**Acting as a Jolly Joker or Increasing Democratic Legitimacy? The Role and Influence of European Semester Officers**

**Abstract**

The European Semester of socio-economic policy coordination has been criticised for poor capacity to induce national ownership over reforms. In reaction to these pressures, the European Commission intensified both bilateral and multilateral efforts to increase the legitimacy of the Semester. European Semester officers (ESOs) were sent to Commission’s representations in national capitals to reinforce policy dialogue with Member States. This paper looks to spell out to what extent and how ESOs enhance the democratic (throughput) legitimacy of the Semester. The empirical part of the paper draws on interview data from 22 Member States. The findings would suggest that ESOs do foster ownership by virtue of explaining to national stakeholders the reasoning behind Commission’s initiatives. Conversely, they succeed less in transmitting stakeholders’ policy concerns and suggestions to the Commission. ESOs’ domestic engagement could, nonetheless, serve as a blueprint for Commission’s future efforts to build domestic coalitions and reduce blame-shifting to Brussels.

**Keywords:** European Semester, European Semester officers, democratic legitimacy, throughput legitimacy, Representation of the European Commission, European governance