

Call for Papers for a Special Issue of *Politique Européenne* : European passages. ‘Intermittent’ EU Professionals and the Social Uses of Europe.

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Keywords : *Political sociology of the EU ; field analysis ; EU professionals ; division of labor.*

This special issue invites contributions focusing on the "intermittent" professionals of the European Union, i.e. individuals who spend only a portion of their careers working within the European political or bureaucratic fields (Rowell and Georgakakis, 2013 ; Kaupii, 2022; Westlake and Georgakakis, 2025a) and whose relations with the EU operate in large part from outside of these fields. While the political sociology of the European union has over the past two decades produced a rich body of literature on EU professionals (Schmidt-Wellenburg, 2025; Alayrac, 2022 ; Beauvallet et Michon, 2010 ; Michel, 2005 ; Robert, Michon et Beauvallet, 2025 ; Vauchez, 2015 ; Vauchez et De Witte, 2013 ; Westlake et Georgakakis, 2025; Georgakakis and Westlake, 2024; Büttner et al. 2015 ;), this has been concentrated on the most permanent and central figures of these administrations : senior Commission officials (Delassalle et Georgakakis, 2007; Georgakakis and Bordier, 2024), long-serving Members of the European Parliament (Beauvallet and Michon, 2016), established lobbyists (Laurens, 2018; Robert et Beauvallet, 2025), high-ranking bureaucrats (Georgakakis, 2017; Lebaron, 2008). Existing research has documented the social foundations of ‘European’ education, showing how access to and investment in such pathways are shaped by class position and capital endowments (Michon, 2019, 2024; Behar, 2024, 2025) and has studied the mechanisms through which EU bureaucratic capital is accumulated and converted to the most dominant administrations. But it has left in the shadows a large proportion of those who actually make Europe function day-to-day. This special issue deliberately inverts that perspective, turning attention instead toward the far more numerous agents who pass through European political and administrative spaces without establishing durable careers there.

Sociology of EU Professionals Beyond Elite Studies

The point of departure for this issue is both empirical and conceptual. Empirically, individuals who spend their entire careers in the Eurocratic Field (Rowell and Georgakakis, 2013) (i.e., the EU institutions, but also interest groups, lawyer firms, NGOs, representatives of national ministries, etc. etc.) represent the exception rather than the rule among EU

professionals. Permanent posts in the European institutions are scarce and fiercely contested: only a small number of candidates succeed in the competitive recruitment examinations that lead to tenured civil servant positions. Beyond this narrow gateway, the European institutional landscape is heterogeneous, and has more recently been characterized by a growing precariousness (Ballatore, 2019, 2024). Temporary contracts, freelance employees, internships, project-based funding, and short-term consultancy arrangements have proliferated across the Commission, the Parliament, Court of justice, interest groups, and the wider so-called “EU bubble”. This structural reality contributes to the segmentation of careers, in which individuals alternate between positions in "European affairs" and other professional sectors: national public administrations, private industry, other international organizations, civil society, academia, etc. These intermittent professionals, therefore, are not marginal figures: they are the numerical majority of those who *concretely* produce European public policies on a daily basis.

Reversing the Analytical Perspective

Building on a Bourdieusian field-theory approach (e.g., Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Bourdieu, 2012), this issue takes actors rather than institutions from its primary analytical standpoint. Rather than measuring intermittent professionals' trajectories against the yardstick of the most dominant EU figures (Eurocrats, etc.), we ask why individuals turn to Europe at a particular moment in their careers, what practices and representations they bring with them, how they contribute to the circulation of knowledge within European institutions, and what consequences this European passage has on the rest of their careers and lives. In other words, this issue proposes to analyse Europe as an object of social uses – distinction, circumvention of national hierarchies, reconversion of devalued assets, professional reorientation, acquisition of symbolic or financial resources – rather than simply as a destination or a career choice. This shift implies a diachronic biographical approach. The passage through Europe should be treated not as a professional episode to be evaluated in isolation, but as one moment amongst others in a longer biographical trajectory. Understanding this passage through Europe requires adopting a relational understanding, situating it in relation to prior socialization (educational, political, professional, familial, etc.) and to the subsequent spaces across which individuals circulate before entering or after leaving their European positions. It also requires moving beyond the binary opposition between national and European spaces, which we argue is insufficient to account for the complex, multi-directional circulation that characterize the careers of professionals across imbricated fields (political, bureaucratic, professional, etc.). From this perspective, Europe appears simultaneously as a space that provides capitals (professional, symbolic, financial, relational, political, etc.) and as a partially institutionalized arena that constrains practices,

shapes representations, and orients position-takings. Passing through Europe offers opportunities for social distinction, for the reconversion of nationally devalued assets into internationally legitimate capital, for professional reorientation, and for the acquisition of specific forms of expertise. But it also imposes constraints, generates disappointments, and sometimes produces profound disenchantment.

