



Think tanks in “Brussels Bubble”

Who’s Agenda?

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**A Report for the “Think Tanks at a Cross-Road: Shifting Paradigms
and Policy Dilemmas in Southern and Eastern Europe”**

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Introduction and main findings

The complexity of decision making in ‘Brussels bubble’ triggered in recent years a lot of debate around different forms and levels of lobbying. The European Commission and the European Parliament joined their efforts for more transparency and since 2011 a Transparency Register is operated by a joint secretariat. The analyzed Brussels based think tanks had some initial problems with accepting the idea to register as long as lobbying was the general label under which the register was discussed but with the introduction of a special category for ‘Think tanks, research and academic institutions’ (subdivided into “Think tanks and research institutions” and “Academic institutions”) they dropped their objections and registered. Under the heading of “Think tanks and research institutions” there are 281 institutions registered but they include also institutions based outside Brussels. In the context of no agreed definition of “independent think tank” there is no agreement about how many Brussels based independent think tanks do exist but their number is a one digit rather than a two digit one. Of the four analyzed think tanks (Bruegel, CEPS, EPC, and ‘Friends of Europe’) ‘Friends of Europe’ is not unanimously perceived as a think tank within the broader research community. ‘Forum’ or ‘platform’ is sometimes considered to be the more proper name for ‘Friends of Europe’ activities linked to the organization of events and debates with representatives of a variety of stakeholders.

The analyzed Brussels based think tanks don’t see any problems with preserving their independence. Their general understanding of independence implies diversity of the financial resources for their activities. Single donors usually don’t stand for more than 2 or 3 % of the overall budget of the respective think tanks. Brussels specificity is the relative high amount that the analyzed think tanks get through membership fees. This example of a good practice for financing think tanks activities at least partly could unfortunately hardly be taken up by small national think tanks since the practice works only for rather big think tanks in the special circumstances of a high

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number of potential members in Brussels and the very location of Brussels that has given the EU decision making machine the label ‘the Brussels bubble’. The functioning of the analyzed think tanks does prove that project based funding can only be part of the budget of a think tank that wants to preserve its independence, especially in terms of freedom to set up its own multi annual agenda and in terms of the potential risk to get hijacked by the agenda of the donors. The analyzed Brussels based think tanks share the view that there is a need to develop a new funding model for independent think tanks.

The analyzed Brussels based think tanks don’t consider the last five years as a period of crisis with a serious negative impact on either their financial sustainability or research agenda. They report about certain difficulties with fundraising, especially with the business community, but regard these difficulties as a temporarily problem already or soon to be resolved. In terms of agenda setting there is a general understanding that the financial crisis has increased the visibility of think tanks and has fostered greater interest in their research on economic and financial issues and respective policy proposals. In McGann’s 2012 Global Go to Think Tanks Index Report the economic think tank Bruegel was ranked first amongst the 75 top think tanks in Western Europe and second amongst the top 100 think tanks worldwide (excluding the USA). On the other hand, the crisis did prove that interest for policy research and policy proposals from think tanks is triggered by the pressure upon politicians to deliver solutions for problems of the day. A long-term research agenda that is not perceived as providing solutions to pressing problems continues to be of a lesser interest for the decision makers.

The Brussels based think tanks follow closely developments in the academia. Think tanks and academia are intertwined in different networks. There are certain concerns that the win-win cooperation modus which is the prevailing one today might turn in the future into a competition modus, especially for EU funded projects, and that under an eventual competition modus the universities would be better placed because of the bigger administrative and research capacity they are perceived to have and

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their increasing entrepreneurship and the trend towards valorization of academic research findings. The perception of the academic research institutions as better equipped and more sustainable might be justified with regard to certain countries but does by far not reflect the reality in all EU Member States.

The competitive environment created by the expansion of electronic media and social networks is perceived partly as a challenge by the analyzed Brussels think tanks. Without changing seriously their way of operating they believe that they should find the proper way how to be present in this new environment.

