

# Overlapping and Evolving European Discourses on Market Liberalization

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## Research Highlights and Abstract

This introduction to the special section on European liberal discourses

- Presents key assumptions discussed in the collection of articles, such as liberalism as a discourse and the conceptualization of discourses as networks.
- Offers an original typology of liberal discourses regarding State intervention.
- Introduces two models linking discursive interactions to discursive change, analogous to the operational code approach and to schema theory in cognitive science.
- Presents original data on DG Trade discourse, to illustrate simultaneous change and continuity.

*This introduction to the special section on European liberal discourses discusses three themes covered by all contributions: (i) the co-existence of several market liberal discourses in the European public sphere; (ii) interactions among these various discourses; (iii) and discursive changes resulting from these interactions.*

**Keywords:** discourse analysis; European Union; liberalism; crisis; ideas; trade

The European economic crisis provides an opportunity for political actors to reshuffle prevailing discourses on economic policy. It also provides an opportunity for academics to study discursive change and resilience. What are the various discourses generated by European institutions and member states? How do these various discourses interact with each other? And do these interactions alter or consolidate prevailing discourses? Amandine Crespy, Ferdi De Ville, Jan Orbie, Ben Rosamond, and Vivien Schmidt investigate these questions in this special section and provide enlightening answers.

The starting point of all contributions to this special section is the acknowledgment that economic ideas constitute and shape the economic world, can redefine that world and how it is conceived by a critical mass of actors, while informing which economic policies should be pursued. Importantly, contributors to this special section do not claim that ideas have to be internalized by political actors to have an impact on economic policymaking (see especially Rosamond 2013). It goes without saying that ideas expressed by political actors can either authentically reflect their thoughts or be expressed strategically in a rhetorical manner. This distinction, however, should not be over-emphasized. At the very least, whether driven by normative assumptions or by interests, the mere expression of ideas has consequences (Schimmelfennig 2001; Hay and Rosamond 2002).

One of these consequences is a stabilizing effect. Actors are often deemed to strive for consistency—both for cognitive and rhetorical reasons—and tend to maintain stable ideas over time. Accordingly, ideas stabilized actors' understanding of their own and others' interests, and therefore their joint institutional arrangements. Based on these premises, several authors turn to ideas and institutions to explain policy continuity in front of contextual change. The long maintenance of the post-war economic order, for example, is frequently explained by the persistence of embedded liberal ideas despite the evolving distribution of power in the international system (Ruggie 1982; Blyth 2002).

In following too closely this line of argumentation, however, the 'ideas literature' suffers from the same static inclination as institutionalist literature. As Kathleen Thelen rightly noted, institutional analysis is 'still generally more apt to ask what institutions do than how they evolve and change through time' (2009, 473). When the institutional literature looks at change, it often describes it rather than explain it. The same criticism could be addressed to a substantial part of ideas literature, despite some significant contributions on ideational entrepreneurs (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998).

For institutionalist and ideational scholars alike, it is especially difficult to account for discontinuous changes (Thelen 2009; Carstensen 2011a). Continuous changes are more easily explained by positive feedback loops, which are at the core of the historical institutionalist research program on path dependency and implicit in several constructivist works on the co-constitution of agency and ideational structures. Abrupt and radical reconfigurations can also be explained by historical institutionalists and constructivists, especially by referring to critical junctures created by exogenous shocks or the contingency of history. Yet, gradual but discontinuous changes remain more puzzling. The dismissal of the Washington consensus at the end of the 1990s and the early 2000s, for example, was a gradual paradigm reorientation that could hardly be explained by a single exogenous shock (Florio 2002).

This special section explores gradual but discontinuous changes in prevailing economic ideas by locating these ideas in their complex discursive ecology. Ideas neither float in a discursive vacuum nor are they simply pitched against each other. Picturing the current economic debates as a hegemonic *vox* market against a counter-hegemonic *vox populi*, essentially opposing bankers' neo-liberal discourse to the *indignados'* Keynesian arguments, would be far too simplistic. If battles of ideas take place, they are not duels opposing two antagonists. They are constant struggles in an ideational jungle. Various ideas interact from various institutional and hierarchical locations (Seabrooke and Tsingou 2009). Ideas live in a continuously evolving (eco)system. Under this perspective, discourse analysis enables us to conceptualize the dynamics of change in ideas and about institutions (Schmidt 2011).

A discourse can be defined as an open network of ideas in which no element can be understood independently (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). At the centre of a given network, some nodal ideas, often particularly ambiguous, are articulated to several other ideas to constitute a discourse. Moreover, these nodal ideas are often part of several overlapping discourses. For example, the ambiguous ideas of 'economic

growth' and 'resources' can be linked to a wide array of other ideas providing them with meanings, relevance and coherence. Conversely, each discourse built around these notions gives them a different meaning. The environmental 'survivalist' and 'cornucopian' discourses, among many others, are both articulated around the notion of growth and resources, but connect them to very different sets of ideas, carrying different world views, causal beliefs and normative injunctions (Dryzek 2005).

