

GEM-STONES programme funds 15 joint PhD theses focussing on how the EU deals with the world's growing institutional complexity

The European Joint Doctorate, funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 programme under Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, was coordinated from 2016 to 2020 by the Institut d'études européennes of the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB). During the past four years, GEM-STONES organised seven conferences and intersectoral forums, produced 15 executive policy briefs, and spearheaded the publication of five academic books.

As a 15-partner strong consortium endowed with a EUR 3.89 million budget, GEM-STONES (an acronym for "Globalisation, Europe and Multilateralism – Sophistication of the Transnational Order, Networks and European Strategies") has funded 15 doctoral researchers to study how the European Union manages the world's growing institutional complexity.

AN INTERSECTORAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING PROGRAMME

GEM-STONES was set up in response to the call for Innovative Training Networks (ITN) projects in the context of the European Union's Horizon 2020 research programme. Coordinated by the Institute for European Studies (IEE) of the Université libre de Bruxelles, the project has brought together 8 universities and 7 non-academic partners (think tanks, research institutes and consulting companies) on three continents. The aim of the project has been to investigate how the European Union deals with the increasing complexity of the global system, brought about by the proliferation of international institutions. Does this global development trend strengthen or weaken the EU's capacity to interact with the world?

In order to answer this question, and thanks to European funding, the GEM-STONES doctoral programme has been able to provide [15 Early Stage Researchers](#) with transnational methods training, a 6-month stay in non-academic environment, and an interdisciplinary research environment involving legal scholars, political scientists, economists and sociologists from top research centres in European studies. Each GEM-STONES PhD student will receive a joint European doctoral degree delivered by two of the universities involved, their international experience further enriched through the inclusion of non-academic immersion and training on professional skills for young researchers.

CONCRETELY ADDRESSING INSTITUTIONAL COMPLEXITY

GEM-STONES contributes towards the debate in EU Studies on the nature of the EU as a global actor by contextualising its policies within the wider institutional environment; be it as a civilian, market, regulatory, or functional power. By offering a detailed analysis of the efficiency and legitimacy of the EU's strategies aimed at responding to the growing sophistication of the transnational order, GEM-STONES has aimed to go beyond previous characterisation of the EU as a Global Actor. Case studies chosen by the 15 doctoral researchers focus, among others, on: the EU as an actor in the multilateral

trade system; developments in the EU's Eastern neighbourhood; the EU's capacity to shape other regional organisations; and the ways in which the EU promotes citizen participation and the rule of law.

Early Stage Researchers, senior academics and experts have mobilised their explanatory powers to shed further light onto the prospects of the EU contributing to purposeful regime complex management. As such, *"the project has created a multidisciplinary, multinational epistemic community around the topic of the EU, globalisation, and global governance"* (Prof. Raffaele Marchetti, Deputy Rector for Internationalization and Professor in International Relations, LUISS Guido Carli di Roma).

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SCIENTIFIC FINDINGS: THE EU REMAINS RESILIENT, CREATIVE AND FLEXIBLE WHEN DEALING WITH REGIME COMPLEXITY

WP 1 findings - The supranational component within EU governance has proven itself both particularly resilient and a catalyst of policy adaptation. Across diverse fields such as environmental protection, the fight against climate change or the external dimension of the competition policy, the EU has shown its ability to develop a set of case-specific mixed instruments that remain anchored in the EU's supranational practices, while simultaneously trying to address some of its limitations.

WP 2 findings - Regarding European actors' ability to engage coherently and to change policy in complex global regimes, the EU must do so, not only through traditional means, but rather through trans-governmental and transnational networks. At least three different factors appear as critical relating to the EU's policy efficiency: a strong internal unity of vision regarding the nature of policy problems and the possible ways forward; a strong record of action and leadership on policy issues; and the EU's and European actors' capacity to adapt and remain flexible in the face of rapidly changing regime and global conditions.

WP 3 findings - Different case studies all show that the consequences born from EU-sponsored inter-regionalism challenge the perceived notion of regionalism as necessarily enhancing public goods. Through its involvement of a wide range of state and non-state actors, inter-regionalism may also have the effect of weakening rather than strengthening formal institutions, by privileging some actors or policies over others. In theoretical terms, the research shows that different regions, actors, and outcomes need to be examined on their own terms, rather than from the singular perspective of a particular organisation, which in academic practice, is often the European Union.

WP 4 findings – Looking at how the European Union's normative agenda has responded to the world's growing complexity, the research notes that even though the EU remains one of the main purveyors of international standards, it must more and more contend with competing norm entrepreneurs. On the global level, the American partner has continued to move away from multilateral practices, and on the regional level, local powers increasingly push for alternate forms of cooperation. The European Union has nonetheless proven to be committed to its own understanding of the norms of e.g. democratisation and human rights and has consistently sought to promote these. The EU continues to support efforts for democratisation in its neighbourhood such as in Moldova and Ukraine and promotes human rights far abroad such as in South-East Asia.

FACTBOX

Funding source: The [MSCA Innovative Training Networks](#) aim to train a new generation of creative, entrepreneurial and innovative early-stage researchers, able to face current and future challenges and to convert knowledge and ideas into products and services for economic and social benefit. The European Commission funded GEM-STONES with a total budget of €3.89 million, for the duration of four years (2016-2020).

15 Early Stage Researchers hailing from 11 countries within and outside of the European Union.

Project partners: [Université libre de Bruxelles-IEE](#) (BE); [University of Warwick](#) (UK); [LUISS Guido Carli](#) (IT); [University of Geneva](#) (CH); [University of Hamburg](#) (DE); [Copenhagen Business School](#) (DK); [Waseda University](#) (JP); [Laval University](#) (CAN); [Transatlantic Foundation-GMF](#) (BE); [GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies](#) (DE); [European Politics - Pol-Int](#) (BE); [Union of International Associations](#) (BE); [McKinsey and Company](#) (BE); [Istituto Affari Internazionali](#) (IT); [European Criminal Law Academic Network](#) (BE).

Major publications: 4 edited volumes, published by Routledge as part of the [Globalisation, Europe and Multilateralism Book Series](#); dictionary on [Research Methods in the Social Sciences](#) published by Oxford University Press; [15 executive policy briefs](#) on the EU's efforts towards complex regime management, summarising the key findings and policy recommendations of the individual research projects.

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