Beyond research on policies designed at the European level the analyzed Brussels based think tanks have additional dimensions of activities that reflect the complex character of decision making within the European Union as a multilevel system of governance and determine the special place they have in comparison to other think tanks in Brussels or to national think tanks committed to EU policy making. Regardless of the prevailing and federal tinted communitarian method of decision making within the European Union it would go too far to compare the analyzed Brussels based think tanks to American think tanks operating at the state level and to put them in contrast to national European think tanks as a kind of federal think tanks. Still, the fact that policies at the European level have to be supported both by politicians and citizens in the Member States requires that think tanking should not neglect the involvement of the national level in the EU policy making process and concentrate only on the European level. The national level of decision taking related to EU policy making is definitely not on the agenda of the analyzed Brussels based think tanks. There are certain attempts to cover this gap through the employment of staff with diverse national background or through the creation of networks that involve national think tanks dealing with EU affairs. (e.g. EPIN - the European Policy Institutes Network coordinated by CEPS or Europe's World as a "Think Tank Europe" network and journal edited by the Secretary General of 'Friends of Europe'). Involving national think tanks is the right approach by Brussels based think tanks to extend their research capacity and outreach beyond the 'Brussels bubble' but the

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necessity to reach out through participation in European networks is a challenge for the national think tanks. Without sustainable financing they can hardly develop the capacity needed for this kind of networking.

The analyzed Brussels based think tanks consider themselves as neutral with regard to the different institutions involved in the functioning of the European Union (the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council of the European Union, the European Commission, the Court of Justice of the European Union, the European Central Bank, and the Court of Auditors) as well as to the consultative bodies of the Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee. Because of the special role of the European Commission in the process of EU policy making it cannot be neglected that the European Commission is the most targeted institution. Moreover, former European officials and European Commissioners are very well represented on the governing bodies of the analyzed Brussels based think tanks. The American ‘revolving door’ phenomena is however not a real issue. Former EU officials get very much involved in think tank governance and activities but there is no reversed trend. The analyzed Brussels based think tanks work on the basis of the formula ‘policies without politics’ but with a strong awareness for the need to take over a kind of an ‘inter-institutional function’, i.e. to insert ideas in the interplay of the European institutions, and a ‘facilitation function’, i.e. to facilitate the interaction between officials and interest groups in the policy shaping.

The neutrality of the analyzed Brussels think tanks can be partly questioned on the basis of their general commitment to European level policies and working mainly within the Europeanization paradigm. The difference is well illustrated by contrasting two national think tanks with explicit commitment in their statements of mission: on the one hand, the French Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, with its commitment to the creation of a political community, beyond market and economic trading, as the end goal of European integration, and the British think tank “Open Europe” that in its statement of mission questions the paradigm of an ‘ever closer Union’. The self-perception of “Open Europe” of being an independent think tank

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that wants to “contribute positive new thinking to debate about the future direction of the European Union” is confronted by outsiders’ perception of its agenda as Eurosceptic. “

Diverging views on the balance between national and European competences and the relevance of this difference are the backdrop for understanding a major difference between the analyzed Brussels based think tanks and national think tanks. Policy proposals by independent national think tanks have to be based on some generally accepted ‘common good’ idea whereas policy proposals by independent EU policy think tanks subscribe to the idea of the ‘common European interest’. As a consequence, national think tanks’ ‘common good’ idea has to be acceptable for the civil society in the countries they are operating in. Otherwise they would lose their legitimacy. In post communist societies think tanks often emerged from civil society, continue to perceive themselves as part of it and feel naturally challenged by the growing populism. Independent EU policy think tanks don’t face a European demos and don’t perceive civil society as their target. Civil society is simply not on their screen. However, they don’t see this as a problem since they believe that working for the ‘common European interest’ implies working in an indirect way for civil society. The neglect of civil society by the analyzed Brussels based think tanks is understandable and has to be accepted. It is quite evident that these think tanks cannot contribute to overcoming the ‘democratic deficit’ of the European Union with its technocratic decision making process. But this fact makes the responsibility of national think tanks even bigger.

The problems of think tanks based in Brussels are quite different than the problems of national think tanks regardless of whether these are think tanks dealing with national policy issues or with European policy issues. The domestic-supranational dichotomy of European policy making is not reflected in the structure and functioning of the Brussels based think tanks that remain limited to the supranational level without this being perceived as a problem. The challenge for national think tanks dealing with EU policy making is not to remain limited to the domestic level

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and thus to create the impression of subscribing to Euroscepticism or to remain limited to the supranational level and thus to remain irrelevant or to foster real Euroscepticism. Brussels based think tanks and national think tanks dealing with EU policy making should explore ways how to reconcile the domestic and the supranational component of EU policy making in their activities.

