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Executive summary

- Ideas and the shapers of ideas have always been central to the European 'project'. Potentially, they have an important role to play in the formulation of public policies, in democratic decision-making, and in providing support to Member States and the European Union's diplomatic efforts. Yet the groups that seek to generate and disseminate policy ideas related to the European continent – 'Euro-think tanks' – have never been studied as a distinct community within the 25 E.U. Member States.
- Using nine criteria derived from previous literature, 149 think tanks have been identified and analysed. 36 are 'Euro-specific' organisations that specialise in European policy issues. For the remaining 113, Europe is a significant research area among other issues.
- They employ nearly 3,000 researchers working more or less closely on policies related to Europe. Communities of researchers working within 'Euro-think tanks' are particularly large in Germany, Austria, Poland, and the U.K. They are relatively underdeveloped in France and Italy. Only 5 per cent work with E.U. actors from Brussels, the rest are based in the Member States.
- Overall, think tank 'supply' is relatively limited, as the sector is somewhat fragmented and focuses on issues – such as institutional matters – where there is significant overlap. Certain policy areas – such as the environment – are relatively neglected. Euro-think tanks' audience is limited, as well as the range of methods they use. Organisations that use a mode of operation founded in Anglo-American practice seem to predominate.
- Qualitative interviews confirm that Euro-think tanks, although welcomed by policy-makers and observers of the sector, have not yet found their place fully in European policy-making: the value they add is not perceived clearly, they are seen as moderately useful, and even sometimes elitist. Overall, they are believed to have a limited impact on policies and public opinion.
- Enlargement has not affected Euro-think tanks' operations much. Academia's increasing entrepreneurship throughout Europe, growing competition, both from within and outside the sector, and, most importantly, financial difficulties due to reduced public funding are however reshaping the market.
- Euro-think tanks are seeking to meet changes in their operating environment through more deliberate fund-raising, networks and cooperation, greater specialisation, financial transparency, and even performance measurement. Traditional perceptions of independence and their role vis-à-vis the mass public are challenged.
- Yet the sector is also getting stronger as smaller, more specialised and militant players join the 'market of ideas'. Actors adapt to new financial imperatives, learn the 'advocacy' game and how to use the media.