Studying these discursive interactions provides a more dynamical picture than the mere study of ideas disconnected from their ideational environment (Schmidt 2008). While discourses can have a stabilizing effect, they are certainly not fixed. Their ambiguity makes them susceptible to constant fluctuations. They are themselves fields of social struggle, in which certain significations are challenged and others claimed. Through interactions, some ideas are added, suppressed or reinterpreted within a given discourse. In this process, two discourses can merge to create a third, like the 'survivalist' and 'cornucopian' discourses that synthesize in the sustainable development discourse (Bernstein 2001). A discourse can also be split apart into rival conceptions, like the various streams of market liberalism (Schmidt 2013). As such, the evolution of prevailing discourses is more frequently the result of a transformative process than a succession of distinct discourses. This does not imply that gradual discursive changes are necessarily continuous. As prevailing discourses are linked to several other discourses, shifts are frequent and often unanticipated.

Contributions to this special section analyze these processes through the study of European market liberalism discourses. Several other researchers have approached liberalism through the lens of discourse analysis, especially, but not exclusively, in Foucauldian or Gramscian traditions (Holborow 2007; Behrent 2009; Abdelal and Meunier 2010; Hay and Smith 2010; Vrasti 2011; Springer 2012). Many authors have also noted that European integration is an interesting case to study market liberalism discourses. The European Union (EU) has been a liberal project since its genesis. But because of its complex institutional architecture combined with its cultural heterogeneity, it constitutes a forum where various streams of market liberalism discourse are intertwined (Hanson 1998; Jabko 2006; Ferrera 2009). In this context, the current European crisis, with its multiplicity of involved institutional actors, provides a unique opportunity to analyse the various liberal discourses, their interactions, and their evolutions.

## Varieties of Market Liberalism Discourses

One fruitful stream of literature in political economy compares 'varieties of capitalisms' (Hall and Soskice 2001; Bruff 2010). Different cultures and institutional environments have led to various market economies that are qualitatively rather than merely quantitatively different. Although France, Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom face similar pressures from globalized markets and are largely subjected to the same EU regulations, their respective variants of a market economy have proven particularly resilient. One country's financial regulations, welfare system and labor organizations would unlikely suit the others.

Judging from the contributions to this special section, it seems that a similar argument could be made for the variety of liberal discourses: although adhering to the same fundamental principles of liberalism, they remain astonishingly diverse (Bruff 2010). Even when one isolates market liberal discourses from Kantian liberalism and cosmopolitan liberalism, it still needs to be disaggregated (Rosamond 2013).

All market liberalism discourses prevalent in Europe support the idea that the market generally allocates resources more efficiently than the State does, but that the State should regulate to palliate market failures, including environmental externalities, social injustice and rent-seeking behavior. That said, market liberalism discourses diverge in their understanding of the economic world, causal relations among economic variables and normative principles that should guide resource allocation. As these divergences are qualitative in nature, the various market liberalism discourses cannot simply be located on a unidimensional scale from the most to the least liberal. Their divergences are a matter of type rather than simply a matter of degree.

For example, as illustrated by Table 1, market liberalism discourses vary on both the capacity and the desirability of public intervention in the context of the European crisis (see also Schmidt 2013). Some hold that in the current crisis situation European States should increase public spending to foster economic growth, even when the crisis is partly created by market concerns on public debt levels. This is the central idea of the French President François Hollande's proposal for a European Growth Pact: 'The European Council should adopt growth measures having a rapid impact and totalling €120 billion' (quoted in *Le Nouvel Observateur* 17 June 2012). Others argue that States should do the opposite and reduce taxation to increase private spending and boost the economy, even if it means reduced fiscal revenue in the short run to address the debt crisis. This is the rationale behind UK Prime Minister David Cameron's tax cut proposal for high income taxpayers: '[It] is about sending a message out to the world that if you want to invest, create, invent, locate, make money, make jobs, then come and do it right here' (quoted in *The Huffington Post* 23 March 2012). Still others make the claim that States have no choice but to adopt austerity plans to fix structural imbalances, even if it accentuates their economic downturn in the short-term. According to the economist Sir Howard Davies, addressing these imbalances is necessary, but it means, 'people are going to

**Table 1: Varieties of Liberal Discourses on State Intervention**

Public intervention capacity	Public intervention desirability	
	Desirable	Not desirable
Capacity	Increase spending to boost growth	Cut taxes to boost private demand
Incapacity	Cut spending even if painful	Cut spending to foster growth

get poorer' (quoted in *The Guardian* 28 January 2009). Finally, some express a more optimistic view on austerity plans, as being both unavoidable and growth promoting. The German Chancellor Angela Merkel argues that reducing debt and promoting growth 'aren't contradictory, they belong together' (quoted by *The Associated Press*, 10 May 2012).