1. EU-oriented think tanks: methodological issues

Exclusively EU-oriented think tanks only emerged in the 1980s. A serious growth in think tank activity both at the national and at the European level can be observed in the last two decades.

Possible explanations for these developments can be

- The deepening of EU competences;
- The increased impact of EU policy-making on member states;
- The heightened awareness of all things European;
- EU institutional and national administrative needs for greater policy advocacy (in line with Sherrington 1999)

Compared to research on national think tanks, research on EU-oriented think tanks is quite limited but at the same time giving important guide lines for further research (e.g. Sherrington 1999; Boucher 2004).

In a project with a focus on national think tanks it appeared challenging to look at the possible similarities and differences between national and EU-oriented think tanks and to find out in how far they mirror the domestic-supranational dichotomy of European Union policy-making and in how far there is scope for cooperation and complementarities between the two.

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Beyond this specific interest in the domestic-supranational dichotomy important questions about the Brussels based EU-oriented think tanks have to remain out of the scope of the report.

The idea that there is a scope for cooperation and complementarities between think tanks at the EU level and the national level arises from the particularity of the EU as a system of multi level governance that is relatively open in comparison to other political systems, with a variety of access points, and with a variety of target audiences, e.g. with a much wider constituency that can and has to be considered, also in terms of their potential to finance think tanks activities:

- The Commission as the main initiator of EU legislation;
- The Council of the EU that from the institutional perspective can also initiate legislation;
- National governments as members of the Council (either at the level of permanent representations in Brussels or within the domestic policy arena);
- The European Parliament that has a growing importance and greater influence as co-legislator under the co-decision procedure;
- National political parties either at the domestic level, or at the transnational level;
- The Committee of the Regions;
- The Economic and Social Committee (although there is a tendency that think tanks approach the corporate bodies and interest groups directly rather than through EcoSoc);
- The corporate sector (a key think tanks' constituency that cannot be neglected as an important source of funding)
- NGOs and interest groups;

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- Academia and other policy institutes and foundations;
- EU citizens

(in line with Sherrington 1999)

In comparison to national think tanks this implies a striking difference – at the national level there are fewer access points and smaller constituencies, and as a result of this a lesser demand for national think-tanking and limited possibilities for national financing.

It is quite evident that there is no think tank that could target the whole wider constituency and all potential EU stakeholders. No doubt, modern communications, social networks and the very informative websites maintained by all big think tanks have theoretically the potential do address anybody but in reality it is the events organized by think tanks (debates, seminars, conferences etc.) that make Brussels based think tanks so much different than national based think tanks. Brussels is the place that allows to easily getting together representatives of the different EU institutions, national diplomats, representatives of interest groups and NGOs. Through bringing together the different EU institutions Brussels based thinks tanks play a very important ‘inter-institutional function’. Furthermore, through bringing together EU officials, national diplomats, interest groups and NGOs Brussels based think tanks play an important ‘facilitation function’, the background for the impressive number of their members and for the important part of their budgets coming from membership fees. (‘inter-institutional function’ and ‘facilitation function’ in line with Emerson 2010).

For the purposes of the present study it was considered relevant to limit its scope to EU-oriented think tanks based in Brussels because of their specific constituency and because of their potential for networking.

The location of a think tank gives an indirect indication about its target groups. The prominent think tank European Council on Foreign Relation has no Brussels office

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but six more offices beyond the main one in London: in Berlin, Madrid, Paris, Rome, Sofia, and Warsaw. The ECFR's main task to "contribute to europeanise the national conversations on the EU's foreign policy priorities and dilemmas" (ECFR website) implies that it is not the Brussels' decision-shapers and decision-makers but national politicians that are ECFR's main target group. Likewise, the Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute is based in Paris but organizes and participates in seminars and conferences throughout Europe. The Eurosceptic British "Open Europe" is targeting member states rather than the Commission (although with a different agenda than the federal minded French Notre Europe –Jacques Delors Institute and has because of this its antenna in Berlin.

Even within Brussels some categories of think tanks had to be excluded but have to be mentioned as an integral part of EU-oriented think tanking. These are on the one hand, the think tanks operating on behalf of clearly defined interest groups, and on the other hand, the in-house think tanks of the European Union.

European interest groups, organized at the transnational level tend to establish themselves in Brussels since the mid-1980s but in their case the distinction think-tanking/ lobbying is quite blurred and it would be problematic to regard them as independent. The Commission as main initiator of EU legislation relies on diverse sources of policy expertise and has actively encouraged the growth of policy communities (interest groups) at the EU level as sources of external expertise.

