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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 5

Methodological strategy

The current chapter deals with the means used to address the research (sub)questions of this study. The aim is to show the data and methods. The chapter has four parts. First, it presents the sources and the way the data were collected. The second section introduces the methods to analyze intra-agenda dynamics. The third part deals with the techniques used for the study of inter-agenda dynamics. In the fourth section a summary is given.

5.1. The data: European Council and Commission agendas on organized crime

The agendas of the European Council and the Commission between 1975 and 2013 are studied. Observing the institutions on a long-term basis allow us to identify the underlying dynamics of their agendas (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993). The research period starts in the year when the European Council started to function.⁶¹ The time frame ends four years after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, which is the last change made to the EU framework so far, and in the year of the last enlargement experienced by the EU at the time of writing. The empirical material of the project is constituted by key policy documents issued by the institutions. More specifically, the Conclusions of the European Council, and the COM docs of the Commission are used to reconstruct the political agendas.

⁶¹ The Commission's origin —the 1950s— was not selected as the point of departure because we would lack information on the European Council of the years prior to its establishment.

The Conclusions of the European Council

The Conclusions⁶² comprise the final statements on the discussions and decisions occurring during each summit of the European Council. This means that these policy documents are issued approximately four times per year, as a result of the gatherings that are usually held twice per semester. In each occasion, the Conclusions are adopted by consensus between all the heads of state or government. These policy documents have a generic nature, as they include all sorts of issues discussed during the meetings.

These sources are appropriate to study the agenda of the European Council because, by this means, the institution communicates its wishes, concerns and opinions on EU issues. Through its Conclusions, the institution also expresses its ideas to an open public, addresses EU political bodies in general and targets particular political bodies. The texts often contain ideas for action, stemming explicitly from suggestions done by other institutions.

The sources of this study include the Conclusions of regular summits, as well as informal and extraordinary meetings. The Conclusions of the so-called Eurosummits were not considered. The reason is that they do not entail the opinion of the European Council as a whole, but of the political leaders of the member states of the Eurozone. Other communications produced in the framework of the European Council meetings were not included because they do not represent the political agenda of the institution itself. For instance, press releases are not considered, given that they comprise only a summary on the topics discussed in the gatherings and the issues included are selected by the press center (of the General Secretariat) of the Council. A similar case happens with the statements published in the social media. Some of the platforms are twitter, facebook, and youtube.⁶³ To begin with, given that information started to be posted via these channels somewhere around 2010,⁶⁴ the platforms do not fit the research period of this study. Although the social media channels are meant to be official, they do not represent the view of the European Council, as a different office than the institution itself (so, regularly the General Secretariat of the Council) decides the information to be published. In addition, many of the platforms are not about the institution, but representatives of it. As an example, in facebook we can keep track of the activities of “Donald Tusk” in his role of President of the European

⁶² Until the Lisbon Treaty, they were officially known as Presidency Conclusions. Afterwards, the official name changed. They are currently called European Council Conclusions.

⁶³ For an overview of the platforms in social media, see <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/contact/social-media/>, retrieved in April 2018.

⁶⁴ The year is estimated considering the registration of the twitter accounts of the so-called “EU Council”, where information on both the European Council and Council are posted together. The “EU Council TV news” is the oldest registered in June 2009, followed by the “EU Council press” in October 2010.

Council, whose “page is managed by the President’s media team”.⁶⁵ Even when press releases and social media statements provide an overall impression of the ‘secret’ activities of the institution, they are not appropriate to reconstruct the actual political agenda, as set by the European Council. Ultimately, the Conclusions are the only valid source, as they constitute “the only written evidence of matters discussed and agreed by the heads of state or government, since meetings are held behind closed doors” (Alexandrova et al., 2012:71–72).

To collect the data, first all Conclusions issued during the research period were gathered. For this, the so-called “European Council Conclusions dataset”⁶⁶ (Alexandrova et al., 2014) was used as a compiler, as it includes the texts of all Conclusions since they were published for the first time until 2014 (at least at the time of writing). This facilitated the process of data collection because it gave me access to all documents in one single volume. During the research period, 136 conclusions were issued (between formal, informal and extraordinary meetings). Next, all documents where organized crime was discussed were selected. In total 76 documents were collected (see Appendix 3).

Data collection was done on the basis of the issues established in the catalogue on organized crime issues (see Appendix 1). This instrument was created and used mostly to collect data, but also to conform a detailed outline of practically all possible organized crime issues that would be later observed in the analysis. In this way, based on the analysis on the academic debate on OC and the ideas regarding the malleability of the topic, as described in the preceding chapter, the catalogue considered the views of academics and policymakers.

On the one hand, the discussion among OC scholars was addressed.⁶⁷ Here three streams can be distinguished. The first line includes those that consider fundamental to study the phenomenon in terms of its qualities, whether, for instance, international, organized or serious (Finckenauer, 2005; Dorn, 2009; Allum and Gilmour, 2012). The second line is on work that conceives relevant to look at its activities (Beare, 2003; Makarenko, 2004). And the third stream argues that it is important to observe the criminal groups, including criminal entrepreneurs (Cohen, 1977; Harfield, 2010). On the other hand, the political side was included by observing the policy instruments adopted so far by EU policymakers on the definition of OC. They conceptualize this

⁶⁵ This can be observed in Tusk’s facebook account (https://www.facebook.com/pg/europeanCouncilPresident/about/?ref=page_internal), when reading the “Moderation policy” within the tag “Info”. Retrieved in April 2018.

