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The OECD

Peter Carroll and Aynsley Kellow

Introduction

The EU has been a full participant, but not a voting member, in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) since the latter’s establishment in 1961. It has also been a full member, with voting rights, in the OECD’s quasi-autonomous, Development Assistance Committee (DAC) since its beginning as the Development Assistance Group (DAG) in 1960. Moreover, European Commission representatives sit regularly on at least 205 OECD committees or subcommittees, each of which meets several times a year for several days, in common with approximately 40,000 public servants drawn from the OECD member countries.

All of the above suggests a rich and complex relationship that would excite scholarly attention. However, on investigation only two sources have been identified that directly address this relationship, an article by Hyams (1970) and a recent paper by Carroll and Kellow (2009). Unfortunately, the Hyams article provides, for the most part, only a description of the OECD, followed by some brief comparisons between the (then) EEC and the OECD. It does not examine the relationship between the two organisations. The Carroll and Kellow paper does look in some depth at the relationship between the two organisations, providing a brief overview of its characteristics. It suggests that they are, indeed, complex, and that their general tenor has progressed from that of competition, to that of cooperation, though by no means of complete harmony. That paper provides much of the material for this chapter.

As it would hardly be proper for the authors of the Carroll and Kellow paper to assess its quality and there is no other literature to review, this chapter has three broad aims: one, to provide an overview of the historical development of the EU–OECD relationship; two, to illustrate that varying and complex nature of that relationship by examining the areas of development and trade in agriculture; three, to suggest a future research agenda that will reveal the full richness of a complex, dynamic relationship and, hopefully, encourage more research into this fascinating relationship.

Origins and development: from competition to cooperation

It is important to realise that the relationships between the EU and the OECD have changed significantly over time, especially as regards the general tenor of the relationships. They began...
on a limited and somewhat competitive basis, slowly becoming more cooperative and wide ranging as the various member countries, the European Commission and the OECD Secretariat became familiar with each other’s roles and capacities.

The competitive nature of the original relationships sprang from the historical circumstances in which the two organisations were established, though this is not evident from the formal documentation establishing the relationship. The OECD Convention, in Article 12, required it to enter into relations with non-member states or organisations. It was to:

Address communications to non-member states or organisations; Establish and maintain relations with non-member states or organisations; Invite non-member governments or organisations to participate in activities of the Organisation.

(OECD, 1961)

In regard to what became the EU, the realisation of the need for a close relationship is made specific in the OECD Convention, Article 13 and Supplementary Protocol Number One, which provided for participation in the OECD’s activities by the European Communities. No other international organisation is singled out for specific mention, though provision was made for the European Free Trade Area’s (EFTA) participation in a 1960 OEEC Ministerial Resolution adopted by the OECD Council (Hahn, 1962). Similarly, Article 304 TEC states that ‘the Community shall establish close cooperation with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the details of which shall be determined by common accord.’

However, while the formal source of the relationship is evident in the OECD’s Convention and TEC 304, the origins of the relationship between the EU and the OECD go back to the days of their predecessors, in the case of the OECD, to the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC), and for the EU, to the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). It seems that, for the most part, relations between the secretariats of the two organisations were generally cordial, with the bulk of the interactions between them involving largely uncontentious, technical issues handled in one of the many OEEC committees. However, at the level of country representatives, the political level, in the OEEC’s Council, chaired by Britain, relationships were sometimes difficult (Griffiths, 1997). In large part these difficulties sprang from the growing differences between OEEC members as to the direction European integration should take in the future.

In very brief summary, the members split into two broad camps. The first consisted of those who favoured a greater degree of economic and political integration among the non-communist European states, based on a supranational authority, the future members of the EEC. The second consisted of those, particularly the British, who favoured the continuation of the OEEC, and who became members of EFTA. The USA and Canada, only associate members of the OEEC, looked on with concern at the growing split between its allies. It seemed that the OEEC was doomed, as its members failed to agree on a new role for the organisation in the 1956–59 period, with the ‘EFTA’ group attempting, unsuccessfully, to develop a European Free Trade Area within the structure of the OEEC (Maddison, 1994: 8; Griffiths, 1997: Ch. XVIII).