Finally, attention to the less visible agents operating within these fields calls for the adoption of an intersectional perspective. More frequently occupying dominated positions within the division of labor (for a discussion of the role of permanence and intermittence in the acquisition of field-specific capital, see Rowell and Georgakakis, 2013), these agents also more often tend to be women and/or individuals from racialized groups.

We invite submissions organized around three axes, each corresponding to a distinct analytical moment in the life of an intermittent European professional.

Axis 1: "Opportune Europe": The Social Logics of a Passage through Europe

The first axis invites contributions examining why individuals invest in Europe at particular moments of their trajectories. Access to European professional space is socially selective, and the decision to pursue it is never purely vocational: it reflects prior dispositions, educational capital and family socialization, as well as strategical choices. For some, Europe represents a detour around nationally dominant educational pathways that remain inaccessible for some (Delval et Behar, 2026). For others, it offers a space in which forms of international capital accumulated elsewhere (through international schooling, international work experience and transnational activism) can be converted into legitimate professional resources. Contributions to this axis might explore questions such as: What social and educational trajectories lead individuals to consider Europe as a desirable professional space? How is this space perceived in comparison to other arenas of power? Which social resources, representations and trajectories make a European passage both conceivable and achievable?

Axis 2 : "Intermittent Workers in the Division of Labor": Practices and Knowledge Circulation in the Making of European Public Policy

The second axis welcomes contributions focusing on the *concrete practices* of intermittent professionals during their European passages, and on how their prior dispositions shape the daily production of European public policy. A key argument here is that intermittent professionals, unlike their permanent counterparts, import exogenous knowledge, categories, practices, and representations into their workplaces that originate in other social worlds and that circulate through European spaces in ways that influence policy outcomes (for ex. expert groups). Contributions might examine the specific labour that intermittent

professionals perform, the positions they occupy within professional and social hierarchies, and the ways in which their prior trajectories (political, academic, national, etc.) inform their practices and actions in their workplaces. We particularly welcome work attending to the relations of domination that structure the daily life of workplaces, and that connects the specificity of "European" domination to broader processes documented in other professional spaces. In particular, we invite contributions that demonstrate how the intermittence and precariousness of certain EU professionals cannot be understood without reference to the racial, gendered, and postcolonial hierarchies that structure the institutional spaces in which they work. We would particularly appreciate contributions looking into the more invisible intermittent EU professionals: freelancers, non-permanent political advisors, parliamentary assistants, cabinet members, but also parliamentary ushers, canteen staff, etc.

Axis 3 : The Biographical Consequences of European Passages

The third axis invites contributions examining the biographical consequences of European passages: the resources, dispositions and representations that individuals carry with them when they leave. Europe can function as a springboard toward more materially or symbolically rewarding positions, through mechanisms of revolving doors between public and private sectors, or through the valorization of EU experience in national or international arenas (e.g. in the case of far-right MEPs, the EP constitutes a space for political professionalization which they can then reinvest in their national fields, see Beauvallet and Michon, 2019). But departure from European spaces is not always voluntary: some individuals fail to consolidate their position and are pushed out by structural precariousness. Beyond material consequences, passing through Europe also shapes how individuals understand themselves and the political project they have briefly served, generating retrospective narratives of vocation, or alternatively, profound disillusionment with European institutions and the professional norms they embody. Contributions might ask: What are the social logics underlying the failure to maintain positions within European institutions? Under what conditions does the Eurocratic field serve as a necessary or possible springboard toward higher social or institutional positions? How are practices and representations acquired within EU bureaucratic spaces requalified when transposed into other national or international arenas? In which fields is a "European experience" socially valuable, and in which is it not?

The Issue in Broader Debates

We situate this project at the intersection of several established research programs. It draws on the sociology of EU professionals and on work examining the mobility of social and professional groups across geographic and institutional spaces. It engages with the political

and historical sociology of the European Union, and connects to broader debates about precariousness in professional labor markets, the circulation of legitimate knowledge within bureaucratic institutions, and the reproduction of social inequalities. This issue also explicitly positions itself within the growing body of work that analyzes European institutions through the lens of social relations of gender and race (Kantola, 2010; Ahrens and Katola, 2025; Jacquot and Ledoux, 2021; Oleart, Waal et Weyenberg, 2025).

Submission Guidelines

We welcome qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods empirical contributions based on original fieldwork (interviews, ethnography and observations, analysis of prosopographical databases, archival research, or combinations thereof) bearing on any segment of the European professional space and any historical period. Proposition can be rooted in sociology, political sociology, as well as history or anthropology. Proposals should be submitted as extended abstracts of 800 to 1,000 words, presenting the research question(s), the empirical material, the theoretical framing, and the contribution to one or more of the three axes outlined above.

Abstracts should be sent to Marie Acabo (marie.acabo@unistra.fr) and Maxime Behar (maxime.behar@univ-amu.fr) by **April 10th**, for a submission of a first version of the paper on **June 15th**. Submissions are welcome in French or in English. We keep ourselves available for any questions.

About the journal

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