⁶⁶ For information on the dataset, see www.policyagendas.eu.

⁶⁷ For a literature review on different ways to study organized crime, see Von Lampe et al. (2006).

problem generally in terms of the criminal networks (Council of Ministers, 1998, 2008) and to some extent of the offenses (Council of Ministers, 1995).

From all these ideas, altogether three approaches on how to look at organized crime were distinguished in the catalogue: denomination, activities and actors. The first one is about the different ways to see the phenomenon of OC in general (e.g. transnational organized crime). In the second, the focus is on more specific criminal offenses (e.g. drug trafficking). And the last approach centers on the individuals involved (e.g. criminal groups).

In determining the more specific issues to be included in the catalogue, reference was made to notions claimed by organized crime scholars (Ruggiero, 1996; Mitsilegas, 2001, 2003; Fijnaut and Paoli, 2004; Irrera, 2010; Longo, 2010), as well as to the offences included in the Europol Convention (Council of Ministers, 1995), diverse publications of Europol (e.g. Europol, 2011) and information contained in the two EU policy instruments adopted so far to define organized crime (Council of Ministers, 1998, 2008). As a result, the catalogue included 25 organized crime issues divided into three clusters, according to the three approaches just mentioned. The “denomination” cluster includes the different terms to refer to the general phenomenon of organized crime. The group “activities” covers the types of crimes. The category “actors” is about the offenders and victims.

The COM docs of the Commission

The so-called COM docs⁶⁸ are the official documents produced by the Commission, with a view to formally initiate a procedure of legislation and assess the status of implemented policies. These policy documents are aperiodic and have a specialized nature. In other words, they are issued whenever is required, according to the needs of the European Union, in order to address specific policy issues.

COM docs include proposals, white papers, green papers, work programs, communications and reports. Proposals are policy initiatives addressing specific issues. The initiatives are later decided by the Council and the Parliament. White papers present specific proposals for possible action in a given area. They are meant to generate discussion among EU institutions, in particular the Council and the Parliament, but they are also open to the public and stakeholders. The aim is to facilitate consensual agreements that may eventually lead to the development of

⁶⁸ The prefix “COM” refers to the Commission. It is part of the label assigned to the documents for classification purposes. Each document is identified by adding the year when it was issued, followed by a consecutive number, e.g. COM(1998)142.

a proposal for EU legislation. Green papers include general ideas on certain topics. They are used mainly for consultation purposes beyond the European institutions, so interest groups and citizens are invited to participate and express their point of view by proposing initiatives. These documents may generate specific legislative points about the discussed topic and promote the formulation of white papers. Work programs contain the priorities of the Commission in a specific policy field in a year. Communications and reports contain diverse information, such as opinions on a certain topic and descriptions of the progress on policy implementation. They sometimes describe the plan of action towards the development of policy goals.

These documents represent the political agenda of the Commission, as they are issued in the context of the policy process and adopted by consensual agreement by the political arm, that is, the College of Commissioners. They thus express the political voice of the institution as a whole. COM docs are appropriate for the analysis because they show the actual issues the Commission officially works on in order to produce and update legislation. They thus demonstrate the policy priorities of the institution. In addition, by this means, the Commission indicates the reasons for its choices and often the source, whether EU institutions, experts, etc., from which the idea of handling a given problem originated.

Other types of documents issued by the Commission are not considered in this project. For instance, the so-called “SEC docs” and “SWD docs” are not included, as they are not official policy documents, but staff working texts for internal communication. The so-called “Strategic plans” are not included because they are issued per Directorate General, which means that they represent the vision of a specific department. Statements produced in the social media and press releases are not considered, as the source of authorship is not the Commission as a whole institution, similarly to the case of the European Council as mentioned above.

Diverse steps were followed to collect the data. First, COM docs on all policy areas published during the research period were identified. This was done using the Application Programming Interface for European Union Legislation, so-called API (Buhl & Rasmussen, website). This application extracts and organizes data from Prelex, an online public database run by the EU’s Publications Office containing all documents issued by the Commission to be transmitted for decision and/or observation of other EU institutions and actors.⁶⁹ API’s interface quality allowed me

⁶⁹ In December 2014 Prelex was closed. However, the data of this project was collected while Prelex was still functioning. Since 2015 the information of this database is available on Eurlex, an EU database the contains all kinds of policy documents from preparatory acts to laws and international agreements. It can be accessed via the following link <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/collection/legislative-procedures.html>.

to get different type of information on all COM docs, such as titles and type of legislation. Next, the information was organized and a large dataset of approximately 25,000 COM docs was created. Later, the dataset was checked for errors and later cleaned discriminating irrelevant information for the project (e.g. name of the commissioner responsible for the document). Afterwards, the data was collected, selecting the documents whose titles included any of the issues in the catalogue of OC issues (see Appendix 1), which was built to collect data, as mentioned above in the subsection of the European Council. With the documents collected, a dataset on COM docs on OC was created. Finally, the electronic versions of the data were obtained and cleaned. This included a detailed process. For the cases where the data was not available electronically –as many sources were produced long time ago-, a hard copy was requested to the Commission's General Secretariat. The information obtained was transformed into a digital format. Once all electronic versions were gathered, they were revised to assure that they were computer-readable to facilitate the analysis. Also they were checked to confirm that each title in the dataset contained indeed only one document. When more than one document was included in the same file (as it was often the case when COM docs were about a proposal that derived from a communication issued simultaneously), the different documents were split. A total of 263 COM docs in the domain of organized crime were collected (see Appendix 4). This represents 1% of the overall agenda of the Commission, which is similar to the amount of data analyzed in previous research using COM docs on single policy domains studying a similar time frame (e.g. Princen, 2009:60).