This 2x2 typology, opposing what should be done with what can be done, is only one illustration of the diversity of dimensions structuring market liberal discourses. Similar typologies were suggested by Hay and Rosamond on globalization (2002), Jeffrey Sachs on macroeconomic thought (*Financial Times* 7 December 2012), and De Ville and Orbie on liberalization (2013).

All contributors to this special section explore this discursive diversity within the market liberalism paradigm, although not necessarily guided by the above typology. One of their common observations is that market liberalism discourses vary, perhaps unsurprisingly, according to the speakers. The various European governments, even those facing similar economic situations, hold different discourses on the nature of the crisis, its causes and what public authorities should do about it (Schmidt 2013). This points toward the conclusion reached by other studies that, although discourses can be carried out transnationally, national cultures and institutions remain central in discourse articulation (Hay and Rosamond 2002; Béland 2009; Hay and Smith 2010).

That being said, contributors note that even within a single organisation, discourses vary according to both the individuals holding key positions and the wider context of discursive exchanges. Nicolas Sarkozy and François Hollande, as French presidents (Schmidt 2013), just like Catherine Ashton, Peter Mandelson and Karel De Gucht, as European Commissioners for Trade (De Ville and Orbie 2013), have held quite different discourses on market liberalism. Even Amandine Crespy (2013), who minimizes the Commissioners' personal views, rejects 'the determination of agency by (institutional) structures'. To qualify Allison's (1969) famous adage, where one stands does not depend entirely on where one sits.

Where one stands depends on where one is (institutionally) sitting but also on with whom one (interactively) talks. Indeed, contributors to this special section observe that individuals adjust their discourse to their audience. Most contributions build on Schmidt's useful distinction (2008) between communicative and coordinative discourses. Policymakers do not hold the same discourses in the policy sphere to achieve coordination with their peers, as in the political sphere to communicate their views to the public. In this special section, Schmidt and Crespy expand this point even further by arguing that several communicative discourses can co-exist, such as one relatively thicker intended for constituents and another relatively thinner for economic agents and experts.

However, as De Ville and Orbie (2013) rightly note, discourses can also be intended for one's self, as an identity building practice. Talking about a so-called 'European model' of market liberalism, implicitly different from the American or Chinese models, could be intended to (re)produce such a model and avoid the economic crisis turning into an identity crisis, threatening the very survival of the European

project. Under this perspective, discourses do not simply carry a set of ideas, but can generate them. Discourses can be communicative and performative.

## Models of Discursive Interactions

Contributions to this special section do not limit themselves to distinguishing the various European market liberalism discourses. Identifying a variety of discourses is only the first step before studying discursive interactions. Contributors to this special section argue that it is discourses' interconnectedness and dialogue, especially between internal and external policymaking, that drives their continuous or discontinuous evolution over time.

Several models can be used to conceptualize relations between discursive interactions and discursive changes. To distinguish these models, it is common to build on an analogy with philosophy of science's concepts of 'paradigms' and 'research programs' (Schmidt 2008). To make a similar distinction, this article rather draws from an analogy with political psychology's concepts of 'operational codes' and 'schemas'. Of course, this analogy has limitations: discourses are social constructions and operate under quite different logics from those at stake in individual cognition. Nevertheless, we argue that looking at how thoughts interact in the individual mind can help to think creatively on how ideas interact in discourses.

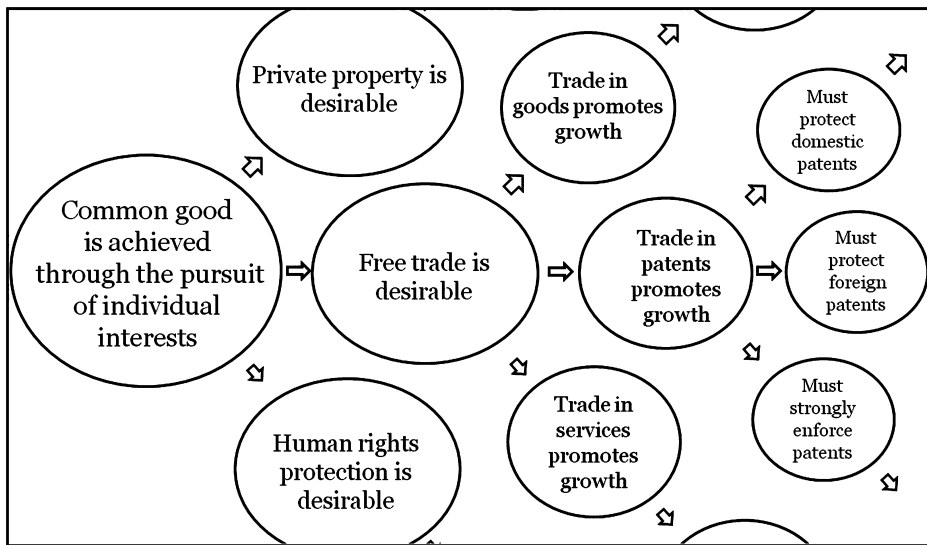
The operational code approach is one of the leading theoretical models in political psychology. It was developed more than 50 years ago by Alexander George (1969), inspired by the work of Nathan Leites (1951), and remains widely used today. An operation code could be defined as a hierarchically structured system connecting all beliefs about the political world that a person holds. More specifically, an operational code ranges from the most philosophical, stable and deeply ingrained political beliefs of an individual to his/her most operational, superficial and volatile beliefs.

