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Conceptualizing Influence and Power of EU Agencies in European Policy-Making

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Abstract

While 'influence' and 'power' are important phenomena of political analysis, scholars hardly agree on the definitions and relations of the two terms. In European policy-making, likewise, we know the procedure and the role of the official European Union (EU) institutions, but the impact of other relevant actors, such as EU agencies, is known less. How should we conceptualize political influence distinct from political power (and vice versa) in policy-making? What are the relations of the two terms? How and to what extent do EU agencies – advisory bodies without decision-making competence – exert influence and power in the policy-making process? By merging two lines of studies, namely the literature on EU agencies as well as influence studies, this article examines these questions and provides a conceptual framework on political influence and power in the context of EU policy-making. It argues that the focus should lie on the input and output sides of policy-making, which is about deciding on one policy – output – out of a set of choice alternatives – input – that are offered to the formal decision-makers. EU agencies have several direct and indirect ways to influence, and in certain situations they even exercise informal power.

Keywords: EU agencies, influence, power, policy-making process

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1. Introduction

Policy competences of the European Union (EU) have gradually expanded from the first day of the European Coal and Steel Community. Especially since the EU has structurally shifted from ‘positive’ to a ‘regulatory’ state (Gilardi, 2008; Majone, 1996), the need for technical information and scientific expertise has increased in various policy areas. Now, specialized expertise from independent experts is required as a crucial resource of policy input in the European policy-making process. However, the European Commission (Commission), the formal policy initiator in the traditional areas of EU policy, is a relatively small bureaucracy which lacks expertise and resources to handle highly technical regulatory issues (e.g. Christiansen and Larsson, 2007). It means that it is inevitable for the Commission to seek external technical input for policy-making.

One of the important sources that the Commission officials can rely on outside its bureaucratic structure is the EU agencies which perform specific technical, scientific or managerial tasks within their field of expertise. Indeed, the establishment of EU agencies has facilitated the development of EU policies, and they have made a valuable contribution to the EU over the years (CEC, 2009). Particularly in risk-related sectors such as medicines, food safety, disease prevention, and so on, policy formulation and decision-making are influenced more and more by EU agencies (Versluis *et al.* 2011).

Since EU agencies have become a significant component of EU governance (e.g. Curtin, 2009; Geradin *et al.* 2005), scholarly attention for EU agencies has grown. Yet, most research focuses are given to their institutional design, independence, legitimacy, autonomy, and accountability (e.g. Busuioc, 2010; Groenleer, 2009; Lord, 2011; Thatcher, 2002; Wonka and Rittberger, 2010). Surprisingly, no systemic empirical evidence has been gathered so far on *de facto* influence of EU agencies on European policy-making. This is problematic not only because it does not provide the comprehensive picture that is necessary for understanding what actually happens during the policy-making process, but also because it does not help us understand the potential impact of the growing role and responsibilities of EU agencies both at the European and the national level.

Therefore, there is an urgent need to understand how and when EU agencies influence European policy-making. This is the topic of the PhD research project, upon which this paper

is based. In order to proceed with this research, the first vital step should be the conceptualization of EU agencies' influence in the policy-making process. How should we conceptualize political influence distinct from political power (and vice versa) in policy-making? What are the relations of the two terms? How and to what extent do EU agencies exert influence (and power) in the policy-making process? This paper tackles these questions, and aims to provide a conceptual framework that can help understand political influence and political power of EU agencies in the context of EU policy-making. This will be done by merging two lines of studies, namely the literature on EU agencies as well as influence studies, and by analyzing the literature of major scholars in these two fields. The policy-making process, in this paper, refers to the first two stages of the policy process, which are policy preparation and policy decision. The policy implementation stage is not considered here.

The structure of this paper is as follows. The next section introduces the main actors of this paper – EU agencies – and their role in the policy-making process. Then the concept of influence and power – political influence and political power to be more precise – are explained. After that, different types of EU agencies' influence are positioned based on their access points during the policy-making process, followed by the conclusion which suggests the steps for further research.