5.2. Methods to study Intra-agenda dynamics

The analysis focused on the attention patterns. Attention is the occurrence of an issue on the agenda of a political institution. Pattern refers to the way an institution gives attention to issues over time. Seven features were measured: development of attention, level and distribution of attention changes, factors of attention, agenda content, allocation of attention, agenda scope, and agenda diversity. The first three aspects were studied for the domain of OC as a whole. The last four features were analyzed by observing more specific issues within the policy field. In this way, a thorough study on the policy problem was achieved. All features are connected to each other, which means that all results must go in a similar direction in order to validate the findings.

Development of attention

The development of attention over time was studied, conducting a mapping of attention. This was done by means of content analysis. The total number of organized

crime issues occurring on the agendas between 1975 and 2013 was identified, using a codebook on OC issues (see Appendix 2). This analytical instrument was developed on the basis of the catalogue (see Appendix 1), but it is a more refined instrument. The codebook is the actual tool used for measuring and conducting the empirical analysis. It has 14 issues. The number of issues included originally in the catalogue was reduced, after the experience obtained from collecting the data. The reason is that not all issues in the catalogue were 'fished' (e.g. gambling) and some issues sometimes belong to two different clusters (e.g. *criminal groups* that commit *money laundering activities*). As a consequence, some issues were discarded and others merged. The separation of issues in three distinct clusters, as established in the catalogue, was eliminated. The reason is that, while such grouping was initially relevant to obtain a thorough impression of all possible lines in the discussion around OC and collect data, it was relevant neither to conduct the analysis nor to achieve the research goal. In addition, the issue terrorism was assigned specific coding rules to assure precision on the measurement and replicability of the analysis. It was done in this way because, as identified in the previous chapter on the policy domain, terrorism can be included in the conceptualization of OC, but can be also considered a problem in its own right. The unit of analysis was words.

The study was done on a year-to-year basis. Other options were to consider semesters or quarters. However, the former interval has been barely chosen to study agenda evolution in the long run (Carammia et al., 2016) and the latter has not been used. Years are a valid interval for diverse reasons. First, most research on the politics of attention on agendas in Europe—including the European Council—and in other political systems, like the United States, has used this time interval (e.g. Jones and Baumgartner, 2005; Jennings et al., 2011; Alexandrova et al., 2012). This makes the results comparable with findings in previous work. Second, an analysis on the basis of years enables us to conduct a critical test to find attention changes. An examination of the data per semester, not to say quarters, facilitates the identification of punctuations as they occur. Thus, if changes can be perceived even year by year, a critical threshold can be surpassed by observing changes at an aggregate level. Additionally, a yearly interval was selected for two pragmatic reasons. On the one hand, the findings of the intra-dynamics of the European Council will be later compared with the results of the Commission. This has implications for the analysis because there is a considerable difference between the periodicity of the data of each institution (i.e. while Conclusions are issued more or less quarterly, COM docs are published as often as the Commission deems it necessary). On the other hand, the research period is long, covering almost 40 years.

The analysis was done on the texts of the Conclusions. Other studies on the politics of attention have analyzed the titles. However, this is not an option in this research, given the characteristics of the Conclusions. These policy documents do not have a title as such, but a name that refers to the city and date when the meeting of the European Council takes place. In addition, only a very limited number of Conclusions are published per year. The reason is that, regardless of how concerned the European Council may be about any problem, the institution holds only around four summits in a year or two gatherings per semester approximately, issuing one set of Conclusions each time. Thus, an analysis of the number of Conclusions leads to an underestimation of the European Council's attention to policy problems. In the case of the COM docs, a content analysis on the text and titles was conducted. The texts in the introductory part were analyzed. One reason is that this section provides an overview of the content of the document and presents the most relevant elements of it, as considered by the institution. The whole communication, by contrast, entails a more technical and legal nature, which may lead to a misrepresentation of the political attention. Another reason is that practically all COM docs include this part, which allows for consistency of the analysis. The titles were also analyzed for a more precise estimation.

Level and distribution of attention changes

The actual level of variation of the development of attention was studied, looking at the distribution of changes. For this, a kurtosis analysis was done. The measurement of kurtosis indicates how "wild" the distribution of attention changes is (Jones and Baumgartner, 2005: 183). This was done to have a more accurate evidence of how the changing trend was, based on the previous results on the development of attention. The aim was to identify whether the changes in attention over time were only incremental or sometimes more drastic.