As regards EU's in-house think tanks, they don't qualify as 'independent', since they either are virtually part of the respective institutions or do have an explicit political affiliation. It has to be mentioned that regardless of their political affiliation they mostly claim to be independent as well.

One could go as far as to consider the European Commission as a think tank but this would definitely overstretch the concept.

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Ad hoc consultative and expert committees do important think tanking for the Commission but since permanence is one of the explicit criteria for think tanks they don't qualify either.

Both the internal think tank of the Commission and the political foundations of the main Pan-European parties can be considered a special type of in-house think tanks.

The internal think tank of the Commission was set up in 1989 by Delors as President of the Commission under the name Forward Studies Unit with a broad five-year mandate to monitor and evaluate European integration by examining questions of medium-term interest for the Commission. Further tasks of the Forward Studies Unit were

- Establishing and strengthening relations with national research institutes;
- Responding to specific Commission requirements (studies and reports on policy dossiers);
- Conducting specific research projects identified by Delors and his cabinet;

There are different opinions in how far the Forward Studies Unit played a crucial role for the formulation of the 1993 White Paper on Industrial Policy or whether this White Paper was simply reflecting popular opinion at that time.

The Forward Studies Unit functioned as a very personal think tank and was in fact absorbed into Delors cabinet; it had a tendency to undermine the collegial ethos of the Commission. In 1995 Santer shifted the remit of the FSU. It became far more thematic, working on the basis of a five-year programme with 14 members representing as many member nationalities as possible. In close cooperation with the Joint Research Center and with the Competitiveness Advisory Group FSU was active to inform Commission thinking on EU affairs but it had a very cautionary approach with the media and no direct public educative role.

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In May 2000, Commission President Romano Prodi changed the FSU into the Group of Policy Advisers (GOPA) under his direct authority, with new resources from within and outside the Commission. He entrusted it with four specific domains: economics, social affairs, foreign affairs, and dialogue with religions.

In 2004 the new Commission President José Manuel Barroso maintained and further improved the idea of having a group of dedicated advisers. GOPA was rebranded as the Bureau of European Policy Advisers (BEPA), and was structured into three teams: political, economic and societal. In May 2010 BEPA was once again reorganized into two teams: Outreach and Analysis, the Outreach team itself being responsible for two sectors – European Dialogue and Global dialogue. The European Dialogue sector within BEPA is responsible for the contacts with think tanks and academia and as such important as an access point to the Commission.

The more recently established political foundations of the main political Pan-European Parties and groupings in the European Parliament can be considered as a kind of EU in-house think tanks, too. Because of their political affiliation it is questionable whether they can be considered as independent think tanks. These are

- The Centre for European Studies – the political foundation of the European People’s Party;
- The Foundation of European Progressive Studies, close to the Party of European Socialists;
- The European Liberal Forum, the political foundation of the liberal family.

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Boucher 2004 in his study on Euro-think-tanks identified only 36 dealing exclusively with EU issues out of 149 having EU issues as part of their agenda. He made the observation that “Only 5 per cent work with E.U. actors from Brussels, the rest are based in the Member States. “ Boucher’s 5 % include the whole group of Brussels

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based think tanks that had to be further slimmed down. National think tanks and foundations with antennas in Brussels, think tanks that are not exclusively concentrated on EU affairs and think tanks that have a clear affiliation with parties or special business interest were automatically excluded from further consideration.

The decision which Brussels based EU-oriented think tanks to include from the small remaining group was made on the basis of the 2010 and 2012 Global Go to Think Tanks Index Reports - McGann, James (2011) and McGann James (2013).

An interesting dynamic was observed. In McGann's 2011 Ranking Index three of the finally selected think tanks were in the Western Europe Top 25 1. CEPS; 2. Bruegel; 3. EPC. In McGann's 2012 Ranking Index all four selected think tanks made it in the Western Europe Top 25 with Bruegel topping the list, followed by CEPS, EPC and Friends of Europe. Being ranked second, Bruegel made it almost to the Worldwide (Non-US) Top 100 and CEPS got within the Top 10.

