providing a theoretical explanation for agenda dynamics. The theories encompass common assumptions as well as complementary premises. Both share a feature that is fundamental in this study: the differences in the internal characteristics of institutions have implications for agenda setting. According to the Processing Model, the variation in the information-processing capacities of organizations affects the way institutions attend issues on their agendas (Jones and Baumgartner, 2005). Similarly, based on the Routes Framework, it is argued in this project that the difference in the political attributes of institutions impacts the manner policy problems are initiated on their agendas (Princen and Rhinard, 2006).

The overarching expectation of ADA is that the intra-agenda dynamics of the European Council and the Commission are mostly different in the long run because the designs of the institutions are different. This means that, in a comparative perspective, their agendas evolve in a different way over time. It is thus argued that their distinct designs make the institutions act differently on the whole, even when their roles are similar.

Second, the part on the inter-agenda dynamics is developed from a theory-building perspective. No specific expectation is formulated *a priori* on how the institutions relate to each other. The reasons for doing this have to do with the research problem. As previously mentioned, part of the puzzle on the interaction between the institutions is that different ideas have been put forward by scholars, but there is barely empirical evidence available and no regulation on how their relationship shall work. This means that there is no straightforward indication on the direction of causality¹⁶ between

¹⁴ Herein referred to as 'the Processing Model'.

¹⁵ Herein referred to as 'the Routes Framework'.

¹⁶ The notion of causality in this study follows the same approach as previous work on agenda dynamics in Canada, as carried out by Soroka (S.N. Soroka, 2002). Such approach is "based on the assumption that causality and predictability are interchangeable, at least empirically speaking" (S. N. Soroka, 2002:131).

the institutions. Thus, all the ideas are basically empirical questions. This circumstance becomes even more challenging when we add to the puzzle the condition that the roles of the institutions overlap, but not their designs. As a result, four different lines of thinking on causality patterns are distinguished in this project, which will be described in Chapter 3. For now, it suffices to know that all four research lines are considered, in order to validate the idea with the strongest empirical evidence and arrive at conclusions on the governing directionality in their interaction. It is done in this manner because testing instead one particular hypothesis, albeit relevant, may give us a partial view and keep limiting our knowledge. Therefore, an exploratory study of the inter-agenda dynamics will be conducted.

For the empirical analysis, the agendas of the European Council and the Commission are studied, represented by key policy documents issued by the institutions over decades. The European Council Conclusions¹⁷ and the COM docs of the Commission are analyzed for the period between 1975 and 2013, as will be described in Chapter 5. Their agendas are studied on a long-term basis because “if we look at policy dynamics in the short term (...), we can be misled” (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993:39). This may hinder us from appreciating substantial arrangements and identifying regular schemes. As has been acknowledged by agenda-setting scholars, “the problem with a cross-sectional design is that it is, by definition, static, while the agenda-setting process is, by definition, dynamic” (S. N. Soroka, 2002:12). Put differently, a longitudinal study allows us to capture underlying dynamics of the institutions in policymaking.

The dynamics of the institutions are studied observing the development of their agendas in the domain of organized crime (OC). This policy field is the vehicle to identify their processes. First of all, choosing a single domain is done for methodological and analytical reasons. According to Princen, it is necessary to limit the scope of policy areas when making an in-depth empirical analysis of agenda dynamics (Princen, 2009:44). An important reason is that such study requires a well-founded understanding of central policy debates in the policy field, which demands “quite an intimate knowledge of the issue area, prior developments in it, and the context within which the debate is waged” (Ibid). Studying a single domain thus facilitates a comprehensive study of dynamics in policymaking, allowing us to become immersed in their complexities. It also facilitates an analysis of these conditions in the long run. The motivation for studying the OC domain will be explained in Chapter 4. To put it short now, organized crime allows us to study the agenda dynamics of

¹⁷ Herein referred to as ‘Conclusions’.

the European Council and the Commission under relatively equal and balanced conditions in the complex EU policy-making process. The two political bodies deal with this policy field similarly, in contrast to the distinct way each of them handles other policy areas. For instance, while the European Council is inclined to deal with particular policy topics such as macroeconomics and the Commission specially with others such as common market issues, it appears that neither institution is the 'owner' of the organized crime domain. OC is thus a 'comparable' policy field for both institutions. Furthermore, the development of organized crime in the EU framework has happened in such a way that it is neither a purely intergovernmental nor entirely supranational policy field, in contrast to other EU domains that are clearly intergovernmental, such as defense, or supranational, such as agriculture. In this sense, OC is a 'mid-range' policy domain. This is an important consideration to avoid bias, given that the European Council is an intergovernmental organization and the Commission a supranational one. These conditions suggest that none of the institutions clearly dominates in this field. In addition, another reason for studying the area of organized crime is that the topic has been subject of significantly limited research from an agenda-setting perspective.