However, fearful of the political as well as economic consequences of a deepening split between the two groups at the height of the Cold War, it was agreed, finally, that a new body would be created, the OECD, with full USA and Canadian membership. Also, mindful of the considerable potential for unnecessary duplication and overlap in the activities of the three organisations, EEC, EFTA and the OECD, it was further agreed that both the EEC and EFTA would participate at the OECD, in the hope that this would minimise frictions between the three organisations and their overlapping memberships and interests (Griffiths, 1997).
This early tension was made more complex by the varying positions of OECD members in regard to both the OECD and its relationships with the EEC. The original EEC members of the OECD, for example, found it a useful forum in which they could:

- first, gain access to, and possible influence upon, the major Western powers (plus Japan after her accession in 1964), in one single forum that dealt with a wide range of issues, primarily economic;
- second, for the smaller EEC members, it enabled access, at least potentially, to the support of non-EEC states in order to influence the larger EEC members, notably France and Germany, to adopt more congenial positions on a range of issues, especially trade and agriculture.

The UK, along with most EFTA members and until it gained EEC membership, regarded the OECD as:

more necessary than ever as a means for continuing economic cooperation between the EEC, the other European countries and North America, of minimising the effects of discrimination and of providing some continuing economic basis for Atlantic cooperation.

(UK National Archives, 1962)

The tension in the relationship was exacerbated by uncertainties regarding the precise role and authority of the European Commission within the OECD, and, hence, its influence in the OECD Council and committees. The Commission had pleaded for full membership, but it was a plea that fell on deaf ears (Schricke, 1989). Instead it was provided with very full access to the OECD’s deliberations, more than that of mere observer status, enabling the Commission to participate and speak in any OECD meetings without being invited, with the sole exception of meetings dealing with the internal organisation of the OECD, including the key Budget Committee (Schmalenbach, 1999; Pocar, 2001).

There were several reasons for the OECD members’ rejection of the Commission’s proposal for full membership, notably:

- first, for all OECD members, a feeling that Commission membership in its own right would make their intergovernmental relationships even more complex and difficult to resolve;
- second, a concern that it might set a precedent in regard to full membership of the OECD for a range of other IGOs, including EFTA, the IMF, the World Bank and, though less likely, other UN organisations, a situation not desired by most OECD member states at a time of rising tensions with the Soviet Bloc;
- third, for at least some of the OECD’s EEC members, such as France and the UK, a very firm ‘generic’, view that national sovereignty should not be surrendered to a supranational authority (as made evident in 1965–66 during the ‘empty chair’ crisis, only resolved by the Luxembourg compromise), as well as a more instrumental desire not to provide a forum for the Commission’s views where they differed from their own;
- fourth, a feeling by non-European members of the OECD that the European states had a more than sufficient influence in the OECD, a feeling that grew over time as first Japan (1964), and then Australia, New Zealand, South Korea and Mexico became members, constituting the current ‘APEC’ grouping within the OECD.

The British views on the EEC and, in turn, regarding the OECD, changed, naturally, on its gaining membership of the EEC, as is evident in a lengthy letter to the prime minister from the
head of the UK delegation to the OECD in 1973, where it was noted in regard to possible reforms of the OECD that:

The one potential area of duplication is between the Community and the OECD. The latter deals on a wider basis with virtually all of the major policy issues which arise in the Community. There may be areas of work which could be undertaken more effectively by the Community than by OECD and where we would prefer to concentrate our efforts in Brussels. Once these are identified, we could with the support of our Community partners try to secure the necessary adjustments to OECD activities.

(UK National Archives, 1973)

This was, from the point of view of any member of both the EEC and the OECD, a sensible, organisational perspective, focused on the need to reduce unnecessary overlap and associated costs. It was a view of which the Secretariat was well aware and a view that did little to reduce the competitive tension of its early relationship with the Commission. Nevertheless, as the UK delegate went on to note, EEC policies had to be conducted in a broader, international, economic context and continuing dialogue with the OECD would be useful and, in regard to issues such as monetary, energy and environmental policy, could be wholly effective only with the cooperation of the USA and Japan (UK National Archives, 1973).