2. EU agencies¹ and their role in the policy-making process

There is no formal, universal definition of an agency, but it generally refers to a “variety of organizations that perform functions of a governmental nature, and which often exist outside the normal departmental framework of government” (Majone, 2000, p. 290). At the European level, EU agencies are decentralized and independent legal entities which operate outside Brussels. There are currently over 30 EU agencies in various policy areas, such as environment, railway, aviation, fisheries, chemicals, food safety, medicines and so on.

The literature on EU agencies describes the creation of EU agencies with three waves.² During the first wave in 1975, two EU agencies were established – the European Centre for

¹ According to the official EU website (http://europa.eu/agencies/index_en.htm, accessed on 15 May 2013), EU agencies are categorized in three groups – decentralized agencies, EURATOM (European Atomic Energy Community Treaty) agencies, and executive agencies. In this paper, EU agencies refer to the ones grouped in the decentralized agencies because they are the ones mainly involved in European policy-making.

² For the full list of EU agencies, see http://europa.eu/agencies/index_en.htm.

the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) and the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (EUROFOUND). More than a decade later, the second wave was emerged from 1990 to 1999 with ten new EU agencies³. Agencification is now in the third wave which began in the beginning of the 2000s. Some of the newest additions are, for example, the European Banking Authority which came into being in January 2011, the Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators which started working in March 2011, and the European Asylum Support Office which is at the planning stage now. It is unknown how many European agencies will be established more in the future because the “EU’s appetite for creating new agencies seems limitless” (Geradin and Petit, 2004, p.4).

Generally speaking, most of the EU agencies perform one of the following functions as their primary task: information-gathering (or fact finding); standard setting by issuing opinions or recommendations to the EU institutions; or monitoring and enforcing European legislations in member states of the EU. Agencies with the information-gathering task collect and analyze objective, reliable and comparable data on a specific policy area. They formulate advice based on this information, and disseminate it to the EU institutions and the general public. In terms of the standard setting function, Eberlein and Grande (2005) explain that the role corresponds fully with the concentration of European regulation in particular policy areas such as labor, health and consumer protection. They argue that these agencies set not just low standards at the level of a lowest common denominator; but indeed, very high regulatory levels are often reached (Eberlein and Grande, 2005).

As for the implementation function, many EU agencies perform this role. The main reason for this is that EU law should be applied in all 27 member states and the Commission as the EU’s administrator does not have the capacity to handle this task. In the same vein, Groenleer *et al.* (2010, p.1226) argue that “officially, independent regulatory agencies such as the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) and the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) were created because member states do not always comply with their obligations with regard to implementation of EU law, and the European Commission is not in the position to ensure the efficient and flexible implementation itself”.

The responsibilities of EU agencies are not limited to one of the primary tasks listed above. In all cases, EU agencies have diverse tasks, involving both the primary (e.g. implementation

³ Among them, two agencies do not exist anymore: the European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia has been integrated into the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in 2007; and the European Agency for Reconstruction (EAR) was closed in 2008.

role) and the secondary (e.g. information-gathering role) tasks. When considering both the primary and secondary functions of EU agencies, some common features emerge. Firstly, most of the EU agencies do not have decision-making power which can produce legally binding decisions on third parties. There are only a few exceptions, such as the Community Plant Variety Office (CPVO) and the Office for Harmonisation in the Internal Market (OHIM). Secondly, EU agencies support European policy-making by collecting, analyzing and disseminating technical information as either the primary or the secondary task. For example, while the primary task of the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) is to set a standard of chemical safety by managing the registration, evaluation, authorization and restriction processes for chemical substances, it also gathers information on chemicals and their safe use and makes them publically accessible.

These two features are important for the aim of this paper because it reveals the fact that EU agencies' expertise and technical information that are provided to the Commission as policy input are not legally binding. As a consequence, the Commission is not obliged to take agencies' advice into consideration even though it receives opinions from EU agencies at the stage of policy formulation. This fact will serve as a crucial base that distinguishes political influence from political power, which will be explained below. The limited competence of EU agencies leads to an assumption that on the surface it seems difficult for EU agencies to exert influence (let alone power) in the policy-making process. This assumption will be revisited in the section 4.