The statistical analysis was conducted in two steps. First, the annual change scores in attention to the domain were calculated. In general there are two options for doing this: a percentage-count method or a percentage-percentage method (Jones and Baumgartner, 2005). The former method enables us to measure the "growth in the total size of the policy agenda (...) by basing change on what has occurred before within the policy arena" (Jones and Baumgartner, 2005: 202). It is based on counts. The latter method considers the space of the agenda constant over time in a given policy field, taking into account the past situation in the field and the present situation in other policy areas. It is based on proportions. In this project, the first approach was selected to do the calculations. Two reasons motivated to follow a percentage-count

method. One explanation is that it goes in line with the research goal, as the method allows us to know the effect of the design of the institution and its overall carrying capacity (Ibid: 180). By contrast, the other method is especially useful for exploring its changing priorities across policy fields (Ibid). Another reason is that the method fits the project, as a single policy domain is analyzed. As a consequence, a relative measure of change that involves other policy fields is not applicable.

Accordingly, the following formula was used:

$$\frac{t_1 - t_0}{t_0} \quad (1)$$

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Where t_1 is the value of the agenda in the present and t_0 is the agenda in the past. The change in the development of the agenda was identified by taking into consideration the situation in the previous year. For instance, if there were 28 number of observations in 2007 and 14 in 2006, then the change score for 2007 is one. In this way, the distribution of attention shifts from one year to the next was measured. The point of departure to do this calculation was the year 1983 for the Conclusions and 1984 for the COM docs. The reason was that the results of the previous analysis on the development of attention showed that OC entered the agenda of the European Council and the Commission for the first time in those years, respectively. These findings had an important analytical implication for this research: the time frame originally established for the empirical study needed to be modified, accordingly. Thus, considering the year when the problem debuted on the European Council agenda, the new period of investigation to analyze the institution's attention was between 1983 and 2013. Similarly, the new time frame to analyze the Commission agenda was between 1984 and 2013.

Second, based on the distribution of yearly change scores, the level of kurtosis was measured. This type of measurement shows the degree of change or 'peakedness' of a frequency distribution. Statistically, kurtosis is considered the fourth moment around the mean. More precisely, the level of kurtosis is the relation between the fourth moment of a distribution and the square of its variance, which is the second moment. A kurtosis analysis is appropriate for diverse reasons. It enables a precise calculation of the distribution of annual changes, in order to statistically confirm the variation of the attention pattern. In addition, it allows for theory testing. According to the Processing Model, a clear indication of the effect of the information-processing characteristics of institutions dealing with complex problems is that the distribution of their policy outputs *invariably* displays a positive kurtosis value (Jones and Baumgartner, 2005:173). Such value means that the development is non-incremental.

In an incremental model of policy change, the theoretical kurtosis score of a normal distribution is 3.0. Above this statistical value, the development is considered to be positive or 'leptokurtic', which signifies that the distribution is non-normal. This indicates that, contrary to an incremental archetype, there is a degree of punctuation in the policy process. In other words, a kurtosis value above 3.0 signifies that policy development over time is not always incremental, but includes important shifts every now and then. Based on the Processing Model, political institutions tend to delay action to process issues and overrespond when they finally react. This behavior stimulates a pattern of both moderate and sudden abrupt shifts in policy. Such punctuated-equilibrium development of policy change, as argued by the theory, is expected to be observed. Put differently, the expectation is to find a leptokurtic score for the level and distribution of attention changes in both agendas. Furthermore, this theory also posits that the distinct constraints of institutions make them prone to variations of attention. The less constrained, the less oscillations. Statistically, this means that the less punctuated the change, the lower the kurtosis value. Based on this, a second expectation is that the value of the Commission agenda is lower than the score of the European Council agenda.

The standard measure, also called Pearson's kurtosis, was calculated. The following formula was used:

$$k = \frac{\sum(X - \mu)^4/n}{(\sum(X - \mu)^2/n)^2} \quad (2)$$

Where X is the variable (change score, in this case), μ is the mean (of the change scores, in this case) and n is the number of data points (years, in this case⁷⁰).

Factors of attention

A study on the factors that generated the attention of each institution was conducted. This was done to identify what stimulated the institutions to take up the problem of OC on their agendas. The analysis was facilitated by the findings on the development of attention. It was carried out in different phases. Initially, according to the expectation of ADA that the attention of the European Council and the Commission is regularly shaped by focusing events and professional concerns, respectively, only one factor was analyzed per agenda. The study was done by means of content analysis. The unit of analysis was documents. For the Commission data, the introductory part was observed. The category was binary coded (1, meaning factor found; and 0, meaning

⁷⁰ Note that a score for the initial year cannot be calculated, given that the calculation of the change scores considers the previous year.

factor not found). Only explicit arguments were considered. The study was thus based on references in the data, not on external sources.

During the development of the analysis, it was identified that the single factor expected to drive the attention of each institution was not constantly present. Consequently, additional factors were included a posteriori in the study. To begin with, no discrimination was done between the two factors mentioned in the hypothesis. This means that the impact of focusing events *and* professional concerns on both agendas was explored. Later, based on the literature on agenda-setting and representation in domestic political systems, different ideas were developed and finally translated into four factors that were incorporated in the study.