The youngest of the four selected think tanks Bruegel is clearly expanding and gaining relevance. In the interviews, this development was interpreted as a positive consequence of the ongoing European and worldwide financial-economic crisis. In times of crises the interest for think tanks specialized in the field of the crisis obviously grows. In fact the very idea to set up a new, independent European think tank devoted to international economics stemmed from private discussions involving policymakers, business leaders and other individuals from several European countries in late 2002. The idea was endorsed and officially floated by France and Germany in a joint declaration in Paris in January 2003 at the 40th anniversary of the Elysée Treaty. Following this declaration, a project group was created to develop and refine the concept, with the support of the concerned French and German ministries. The initiative subsequently found support from 12 EU governments and 17 leading European corporations, who committed the project's initial funding base (5 million euro over 2004-2006) and participated in the election of its first Board in December 2004.

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Top 25 think tanks in Western Europe 2010

- **Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) - 4 out of 25**
- International Crisis Group (ICG) – 8 out of 25
- **Bruegel - 9 out of 25**
- **European Policy Centre (EPC) – 25 out of 25**

Top 75 think tanks in Western Europe 2012

- **Bruegel – 1 out of 75**
- International Crisis Group (ICG) – 4 out of 75
- **Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) – 8 out of 75**
- Carnegie Europe – 17 out of 75
- Egmont Institute. The Royal Institute for International Relations – 31 out of 75
- **European Policy Centre (EPC) – 36 out of 75**
- Centre for European Studies (CES) – 38 out of 75
- **Friends of Europe – 54 out of 75**
- Foreign Policy Center (FPC) – 55 out of 75
- European Center for International Political Economy (ECIPE) – 59 out of 75
- Security and Defense Agenda – 75 out of 75

Top 100 thin tanks worldwide (Non-US) 2012

- **Bruegel – 2 out of 100**

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- International Crisis Group (ICG) – 6 out of 100
- **Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) – 8 out of 100**
- European Center for International Political Economy (ECIPE) – 80 out of 100
- Egmont Institute. The Royal Institute for International Relations – 83 out of 100

The goals of Bruegel, CEPS, EPC and Friends of Europe

The shortest possible presentation of the four think tanks is the one provided by them in the Joint Transparency Index of the Commission and the European Parliament. This presentation was compared than with the information from the conducted interviews in order to make some conclusions on the target groups of the surveyed think tanks with special attention to the role attributed to civil society and citizens.

Bruegel

“Bruegel is a European think tank working in the field of international economics. Established in 2005, Bruegel is independent and non-doctrinal. It seeks to contribute to European and global economic policy-making through open, fact-based and policy-relevant research, analysis and debate. Bruegel's governance and funding model is unique. Its membership includes EU governments and leading international corporations as well as international institutions. Its day-to-day work is carried out at arm's length from members' interests.”

The involvement of EU governments in Bruegel raises the question that in a very broad sense it might be considered on the edge of an in-house think tank of the EU.

CEPS

Founded in Brussels in 1983, the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) is among the most experienced and authoritative think tanks operating in the European

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Union today. CEPS serves as a leading forum for debate on EU affairs, but its most distinguishing feature lies in its strong in-house research capacity, complemented by an extensive network of partner institutes throughout the world.”

EPC

“The European Policy Centre (EPC) is an independent, not-for-profit think tank, committed to making European integration work. The EPC works at the ‘cutting edge’ of European and global policy-making providing its members and the wider public with rapid, high-quality information and analysis on the EU and global policy agenda. It aims to promote a balanced dialogue between the different constituencies of its membership, spanning all aspects of economic and social life. In line with its multi-constituency approach, members of the EPC comprise companies, professional and business federations, trade unions, diplomatic missions, regional and local bodies, as well as NGOs representing a broad range of civil society interests, foundations, international and religious organisations. On 9 January 2013, the EPC had around 400 member organisations.”

Friends of Europe

“Friends of Europe is an independent Brussels-based think-tank which offers a forum for lively and visible debate among EU and national policymakers, NGOs, business leaders, the media and civil society. Politically independent and not-for-profit, we aim to help bridge the understanding gap between EU policies and the EU’s citizens through reports, briefings and debates. By working with a wide range of partners in both the public and private sectors, Friends of Europe advances the debate on the issues and challenges facing Europe and its citizens.”