3. Concepts of influence and power

Almost all scholars in political science would agree that 'influence' and 'power' are important phenomena of political analyses, but there is hardly any consensus on the definition and on the relations of the two terms. Although there have been some attempts by scholars to define the concepts of influence and power, there is a lack of clarity of the meaning of influence distinct from the one of power – and vice versa – which can be generally accepted and adopted in political science as well as in ordinary language in a broader context. One reason why there lacks the clarity of these concepts is that we all understand what they mean when we hear or talk about them. These words are commonly used to describe situations of our everyday interaction with other persons or groups in a society, and particularly in a situation that involves political behavior. Thus, Dahl and Stinebrickner (2003, p.12) mention that “most

theorists seem to have assumed, as did Aristotle, that they needed no great elaboration (on defining these terms), presumably because their meaning would be understood by people of common sense”.

In the absence of the clear meanings of influence and power, what is immediately noticeable is that these two terms are closely related and used as synonyms to each other. Some authors’ definition of power can be interpreted as the one of influence by other authors and similarly, some authors use the term influence to describe a certain phenomenon which is also described as power by other authors. Therefore, it is important to review the literature on both power and influence – and some authors use these terms interchangeably as mentioned earlier (see e.g. Wallace, 2005) – if one tries to understand the concept of one of them. Since there is a higher volume of literature describing power rather than the ones specifically mentioning influence, this section will elaborate on the concept of power first and present what makes influence distinct from power. Then the specific concepts of the two terms in the context of the policy-making process in the EU, which is the focus of this research, are suggested.

3.1. Power

The concept of power is understood in many different ways from discipline to discipline. In political science, power should be considered in a relationship between and among various actors that are involved in a political procedure and/or process (e.g. Dahl, 1957; Lasswell and Kaplan, 1950; Simon, 1953). Robert Dahl is one of the most important scholars in the studies of influence and power in a policy process, and he clearly illustrates the relational aspect of power. He suggests that “A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do” (Dahl, 1957, p.202). The actors can be individuals, groups or organizations, and what he emphasizes is that different preferences of actors should be looked at in order to study power. Those who can realize their own preferences rather than preferences of others can be considered as power-holders.

Based on the relational aspect of power, one approach to systematically organize the concept further is to classify conceptions between the one emphasizing ‘power over’ and the other emphasizing ‘power to’. With regard to the ‘power over’ view, one of the most-cited scholars is Max Weber. To him, power is the “probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests” (Weber, [1922]1978, p.53). In a relation between actors, power here implies that power-holders have the ability with which they ‘can’ impose their will on

the power subjects and that the power subjects do something against their own wishes or interests. This reveals the coercive characteristics of power.

The ‘power to’ view emphasizes the ability of power-holders to satisfy their wants and desires or to achieve goals in line with preferences of power-holders. The core concept, in other words, is the ‘competence’ or ‘capacity’ of the power holder(s) to bring about consequences. Hobbes’s idea of power was built in this line that the power of a man is “his present means to obtain some future apparent good” (Hobbes, [1651]1991). Likely, the power of political actors can be seen through the “production of intended effects” (Russell, 1938, p.25). If one thinks about the policy-making process, there are various actors who try to shape certain policy in a way that is closest to their preference. Not everyone is able to achieve what they want when there are conflicts among actors’ preferences, but those who realize intended results are the power-holders as Dahl explains.

