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## Appendix: Methods and fieldwork

Below we explain the methodological design, the embedded fieldwork and interviews that were conducted for this research project and for this specific paper.

### Methodological design

This paper uses the method of embedded process tracing. Process tracing is an in-depth case study method that can be used to empirically assess *processual* causal claims (Beach and Pedersen, 2019). Process tracing as used in this article consists of two main elements: an analytical framework that theorizes the process-level (by means of a 'process theory' or 'causal mechanism'); and an application to and evidencing of this framework to an empirical case.

The data gathering and analyses were *embedded*, thereby allowing us to go beyond publicly available sources, official documents, press reports, and on-off, ex post interviews. Data gathering was conducted both in real-time and afterwards, through observations, document-analysis and regular conversations with insiders, while the decision-making process was unfolding. The embedding took place in the periods October-December 2021, March and May-June 2022, and served to acquire a deeper understanding of the informal dynamics, which could be used to frame further interviews and document analysis afterwards.

### *The EPT approach in four steps*

EPT consists of four steps, which combine mainstream process tracing (early and explicit causal theorization) with interpretivist/ethnographic elements of repeated (but targeted) immersion and prolonged exposure to the field (going back to the field and confronting practitioners with initial evidence and inferences). The steps are:

1. Exploring the field ('soaking and poking')
2. Proto-theorizing (developing an initial process theory or causal mechanism)
3. Evidencing, evaluating and updating the process theory
4. Identifying functional equivalences across cases (generalization)

Steps 1 and 2 are best done simultaneously. Step 1 involves entering the field at a very early stage in the research project, to engage in an initial 'soaking and poking' (soaking in the environment, while poking at things to understand them). For this the researcher needs to have sufficient access and be sufficiently knowledgeable about the general characteristics and practices in that field, but not (necessarily) about the specific process or outcome at hand. Researchers might be hesitant about approaching participants and asking for interviews, before they have a clear view of what they are looking for and which questions to ask. Instead, they should proceed from the initial puzzle about current developments.

Step 2, proto-theorizing, involves laying out the initial theoretical groundwork and initial casing, on the basis of sensitizing questions: what is 'the puzzle', what is 'the case' and 'what is this a case of'? It also involves specifying initial ideas about process-level factors that mattered. This step is close to the heart of an abductive research design, as it involves theorizing how the initial hunches and observations might fit together.<sup>1</sup> At this stage, such a process theory has the status of a mechanistic sketch that flags the core actors, activities and the causal logic that binds these actions together. The focus will be on the simple and easily identifiable elements of the system or process. In the EUCO system, the focus is on usual suspects: the activities of the PEC and his Cabinet, the Council Secretariat, the political levels of the Commission and key representatives from member states: the leaders, their Sherpa's and Coreper II ambassadors.

Step 3 is to further develop and refine the process theory, by evaluating, evidencing and updating all the individual parts of the process theory. Like interpretive and ethnographic approaches, EPT assess the relevance of specific actions or activities through their social (meaning-making) context. The evidencing (empirical tracing of evidence) in EPT involves going back to the field, talking to the same people as in step 1, and many others, preferably presenting them with your initial analysis (a first draft), and updating your account on the basis of additional, documental evidence. Step 3 revolves around the *targeted* acquisition and *critical evaluation* of this empirical evidence to substantiate and revise the provisional process theory. Obviously, we cannot trace every phone-call or e-mail, so we should determine what kind of empirical fingerprints key activities leave behind. For instance, does the sequence of events match with the theorized process? How would certain stated actions by participants be reflected by what is (and what is not) stated in documents?

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<sup>1</sup> Neo-positivists might be inclined to revert such activities to the 'context of discovery' and argue that real scientific evaluation only focuses on the 'context of justification'. Neo-positivists follow Karl Popper's argumentation that it doesn't matter where theoretical conjectures come from, it only matters how these are subsequently tested.

What kind of response would they trigger from other actors? Building on the trust and cooperation developed in step 1, the researcher should be willing to be critical about what insiders say about their actions and presumed effects. The embeddedness again works in both direction, as insiders themselves learn about the trails of events that were not apparent to them at the heat of the moment.

Step 4 is about separating the general causal principles from the case-specific actions or events. The set of actors and their actions will always be unique to the case. However, there might be other cases in which similar actors are performing *functionally equivalent* activities in a causal process sense, but which might not necessarily have the exact same effects (due to case-specific idiosyncrasies). EPT aspires to generalization, meaning a very targeted and explicit identification of other cases/situations in which the process theory might apply. This is generalization not in the statistical sense of delineating the target population and the probability that causal effects are present there. In EPT, generalization revolves around abstracting away details of the social practice, that seemed important to insiders, but whose influence on the larger chain of events was limited. The targeted immersion of step 3 is meant to end with a clear-cut verdict on which analytical interpretation should be given precedence to.

### Interviews

Below, we only list the interviews that are used directly for this paper. We created a balanced view by speaking to all sides/institutions, and all levels of the decision-making (EU/CO/PEC Cabinet, Council Secretariat, Commission, Coreper, Working party level). We list the interviewees according to their institutional affiliation. To ensure complete anonymity, we will not attribute specific references in the text back to the specific interviews, but only refer to these interviews in a generic sense.