In this way, six factors in total were analyzed: focusing events, professional concerns, EU institutional milestones, political signals, policy inheritances and public concerns. Focusing events are salient, powerful and sudden socio-political occurrences.⁷¹ Professional concerns are statements from a group of experts that estimate critical the status of a given condition.⁷² EU institutional milestones are key developments in the institutional framework of the European Union.⁷³ Political signals are indications made by political actors to address a given issue.⁷⁴ Policy inheritances are previous policy decisions and political agreements that influence the consideration of current policy commitments.⁷⁵ Public concerns are problems that citizens consider important to be tackled by the EU.⁷⁶ For analytical purposes, a codebook on factors of attention was created (see Appendix 5). On this basis, the six categories were examined for each of the two agendas. The categories were binary coded. Next, the analysis zoomed

⁷¹ The notion is based on the Routes Framework that posits that ‘symbolic events’ impact issue initiation in EU agenda-setting (Princen and Rhinard, 2006). The term and conceptualization follows from Kingdon’s (1984) and Birkland’s (2010) notions of focusing events. Accordingly, these events are “a powerful symbol” (Kingdon, 1984:95) and attract attention, due to their “sheer magnitude” (Birkland, 2010:118) and sometimes given the “harm they reveal” (Birkland, 2010:118). They are also “sudden” and “relatively rare” (Birkland, 2010:118).

⁷² The term is borrowed from the Routes Framework (Princen and Rhinard, 2006). Accordingly, ‘professional concerns’ stem from “people working in the same issue area” or “in epistemic communities” and affect issue initiation in EU agenda setting.

⁷³ The notion is inspired by Breeman and Timmermans’ idea of ‘institutional milestone effect’ (2012), which refers to the impact that changes in European legislation, particularly EU treaties, have on national legislation.

⁷⁴ The term is inspired largely by the Processing Model, where signals from the environment play an important role and push for attention to be transformed into policy output. Additionally, the notion takes into consideration that agenda setting in the EU is inherently a political process, as mentioned in Chapter 2.

⁷⁵ The notion is inspired by Rose and Davies’ idea that newly elected politicians have little choice but to work with ‘inheritances’ or ‘legacies’ on programmes initiated by previous governments (1994).

⁷⁶ The notion is inspired by Jones and Baumgartner’s idea of ‘policy priorities of the public’ and the extent of responsiveness of the government to such priorities (Jones and Baumgartner, 2004).

in into central moments of attention over time, such as when OC first appeared on the agenda and when the domain was high on the agenda. This study was done in a qualitative way.

Agenda content and allocation of attention

The specific content of the agendas was identified, counting all different OC issues handled by the institution in the whole research period. The issues analyzed were those pre-established in the codebook in Appendix 2.

An analysis of the allocation of attention across the total number of different OC issues was done, calculating on an annual basis the percentage of attention to each issue in relation to the overall agenda during the research period. This enabled us to recognize the relative variation of attention within the OC agenda over time.

Agenda scope and diversity

The scope of the agenda was analyzed by identifying the number of issues that reached the radar of the institutions during the research period. The number of different OC issues attended by each of them was counted on an annual basis. This was done to see the how the agenda concentrated in few or many issues over the years.

An analysis of the diversity of its agenda was done, calculating the level of entropy. Entropy indicates the variation in the composition of the different groups in a sample. More specifically, it measures the diversity of observations across the total number of given categories and the probability of observing variation on a specific event. Although the analysis of attention allocation and agenda scope provided an overview of how disperse the consideration to OC issues was over time, a statistical analysis provided a more accurate evidence of the range of diversity.

This type of measurement has been used in agenda-setting studies to measure the fragmentation of attention across policy issues or, more precisely, agenda concentration and agenda diversity (Jennings et al., 2011; Alexandrova et al., 2012; Carammia et al., 2016). Accordingly, while a concentrated agenda involves attention to one issue, a diverse agenda entails equally shared attention among many issues. The degree of entropy depends on the total number of issues on the agenda, given that the goal is to identify the portion of attention allocated across all elements in the sample. A concentrated agenda has a lower degree of entropy and, conversely, a dispersed agenda a higher level. In other words, a lower value signifies that the focus is on one or a small number of issues, while a higher entropy means that the attention

is spread more similarly among issues. These patterns speak to the information-processing behaviors of macropolitical institutions and policy subsystems, respectively. Therefore, calculating the degree of entropy is appropriate for two reasons. First, I am interested in knowing whether each of the two institutions regularly focused on one or many issues, as this provides evidence to further compare the intra-dynamics in the way problems enter and fade away from the political radar of each institution. Second, I am also interested in knowing whether the variation pattern in expansion and concentration occurred in a similar way because this allows for a more detailed evidence of the (dis)similarities in their processing dynamics.

The entropy was calculated using Shannon diversity index (H), based on the following formula:

$$H = (-1) \sum_{i=1}^n p(x_i) \ln(p(x_i)) \quad (3)$$

where H is the entropy value of the negative sum for all categories of the probability $p(x)$ that x (an observation) happens within a particular category i , multiplied by the natural log of that probability. For categories where no observation happens in a given year, it is assumed that $0 \times \ln(0)$ equals zero, given that logs of zero cannot be calculated. The minimum score of H is always zero. However, the maximum value is not fixed, but dependent on the number of categories.