This leads to another approach to systematically organize the concept: three faces of power. The realization of preferences in the process of decision-making or policy-making, which is just explained above on the basis of Dahl’s definition, is the ‘first face’. The ‘second face’ is developed by Bachrach and Barats (1962, p.948), who argue that “power is also exercised when A devotes his energies to creating or reinforcing social and political values and institutional practices that limit the scope of the political process to public consideration of only those issues which are comparatively innocuous to A”. This is what they call ‘nondecision-making’ that suppresses conflicts and intentionally prevents certain issues from even being discussed in the political process. The ‘third face’ of power is proposed by Lukes (1974). He argues that nondecision-making is still considered in the decision-making process and thus, the ‘second face’ omits a situation of a latent conflict that prevails even before agenda-setting, which assumes that “there would be a conflict of wants or preferences between those exercising power and those subject to it” (Lukes, 1974, p.25).

3.2 Influence

The most usual way to define influence is based on its relationship to power, and many authors elaborate their ideas on this by analyzing whether or not one concept is subordinate to the other. According to this approach, three relational categories of influence and power can be identified⁴: (a) influence as the general concept and power as a special case of influence; (b)

⁴ For comprehensive elaboration and discussion on these three relations, see Zimmerling (2005).

power as the general concept and influence as a special case of power; and (c) influence and power as the mutually exclusive concepts.

The first category (a) considers power as a subordinated concept that belongs to the broad meaning of influence. Lasswell and Kaplan (1950) are the most cited scholars in this view, and they argue that what makes power a special case of influence is the threat of sanctions. They define power as “participation in the making of decision: G has power over H with respect to the values K if G participates in the making of decisions affecting the K-policies of H” (Lasswell and Kaplan, 1950, p. 75). In this definition, ‘decision’ refers to “a policy involving severe sanctions (deprivations)” (Lasswell & Kaplan, 1950, p.74). Dahl (1963, p.50) continues with this line of argument, and defines power as “influence based on the applicability of severe sanctions”. Therefore, power is exercised “when compliance is attained by creating the prospect of severe sanctions for noncompliance” (Dahl & Steinbrickner 2003, p. 38).

In order for influence to be transformed into power, in this view, the threat of sanctions should be accompanied, and sanctions should be important enough to the ones being affected to make them do what power-holders want⁵. However, it does not necessarily mean that power is considered to be exercised only when sanctions are actually imposed. Without any opposition on the part of the power subject – thus compliance is achieved without imposing sanctions because exercise of power is accepted – power is also conceivable (Van Doorn, 1962, cited in Wrong, 1995). Moreover, it does not mean that those with influence are always required to possess legal competence to impose sanctions in order to exercise power. Deprivation in a broad sense includes risks of losing credibility, reputation or being criticized as a form of invisible means of influence. It implies that actor A may be able to exert influence on actor B without directly doing something, and perhaps only the presence of actor A is enough for actor B to be influenced. This is called unintended, anticipated, implicit or indirect influence (see e.g. Wrong, 1995). Thus, those without legal competence to impose sanction may be able to exercise power if, for example, they can generate criticism about noncompliance and in this way, logically convince them to comply.

The second category (b) – influence as a special case of power – considers power in terms of “a kind of ability to exert purposefully a causal influence on social results or other people. In

⁵ However, there are scholars who question whether power comprises only those cases where sanctions are included. For example, Parsons (1963a, p.237) rejects this view of power and states “securing compliance with a wish [...] simply by threat of superior force is not an exercise of power”.

short, power is the ability to influence social outcomes according to one's wants" (Kliemt, 1981, p.52). Similarly, Hoogerwerf (1972) sees power as potential influence, and defines power as the possibility to influence the behavior of others in accordance with the actor's own purposes (cited in Mokken and Stokman, 1989). To him influence occurs wherever behavior leads to change in behavior. Moreover, Cartwright (1969, p.125) provides a clear explanation of power and influence in this view by stating that "when an agent, O, performs an act resulting in some change in another agent, P, we say that O influences P. If O has the capability of influencing P, we say that O has power over P". Since influence is subordinate to power, influence cannot exist without power. To put it differently, all actors who are influential must also be powerful although it is possible that some powerful actors do not have influence. However, the main criticism of this view arises from this point. In a situation where there is influence without exercising power, this view is not applicable.