The evolution of an operation code over a person's life is governed by a strong motivational drive to maintain internal consistency (Festinger 1957). Incoming information compatible with the operation code can easily be integrated into it, contributing to its continuous expansion, complexification, and stabilization. Incompatible information, however, is often dismissed to avoid the uncomfortable feeling of cognitive dissonance. When incompatible information cannot be dismissed, individuals typically generate a limited addendum to nuance their beliefs system at its periphery, while leaving its philosophical core unchanged.

Ole Holsti (1970), for example, reconstituted the operational code of John Foster Dulles. He argued that due to cognitive consistency, Dulles was unable to assimilate information conflicting with the well-established belief that Soviet decision makers were strongly hostile to the United States. While Dulles continuously learned during his political career, only a major exogenous shock, like the collapse of the Soviet Union, could have forced him to rethink the philosophical core of his belief system.

The operation code approach is thus a theoretical model that allows for dynamic changes at the superficial level but stresses stabilizing forces at the fundamental level. In this sense, it is analogous to the discourse analysis model emphasizing the



**Figure 1: A Liberal Discourse Structured as the Operational Code**

hierarchical ordering of ideas in a given discourse. It is indeed frequent among discourse analysts to distinguish ideas operating at the background of discourse, such as philosophical ideas, from those operating at their foreground, including policy and programmatic ideas (Schmidt 2013; Rosamond 2013).

For example, Figure 1 presents a hierarchical ordering of liberal ideas. At the basis of the discourse is the underlying assumption that the common good is achieved through the pursuit of individual interests. Several norms could be attached to this foundational tenet of liberalism, including the one that free trade is desirable. Discourse then enters the realm of foreground ideas, such as the programmatic belief that trade in patents promotes economic growth, and the more specific policy prescription that a country should protect foreign patents.

According to this model, foreground ideas can easily fluctuate with social interactions, making a discourse more nuanced and complex. The idea that a liberal economy should offer a high level of protection to foreign patents entered liberal discourses relatively recently (Drahos 1996). The deepest and most general background ideas, however, are slower to change and provide an enduring logic for most policy development. The assumption that the common good is achieved through the pursuit of individual interests is so fundamental that it is rarely challenged, even by actors advocating for major policy reforms (Bernstein 2001). ‘Subtle discursive changes’, i.e. change on foreground policy ideas, as De Ville and Orbie (2013) define them, enable more fundamental continuity of background ideas.

This model of discursive change at the superficial level, but continuity at the philosophical level, is sometimes labeled the ‘ideational punctuated equilibrium model’ (Seabrooke 2006). This model assumes that, despite constant changes at the