The relationship became less competitive and more cooperative as time progressed, for a variety of reasons. The first of these came with the departure of De Gaulle and a resulting moderation of the French desire to strictly constrain the role of the Commission. The second was the evident economic success of the EEC, combined with the eventual accession of the UK and several EFTA countries to membership in the 1970s, making it clear that the EEC’s future was now secure, with no likelihood that the OECD would achieve the once envisaged role of the management of a European Free Trade area. A third, external factor was the development of the G7/8 and, in particular, its increasing tendency to use the OECD and, often, the EEC (as with several other IGOs), as a means for implementing positions and policies agreed in its meetings. While the G7/8 and its members had no formal authority in regard to either the EEC or the OECD, its ‘requests’ and suggestions for cooperative work were of considerable influence and rarely, if ever, disregarded. The tendency commenced in 1979 with the G7’s decision to establish a high level group of representatives, including the European Commission, within the OECD to review its agreements on oil and energy consumption in the face of the 1979 OPEC oil price increases (G7, 1979). The G7/8’s practice of encouraging inter-IGO cooperation continues to this day, as demonstrated in the regular G7/8 Summit Communiqué.

However, the relations between the EU and the OECD are still subject to occasional stress. In 2004, for example, the EU was keen for invitations to take up OECD membership to be offered to all six of its then ten new members (as of 2004 – it was expanded to a proposal for membership for Cyprus and Malta in 2006–07), not already members of the OECD and seems to have anticipated a positive response to its proposal (Directorate-General for Trade, 2004). Somewhat to its surprise the proposal met with considerable resistance from the non-European members, concerned to avoid an even greater preponderance of EU members in the OECD. Also, Turkey opposed an invitation to Cyprus, based on its continuing disagreements with the latter over Turkish occupation of North Cyprus. In addition, non-European OECD Council members were reported as regarding most of the new EU members as being too small in terms of economic significance to warrant membership (Beatty, 2007). It took two years of negotiation for a compromise to be reached, with only two new EU members, Estonia and Slovenia, being invited to consider accession to the OECD (Directorate-General for Trade, 2005).
Relationships and inter-organisational complexity

In this section the aim is to provide an outline of the extent and complexity of the EU–OECD relationship by focusing on the area where the bulk of the interactions that constitute the relationship take place, the OECD’s committee system. In contrast, for example, to the IMF or the World Bank, the representatives of the member states of the OECD and the representatives of the Commission are deeply engaged with its work, largely by virtue of the central role they play as members of the two hundred plus OECD committees, sub-committees and working groups. An indication of the sheer scale of this work can be seen in the fact that over 40,000 public servants attend OECD committee meetings every year.

The committees and the working groups they spawn are the primary focus of the organisation’s work, where, subject to the overall agreement of Council, rolling, two year work programs are planned and executed, drawing upon the extensive support of the relevant OECD directorates and, in turn, the members of global networks of actors. The latter are predominantly public servants, but with significant numbers of influential, non-governmental persons and organisations. As Slaughter notes, the OECD can be conceived of as an important network of networks, forming an essential part of the systems of global governance (Slaughter, 2004).

The EU–OECD interactions in the area of trade, for example, take place within the context of the OECD’s Trade Committee and, in relation to agriculture, the Agriculture Committee. The former has five major subsidiary bodies, the: Working Party of the Trade Committee; Joint Working Party on Agriculture and Trade; Working Party on Export Credits and Export Guarantees; Joint Working Party on Trade and the Environment; and the Global Forum on Trade. The Agriculture Committee has ten subsidiary bodies, with its Working Party on Agricultural Policies and Markets and the Joint Working Party on Agriculture and Trade being of particular importance in relation to trade in agriculture. The Commission has representatives on both the parent committees and all fifteen subsidiary bodies, is currently the vice-chair of the Trade Committee and co-chairs the Trade and the Environment committee with New Zealand. In addition, a number of special committees have been established by OECD members in relation to trade, especially when difficult and contentious issues are involved. The Council Working Party on Shipbuilding, for example, reports directly to OECD Council, as does the Steel Committee (with a vice-chair from the Commission).

