

Staying in the Loop - The Commission's role in first reading agreements

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The European Policy Institutes Network (EPIN) just published a new EPIN Working Paper No. 25 Staying in the Loop - The Commission's role in first reading agreements by Niels Fuglsang and Kim B. Olsen from the University of Copenhagen.

The codecision procedure has changed radically since its inception in 1992. At first characterised by inter-institutional mistrust, the codecision procedure today is used to settle quick political agreements informally between the Parliament and the Council. This new negotiation culture can be seen in relation to the growing number of informal first reading agreements between the Parliament and the Council, at the expense of the more formalised and timeconsuming second and third reading agreements. While this change entails closer cooperation between the Parliament and the Council, it presents serious challenges for the Commission, which has some difficulty acting in this more informal and more political environment.

This paper argues that the Commission's problems are due to its internal organisation being split in two – there is: 1) a highly political 'top' level including the Commissioners, their cabinets and the Secretariat General, and 2) a less political 'bottom' level with more technically-minded civil servants. The Commission now faces a major problem when sending these civil servants to negotiate informally with the politicians in the Parliament: they simply don't speak the language of politics and as a result the Commission runs the risk of being marginalised within the codecision procedure.

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