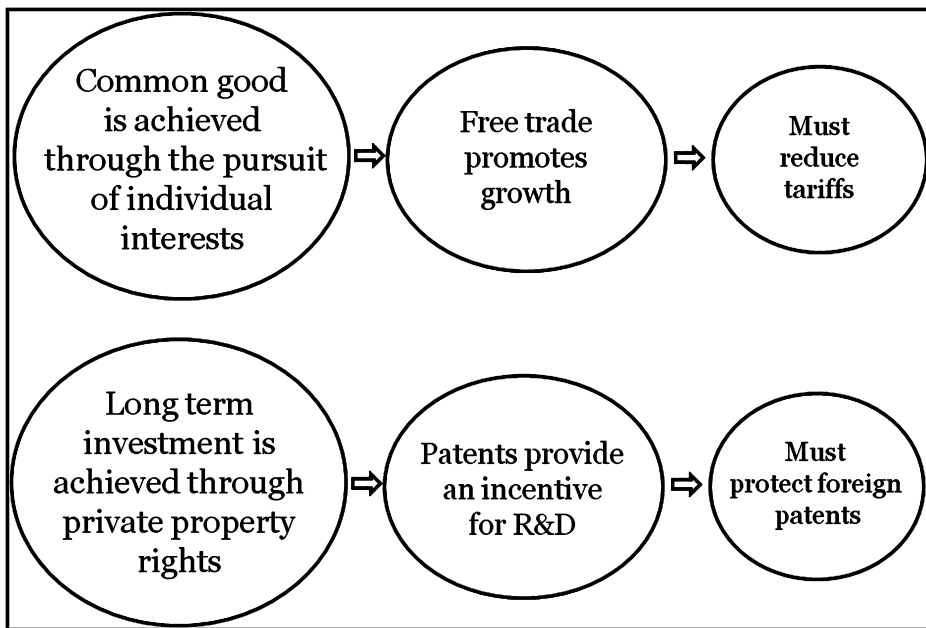
superficial level, the overall ideational equilibrium remains generally stable. Only rare exogenous shock can generate enough uncertainty to openly discuss background ideas until a new ideational equilibrium is found. For example, according to several authors following this logic, the Great Depression provided enough disruptive power to favor the establishment of Keynesian liberalism ideas in the post-war period (Ruggie 1982; Ikenberry 1993; Blyth 2002). Similarly, many argue that it was the unexpected simultaneous increase in inflation and unemployment in the 1970s that challenged the established Keynesian paradigm and promoted neo-liberal ideas, which were already available but at the margin of economic thinking, as the new ideational foundation (Hall 1993; McNamara 1998; Marcussen 2000). For this ideational punctuated equilibrium model to be valid, however, one must assume that crises are exogenous shocks rather than endogenous constructions. Many constructivists are not prepared to make such concession (Widmaier et al. 2007).

An alternative model of discursive changes is more analogous to schema theory, equally influential in political psychology. Like operational codes, schemas are hierarchically ordered systems of knowledge. They are, however, clustered around different concepts and the various schemas of an individual on a given topic are not necessarily interconnected. As Larson notes, schema theory 'allows for the possibility that an individual might have organized but atomized schemas about politics, rather than having a coherent belief system in which several ideas are interrelated' (1994, 20).

Assuming that ideas are simply clustered rather than hierarchically ordered raises major implications. Notably, given the absence of a single philosophical core connecting the various ideas, a discourse can support a lesser degree of internal coherency among its elemental ideas. A discourse that appears incoherent to an outsider can be maintained as long as these elemental ideas, clustered in different groups, remain unconnected and follow their own evolution. In other terms 'a direct transfer of meaning from a context to another' is not possible: in travelling from a discursive context to another, meanings change (Seidl 2007, 198).

For example, Figure 2 presents a schematic representation of normative and causal ideas organized according to schema theory. Ideas are still hierarchically structured according to Schmidt's distinction between philosophical, programmatic and policy ideas. However, instead of having a single core of background beliefs, as in Figure 1, it has two unconnected cores, allowing for the co-existence of ideas that might seem inconsistent. While the policy prescription to protect foreign patents is consistent with the assumption that private property induces investment, it could be seen as inconsistent with the belief that free trade promotes growth. After all, patents are—by definition—monopolistic rights that temporarily prevent the free flow of inventions. Most liberal economists of the XIX century strongly opposed patent protection for this reason (Drahos 1996). Over the course of the XX century, this opposition vanished and liberal discourses saw a gradual shift in support of patent protection. This ideational turnaround was not the result of any exogenous shock and could hardly be conceptualized under the ideational punctuated equilibrium model. Instead, it was made possible by the parallel evolution of disconnected liberal ideas, one on trade and the other on private property.



**Figure 2: A Liberal Discourse Structured as a Schema**

Likewise, several scholars have noted that liberal discourses are not always consistent. Alasdair Young, for example, argues that EU discourses in the context of multilateral trade negotiations vary according to the specific issues discussed. It communicates different ideas when discussing trade in goods, investment protection or food-safety rules. Young concluded that ‘the EU cannot be easily characterized as liberal or protectionist, which it appears to be as much to do with the aspect of trade policy in focus’ (2007, 807). Amandine Crespy (2013) makes a similar argument regarding ‘services of general interest’ (SGI), a neologism created to disaggregate the cluster of ideas on service liberalization and to avoid exposing EU’s incoherence. The concept of SGI enables the EU to express different ideas at the European and the international levels, and for different types of services.

This second model of discursive structure and change puts a greater emphasis on the role of agency (Carstensen 2011a, b). Free from the structuring constraints of a single philosophical core, new ideas can be attached and old ones removed more easily. These processes do not happen in a deterministic manner but as a result of creative articulations by agents mobilizing ideas at their disposal. Under this theoretical model, as Martin Carstensen puts it, ‘agency often takes the form of bricolage, where bits and pieces of the existing ideational and institutional legacy are put together in new forms leading to significant political transformation’ (2011b, 147). One strategy to force a speaker to substantial change his/her discourse is to force him/her, in the course of a discursive interaction, to connect incoherent ideas and face the risk of being accused of discursive dishonesty or rhetorical action. In turn,

a speaker can prevent this risk by trying to disentangle ideas that were previously grouped together and to create distinct clusters.