Where Commission representatives chair, co-chair or serve on the coordinating bureau of a committee, they also interact on a frequent basis with supporting staff from several OECD directorates, but primarily with those in the Trade and Agriculture Directorate (TAD). In turn, both committee members and directorate staff are linked into a range of regional and global networks concerned with trade and agriculture, networks consisting of other IGOs (e.g. the WTO, WIPO, FAO and WHO), a varying number of public servants working within national departments responsible for trade and for agriculture (usually including those who sit on the Trade and Agriculture committees), various interest groups (including those formally represented on the OECD’s own Business and Industry Advisory Committee and Trade Union Advisory Committee, as well as major regional groups), and leading experts, most of which come together on a regular basis in either or both of the Global Forum on Agriculture and the Global Forum on Trade, organised by the OECD.

The interactions take place within a regular cycle of OECD activities, focused, for the most part, on the development of required documents and reports for the annual series of committee meetings. The documents are developed on a largely consultative and iterative basis, taking into consideration the views of a varying number of actors within the specific network or networks concerned. The authors are most frequently one or more members of the OECD directorate.
staff, sometimes with the assistance of one or more external consultants, working in close cooperation with the committee’s bureau members. On occasion they may be developed by staff in a department of a national administration, or by an ad hoc team drawn from one or more IGOs, including the EU (see, for example the considerable number of joint Eurostat–OECD projects, OECD, 2008).

Although the working processes of the committees and directorates varies somewhat, one of their major characteristics is the well-established use of various types of peer evaluation systems, a particular type of interaction once labelled by the OEEC as that of ‘confrontation’ (for a useful comparison of the use of peer review by the OECD and the EU, the latter having ‘borrowed’, the technique from the OECD, see Groenendijk, 2009). Each review focuses on an examination of one member’s (including, on gradually increasing basis, the EU), policy performance or practices by other members, including economic, environmental, educational, financial and governance policies. The Commission representatives are in a unique and somewhat unenviable situation in relation to OECD peer reviews of EU policies and practices for at least two reasons. One, unlike the individual member countries, several of those present and, sometimes, actually conducting the review, are often also its political masters, individual country members of the EU. Two, within the supranational context of the EU, the Commission has only limited and distinctly varying levels of authority in regard to the policies of its members. Hence, its capacity to implement any of the recommendations for change contained in the OECD’s peer review reports is, in turn, limited. In this sense Commission quasi-membership of the OECD is a two-edged sword. On the one hand it can be used as a forum in which the Commission can urge the development of policies that would be difficult to promote successfully within the differing political circumstances of the EU policies that, if developed and agreed by the OECD Council, can then be implemented within the EU. On the other hand EU member states of the OECD can use it as a forum to achieve reviews of the Commission’s performance that might be less than flattering. The OECD’s Development Assistance Committee, for example, conducted a series of reviews of the EU’s policy, organisation and processes in relation to development cooperation in the 1990s that led to major criticisms of its performance and recommendations for reform (see, for example, OECD, 1998, 2002, 2007).

**Issues and influence in the relationship: trade, environment and development**

The aim of this section is to briefly illustrate the varying types of relationship that exist between the EU and the OECD, suggesting the considerable influence of the latter as an important source of policy learning for the EU, encouraging an increasing degree of policy convergence.