Mokken and Stokman (1989) support the third category (c) – mutually exclusive concepts – by arguing that it is possible that power and influence exist independent of each other. When explaining this point, they use an example that man has power over wild animals by restricting their territory, but without influencing animals' freedom to move around within the territory. Their definitions of power and influence are: "Power is the capacity of actors (persons, groups or institutions) to fix or to change (completely or partly) a set of action or choice alternatives for other actors; and influence is the capacity of actors to determine partly the actions or choices of other actors within the set of action or choice alternatives available to those actors" (Mokken & Stokman 1989, p.46).

Similarly, Parsons (1963b) and Zimmerling (2005) support that political influence is analytically independent of power although they are closely interconnected, and influence and power should be understood as two disjoint categories rather than sub- and superordinations. According to Zimmerling (2005), power is linked to power subject's action while influence affects belief. Thus, she defines power as the "ability to *get desired outcomes* by making others *do* what one wants" and influence as the "ability to affect others' *beliefs*, that is, their knowledge or opinions either about what *is* or about what *ought* to be the case, about what is (empirically) true or false or what is (normatively) right or wrong, good or bad, desirable or undesirable" (Zimmerling, 2005, p.141, italics in original). However, this view is hard to adopt especially in a political decision-making process because deciding on one policy requires at least a majority of decision-makers agreeing on the policy under discussion, which

implies that a certain number of decision-makers need (to be convinced) to share beliefs. In this respect, influence and power cannot be mutually exclusive.

3.3 Definitions in this research

In terms of power in its relational aspect, this research focuses on the ‘power to’ perspective because what is interesting to find out is about how and to what extent EU agencies without decision-making competence interact with other actors in the policy process *to shape and to produce policies* in line with agencies’ preferences. Moreover, the ‘first face’ of power is mainly concerned because this research looks at both policy preparation and policy decision stages, and it means that EU agencies play a role in the process of making decisions rather than nondecision-making. The concept of power is taken as a special case of influence, which is the first one of the relational categories between power and influence. In this sense, those who exert influence can transform influence into power if they have the capacity to utilize either sanctions or deprivation. By considering deprivation, the analysis looks at both direct (visible) and indirect (anticipated) influence.

On the basis of these concepts, the definitions of political power and political influence are developed by modifying Mokken and Stokman’s (1989) distinction between the ability to fix or change a set of action or choice alternatives and the ability to determine something from the set of action or choice alternatives that are provided. They are understood as follows:

- Political influence is the ability to fix or change (partly or completely) a set of action or choice alternatives available for collectively binding decisions by formal power holders; and
- Political power is the competence (conferred by a system of normative and legal rules) to determine (partly or completely) the choice for a specific decision out of the given set of action or choice alternatives with a collectively binding effect

In other words, those who exercise political influence provide a ‘menu’ of political choices and those who choose one from the menu as a collectively binding decision are power-holders. These concepts imply that the focus should lie on the input and output sides of a collective process of policy-making, which is about deciding on one policy – output – out of a set of choice alternatives – input – that are offered to the formal decision-makers. In order to compose a set of choice alternative, those responsible for it should be able to collect, aggregate/ synthesize, and disseminate information and advice in a manner that is relevant

and understandable for the political authorities. This is the role of many EU agencies as they gather, identify and construct technical information and expertise in their specific policy area, and provide them directly or indirectly to the Commission as well as other EU institutions in the policy-making process. Next section elaborates more on the access points of EU agencies to exert influence.

4. Access points and types for the influence of EU agencies

As explained in the section 2 above, most of the EU agencies play a role as an advisor – either as the primary or the secondary task – to the Commission and other EU institutions by providing technical information and expertise in a form of an opinion or a recommendation. EU agencies interact with different actors in the policy-making process depending on the category of European legislations, which is largely divided into ordinary legislations and implementing measures.

