

ERC Consolidator Grant 2016
Research proposal [Part B1]¹
(Part B1 is evaluated both in Step 1 and Step 2
Part B2 is evaluated in Step 2 only)

Labour Politics and the EU's New Economic Governance Regime

EUROPEAN UNIONS

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Proposal duration in months: 60 month

European trade unions play a major role in democratic interest intermediation. This role is currently threatened by the increasingly authoritarian strain in EU's new economic governance (NEG). This project aims to explore the challenges and possibilities that the NEG poses to labour politics. Until recently, European labour politics has mainly been shaped by horizontal market integration through the free movement of goods, capital, services and people. After the financial crisis, the latter has been complemented by vertical integration effected through the direct surveillance of member states. The resulting NEG opens contradictory possibilities for labour movements in Europe.

On the one hand, the reliance of the NEG on vertical surveillance makes decisions taken in its name more tangible, offering concrete targets for contentious transnational collective action. On the other hand however, the NEG mimics the governance structures of multinational firms, by using key performance indicators that put countries in competition with one another. This constitutes a deterrent to transnational collective action. The NEG's interventionist and competitive strains also pose the threat of nationalist counter-movements, thus making European collective action ever more vital for the future of EU integration and democracy.

This project has the following objectives:

1. To understand the interrelation between NEG and existing 'horizontal' EU economic governance; and the shifts in labour politics triggered by NEG;
2. To open up novel analytical approaches that are able to capture both national and transnational social processes at work;
3. To analyse the responses of established unions and new social movements to NEG in different areas of labour politics, economic sectors and governance levels, and their feedback effects on NEG;
4. To develop a new scientific paradigm capable of accounting for the interplay between EU economic governance, labour politics and EU democracy.

The project belongs to the primary ERC review panel SH2. Within SH2, the ERC keyword 'Democratisation and Social Movements' characterises the subject of my proposal very well, as I am studying the role of labour movements in the politicization and democratisation of EU's new economic governance regime. I have also added three free keywords to the list: 'labour movements', 'labour politics', and 'industrial relations'.

¹ Instructions for completing Part B1 can be found in the *'Information for Applicants to the Starting and Consolidator Grant 2016 Calls'*.