Except ‘Friends of Europe’ none of the other three think tanks seems to consider civil society and citizens as their immediate target group. The conducted interviews by Rashko Dorosiev confirmed that civil society is not on their screen and that they don’t consider it as their target. They don’t see this as a problem either since they believe that working for the ‘common European interest’ implies working in an indirect way for civil society. As far as there is no European demos this doesn’t come

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as a surprise. But it is surprising that EU-oriented think tanks seem to be neglecting the growing Euroscepticism and as a result of it also populism, a challenge not only for the elaboration of domestic policies but also for the further European integration project. The neglect of civil society by the surveyed Brussels based think tanks is understandable and has to be accepted. It is quite evident that these think tanks cannot contribute to overcoming the ‘democratic deficit’ of the European Union with its technocratic decision making process. But this fact makes the responsibility of national think tanks even bigger.

Independence – myth or reality?

The complexity of decision making in ‘Brussels bubble’ triggered in recent years a lot of debate around different forms and levels of lobbying. The European Commission and the European Parliament joined their efforts for more transparency and since 2011 a Transparency Register is operated by a joint secretariat. The analyzed Brussels based think tanks had some initial problems with accepting the idea to register as long as lobbying was the general label under which the register was discussed but with the introduction of a special category for ‘Think tanks, research and academic institutions’ (subdivided into “Think tanks and research institutions” and “Academic institutions”) they dropped their objections and registered.

At the peak of the debates around the Transparency Register attention was attracted to a study of academics at the University of Bath and University of Edinburgh.

“After trawling through some 700 internal documents from British American Tobacco (BAT), academics at the University of Bath and University of Edinburgh say they have found evidence that the cigarette giant in the mid-1990s teamed up with the European Policy Centre, the prominent Brussels think-tank, to create a front group to ensure that the EU framework for evaluating policy options emphasized business interests at the expense of public health.” (Phillips 2010)

Hans Martens’ (Chief Executive of EPC since 2002) response to the alleged EPC lobbying was that the events referred to in the study occurred at a time when EPC,

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then called Belmont EPC, was a consultancy and that this might have been the window for involving with the interests of some of its stakeholders. But since 2002 EPC “operates on the basis of multi-stakeholder engagement and does not represent any of the members’ interests at all.” Phillips 2010 finds EPC’s eagerness to join the Transparency register as the very first think tank as an attempt to neutralize suspicions that it might be involved in “lobbying”.

It is not easy to find information about the early days of the Center for European Policy Studies – the oldest and until recently considered the most important Brussels based think tank. The New York Times, September 25, 1983 described the creation of CEPS as the “European Brookings” and “one of Europe’s latest experiments in American governance — a think tank.” Indeed its financial backers were said to include the European Economic Community, NATO, the Dutch Government and the Ford Foundation. The *Economist*, December 18, 1982, stated that the main instigator of the project was Jacques van Ypersele (the Belgian prime minister’s chef de cabinet) but that one has to go even further back in time to find how it all started. “The idea of creating a European version of Washington’s Brookings Institution was first suggested several years ago by McGeorge Bundy, president of the (American) Ford foundation. He wrote to European prime ministers and presidents in 1977 and convened a planning conference at Versailles. Although the inspiration was American, European leaders were enthusiastic about the whole project.” Peter Ludlow, CEPS founding director, stated in a 2008 CEPS interview that the British Prime Minister Thatcher seems to have hated the organisation, regarding it as just another European expense. In the early days the US seem to have used CEPS to lobby against the Netherlands rejection of 48 cruise nuclear missiles assigned to it under a 1979 plan to install 572 medium-range nuclear missiles in five West European nations (*The Associated Press*, May 26, 1984). CEPS (1985) report ‘New Approaches to Nonproliferation: A European Approach,’ argued that Western Europe had been developing a consensus on the spread of nuclear weapons ever since the 1970 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

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It is virtually impossible to get the full picture about this alleged lobbying case almost 30 years ago but even today think tanks in general and CEPS in particular can raise suspicions that reports are not neutral and can easily be if not suspected of so at least abused for advocacy and lobbying purposes by political players. CEPS interlocutors reported that the simple choice of a research topic can be abused for domestic political debates or mistaken as a bias (e.g. CEPS research on the ongoing political reviews on balance of competences in the UK and in the Netherlands).

Transparency, diversified financing and a multi-constituency approach are the catchwords that Brussels' based think tanks refer to when they argue being independent. But all of them seem to be reluctant to get associated with 'advocacy'.

All four think tanks joined the transparency register; information on financing and their corporate donors is also to be easily found on their websites.