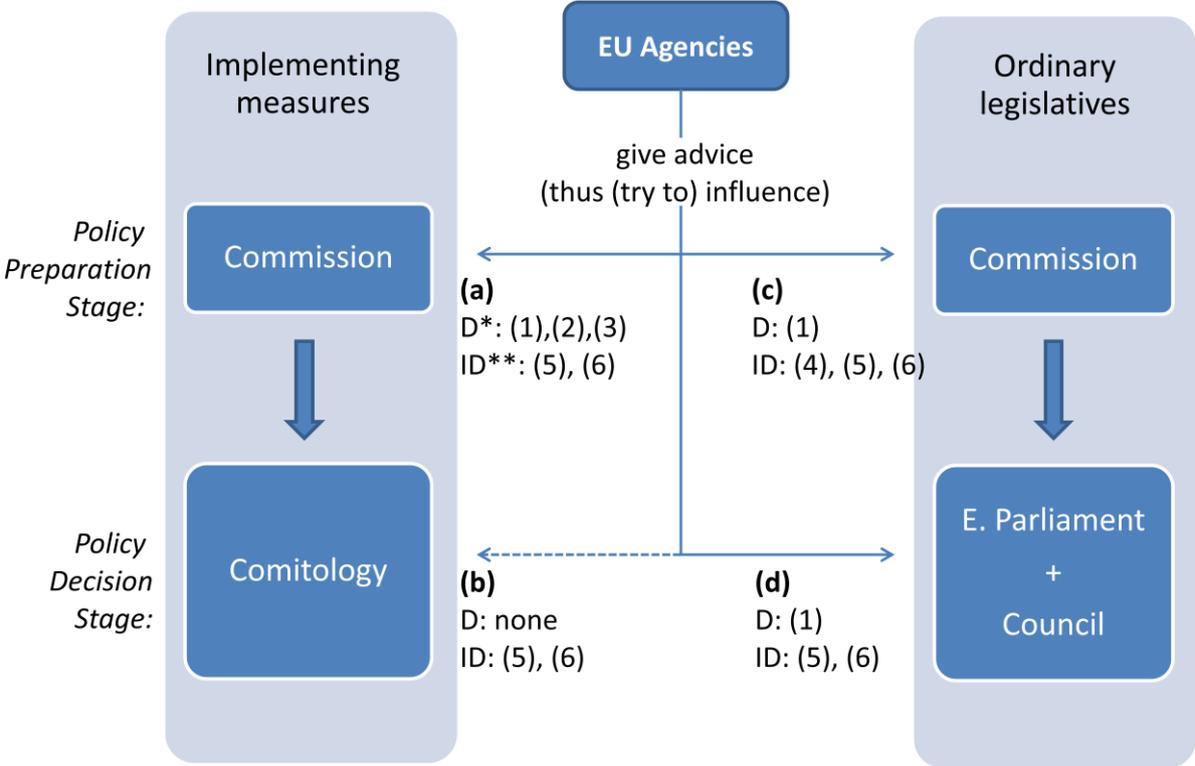
[Table 1] Types of influence of EU agencies in the policy-making process

EU Agencies’ Influence in the Policy-Making Process	<i>Direct Influence</i>	(1) By request: when the EU institutions request EU agencies to provide their opinions
		(2) As procedure: when the EU institutions must consult EU agencies as part of the policy-making procedure
		(3) By own initiatives: when EU agencies issue opinions as their own initiatives
	<i>Indirect Influence</i>	(4) By generating ideas: when the EU institutions pick up the ideas and issues that are discussed elsewhere by EU agencies and develop into a policy
		(5) By networking: when EU agencies network with the EU institutions in order to informally acquire or disseminate relevant information
		(6) By being aware of agencies: when the EU institutions are aware of the presence of EU agencies and of their scientific expertise

Source: Author’s compilation

As Table 1 explains, EU agencies have various ways to exert direct and/or indirect influence. While direct influence is based on the formal mandates of EU agencies that are described in the founding regulation of each agency, indirect influence is based on unintended (but positive) effects that EU agencies bring as well as on networking activities that EU agencies perform that are not specified in their founding regulation. Each type of influence is explained based on the access points in the policy-making process and the actors that EU agencies interact with. They are illustrated in Figure 1 below.