**Development**

The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) is one of the OECD’s main committees, and its mandate is to: provide a forum for consultation regarding development aid, with a view to improving its efficiency and volume; to make regular reports and recommendations to its members and to OECD Council; to invite participation by other countries and IGOs, as necessary (OECD, 2009a). It has nine subsidiary bodies and, in addition to DAC, most of the OECD’s directorates and several of its committees are involved to varying extents in development activities, forming a development cluster that includes the Development Centre, the Sahel and West Africa Club and the Centre for Co-operation with Non-Members.
In the face of such complexity the European Commission is represented on all of the DAC committees by staff from a variety of its directorates, with EuropeAid, for example, being its representative on DAC’s Working Party on Aid Effectiveness and non-DAC subsidiary OECD bodies such as the Joint Venture on Public Financial Management, the Joint Venture on Procurement and the Joint Venture on Monitoring the Paris Declaration. While lead responsibility for EU external relations is placed with DG External Relations, DG Development is responsible for managing EU relations with the development activities of the OECD, working together with the EU’s Delegation in Paris.

The significance of the DAC for the Commission is that while it is only an ‘invited’ representative in the rest of the OECD, it is, and always has been, a full member of DAC.

The primary reason for this unusual status goes back to the origins of DAC and its predecessor, the Development Assistance Group (DAG). The OEEC, largely on the basis of the colonial interests and involvement of several of its members, notably France and the UK, had undertaken a limited variety of development activities. However, the Eisenhower Administration was keen to see the major Western aid donors, at that time largely European states, carry a greater share of the burden of development assistance and reduce its own, rapidly growing balance of payments deficit. Somewhat reluctantly they agreed, leading to the formation of DAG in 1960. As the newly established EEC had created a substantial, European Development Fund (albeit outside of the EEC budget), it was felt that Commission membership would be appropriate (Esman and Cheever, 1967; Fuhrer, 1996; Giaufret, 1999; DFID, 2011; EDF, 2011). Hence, when the OECD was formed in 1961 members agreed to the establishment of DAG, renamed the DAC, as a semi-autonomous committee with the organisation.

This provided the fledgling Commission, keen to extend its authority and effectiveness, with access to an increasingly important network of key actors in regard to development assistance. These included all the major aid donor countries, three of which, the USA, the UK and Canada, were not members of the EEC, with a fourth, Japan, to become of growing importance in the near future as it increased the volume of its aid. Similarly, as DAC settled into its role, increasingly it provided the Commission with access to the growing network of IGOs now working in the development area, including the UN and its specialised and regional agencies, the International Development Association (IDA), NATO and the IMF (Esman and Cheever, 1967: 175–78). This access was to prove of growing value as the EEC increased its volume of aid and associated aid programmes, especially given its initially limited organisational and staff capacity in the area.

However, despite its membership of DAC, the competence of the Commission in the area of development and, hence, in DAC was, at best, shared or mixed with that of EEC members, although the European Court of Justice confirmed that Article 133 regarding the EEC’s Common Commercial Policy gave the Commission not only exclusive competence in that field but also a degree of competence in relation to development activities, at least where they related to Commercial Policy (Breitwieser, 1994). Hence, while it has always been a member, the Commission’s autonomy and authority in regard to development issues, whether inside or outside of DAC, were tightly constrained, at least until the Treaty of Maastricht took effect in 1993. In much of the 1960s, for example, a series of disputes between the Commission under Hallstein and De Gaulle’s Governments on the issue of the Commission’s diplomatic standing severely limited its capacities, activities and authority (Hill and Wallace, 1979).

The Commission’s capacity for effective action was also hindered by a lack of internal coordination on foreign policy matters, with aid policy split between the officials responsible for the EDF and those in the then DG I External Relations and DG VII Development (Hill and Wallace, 1979, Putzel, 1998). This gradually changed during the 1970s and 1980s, leading up to
Maastricht, as the Commission became more involved in a greater range of external relations, notably regarding trade and commercial policy, but also in relation to a growing network of association agreements with the ACP and other countries (Hill and Wallace, 1979; Grilli, 1993).

Perhaps the key characteristic of the EU relationship with the OECD in relation to development in the last decade has been that of policy learning on the Commission’s behalf. In very brief summary, it was not until 2000 that the first detailed EU policy statement on development was agreed, a statement that drew upon the earlier work of the DAC, notably its *Strategy for the 21st Century*, which the Commission earlier had endorsed, pointing out the participation the Community had in DAC and the strategy’s development (OECD, 1996). DAC’s strategy later became the basis for the UN’s Millenium Development Goals (MDGs), following its proposal that a global development partnership was necessary and should be aimed at a number of specific, ambitious, but realisable goals (OECD, 2009b).

