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Evaluation capacity in the European Commission

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Evaluation capacity in the European Commission

Research about the capacity for ex-post legislative evaluations of seventeen Directorates-General dealing with European legislation.

In recent years, the European Commission has repeatedly stressed the importance it attaches to ex-post legislative evaluation. As a part of its agenda for Better Regulation, the Commission has promoted evaluation as a key tool for learning how legislation can be improved, for improving the accountability of the Commission towards the Council and the European Parliament and for repealing unnecessary rules. These high ambitions raise the question how much capacity the Directorates-General (DGs) of the Commission really have for legislative evaluation.

The research presented below is based on interviews with twenty evaluation coordinators and heads of evaluation units working for seventeen DGs responsible for EU legislation. The data is based on the year 2014, shortly before the Commission published its new Better Regulation Guidelines in 2015. However, most respondents thought that the situation in their DG would not change significantly because of these guidelines, as they would not cause immediate financial or personnel investments in evaluations.

The results show that all DGs have a planning for future evaluations and recognize learning and accountability as the basic aims of legislative evaluation. Beyond that, however, there is much variation among DGs. While in some DGs coordinating ex-post evaluation is the part-time job of just one person, other DGs dedicate a small team to this task; while most DGs spend about

Key points:

- The Directorates-General (DGs) of the Commission vary greatly in their capacity for ex-post legislative evaluation.
- DGs with a strong tradition in evaluating spending programmes also have more capacity for legislative evaluation.
- Most DGs did not expect extra investments in ex-post legislative evaluation to occur because of the new Better Regulation guidelines of 2015.

For the full report about this research, see: Voorst, S. van (2017). Evaluation capacity in the European Commission. *Evaluation*, 23(1), 24-41.

This research about evaluation capacity is part of a larger PhD project about ex-post legislative evaluation in the EU. For more information, please contact s.vanvoorst@fm.ru.nl

€200.000 on an average evaluation of one regulation or directive, other DGs spend around €400.000 because they require detailed case studies in all member states.

Since 2007 the number of DGs with internal training sessions paying attention to legislative evaluation has gradually increased. Nine DGs organized such sessions in 2014, while four DGs have internal networks for ex-post evaluation. These internal training sessions and networks tend to be valued more than the centralized evaluation trainings and networks managed by the Commission's Secretariat-General, because they focus on specific examples relevant for the DGs and reach a broader audience of policy makers. For the same reason the DGs for the Internal Market and the Digital Single Market have published their own guidelines for ex-post legislative evaluation, while seven other DGs have published internal guidelines for ex-post evaluation in general.

How can these differences in capacity between DGs be explained? An in-depth analysis of the data shows that neither the number of laws for which a DG is responsible nor the sensitivity of these laws (i.e. if they touch upon the sovereignty of the member states) affect that DG's evaluation capacity. However, the DGs' evaluation capacity does turn out to be affected by the presence of a strong evaluation tradition in the field of spending activities, as the data show that DGs with large budgets for spending programmes consistently invest more means in legislative evaluation than other DGs. This is also confirmed by statements of various respondents.

Accordingly, if the Commission wishes to strengthen evaluation capacity in its organization it would be useful to pay specific attention to those DGs with a small spending component, since these DGs tend to lag behind more often when it comes to supporting legislative evaluations. The Commission would also do well to encourage training sessions and networks for ex-post evaluation at the decentralized (intra-DG) level, as these kinds of arrangements are especially valued by the DGs when it comes to promoting evaluation as a tool for learning and accountability.