

Seminar 8 (Simulation) — Facebook vs. Brussels, 2010

IR227 Politics of Change — alternative seminar format

July 2026

What you'll do in 90 minutes

[Bridge to seminar] *It is 2010. Facebook has just hit 500 million users. The European Commission is about to decide what replaces the 1995 Data Protection Directive. You are on one side of that decision.*

- Two teams: Facebook's European public-policy office; the European Commission's DG Justice team.
- Facebook builds a public affairs plan to blunt the Brussels effect. The Commission builds a white paper to produce one.
- Same toolkit, opposite sides of the table. Plenary is a live cross-examination.

Three methodological points up front

1. The Brussels-effect conditions are a checklist either side can use — the Commission to engineer diffusion, Facebook to block it. Same five conditions, opposite intent. (Bradford 2020)
2. Institutional-change mechanisms describe your own strategy, not just the case: is Facebook defending drift? Is the Commission attempting displacement or layering? (Streeck and Kathleen 2005)
3. Industry is a variable, not a bloc. Some firms prefer a high, predictable compliance bar over prolonged uncertainty; identify who's actually aligned with whom.

Two teams, one confrontation

	Facebook (European public policy)	European Commission (DG Justice)
Deliverable	Public affairs plan	White paper
Aim re: Brussels effect	Avoid it	Produce it
Core tool (in addition)	Stakeholder mapping	Institutional-coalition design

~6–7 students per team. Each team owns one confidential-ish role brief from `ta/case-08-sim.tex` plus a short intelligence note on the other side.

Recap: the Brussels-effect conditions

Framework: Five conditions for the Brussels effect

1. Market size.
2. Regulatory capacity.
3. Stringent standards.
4. Inelastic targets.
5. Non-divisibility.

Each is a lever. The Commission's team designs a Regulation, extraterritorial scope, and real fines to secure all five; Facebook's team looks for the weakest one to attack. (Bradford 2020)

Recap: institutional-change mechanisms

Framework: The five mechanisms

Drift. Rules unchanged, environment changes; outcomes diverge.

Conversion. Rules unchanged in form, redirected to new purposes.

Layering. New rules added on top of old without dismantling.

Displacement. Old institutions actively replaced by new ones.

Exhaustion. Institutions wither without intentional replacement.

Ask which mechanism each side is trying to *engineer*: replacing a Directive with a Regulation is one of these; keeping a friendly national regulator as lead supervisor is another. (Hacker et al. 2015; Streeck and Kathleen 2005)

Recap: political capital and stakeholder mapping

- Bendiek-Stürzer: diffusion is more credible when it rests on visible internal consensus, not market size alone — and that consensus can be built or fractured on purpose. (Bendiek and Stuerzer 2023)
- Stakeholder mapping (Facebook's practitioner tool): plot each actor on power/interest — manage closely, keep satisfied, keep informed, monitor. Tells you where to spend scarce lobbying capacity.
- Weaponized interdependence as a secondary lens: who controls a choke-point here — market access, or transatlantic data flows? (Farrell and Newman 2019)

- Setup and role assignment (10 min)
- Team drafting (30 min) - Both fill in **goal / strategy / how**.
 - Facebook: public affairs plan.
 - Commission: white paper.
- Each team selects two spokespeople + discussion (30 mins). 10 mins presentation each and 10 mins discussion.

- Bendiek, A. and I. Stuerzer (2023). **“The Brussels Effect, European Regulatory Power and Political Capital: Evidence for Mutually Reinforcing Internal and External Dimensions of the Brussels Effect from the European Digital Policy Debate”**. In: *Digital Society* 2.1, p. 5.
- Bradford, A. (Feb. 2020). **“The Brussels Effect”**. In: *The Brussels Effect: How the European Union Rules the World*. Oxford University Press.
- Farrell, H. and A. L. Newman (July 2019). **“Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion”**. In: *International Security* 44.1, pp. 42–79.

- Hacker, J. S., P. Pierson, and K. Thelen (2015). **“Drift and conversion: hidden faces of institutional change”**. In: *Advances in Comparative-Historical Analysis*. Ed. by J. Mahoney and K. Thelen. Strategies for Social Inquiry. Cambridge University Press, pp. 180–208.
- Streeck, W. and T. Kathleen (2005). **“Introduction: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies”**. eng. In: *Beyond Continuity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 1–39.