In the operational code model, the strength of an idea depends upon its location within the system, whereas in the schema model, it depends upon its capacity to be connected with new ideas (Jabko 2006). One model emphasizes centralization and the other connectedness within networks of ideas that we call discourses.

The two models, however, are not necessarily incompatible (Schmidt 2013). Discourses' nodal ideas, often the most ambiguous, are typically both highly centralized and highly connected. Most contributors to this special section navigate between these two ideal-types, heuristically useful but empirically artificial.

## **Evolving Discourses on Market Liberalisation**

A third recurrent theme in this special section, besides the variety of liberal discourses and interactions among them, is the evolution of prevailing discourses. Two types of changes could basically occur: a change in the relation between the existing ideational components of a discourse, including the connections and centrality of an idea, and/or a change in the composition of the ideas of a discourse, including by introducing new ideas or changing the meaning of existing ideas (Carstensen 2011a, b).

On all accounts, prevailing discourses in Europe still emphasize a distinctive European brand of liberalism. They reject the perceived unregulated capitalism of Asia and the United States and assert the existence of a distinctive European model. The Lisbon Treaty refers to this distinctive model as a 'competitive social market economy' (art. 3(3)).

A 'competitive social market economy' seems like an oxymoron. How can a market be simultaneously social and competitive? The addition of these two adjectives might have been an attempt to bring together various market liberalism discourses in an ambiguous but consensual discourse. Once parallel liberal discourses are reconnected, however, the question of their specific articulation arises.

On this matter, political discourses increasingly put forward the idea that a strong, competitive economy allows for the maintenance of social policies. Conversely, it is rarely argued that a social market economy *per se* favors competitiveness. In 2008 and 2009, the resilience of the German labor market was sometimes attributed to the unique cooperation between unions and management councils. This argument, however, progressively disappeared from public debates. From 2009 onward, the crisis was presented as a 'debt crisis', placing the blame on irresponsible fiscal policies, rather than on risk-taking speculators. Germany remained the model to emulate, but less for its industrial relations than for its fiscal austerity and constitutional debt brake. Contrary to what might have been expected, the European crisis became an opportunity to stress the primacy of the 'competitive' element of the European model over its 'social' element.

Several authors, including some of the contributors to this special section, have noted this qualitative jump in prevailing market liberalism discourses in Europe. Depending on their favored terminology, Europe has moved from a 'managed

globalization’ to a ‘Global Europe’ discourse, from a ‘Ricardian’ to a ‘clash of capitalisms’ phase, from a ‘market-correcting’ to a ‘market-enabling’ approach, from a ‘neo-mercantilist’ to ‘embedded neo-liberal’ hegemony, or from a ‘neoliberalism 2.0’ to a ‘neoliberalism 3.0’ ideology. Expressions vary, but most authors consider that EU’s institutions put an increasing emphasis on competition, both on domestic policymaking and international negotiations (Meunier 2007; van Apeldoorn et al. 2009 and van Apeldoorn and Hager 2010; Hendrikse and Sidaway 2010; Höpner and Schäffer 2010; Siles-Brügge 2011; Kessler 2012).

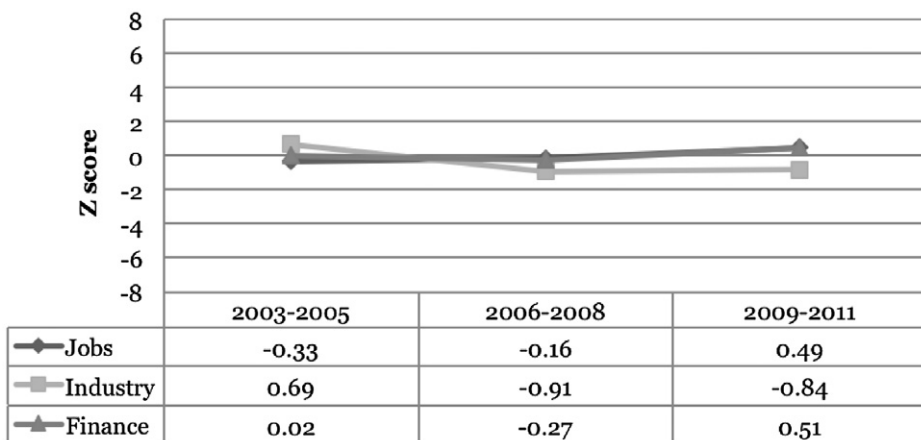
This discursive change resonates in both domestic economic policy and in the EU’s external economic relations.