- Bruegel

Bruegel's 2011 budget amounted to € 3 948 290, out of it € 2 494 375 public financing and

€ 1 453 915 from other sources (including € 991 667 Euro from members).

- CEPS

CEPS 2010 total budget amounts to € 8 534 190, out of which € 6 092 374 public money. An essential part of it comes from EU funds for FP7 consortium partners (€ 3 509 145) and for EU supported projects (€ 1 577 143 Euro). The € 6 092 374 from other sources include contributions from members (€1 446 943).

- EPC

The EPC' 2011 budget was ^2,444,159, out of it ^ 229 854 public money and ^ 2 214 305 from other sources . Around one-third of the EPC's funding comes from membership fees. In 2011 it was ^779,758. Approximately one-third of the EPC's funding in 2011 (^ 800 000) came from European foundations, the EPC's strategic

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partners, the Compagnia di San Paolo and the King Baudouin Foundation (€700,000) and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (€100,000).

- Friends of Europe

The Friends of Europe 2011 budget was € 2 277 121, out of it € 749 686 public financing and € 1 527 435 from other sources, mainly membership fees amounting to € 1 300 205, i.e. more than half of the total budget.

Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO) is a research and campaign group working to expose and challenge the privileged access and influence enjoyed by corporations and their lobby groups in EU policy making. CEO works as a watchdog. It was very active with regard to the adoption of the Transparency Register of the Commission and the Parliament and more recently with regard to the adoption of new Staff Regulations seen by CEO as small steps forward towards limiting risks of conflict of interests, partly because of the revolving door phenomenon, associated with movement of public officials into the private sector and vice versa.

However, the wide-spread involvement of former Commission's officials in the governance of think tanks seems not to be a problem. And young researchers often use the Brussels based think tanks as a stepping stone for a further career in the EU institutions.

The sometimes blurred border lines between lobbying and think-tanking and think-tanking and advocacy (with think-tankers disagreeing on the question whether advocacy should be part of their activities or rather not) will continue to support doubts about independence. In cases of disagreement on crucial values (e.g. sovereignty, solidarity etc.) there will be always a discrepancy between the self-perception of a think tank and its public image. (e.g. 'Open Europe', think tanks with affiliation along the lines left/ right etc.)

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2. Think tanks – how much do personalities matter?

There is no clear answer to the question whether think tanks do matter because of their institutional set up and structure or whether it is rather personalities at the head of think tanks that contribute to their influence and effectiveness.

In recent years there has been a lot of criticism about the lack of leadership in the European Union (at present the debate is rather about the German hegemony as the wrong way of leadership) and in particular as regards the European Commission (German hegemony is criticized as emblematic for an increasing role of the European Council at the expense of a weaker Commission). The hardest criticism towards the Presidents of the European Commission comes from analysts who consider the two mandates of **Jacques Delors** as the ‘golden age’ of the European Union. It can be debated whether Jacques Delors was the man with the great ideas or whether he was just the right man at the right place at a time when deeper integration was simply in the air. His activities after his time at the head of the European Commission suggest rather the second option. Jacques Delors continued to be very active at the European level within the growing NGO community but he opted to consider as the target group of his think tank not the European Commission (contrary to the most important Brussels based think tanks) but member states. The importance of member states and their governments might be the lesson learned from his time as President of the Commission. At the website of Notre Europe one can read:

“I created **Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute** in 1996 on my return to Paris following the end of my presidency of the European Commission. To this “think tank” for Europe I gave the name “Notre Europe” (“Our Europe”), with the aim of stimulating European debate by means of papers, speaking events and appearances in the radio and television media.

We tried to form a team which could fulfill two objectives: firstly, to produce analyses and proposals, and secondly – much more difficult – to try to exercise an influence on the governments and member states of the EU. Today, the *Notre Europe team is international* – the most important point.”

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Thus the Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute is a French think tank with an international team. The important difference to the Brussels based think tanks on focus in this paper is that it is targeting not the Commission but member states.