The analysis was conducted in three parts. First, the range of measurement was estimated. It was necessary to calculate only the maximum value, as the lowest possible entropy score is a given, as just mentioned. It is zero, which means that all the attention is concentrated 100% on one issue. However, the maximum possible value varies according to the total number of categories. In this case, based on the previous results of the analysis on agenda content, the total number of OC issues was thirteen for the analysis of the European Council. Based on the formula in equation (3), the highest possible entropy score for a sample of thirteen categories is 2.5649. This value signifies that all thirteen issues are equally attended, each occupying 7.69% of the total agenda space. To calculate the range measurement for the analysis of the Commission, according to the earlier findings on the agenda content, the total number of issues attended by the institution during the research period was twelve. On this basis, the maximum entropy value was estimated. For a group of twelve categories, the maximum possible score is 2.4849. This means that the attention is equally distributed among issues, each receiving 8.33% of the total amount.

Next, the actual score for each year was measured. In the last part, the average entropy level for the whole research period was calculated. Years in which OC issues

were not on the agenda were not included in the calculation of entropy. The reason is that, for determining the level of entropy of the agenda, issues must be present on the agenda in the first place. It is thus incorrect to consider that the entropy score in years of no attention is zero, as it would mean that the institution focused on one issue, when in reality it did not consider the problem at all. As a result, the average score excludes years without attention.

According to the Processing Model, the fewer constraints to process issues —as it is the case of parallel-processing institutions, such as the Commission—, the more diverse the agenda. Therefore, the attention is more equally shared. In terms of entropy, the more diverse the agenda, the higher the entropy level. On this basis, I expect to find a higher average value in the Commission agenda in relation to the average value in the European Council agenda.

5.3. Methods to study Inter-agenda dynamics

The analysis centered on the governing pattern in the relationship between the institutions. It explored the directionality between their agendas. Drawing from the field of econometrics, Vector Autogression (VAR) techniques were used (Sims, 1980; Freeman et al., 1989; Stock and Watson, 2001). By means of VAR, the agenda interaction was modelled.

VAR is a multiple regression model, in which each variable in the system is “explained by its own lagged values, plus current and past values of the remaining (...) variables” (Stock and Watson, 2001:101). For instance, in a bivariate model, i.e. consisting of two variables, the value of one variable is caused by the lagged values of itself, as well as the present and lagged values of the other variable. VAR models do not presuppose which variable is exogenous —or independent. All variables are in principle assumed to be endogenous —or dependent. After running the model and examining the results, exogeneity becomes clear. In this project, these conditions of flexibility provide a better alternative for modelling than other methods, such as structural equation (SEQ) models, where the parameters need to be rigorously predetermined by placing “reliance on a single theory” (Freeman et al., 1989:848). Setting strict parameters and doing it *a priori* becomes a problem in this study because there is no clarity in the theory about the institutions’ interplay and our knowledge of the reality is substantially limited. Thus, as a result, we are uncertain about the actual properties of the system. It, however, shall not be understood as if no specifications are considered in the formulation of VAR models. Comparatively speaking, “VAR imposes fewer and weaker restrictions” than SEQ (Freeman et al., 1989:843).

VAR techniques are widely used in Macroeconomics to study the relationship between two or more variables in time series data. This method has been used to analyze, for instance, the relationship over decades among interest rates, inflation and unemployment and the effect of a change in any of them (Stock and Watson, 2001).

The method is also applied to model policy processes. VAR is adequate to study the inter-agenda dynamics of the European Council and the Commission for several reasons. To begin with, VAR fits this research because it is about the analysis of time series data. Thus the relationship between the institutions can be analyzed in the long run, revealing its underlying trend.

A central reason for using this method is that, as Edward and Woods have argued, "VAR is the most appropriate method for circumstances in which the theory provides a weak rationale for imposing restrictions on the parameters of a structural equation system" (Edwards and Wood, 1999:334). This feature is particularly relevant in this project given the wide academic discussion on the relationship between the institutions vis-à-vis the little empirical work, not to mention the lack of regulation on their interaction. Consequently, there is neither a firm theoretical basis nor a genuine justification for predetermining the direction of influence between the institutions.

Furthermore, in line with the Agenda Dynamics Approach, VAR allows us to study specific processes based on a theory-building perspective. This is possible because, in order to run this type of autoregression model, there is no need to establish *a priori* restrictions derived from theoretical assumptions (Sims, 1980). This does not mean that we can start running models 'just like that' without any theory. Theory is indeed used, for instance, to select which variables are to be included in the system, but not to assume which of such variables is independent (Freeman et al., 1989: 844). In a way, the data can 'talk' (cf. Edwards and Wood, 1999:334). But "the data will obviously not determine directly the outcome of the debate between various schools of thought; it does, however, influence the conflict by defining what battlefield positions must be" (Sims, 1980:30). It is the researcher who gives voice to the findings, based on theoretical and empirical knowledge on the analyzed phenomenon and the variables in the study. In general, for modelling by means of VAR, it is necessary to be well informed about possible theoretical causal-relation dynamics in order to construct the system, conceive a reliable analysis and draw founded conclusions.

Another reason to use VAR is that with this method the causality between variables can be estimated, in clear line with the research goal on the inter-agenda dynamics. As Liu et al. have argued, an "advantage of VAR modeling is that it can provide empirical evidence for Granger causality of two possibly interactive variables" (Liu

et al., 2009:412). According to the notion of Granger causality, one variable causes another variable, if the lagged values of the former and the latter variable help better predict the present value of the latter variable (Granger, 1969:459). This is tested in VAR techniques as a means to interpret the output of the estimated model, as will be described below.