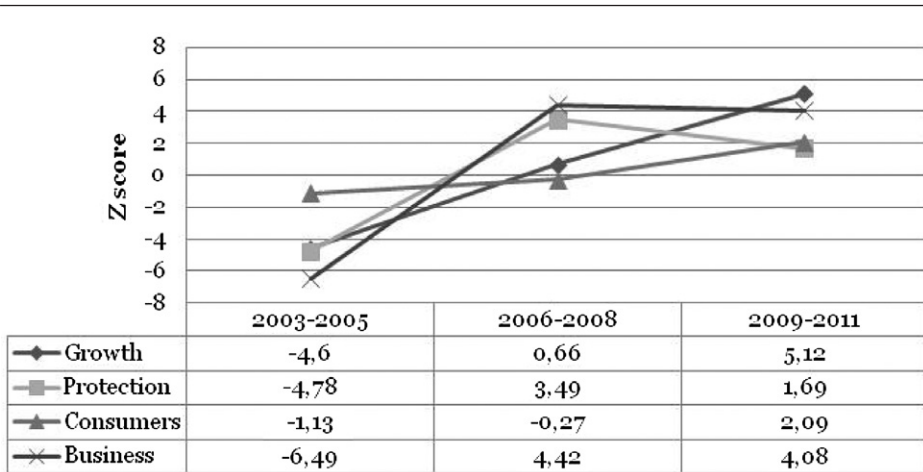
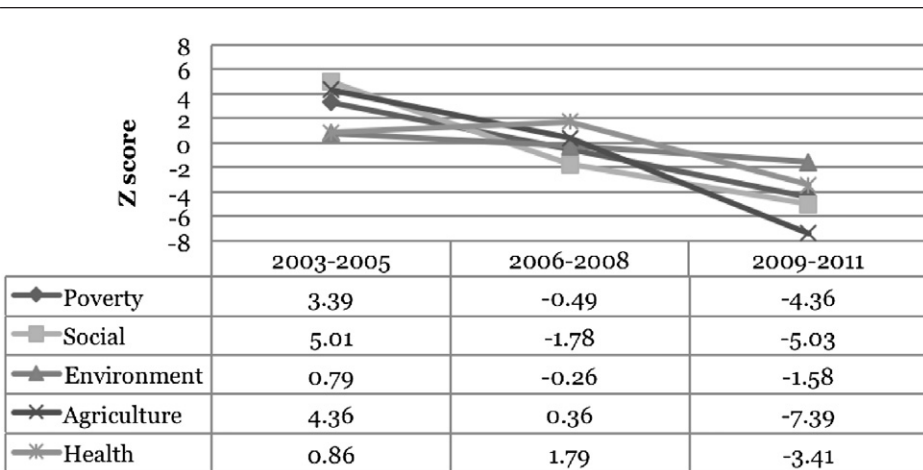
Discursive change, however, is not constant. Neo-liberalism is not increasingly being promoted on all fronts. Figures 3, 4 and 5, for example, provide an illustration of both continuity and change in DG Trade communication. These figures were generated from an analysis of 990 press releases published by DG Trade from January 2003 to December 2011, totaling 494,426 occurrences of 12,252 different word forms.

From this corpus, twelve semantic fields were created, each regrouping ten to fifteen words related in meaning. The semantic field ‘jobs,’ for instance, includes words like ‘labor’ ‘workers,’ ‘workforce,’ ‘employees,’ ‘employment,’ and nine other related words. The semantic field ‘social’ included ‘socially,’ ‘socio-cultural,’ ‘solidarity,’ ‘welfare’ and six other related words. Each semantic field covered between 300 and 700 occurrences in the entire corpus. Then, the relative use of semantic fields was compared over three periods of three years each. A Z score of 2 (or -2) indicates that the semantic field for a given period is significantly more (or less) frequently used than over the other two periods.

As Figure 3 suggests, several important themes were addressed consistently from 2003 to 2009 in DG Trade press releases. The economic crisis, including increased

**Figure 3: Relatively Stable Semantic Fields in DG Trade Press Releases**



**Figure 4: Increasingly Used Semantic Fields in DG Trade Press Releases****Figure 5: Less Frequently Used Semantic Fields in DG Trade Press Releases**

unemployment rates and evidence of financial misconducts, did not affect the relative use of the semantic fields 'jobs' and 'finance'. DG Trade's press releases continuously asserted that trade helps generate jobs, and that it aims at increasing trade in financial services. On these issues, DG Trade's discourse seems relatively constant.

As indicated by Figure 4, other semantic fields were used with increased frequency. As the economic growth in Europe declined, DG Trade's press releases increasingly portrayed economic growth as the key objective of European trade policy. A press release of 2011, for example, quoted the Commissioner de Gucht: 'In these difficult economic times, it is essential to deepen the transatlantic trade market to boost

growth'. DG Trade also increasingly insisted on the necessity 'to fight' or 'to resist' protectionism, although this warning became less preeminent after 2009 (De Ville and Orbie 2013). Finally, press releases increasingly referred to 'businesses' and 'consumers,' most likely as a way of personalizing the main beneficiary of trade policy. In 2010, for example, Commissioner de Gucht said 'These trade negotiations should help create a modern, transparent and predictable environment for consumers, investors and businessmen'.

