

Impact of European Union Law on National Law

Submitted on 27 May 2014 by Jorge Leitão

On 22-25th of May, citizens of the European Union had to choose the next members of the European Parliament. As with previous elections, turnout was low - which seem to suggest that many are not convinced of its importance. Yet, during the campaign, many claimed that the European Union has never had so much impact on the life of its citizens as it has today.

As a European citizen (Portugal), I believed this claim, yet always with a bit of distrust as I was never able to find evidence that supported it.

As a physicist, I took the claim with even more caution since it seems hard to even quantify “impact on the life of the citizens”.

These two perspectives of my life are in fact combined in a small civic project - publicos.pt - where I collect datasets of the portuguese state and present quantitative analysis to fulfil civic curiosities. Needless to say, I had an enormous curiosity to test this claim.

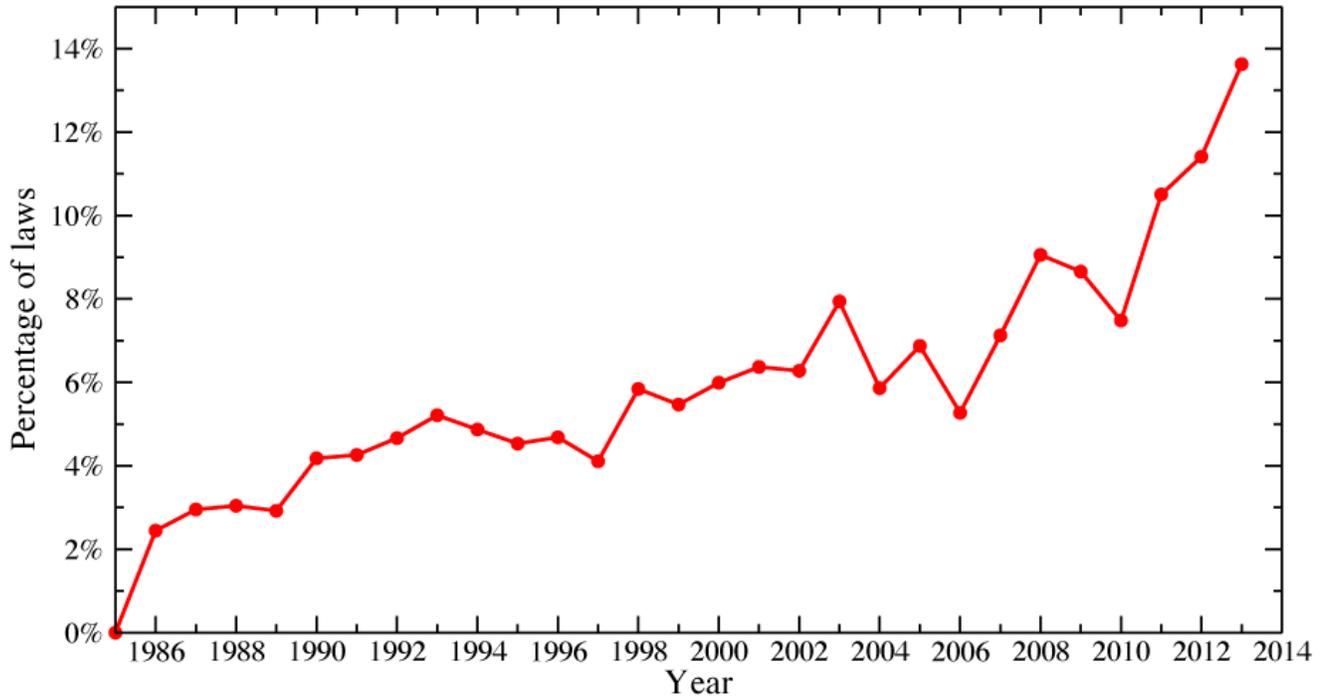
The assumption is the following: the life of the citizens is governed by national laws. Thus, the impact of the European Union on the life of the citizens can be measured by its impact on the national laws.

With this idea in mind, I came up with a way to quantify it: count *how many new national laws cite at least one european law*, and divide that number by the *total number of new laws*. If this ratio is zero (0%), the impact is low since new national laws are not translating EU decisions into people's life; if this ratio is one (100%), the impact is high.

Thanks to a european law, the portuguese state [has all its laws available online](http://publicos.pt) (pt). Even better, my little project already had this database. So, using [Python](#), [Django](#) and [xmgrace](#), I've came up with the following graph:

Impact of EU legislation on Portuguese legislation

Percentage of portuguese laws citing at least one EU law



(details and licence [here](#); code in [github repository](#))

As expected, we observe a steady increase from 1986 (year Portugal joined EU): 14% of all portuguese laws created in 2013 cite at least one european law.

Also, from 1986 to 2006 (20 years) there was a consistent increase of 5%, from 2% to 7% and we observe a change in the sloop since 2006, which gave rise to an increase of 7% in 10 years: not only it is increasing, but it seems to be increasing faster (2x faster).

In conclusion, the claim that the European Union never had so much impact on the life of the citizens seems to be well supported for the Portuguese case: for the first time, in 2013 14% of all new portuguese laws cited at least one european law, and in the last 10 years this number increased 7%, about as much as in the 20 years before.

It would be interesting to see how this compares with other european states.