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Exploring accountability in the EU forest governance

The scholars of environmental governance firmly recognize the increased role of non-state actors (private sector, civil society etc.) in policy-making and the EU is not an exception from this trend (Marks & Hooghe 2004; Rhodes 1997). The inclusion of multiple interests into decision-making can help to increase consensus on the issues at stake and likely to support policy implementation, not least through the provision of additional resources (Conzelmann & Smith 2008; Reed 2008). At the same time, the increased involvement of multiple-actors, which often do not have clear jurisdictional or representative mandates pose significant procedural and conceptual challenges to achieving transparent, inclusive and accountable governance. Additionally, the multi-level character and complexity of EU policy-making further reduce the visibility, openness and clarity of decision-making processes, and may therefore undermine inclusion, transparency and accountability (Conzelmann & Smith, 2008; Knill & Liefferink, 2007; Suskevic, 2012).

This paper primarily looks at accountability aspect that allows assessing the overall degree of democratic control of governance arrangements. It can also act like “peer-review” to check the implementation of undertaken commitments among those directly involved (Piattoni, 2009; Peters & Pierre, 2004). The concerns over accountability in the EU are further linked to existing informal mechanisms widely utilized in policy-making (Rauschmayer et al., 2009; Hogenauer, 2014). Such mechanisms are often difficult to monitor and assess, limiting public control over decision-making (Rauschmayer et al., 2009; Bäckstrand et al., 2012). So far, there has only been few policy initiatives developed at the EU level to address accountability issue. The EU Transparency register, where all organizations, which are interested in access to the EU institutions are encouraged to register is one of such examples. This paper based on literature review and initial analysis of the EU Transparency register aim to explore representation of various actors expressing interests in forest and forest-related policies. The paper further elaborates on possible implications of such transparency initiatives for accountability in the EU multi-level governance.

Previous literature often states the accountability problem in governance, but rarely elaborates on the long-term implications of such governance arrangements for democratic regimes, as well as on ways how to bridge this “accountability gap”, especially in the multi-level context of the EU governance. Thus, exploring initiatives for increasing transparency of the EU decision-making and their implications for accountability can bridge this knowledge gap.

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