

Opening Editorial

Evaluation may seem a technical topic of interest to only a small academic research community, while exercised by a larger, practitioners' community of consultancies specialising in financial auditing or in project and programme evaluations. However, as evaluation has risen centre-stage on the European Commission's Smart Regulation agenda, it has become a key topic of regulatory policy, raising important governance and institutional questions beyond the field of expenditure programmes.

In November 2013, the European Commission opened a consultation process on a draft proposal for new guidelines on *ex post* evaluation. Then, some months later, it opened a consultation process on its new draft guidelines for the *ex ante* system of integrated impact assessments. The nearly parallel presentation of these two consultation documents is no accident. Both are inspired by the same intention to create a stronger link between *ex post* and *ex ante* evaluation in European governance, in an attempt to create an "evaluation culture" that applies to both expenditure and regulatory policy. At the time of writing this editorial, the final versions of the new guidelines are yet to be published. The delay can be explained by the new European Commission having taken office in November 2014. Despite this delay, there is no doubt that the Juncker Commission will commit to a cyclical understanding of policy evaluation, which has at its core a strengthened link between *ex ante* and *ex post* evaluation. Indeed, evaluation appeared at the top of the new Commission's political agenda when the Commission presented its Work Plan for 2015, in which evaluation is considered a central tool to make the European Union (EU) "big on big things, and small on small things".

It is in this context that the Centre for European Law and Governance at Cardiff University organised a workshop on policy evaluation in June 2014. The aim of the workshop was to address the challenges of the EU's new approach to policy evaluation, which are manifold: how can *ex post* evaluation feed into *ex ante* assessment of new action? What is the most appropriate methodology for evaluation when extended to regulatory policy? What are the main objectives of evaluation (accountability? policy learning?)? Who are the key actors and what are the key interests at stake? In order to address these questions the workshop brought together scholars from what are otherwise two rather distinct research communities, namely those dealing with (*ex post*) evaluation (often focusing on expenditure programmes) and those dealing with *ex ante* impact assessments (mostly focusing on regulatory action).

The articles in this special issue are the final versions of papers originally presented at this workshop. The *EJRR* appeared the most appropriate journal in which to present our findings. As evaluation has been placed higher on the political agenda it merits the attention of all those concerned with EU governance and regulation. Moreover, while much of the literature on (*ex post*) evaluation to date has focused on questions of methodology (particularly for the assessment of expenditure programmes) our Spe-

cial Issue focuses on the institutional challenges of a new approach to evaluation that not only intends to link *ex ante* and *ex post* assessment, but also extends the evaluation debate to regulatory intervention.

The Special Issue is structured in the following way. The introductory article by Stijn Smismans provides conceptual clarification on “evaluation” and related concepts, while building a bridge between the different research communities which have dealt with *ex ante* and *ex post* evaluation of regulatory and expenditure policy. It then goes on to analyse the challenges of the Commission’s new approach to evaluation by identifying fits and misfits between *ex ante* and *ex post* evaluation in the light of four key objectives of evaluation.

Following the introduction, Claire Dunlop and Claudio Radaelli critically assess the existing state of affairs in research on the EU’s key instrument of *ex ante* evaluation, namely the system of integrated impact assessments, shedding new light on research questions about the control of bureaucracy, the role of IA in decision-making, economics and policy learning, and the narrative dimension of appraisal. In the subsequent article, Steven Højlund studies the history of *ex post* evaluation in the EU, analysing changes in relation to different objectives of learning and accountability.

The two following articles provide detailed case studies of evaluation in two policy areas. While the case studies are both from traditional expenditure policies (for which *ex post* evaluation is more developed than for regulatory policies) they focus on the use of particular regulatory techniques within these expenditure policies. Lut Mergaert and Rachel Minto analyse evaluation with respect to gender mainstreaming in EU Research policy, while Emanuela Bozzini and Jo Hunt study the evaluation of the principle of cross-compliance in the Common Agricultural Policy. Both articles criticise the positivist understanding that sees evaluation as part of a linear model of policy-making, providing analytical data which would feed back into new initiatives in a straightforward way. The reality is far messier, with multiple actors at play, the redefinition of objectives and benchmarks throughout the process, and multiple evaluations taking place with overlapping and not corresponding time frames.

In the following article, Lorna Schrefler, Giacomo Luchetta and Felice Simonelli analyse a new *ex post* evaluation tool used by the European Commission, namely the cumulative cost assessment (CCA). Rather than assessing individual regulatory interventions separately, the CCA provides an overall assessment of a regulatory framework affecting a particular sector of industry, although its use has clear limitations as it only assesses the costs and not the benefits of the regulatory framework.

The following two articles broaden the debate by focusing on two topics that are increasingly closely related to the topic of evaluation, namely audit and enforcement. Focusing on the European Court of Auditors, Paul Stephenson analyses how the distinction between audit and evaluation gets blurred when auditing focuses increasingly on performance (going beyond its more traditional focus on compliance and finan-

cial auditing). Melanie Smith looks at the overlapping territory between evaluation and enforcement, analysing the potential use of infringement data in the EU's (intended) systematic extension of evaluation to regulatory action. At the same time, she argues that evaluation can contribute to a more accountable enforcement procedure.

The last article of this Special Issue further broadens our view on the EU's new approach to evaluation by providing a comparative perspective beyond the EU. Anne Meuwese, Michiel Scheltema and Lynn van der Velden analyse the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's new Framework for Regulatory Policy Evaluation, which functions both as an evaluation framework for regulatory policy in general (including the entire spectrum of better regulation tools) and as a framework for evaluation practices more specifically.

I would like to finish this editorial by thanking the people who made it all possible; first of all, the contributing authors, the external reviewers, as well as the two Commission officials who participated in the workshop, giving very valuable feedback. I am particularly grateful for the enthusiasm of the many people at the Cardiff Centre for European Law and Governance who were eager to engage in a reflection on this topic. Thanks are due to the European Commission for financial support as the workshop was funded under the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence scheme, as well as to the European Research Council (ERC), since research on this Special Issue by Smismans, Minto and Bozzini was funded as part of an ERC consolidator project. Last but not least, I would like to thank Cliff Wirajendi and Alberto Alemanno for the smooth cooperation on this publication.

I wish you a pleasant reading.

Stijn Smismans