[Figure 1] EU agencies’ different access points and types of influence



*D: Direct influence

**ID: Indirect influence

Source: Author’s compilation

At the policy preparation stage of implementing measures (a), there are three direct ways in which EU agencies may exert influence: first, when the Commission considers it appropriate or necessary, it may *request* agencies to submit their opinions; second, as part of the policy-

making *procedure*, some agencies are formally required to provide their opinions before the Commission formulates the policy drafts – in other words, the Commission must consult these agencies; and last, EU agencies may submit their *own initiative* opinions. During the decision-making stage of implementing measures (b), EU agencies are not involved since they have no decision-making competences. Although EU agencies formally have no role – thus no direct influence – they may informally approach comitology members through *networking* activities and try to convince them in line with agencies’ preferences. Moreover, the decision-makers are *aware* of the presence of EU agencies and may feel burden to deviate from the opinions of experts in EU agencies who are in many cases seconded from national competent authorities. In these cases, EU agencies possibly exert anticipated and/or indirect influence. These two ways of indirect influence can be applied at both policy formulation and policy decision stages in the two categories of EU legislations.

In the policy preparation stage of ordinary legislatives (c), no EU agency is formally responsible to provide information as part of the procedure and to submit its own initiatives to the Commission. The only direct way for EU agencies to exert influence is when they are *requested* by the Commission. As for the indirect influence at this stage, besides *networking* and the EU institutions being *aware* of EU agencies, the Commission may pick up *policy ideas* discussed by EU agencies during the procedure for implementing measures and draw a new policy proposal of a directive or regulation. Thus, all three ways of indirect influence are applicable here. In the policy decision stage (d), the European Parliament and/or the Council of Ministers may also *request* EU agencies to provide expertise to them. This is the only direct way: yet indirectly, there may be two ways which are *networking* activities by EU agencies and the EU institutions’ *awareness* on agencies and their expertise.

Overall, agencies have direct and indirect ways to provide their expertise as policy input when the Commission develops policy proposals, which should eventually be agreed and adopted by the decision-making bodies. At the policy preparation stage, EU agencies are the wielders of influence if their policy input is included in and shapes the contents of a policy proposal, and the Commission holds the formal power to decide the contents of a policy proposal among many alternatives. At the policy decision stage, by mostly utilizing informal and indirect means, agencies exercise influence if their policy input is included in and shapes the contents of a policy output. The formal power to decide the final policy output lies with the Parliament and the Council (for ordinary legislatives) or comitology (for implementing measures). However, it is important to note that if both policy proposal and policy output are

shaped and decided mainly based on and in line with EU agencies' input, agencies may be said to exercise *informal power*. This power is informal because it is not legally given competence of EU agencies.

[Table 2] Influence and power in the policy-making process

	Policy preparation stage	Policy decision stage
Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Influence:</i> When an agency's policy input is included in and shapes the contents of a policy proposal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Influence:</i> When an agency's policy input is included in and shapes the contents of a policy output <i>(possible) Informal power:</i> When both the policy proposal and the final policy output are mainly based on and in line with the agency's input
European Commission or Decision-making bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Power:</i> When the Commission decides on a policy proposal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Power:</i> When the decision-making bodies decide on a final policy output