The incumbent President of the Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute is the Portuguese **António Vitorino**, European Commissioner for Justice and Internal Affairs from 1999 to 2004. Since 2005 he has been president of the general assembly of the Santander Totta bank and an associate at the law firm Cuatrecasas, Gonçalves Pereira & Associados. In an interim period he was Chairman of the Board of the EPC. As Chairman of the EPC Board he was succeeded by **Meglana Kuneva**, former Commissioner (2007-2010), too. (Her political activity in Bulgaria, as independent candidate in the presidential elections in 2011 and as chairman of the “Bulgarian Citizens party”, seems to be in contradiction with the claimed EPC policy of not including in the Board of active politicians). In 2010 Bulgarian media reported about Kuneva being in discussion for the position Director-General of the already discussed Bureau of European Policy Advisors of the European Commission but she didn't get the position. However, at a personal level she remained linked to think-tanking activities for the Commission as an adviser on passengers' rights to Commissioner Siim Kallas. There was also a period of overlapping of Kuneva's involvement in the EPC Board and in the Board of the BNB Paribas bank.

The list of former Commissioners' involvement in EU-oriented think tanks can be easily continued and complemented by lower ranking EU officials both at the present moment and in retrospective.

On the basis of personal experience in Brussels the author of this report is aware also of cases when Commission's officials have been temporarily on leave from the Commission in order to be able to promote their ideas through reports prepared by Brussels based think tanks.

These instances of the ‘revolving door’ phenomenon can be extended by examples of personalities that are moving from the consulting business to the think tanks environment and vice versa, an illustration of the fact that the borderline between

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consulting and think tanking can get blurred. (EPC historical background is a good example illustrating how a think tank can emerge from the consulting business – the consulting Belmont firms (Belmont European Community Office and Belmont European Policy Centre) transformed in 1998 into the European Policy Center.

The impressively growing authority of Bruegel is quite obviously linked to the heavy -weights on its Board and Advisory Council, as well as to its Director **Jean Pisani-Ferry**. The incumbent Chairman of the Board is **Jean-Claude Trichet** who succeeded **Mario Monti** and **Leczek Balcerowicz**.

The hypothesis that within the think tanking community it might be very much about personalities rather than institutional set ups is the former British diplomat and EU official **Fraser Cameron**. After a period as a Director of research at the EPC he set up his own think tank cells (the EU-Asia Center and EU-Russia Centre) - quite small in terms of financing and staffing but with the intention and the potential to facilitate think tank networking around and with Asia and Russia.

Journalists involved in reporting on the EU seem to be challenged to develop over time into think tankers. A background in media and communications is obviously a benefit within the think tanks environment, an interesting example being **Giles Merritt**, the founder and Secretary General of Friends of Europe, according to himself “the most focused of the three main think tanks in Brussels on reaching public opinion across Europe”. For 15 years he was a staff correspondent of the Financial Times, successively in London, Paris, Belfast/ Dublin and Brussels. His work with think tanks began in the mid-1980s, when he devised and chaired a series of Business Policy Seminars on behalf of the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) but he never stopped writing contributions for newspapers, including for the International Herald Tribune. In addition to Friends of Europe, in Autumn 2005 Merritt launched Europe’s World, the only Europe-wide policy journal as a European counterpart to the US periodical Foreign Affairs and co-founded and became Director of the Security and Defence Agenda (the SDA), the only think tank in Brussels that concentrates solely on security and defence issues.

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Because of Merritt's concentration on public events rather than on research 'Friends of Europe' is sometimes classified as a quasi-think-tank but his think tank is interesting with his awareness of the wider constituency going well beyond the EU institutions and his ambition to build bridges between national, regional and global think tanks.

3. Networking

On the basis of the interviews and the conducted research it is evident that networking plays an increasing role for EU-oriented think-tanking.

The European Commission itself is encouraging and supporting networking and cooperation with think tanks. BEPA, the Commission's internal think tank, is in charge of contacts with think tanks and academia through its 'European Dialogue' sector managed by the Outreach team.

Brussels' based think tanks are active in establishing and coordinating networks for international cooperation, e.g. CEPS was instrumental for the establishing of the European Policy Institutes Network (EPIN) and coordinates its activities, including the maintenance of a website.

"EPIN is a network of dynamic think tanks and policy institutes focusing on current EU and European political and policy debates. It is a comprehensive network with 35 members in 26 countries, including almost all the EU member states and candidate countries. EPIN aims to contribute to the debate on the Future of Europe through up to the minute, expert analysis and commentary and through providing easy access to understanding the different national debates." (EPIN website)

The European Network of Economic Policy Research Institutes (ENEPRI) is another network coordinated by CEPS and facilitates joint research projects on ageing and health, tax/benefit systems.