A final motivation to use VAR relates to its methodological novelty. This technique has not been applied to study EU policymaking. Until now, research by means of VAR has been conducted in national political systems to study the relationship between political institutions and between political and public organizations. Most work has been done on institutions in the United States (e.g. Rutledge and Larsen Price, 2014; Peake, 2017; Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake, 2004; Edwards and Wood, 1999). Some work has been conducted to study organizations in other countries, such as Canada (S. N. Soroka, 2002) and the Netherlands (Vliegenthart and Roggeband, 2007). However, VAR has not been used to analyze the interaction between political institutions at the EU level. It is thus appropriate to use it because this promotes an innovative method for the analysis of the policy-making process in the European Union political system.

VAR is, however, not exempted from criticism and disadvantages. Perhaps one of the most criticized features relates to the concept of Granger causality. The reason is that this type of causality is not entirely the same as normal causality. Granger causality is about “prediction” (Granger, 1969:429). It demonstrates potential causality, provided the occurrence of one variable by which the other variable can be better determined. Some scholars consider this circumstance a limitation. However, in VAR models an additional test on Impulse Response Functions (IRF) complements the information obtained by Granger tests (Edwards and Wood, 1999). Also as a way to interpret the VAR output, IRF allows us to confirm and observe further the behavior between variables by showing the response of one variable to a simulated shock in another variable in the system, as will be mentioned in the next section.

Some disadvantages of the method can be also noticed. VAR does not allow for an analysis of short-term deviations from the long-term pattern. Nevertheless, there are reasons why this situation is not necessarily a drawback in this study. One is that the research goal is to identify the primary trend in their interaction in the long run, not to show transitory moments. However, because random patterns may happen in time series, one of the conditions to run VAR is to control for stationarity. Stationarity refers to the stability of the system. This concept brings us to another reason. If the test to control for stationarity is passed, it means that the same trend occurs across time periods. In this research, the data passed the test, as will be shown below.

Another disadvantage discussed in the literature is related to the circumstance that, as will be explained, the examination of individual coefficients in the regressions—as it is common practice in econometrics—is extremely complex in VAR models and, therefore, this is usually not done (Sims, 1980). Instead, tools to interpret the results are necessary. In this way, VAR models are not so precise in quantitative terms as, for instance, SEQ models. However, this situation is compensated because VAR provides better “accuracy of causal inference” than SEQ, as claimed by Freeman and colleagues (Freeman et al., 1989:842). In effect, as Soroka has argued, with VAR models we are able to “make more convincing claims about causal relationships between variables”, in comparison to SEQ models (Soroka, 2000:144). Considering the trade-off and in view of the research goal in this study, the argued disadvantage does not represent a problem here; the feature of the method, as suggested by Freeman et al. and Soroka, rather benefits this research.

The model

VAR was conducted for a bivariate model, that is, the European Council agenda and the Commission agenda. The domain of organized crime as a whole was analyzed. Time series data on attention of each institution to this field were used, on the basis of the data previously collected for the analysis on the intra-agenda dynamics. The model revolves around notions obtained from the earlier results. It was built in different steps, which are described in the three following sections. The results of the first two parts can be found in Appendix 7. The findings of the last part are introduced in the analytical chapter (Chapter 8). The overall procedure was conducted using Stata 13.

Data preparation

The analysis of the inter-dynamics was done on a quarterly basis. Therefore, before constructing the model, the original yearly data used to study the intra-dynamics was disaggregated in quarters. At first sight, an obvious choice was to take the same annual interval used for the analysis on the intra-agenda dynamics. This interval is, however, not appropriate to study the interaction. Years are too long to capture the fine dynamics of the relationship, given the distinct institutional calendars to process issues. The European Council has per year a relatively fixed number of gatherings, where it deals with policy problems. While the number of summits per year has increased in the last two decades (Puetter, 2014:104–106), on a longer term the European Council has held two meetings on average per semester or one “every three months” (Werts, 2008:189). By contrast, the Commission is significantly flexible in this regard. The institution has no schedule as such, in the sense that

it does not need to reach a predetermined number of policy documents per year or semester. Instead, the Commission can issue communications on policy issues whenever necessary. Therefore, a lot can happen in a semester, not to mention a year. As a result, a study on a quarterly interval seems appropriate. It enables a refined view on the interactive processes.

The research frame was between 1993 and 2013. The time before this period was not considered, given that the findings on the intra agenda-dynamics show that the institutions —especially the Commission— discarded the problem from their agendas in many years, which would provide several time points with missing data (see Chapters 6 and 7). These results demonstrate that the situation changed in 1993, when the attention of both political bodies took off and afterwards the problem was constantly present every year on their agendas. The study included in total 83 quarters, from the second quarter of 1993 —when the domain appeared on the agendas for the first time— to the fourth quarter of 2013 —the last period the domain was on the agenda, according to the research period. The domain analyzed included eleven OC issues, in contrast to the study of the intra-agenda dynamics that considered fourteen. Three issues were discarded (i.e. cigarette smuggling, trafficking in works of art, trafficking in vehicles) because the findings on the intra-agenda dynamics showed that on the whole both institutions paid less than 1% of attention to such issues and, in some cases, no attention (see Appendix 6).