<u>Acronym</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Place</u>
<b>Cabinet of the President of the European Council</b>			
CPEC1	Member of Cabinet	July 2022	Brussels
CPEC2	Member of Cabinet	October 2022	Telephone
CPEC3	Member of Cabinet	October 2022	Brussels
CPEC4	Member of Cabinet	January 2023	Brussels
CPEC5	Member of Cabinet	April 2023	Brussels
<b>European Commission</b>			
COM1	Member of Cabinet President of the Commission	July 2022	Brussels
COM2	Member of Cabinet President of the Commission	January 2023	Brussels
COM3	Head of Cabinet Vice President	September 2022	Online
COM4	Member of Cabinet Vice President	July 2022	Brussels
COM5	Head of Unit General Secretariat	October 2022	Brussels
COM6	Member of unit General Secretariat	April 2022	Brussels
COM7	Member of unit General Secretariat	October 2022	Brussels
COM8	Head of Unit DG ENER	March 2023	Brussels
COM9	Member of unit DG ENER	February 2023	Brussels
COM10	Member of unit DG ENER	March 2023	Brussels
<b>General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union</b>			
CS1	Secretary General	March 2022	Brussels
CS2	Director General,	January 2022	Brussels
CS3	Director General TREE	July 2022	Brussels
CS4	Director General TREE	October 2022	Brussels
CS5	Director General TREE	January 2023	Brussels
CS6	Head of Unit	November 2021	Brussels

CS7	Head of Unit	January 2022	Brussels
CS8	Head of Unit	March 2022	Brussels
CS9	Head of Unit	June 2022	Brussels
CS10	Head of Unit	June 2022	Brussels
CS11	Head of Unit	September 2022	Brussels
CS12	Head of Unit	October 2022	Brussels
CS13	Head of Unit	January 2023	Brussels
CS14	Head of Unit TREE	October 2022	Brussels
CS15	Head of Unit Ecofin	October 2022	Brussels
CS16	Member of unit	July 2021	Brussels
CS17	Member of unit	June 2022	Brussels
CS18	Member of unit	June 2022	Brussels
CS19	Member of unit	October 2022	Brussels
CS20	Member of unit	December 2022	Brussels
<b>Member States Representatives</b>			
MS1	Personal advisor (Sherpa)	June 2022	Telephone
MS2	Personal advisor (Sherpa)	November 2022	the Hague
MS3	Deputy Director General	July 2022	the Hague
MS4	Deputy Director General	November 2022	the Hague
MS5	Deputy Director General	January 2023	the Hague
MS6	Head of Unit	April 2022	the Hague
MS7	Antici	July 2022	Brussels
MS8	Antici	October 2022	Brussels
MS9	Antici	January 2023	Brussels
MS10	Mertens	July 2022	Brussels
MS11	Attaché Energy	February 2023	Brussels

### EU documents and press reports

ACER (2022) *Final assessment of the EU wholesale electricity market design*, 29 April.

Council of the European Union (2021) *Outcomes of the Council meeting, Transport, Telecommunications and Energy*. 26 October, Luxembourg.

Council of the European Union (2022) *Council regulation establishing a market correct mechanism to protect citizens and the economy against excessively high prices*, Brussels, 19 December 2022/0393 (NLE).

Dutch TTF Natural Gas Futures (2022). <https://www.ice.com/products/27996665/Dutch-TTF-Gas-Futures/data>

European Commission (2021) *Communication Tackling rising energy prices: a toolbox for action and support*. COM(2021) 660 final, 13 October, Brussels.

European Commission (2022a) *Communication REPowerEU: Joint European Action for more affordable, secure and sustainable energy*. COM(2020) 108 final, 8 March, Strasbourg.

European Commission (2022b) *Communication Security of supply and affordable energy prices: Options for immediate measures and preparing for next winter*. COM(2022) 138 final, 23 March, Brussels.

European Commission (2022c) *Communication REPowerEU Plan* COM(2022) 230 final. 18 May, Brussels.

European Commission (2022d) *Proposal for a Council Regulation Establishing a market correction mechanism to protect citizens and the economy against excessively high prices*. COM(2022) 668 final, 22 November, Brussels.

European Council (2021a) *Conclusions* 21-22 October, Brussels

European Council (2021b) *Draft Conclusions* 16-17 December, Brussels.

European Council (2022a) *Conclusions*, 24 February, Brussels.

- European Council (2022b) *Versailles Declaration. Informal meeting of the Heads of State or Government* 10-11 March, Versailles.
- European Council (2022c) *Conclusions* 24-25 March, Brussels.
- European Council (2022d) *Conclusions* 30-31 May, Brussels.
- European Council (2022e) *Conclusions* 24 June, Brussels.
- European Council (2022f) *Conclusions* 21 October, Brussels.
- Eurointelligence (2022) *Moving past the price cap*, 7 December.
- Juncker, J-C. (2014) *Opening Statement of President-elect Jean-Claude Juncker at the European Parliament hearing* 21 October, Strasbourg.
- Ludlow, P. (2016) *Migration policy, the British question and economic policy*, EuroComment.
- Politico (2022b) *EU agrees on gas price cap, skeptics denounce it as an 'illusion'*, 19 December.
- Von der Leyen (2022a) *Opening remarks by President von der Leyen at the joint press conference with President Michel and President Macron following the meeting of the European Council of 23-24 June 2022*, 24 June. Video footage, minutes 33-35.