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Taking centre stage: understanding how EU account-holders enact their accountability roles

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About the author

Benjamin Leidorf-Tidå (12 May 1991, Trelleborg, Sweden) obtained his High School diploma at Söderslättsgymnasiet in 2010, after which he went on to study Political Science at Lund University where he obtained a BSc in 2013 and a MSc in 2015. After his studies, he followed his heart to the Netherlands where he worked for the non-governmental organisation Gender Concerns International from 2016 to 2018.

In 2018, he joined Leiden University as a PhD candidate within the research project *Reputation Matters in the Regulatory State: Rethinking the Fundamentals of Regulatory Independence, Credibility and Accountability*, funded by the European Research Council and led by Madalina Busuioc. In his PhD project, Benjamin investigated the account-holding behaviour of several institutional EU account-holders tasked to hold EU agencies accountable. His PhD research, which contributes to an increased understanding of account-holding behaviour, has been published in the international peer-reviewed academic journals *Public Administration*, *Journal of European Public Policy*, and *Journal of Common Market Studies*.

During his PhD trajectory, Benjamin actively engaged with peers in the academic community. He took several courses within the Netherlands Institute of Governance (NIG) graduate school programme, as well as in the method schools of the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR). He presented his research at several international academic conferences, and won the award for the best paper of the Permanent Study Group XIV on EU Administration and Multilevel Governance at the 2021 European Group of Public Administration (EGPA) Conference for a prior version of the article later published as 'Account-holding Intensity in the EU Accountability Landscape: A Comprehensive Review of EU agencies' Institutional Accountability Relationships' in the *Journal of Common Market Studies*. He also co-chaired the Leiden University PhD seminars 2020-2021, and co-organised and co-chaired a panel on public accountability at the annual NIG conferences 2020-2022. Additionally, he served as VU Amsterdam's representative in the NIG PhD Council in 2022.

Benjamin is currently working as an Assistant Professor of Public Administration at VU Amsterdam where he researches the role management and strategic reputation-, legitimacy-, and authority-building of public organisations in the face of societal developments such as the digitalisation of government. He also teaches courses on good governance as well as research methods in VU Amsterdam's Public Administration Master programme.

Accountability is a cornerstone of democratic governance. But with the emergence of increasingly complex multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance structures, and an increasing amount of delegation of public powers and tasks to both public and private non-majoritarian bodies, safeguarding public accountability has however become an increasingly complicated endeavour. This is not the least to be seen in the EU, where discussions about the EU's democratic deficit often centre around questions of accountability, with the accountability of non-majoritarian and (semi-)independent EU agencies being of particular concern.

This dissertation focuses on how institutional EU account-holders execute their account-holding roles, in particular vis-à-vis EU agencies. Findings indicate that EU account-holders, within the constraints of their specific account-holding roles, are visibility-seeking organisations looking to take centre stage. This has important democratic accountability implications: Does the visibility-seeking behaviour of account-holders lead to low(er)-visibility agencies and issues escaping democratic scrutiny, or does it push account-holders towards going above and beyond their formal account-holding obligations?