Further, the project focuses on the attention given by the institutions to the policy problem of organized crime over time. In policymaking, attention is fundamental. Attention is a condition to turn on the machinery of the policy process. This is because "[c]hoice presupposes attention" (Jones and Baumgartner, 2005:33) and "agendas are about the attention given to issues" (Princen, 2009:19). Only the issues selected by policymakers reach the agenda and are in position to be decided. In this way, policies can be made or changed. Agenda setting thus determines what problems in a political system are attended by the government. This is an important reason why this stage in the policy process is crucial.

The methodological strategy of this study is broadly divided in two parts, as will be described in Chapter 5. First, the analysis of the intra-agenda dynamics is largely conducted in a quantitative fashion, by means of content analysis and the use of statistical tools. Also part of the study is developed qualitatively, adding value and meaning to the numerical findings. The results on the dynamics in the European Council agenda and the Commission agenda will be presented in Chapters 6 and 7, respectively. Second, the analysis of the inter-agenda dynamics is based on econometrics. Here vector autoregression (VAR) techniques are used. This is an innovative method to the study the relationship between institutions in the European Union. The findings will be discussed in Chapter 8.

In short, based on the lens of the Agenda Dynamics Approach, this project studies in a systematic and in-depth way how the European Council and the Commission have set their agendas over time, comparing their patterns and showing their governing relationship in the long run. By doing so, the project attempts to explain the dynamics in and between the agendas of the institutions.

1.2. Towards a better understanding of agenda setting in the EU

This study and its central research question are relevant for many reasons. First of all, we will identify the processes experienced by the institutions in agenda setting and explain such dynamics. In theorizing the intra-agenda dynamics, core premises of the Processing Model and the Routes Framework will be examined. This will help in consolidating and modifying theoretical knowledge. The Processing Model, which was originally developed to study domestic political systems, will be tested on the European Union. This will add value to our limited knowledge on the effect of information-processing capacities of institutions on agenda setting in this political system. In addition, the Routes Framework will be challenged because no systematic analysis has been done to estimate the validity of its postulates.

The project will empirically observe the institutions separately and will go one step further by also making a comparative analysis of their dynamics on a long-term basis. Conducting an empirical study that compares the European Council and the Commission will represent a fascinating challenge, given that they encompass political agendas that diverge in shape and scope. Such study will be especially relevant because, as Princen has claimed, “a more fine-grained analysis that compares different EU agendas is necessary to obtain a clearer understanding of ‘the’ EU agenda and the roles played in it by the different EU institutions” (Princen, 2013:864).

The study will also contribute to our understanding on their relationship, by empirically exploring the interaction of their agendas over decades and providing an explanation of the dynamics observed. This will push our knowledge an additional step forward because, after knowing how each institution works individually and comparing their ways, we will identify the trend in their interplay. Moreover, an innovative method for the analysis of the relationship between political institutions in the European Union will be introduced. The outcome from this systematic and longitudinal study will add important value to inform scholars, given the ample academic discussion and the scarce empirical research.

In addition, the project will fill a gap in the organized crime literature. It will provide a less conventional perspective to look at OC, studying this phenomenon from a political science view with focus on agenda setting. This will be done by analyzing the 'coming' and 'going' of this policy problem in and between the agendas of two policy-making institutions in the European Union. This is also relevant because we have barely knowledge on the way EU institutions have dealt with organized crime as a policy theme. This will be the first in-depth and long-term study conducted systematically on the evolution of the EU political agenda on organized crime.

All in all, the project will allow us to theoretically and empirically address one part of the big puzzle of how agenda setting in the European Union occurs. Ultimately, understanding how the European Council and the Commission set their agendas individually and in interaction is key to better comprehend policymaking and policy change in this political system.

1.3. Structure of the dissertation

The dissertation is divided into nine chapters and develops in the following way. After this *introductory chapter*, the *second chapter* deals with relevant features of the agenda-setting process in the European Union. It describes the roles and designs of the European Council and the Commission, and compares them. The *third chapter* introduces the theoretical framework of the project: the Agenda Dynamics Approach. It shows the theoretical notions on which ADA is supported and presents its components and propositions. Along the lines of this chapter, the literature on the institutions is reviewed. The *fourth chapter* touches upon the policy domain of organized crime as a means to identify the dynamics of the institutions. It describes its characteristics as a policy domain in the EU institutional framework and shows its analytical relevance in this study. In doing so, it reviews the literature on OC. The *fifth chapter* describes the Methods. It also presents the data of the study. The *sixth chapter* introduces the first of three analytical chapters. It identifies the dynamics of the European Council. It shows the way the attention of the institution evolved over the years and the factors that stimulate this body to set issues on its agenda. The *seventh chapter* presents the analysis on the dynamics of the Commission and compares the findings to the results of the European Council. Next, *chapter eight* introduces the last analytical chapter. It examines the inter-agenda dynamics. It studies four research ideas to arrive at conclusions of how the relationship works. The *final chapter* concludes. It describes the lessons learned from this project, its limitations and avenues for further work.