The 2000 Commission statement was announced at a time of mounting criticism of the EU’s aid efforts, including repeated criticism from DAC (OECD, 1998, 2002; European Commission, 2000; House of Commons, 2000; Santiso, 2002). Clare Short, Britain’s then Secretary of State for International Development, stated publicly in June 2000 that ‘the Commission is the worst development agency in the world. The poor quality and reputation of its aid brings Europe into disrepute’ (Short, 2000). While DAC’s 1998 and 2002 reports on the Commission were highly critical, their very existence and public nature indicates how close and trusting the relationship with DAC had become. The reports in question were surprisingly open, critical and influential, leading to significant reforms in the EU’s development policy, procedures and organisation (OECD, 1998, 2002, 2007).

**Trade and agriculture**

If the example of development suggests the predominant characteristic of EU–OECD relationships was that of policy learning, largely by the Commission, the area of agricultural trade has been, and remains, an area of very limited policy learning and painfully slow policy development and convergence.

Until the later 1970s the agriculture policies of the bulk of OECD members were characterised to varying extents by a high degree of direct and indirect state support, intervention and protectionist policies. The USA, for example, had played a leading role in creating special exceptions for agriculture in the negotiations leading up to the GATT agreement, in large part to enable protectionist policies for its agricultural producers (Goldstein, 1993). Within the general context of GATT rules, the EEC’s developing Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), initially based largely on an amalgam of French and German policy positions, was similarly protectionist, though using a different selection of policy instruments (Coleman, 1998: 636).

However, there were considerable variations between member states’ positions in relation to trade in agriculture with Australia, New Zealand, Sweden and Norway, for example, being less protectionist than most of the members of the EEC or the USA. The result was that the OECD’s trade and agriculture committees, given their largely consensus-based decision procedures, were markedly constrained in the breadth of the research activities they could undertake until the middle 1980s. In such a situation the role of the European Commission was both restricted and, for the most part, defensive, increasingly subject, together with its members, to criticisms as to the negative impacts of CAP on trade in agriculture.

As the problems of CAP, particularly its rising cost and the increasing lack of competitiveness of many European farmers, became more obvious in the 1970s and early 1980s, the agricultural policies of individual EEC members began to increasingly differentiate, although remaining...
within the general constraints of a slowly evolving CAP. Most policy developments, particularly those of the USA and the UK under the governments of Reagan and Thatcher, moved in the direction of the gradual opening up of agricultural producers to a range of domestic and international market forces (Coleman, 1998, Davis, 2004).

This change in direction was both guided and promoted by the research work and related publications of the OECD’s trade and agriculture directorates, which found slowly increasing sympathy among Commission officials, if not the French and Italian representatives in the OECD (see OECD, 1972, 1982, 1987a, 1987b). It also led to a more active role by the Commission’s representatives within the OECD, keen to use both its pro-adjustment publications and the influence of non-EU member states to help persuade the French government, for example, to move to accept the need for greater reforms in the CAP. One of the most valuable developments, for example, was the OECD’s development of the concept and measurement of producer subsidy equivalents (PSE). The concept was developed in order to enable a common measure of the cost of the wide range of differing types of government support for agriculture offered by OECD members to their farmers. As a result a more accurate and, importantly, comparative accounting of the real costs of agricultural support in member states and the EEC could be provided. In turn, the PSE enabled more objective bargaining among EU and non-EU member governments in the OECD and, most importantly, also within the WTO, about the real extent of subsidies in agricultural policies and their impact. In effect it changed the terms of the debate about agricultural subsidies by making it clear that many previously defined agricultural policies were, in fact, trade-distorting subsidies.