Source: Author's compilation

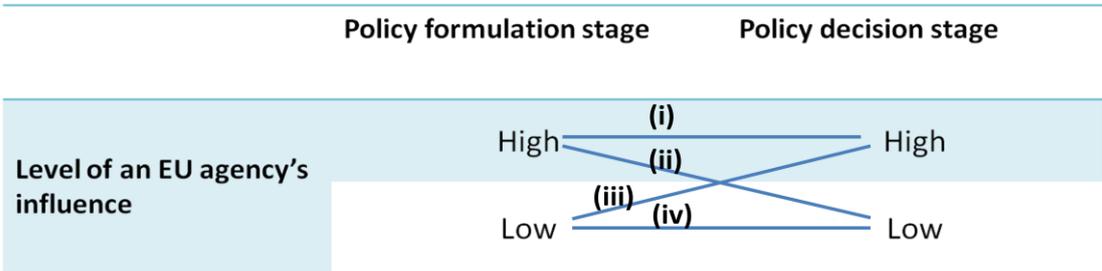
By dichotomously measuring the level of EU agencies' influence between high and low at each stage of policy-making⁶, one can draw four possible outcome scenarios of EU agencies' influence (see Figure 2). If an EU agency's influence is high at both stages of policy-making (i), it means that both the policy proposal and the policy output are mainly based on and in line with the agency's input, and this is the situation for the exercise of informal power by the agency. If an EU agency exercises high influence at the policy formulation stage but low influence at the policy decision stage (ii), it means that the Commission agrees on the recommendations by the agency but the decision-making bodies adopt a different policy. This may occur when the EU agency fails to convince the decision-makers or when the issue under

⁶ Although the focus of the PhD research is not on the comparison of each agency's level of influence – rather, the aim is to find the causal mechanisms and pathways of EU agencies' influence – it is important to clearly operationalize how to measure high or low influence because the measurement also affects the choice of methods for this research. However, since this paper aims to present conceptualization of influence and power, operationalization is not explained here.

consideration is so salient or controversial that the member states of the EU are divided with conflicting interests and preferences.

If the level of EU agency’s influence is low at the policy formulation stage and high at the policy decision stage (iii), it implies that the decision-making bodies deviate from the policy proposal that does not share the view of the agency’s input. This may occur when the decision-making bodies amend the policy proposal because they are convinced by the agency through the exercise of agency’s indirect influence or purely based on luck that other external events or actors – e.g. unexpected disease outbreaks or lobbyists – affect decision-making and the situation becomes favorable to the preferences of the agency. If an EU agency’s influence is low at both stages (iv), it means that the agency makes no impact on policy-making. It may occur when the EU institutions ignore the work of the agency or when the agency fails to utilize both direct and indirect influence.

[Figure 2] Four possible scenarios of EU agencies’ influence in policy-making



Source: Author’s compilation

5. Conclusion

In order to understand the influence of EU agencies in the European policy-making process as a PhD project, this paper presents the first step of the research which is about conceptualizing the central concepts of influence and power. While influence is understood as the ability to fix or change a set of choice alternatives, power is considered as the ability to determine a decision out of the various alternatives. In addition, power as a special case of influence accompanies the threat of sanctions or deprivation. It is not the aim of this paper to claim that the conceptual choice suggested here should be accepted in all analyses of political systems or processes. Rather, this conceptual choice is most suitable in the context of the technocratic and regulatory mode of EU governance and the role of EU agencies herein.

During the European policy-making process EU agencies have different access points, and may utilize direct influence and/or indirect influence. When only looking at the legal procedures and formal competences of the actors described above, it seems that a power relation in this policy-making process is *unilateral* in which one party, which is the Commission in the policy formulation stage and the decision-making bodies in the policy decision stage, exercises power to shape and determine policies (see Goldhamer and Shils, 1939)⁷. However, relying exclusively on this perspective would result in a merely partial understanding because it overlooks the actual behavior of actors in the policy process, such as networking, bargaining or joint decision-making. Alternatively, one could expect that the power relation in practice might be bilateral because both EU agencies and the EU institutions exercise power over each other to make a decision or multilateral because external actors might also exert influence.

As a next step, therefore, the conceptual part driven by the literature review should be supplemented by empirical research which focuses more on actual behavior and practices of EU agencies and the EU institutions. By doing so, it would be possible to verify whether the direct and indirect influence illustrated in Figure 1 occurs in practice and if so, which patterns of influence mechanisms emerge and dominate the policy process in the EU.

⁷ The unilateral power relation is also described as ‘integral power’, in which “decision-making and initiatives to action are centralized and monopolized by one party” (Wrong, 1995, p.11)

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