Perhaps more tellingly, Figure 5 presents some semantic fields that were less frequently used over time. It seems that, while DG Trade centered its discourse on economic growth, it paid less attention to other policy objectives, such as international development, social welfare, environmental protection, food safety, and public health. This finding supports the conclusion of Sophie Meunier that, after Commissioner Lamy and his ambitious programmatic idea of 'managing globalisation', DG Trade returned to the roots of trade policy, 'with the EU now back to pursuing economic instead of normative foreign policy objectives' (Meunier 2007, 906).

This rough analysis of DG Trade's communicative discourse provides some instructive evidence that prevailing market liberalism discourses in Europe are partly stable and partly changing in a continuous manner. However, several important questions remain. Are we witnessing a radical change or a mere cosmetic adaptation? Do changes in some dimensions of the discourse provide enough flexibility to enable continuity in other dimensions? What exactly prompted some dimensions to evolve in the way they did? Are changes in communicative discourses followed by changes in coordinative discourses? How is the substantive content of changing discourses interpreted by different audiences? How do institutions and power relations structure discursive interactions? Contributors provide different answers to these questions, as the following section highlights.

## **Four Contributions on Discourses, Interactions and Changes**

Looking at market liberalism through the lens of discourse analysis facilitates the study of social interactions and gradual change. None of the contributors of this special section consider the Eurozone Crisis as an exogenous shock that opened an opportunity for radical change. The various market liberal discourses currently evolving in the European discursive landscape have ancient historical roots. That said, they are gradually evolving and their balance, at least in certain institutional contexts, is shifting.

Rosamond's contribution offers a useful conceptualization of market liberal discourse using the debate over 'normative power Europe' as an entry point. In doing so, Rosamond introduces several notions that are used by other contributors, such as the false dichotomy between strategic and normative behavior, the interaction between background and foreground ideas, and the simultaneous complementarity and contradictions among liberal discourses.

De Ville and Orbie consider that the multiplicity of market liberalism identified by Rosamond has not deeply destabilized DG Trade discourses. Contrary to Meunier (2007) who argues that the transition between Pascal Lamy and Peter Mandelson

resulted in a 'doctrinal shift', De Ville and Orbie have found that DG Trade has remained deeply neoliberal over time. For them, changes in DG Trade discourse are limited to the policy ideas level, leaving the philosophical core of market liberalism intact. Moreover, the creative adaptation of DG Trade to the economic crisis helps to understand, according to De Ville and Orbie, 'the surprisingly resilient free trade agenda'.

Crespy's contribution also focuses on DG Trade discourses but pays greater attention to its contestation. Using the case of services liberalization, she investigates not only if Commissioners' discourse has changed over time, but also how it has interacted with counter-hegemonic discourses. Crespy argues that, despite contestation by Non Governmental Organizations (NGO), unions, and left-wing political parties, different Commissioners maintain their neo-liberal discourse on service liberalization over the last decade. Neither the personality of the actors involved, nor the nature of arguments invoked significantly affected discursive interactions. Crespy notes, however, that Commissioners tend to be more responsive to contestation in certain institutional settings, especially in their relations with the European Parliament. This observation enables Crespy to conclude on a positive note, arguing that 'institutionalization of politics, when geared towards political accountability, can open discursive spaces'.

Schmidt's contribution looks at discursive interactions precisely when political accountability is blurred by institutional complexity and overlaps between distinct forums. Schmidt studies discursive interactions about—and during—the European crisis, taking into account the agency of a wider diversity of actors than previous contributions. This agency includes national authorities, multiple European institutions, private stakeholders, policy experts, and the media. Although her representation of their discursive interactions is made clear thanks to her distinctions between types of arguments, levels of generality and discursive spheres; policymakers involved in the process seem to have lost control over their communicative discourses, to which political and economic actors react differently. Unfortunately for policymakers, they cannot distinguish their discourses to the market and to the people in the same way as they differentiate their coordinative and communicative discourse. Policymakers can communicate with the market, but can hardly coordinate it.

Overall, the special section points to the fact that the current economic crisis, whether labeled the 'Global Crisis', the 'Great Recession', the 'Sovereign-Debt Crisis', or the 'Eurozone Crisis', has not led to any discursive crisis. While the Great Depression of the 1930s and the Stagflation of the 1970s were followed by discursive and policy changes, in favor of Keynesian liberalism for the former and neo-liberalism for the latter, contributors to this special section do not find any abrupt change resulting from the crisis. Rather, they point to incremental, but at times discontinuous, adjustments.

### **About the Authors**

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