Then, the variables were standardized. Next, the stationarity of the time series was checked, a key condition to be able to run VAR.⁷⁷ Statistically this can be observed by the presence of unit root, which means that the time series has a random pattern. An Augmented Dickey-Fuller (ADF) test was conducted. The Akaike Information Criterion was used to determine the lag length to do the test. The results indicate that the variables are stationary (see Appendix 7, Table A). This enabled us to conduct the model.

Vector autoregressions and post-estimation tests

As we know by now, VAR involves the examination of lagged values. Thus, prior to running the model, the lag length to conduct the analysis was calculated. This was done by a Likelihood Ratio (LR) test (see Appendix 7, Table B). Then the vector autoregressions were run. The results of the estimated VAR are regularly not reported in academic research. Instead, further tests need to be conducted to interpret the output. The reason of this convention is that it is complex to directly analyze and digest the large number of coefficients obtained by VAR models, as Sims has argued:

⁷⁷ When time series fail the test, the data must be transformed before modelling.

“Autoregressive systems like these are difficult to describe succinctly. It is especially difficult to make sense of them by examining the coefficients in the regression equations themselves (...) The common econometric practice of summarizing distributed lag relations in terms of their implied long run equilibrium behavior is quite misleading in these systems” (1980: 20–21). As a consequence, additional tests are required to read the VAR output. The interpretative tools commonly used are Granger causality and Impulse Response Function. They are described in the next section.

To validate the estimated model, two conditions were controlled: stability and autocorrelation. The eigenvalue stability condition was checked and a Lagrange Multiplier (LM) test was conducted to control for autocorrelation in the residuals.⁷⁸ The results indicated that the model was adequately specified (see Appendix 7, Figure A and Table C). This gave solid ground to the interpretative tools.

Interpretative tools

As just mentioned, there are two ways to make sense of the results of VAR. First, Granger causality allows us to test causal relations, or direction, between variables. According to this notion, variable A Granger-causes B, if B can be better predicted from the history of A and B together than only of A. This is based on the idea that the cause happens before the effect. The null hypothesis is that the lagged values of variable A do not Granger-cause the current values of variable B. If the null hypothesis is rejected, the alternative hypothesis is accepted. In theory, four different results are possible to obtain from the model: no Granger-cause relationship between the institutions; the European Council Granger-causes the Commission; the Commission Granger-causes the European Council; and the institutions Granger-cause each other. To identify this, Wald tests were conducted. The results are discussed and reported in Chapter 8.

Second, Impulse Response Functions show the reaction of each of the variables in the system to a simulated unexpected exogenous shock to one variable and then to another variable, and so on, over a horizon of time. In other words, “[s]hocking a variable means increasing the independent series by one standard deviation and estimating the impact the increase has on the other series in the system” (Peake, 2001:73–74). This provides further information on the effect between variables, such as the magnitude. The reactions of the institutions were tested by IRFs, or more precisely, orthogonalized IRFs. The shocks were orthogonalized by Cholesky decomposition (Sims, 1980). This transformation makes the error terms orthogonal

⁷⁸ Finding evidence of autocorrelation means that some parameters of the model need to be further analysed and better specified.

or contemporaneously uncorrelated, which allows for the simulation of the system's response to unexpected disturbances to the system. The results on the IRFs are discussed and reported in Chapter 8.

Granger and IRF analyses are useful for various reasons. They do not only make possible to interpret the results of the estimated VAR. They are also important to validate the findings. The results of the predictive causality of Granger causality tests confirm and complement the evidence of IRFs on the response of one variable in relation to the impact on the other. Moreover, IRF facilitates the interpretation of the findings, as it allows for a visual representation of the model. It also gives additional information on the impact. In this way, the combination of both tests in this study provided strong evidence of the causal relations between the variables and made possible to characterize their interaction.

Additionally, to make the results more solid, a change in the ordering of the variables was done to check that the pattern in the relationship holds. According to the literature, IRFs are sensitive to variation in the ordering—situation that does not occur for Granger causality— (Peake, 2001:74). The convention is to decide the original ordering of IRF on the basis of the Granger causality test, by which the variable that proves to be independent in the latter test is placed first in former analysis. In order to challenge this convention, additional IRFs were conducted, setting the variable ordering the other way around. This means that the variable that was found to be dependent, according to the results of Granger causality, was located first. The results obtained (see Appendix 7, Figure B and Table D) were similar to the original model (see Chapter 8, Figure 8.1 and Table 8.2).

5.4. Summary

This chapter described the methodological strategy of the project. It first dealt with the sources and the data collection process. It showed the reasons the Conclusions of the European Council and the COM docs of the Commission are used to reconstruct their agendas for the analysis. It also described how the policy documents, as they relate to the OC domain, were collected. Later, the chapter addressed the methods. It showed the way seven features, such as agenda diversity and factors of attention, were measured to study the intra-agenda dynamics. It also explained why vector autoregression techniques were used to analyze the inter-agenda dynamics. The steps followed to build and run the VAR model were described. The next chapter presents the first empirical study applying ADA. It analyzes the intra-dynamics of the European Council.