

EPIN

EUROPEAN POLICY INSTITUTES NETWORK



Sebastian Kurpas, Centre for European Policy Studies, 29 September 2006

1. Status quo

- Network of European think tanks and policy institutes
- Currently 25 members in 21 countries, from both old and new member states as well as from accession countries; “hard core” of about 10 active institutes
- Two conferences in Brussels per year; ad hoc conferences or activities in member states (e.g. “roadshow” in Denmark)
- Website www.epin.org
- Joint publications on topical issues (e.g. flexible integration, Europe of citizens)
- Institutes are quite diverse in size and structure, but they are all politically independent and have no fixed point of view
- Keeping strong focus on institutional reform, but also issues as diverse as the European elections, communication policy, the political dynamics after enlargement, EU foreign policy and justice and home affairs.

2. History

- Network founded in 2002 and partially financed under the PRINCE “Future of Europe” programme for the duration of the constitutional Convention
- Followed the constitutional Convention over the duration of its work
- More than 30 conferences in member states and candidate countries in one year
- CEPS as coordinator

- Funding ended after the Convention, but CEPS decided to keep the network in existence (financial support & coordination)
- EPIN continued to follow the constitutional process (intergovernmental conferences, ratification process, period of reflection)
- Since 2005 creation of a “steering committee” with the six most active member institutes: CEPS, DIIS (Denmark), ELCANO (Spain), Europeum (Czech Republic), Notre Europe (France), SIEPS (Sweden)

3. Achievements: European “added-value” for researchers, decision-makers and citizens

- Think tanks and policy institutes: Independent sources of information for EU citizens (unlike political parties, lobby groups, consultancies, etc) => Rather rare in the EU environment
- A network of think tanks: Provision of a platform for researchers and policy analysts to establish personal links, exchange knowledge and collaborate on EU-related issues
- Promotion of and participation in a pan-European debate:
 - ⇒ Presentation and exchange of views from different national backgrounds (e.g. on EP elections or the constitutional ratification process)
 - ⇒ Strengthen a common European dimension in the national debates on Europe
- Elaboration and dissemination of common policy proposals for topical issues to citizens and decision-makers

4. Challenges

- Building up the network:
 - Identifying the right partners
 - Convincing potential partners to become involved (e.g. in view of bureaucratic conditions for PRINCE funding)
- Structure: “Light” vs. “institutionalised” network
 - So far, EPIN has been an “on demand” network for its member institutes
 - no membership statute
 - (small) membership-fee, only for institutes in steering committee (i.e. say on future priorities, participation in common publications)
- Content: Relevance of issues
 - ⇒ Can vary depending on national context (e.g. “flexible integration” more topical in member states than in accession countries)
- Financing: Funding still mostly national; pan-European networks often do not seem to fit in these national structures