A research agenda: general directions

A first and central part of any research agenda and related research questions must be the writing of a detailed history of the development of the relationship over time in order to provide the basic information from which more detailed work can proceed. As noted above, this is sadly lacking, so that the arguments and propositions developed in this chapter and the Carroll and Kellow paper cannot easily be tested. Is it accurate to argue, for example, that the general tenor of the EU–OECD relationship has become one of cooperation, rather than competition? Indeed, given the large number of OECD committees and the different, if interdependent, policy areas with which they are concerned, is it reasonable to characterise such a complex, dynamic set of relationships as being competitive or cooperative? Surely one might expect the relationships within the context of each committee to be somewhat different, depending on the political sensitivities involved. Answers to such questions require detailed, historical information.

A second important area for research must be an examination of the relations between the Commission representatives and the representatives of EU members within the context of the OECD and how their activities are coordinated. What, for example, is the role of the EU’s Permanent Delegation to the OECD as regards coordination of EU members and how effective is it when faced with the enormous task of coordinating, where possible, the view of EU members across such a range of committees? When and where do Commission representatives speak for the EU as a whole? Is Commission leadership more prevalent in the Trade Committee, or do EU members display a variety of views, regardless of the Commission’s position? In particular, does the Commission play a fuller, more active role in the only OECD committee in which it is a full member, with full voting rights, the DAC?

Thirdly, if one accepts the now well entrenched principal–agent view that public servants as agents are motivated, at least in part, by interests additional to, and different from, those delegated
to them by their principals, what are the implications of this in the OECD context? After all, it has not one, but two sets of agents, those of the EU members in the shape of Commission representatives and those of the OECD members, in the shape of its secretariat. What are the relationships between these two sets of agents? Are they broadly similar to those that exist between non-EU members and the OECD secretariat, with Commission representatives being quasi principals and the secretariat their agents? Or, given that with the exception of the DAC, the Commission is not a member of the OECD but a privileged participant, are the relationships rather different? Are Commission representatives in competition with secretariat members when, for example, it comes to the allocation of additional or new work by member states – should it go to the OECD, or should it go to the Commission?

A fourth area for research is that of the relations between the EU members and non-EU members in the OECD. We are aware that, as with all international organisations, the members congregate into several ‘factional’ groupings of members (EU, APEC, Nordic and G7/8) to identify, develop and pursue common interests across a wide range of issues, including key policy, structural, process and staffing issues. How cohesive is the EU group? What strains arise where representatives are members of more than one informal group or faction, for example, the Nordic members of the EU, or the G7/8/20 members of the EU? How influential is the EU group, as regards what range of issues?

Finally, for want of space, how does the EU relationship with the OECD compare with its relationships with other multilateral organisations such as the WTO and the UN’s specialised agencies? Moreover, given that the OECD has a wide range of relationship with other multilateral organisations, what opportunities does this provide for Commission representatives?

Conclusion

This preliminary investigation of the relationship between the EU and the OECD has indicated a very rich lode of material that warrants more detailed and extensive study, both for the light it would throw upon the relationship and, importantly, the access to broader, often global networks that membership of OECD committees provides for the Commission.

In summary, as indicated, we suggest that it is more accurate to speak of not one, but of many and often complex interactions as characterising the relationship between the EU and the OECD at any point in time. The primary locus of those interactions are the many and varied committees of the OECD, the committees often forming a primary focus of a broader system of global governance, or at least an influential node within such a system.

It is also clear that over time the nature of those relationships seems to have changed, becoming, in general terms, more cooperative and extensive, though not always harmonious. They are characterised, in the cases examined and, we suspect, for most other cases, by substantial policy learning for those involved. In turn, this has led, to varying extents, to the development and modification of significant areas of EU policy and practice in line with OECD recommendations and agreements. This is not to suggest that the EU (nor any country member), has engaged in extensive and simple policy transfer from the OECD, what might be described as policy copying, but in partial and selective transfer, modifying what is learnt in the OECD context to suit the EU’s political, economic and social circumstances. Indeed, increasingly Commission representatives engage with OECD country representatives in multilateral policy designs and recommendations that are later used to influence, to varying extents, related EU developments, not simply in transferring what is developed by others.
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