

# **THE PARALLEL ADMINISTRATION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION:**

## **National Officials in European Clothes?**

Jarle Trondal

CES – Centre for European Studies

Agder University College

Department of Social Sciences

Servicebox 422

4604 Kristiansand, Norway

Phone: +47 38 14 15 61

Fax: +47 38 14 10 26

Email: Jarle.Trondal@hia.no

### **ABSTRACT**

This chapter poses the following question: Does the European Commission manage to transform the loyalties and identities of Commission officials seconded on short-term contracts? Studying the mix of national and supranational loyalties amongst Commission officials is important in order to assess the integrative and transformative power of the core executive of the European Union. Moreover, the parallel administration of the European Commission is an important laboratory for studying system integration across the EU/nation-state interface. This study applies an institutional middle-range approach to make conditional assessments on the transformative power of the parallel administration of the European

Commission. Making explicit references to operational dimensions are vital in order to determine the conditions under which institutions matter generally, and in order to identify the conditions under which the European Commission contribute to system integration across levels of governance in particular. Further empirical studies, however, are needed to test the conditional validity of the suggested hypotheses. Hence, this chapter outlines a middle-range research agenda for future empirical studies of system transformation in Europe.

## **INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>**

Despite much effort uncovering the cogs and wheels of European integration, the scholarly debate has largely been trapped in a neo-functionalist versus intergovernmentalist dichotomy. The 1990's, however, witnessed a theoretical turn in the study of European integration towards less focus on either/or 'unifying story-lines' and more in the direction of both/and middle-range theories. This theoretical move partially reflects a more general 'institutionalist turn' in the study of public administration and European integration (Jupille and Caporaso 1999; March and Olsen 1998). The study of European integration has developed from a study of European Union (EU) institutions towards a study of the EU through institutional lenses (Schneider and Aspinwall 2001). The current study suggests an institutional middle-range approach to make conditional assessments of the transformative potential of the parallel administration of the European Commission. The goal is to outline a research agenda for future empirical studies into the question of system transformation in Europe.

The European Commission is the core executive body at the heart of the EU (Nugent 1997). As a catalyst of European integration and transformation of national government systems the European Commission is an important institution to "unpack". This chapter poses the

following question: Does the Commission manage to transform the loyalties and identities of national civil servants seconded on short-term contracts to the European Commission?

Secondment refers to national civil servants hired on temporary contracts within the European Commission. Studying the mix of national and supranational loyalties amongst Commission officials is important in order to assess the transformative power of the European Commission writ large. Supranational loyalties denote Commission officials identifying with the EU at large, with the European Commission, with the Directorate General (DG) in which they are employed, or with particular task roles. Despite the existence of several partially competing organisational logics within the Commission (Christiansen 1997), it is important to uncover the relative primacy of supranational dynamics. This chapter highlights one under-researched ‘Cinderella’ of the European Commission where intergovernmental dynamics may have ample chances of survival and viability: the parallel administration of seconded national civil servants (Cini 1996; Shore 2000; Wessels 1985). Hence, a least likely research design underpins the study.

One rationale for studying national civil servants seconded to the European Commission is to assess the extent to which individual officials come to construct new supranational loyalties, identities and role perceptions. This represents a critical examination of the socialising and re-socialising power of the European Commission. Arguably, the emergence of supranational identities and roles amongst seconded Commission officials is conducive to system transformation at the level of individual civil servants. According to the White Paper on European Governance issued by the Commission in 2001 “exchange of staff and joint training between administrations at various levels would contribute to a better knowledge of each other’s policy objectives, working methods and instruments” (European Commission 2001: 13).

Only a few studies have penetrated the internal life of the European Commission (e.g. Cram 1994; Edwards and Spence 1997; Shore 2000). Not surprisingly, the parallel administration of the Commission has been subject to even less scholarly attention. I argue, however, that seconded Commission personnel represent an adequate testing-ground for institutional approaches on system transformation. Seconded national civil servants are heavily “pre-packed” and pre-socialised prior to entering the Commission. Their stay at the Commission is relatively short and the majority return to prior positions in national ministries or agencies when their temporary contracts come to an end. Hence, one should expect these officials to be fairly reluctant Europeans. However, the *prospective emergence* of supranational allegiances amongst seconded personnel is indicative of the supranational character of the Commission at large. Moreover, the enactment of supranational allegiances amongst seconded national civil servants is indicative of the transformative power of the European Commission. According to Cini (1996: 121), “the appointment of temporary staff encourages an intermingling of national and European administrators which itself has the potential to provoke a sort of process of Europeanisation at the national and sub-national levels”.

The next section provides a short review of recent literature on the parallel administration of the European Commission, succeeded by two concepts of system integration across levels of governance: a weak and a strong. Finally, a middle-range institutionalist perspective to system integration is outlined that suggests scope conditions under which supranational allegiances are likely to precede national and sectoral allegiances amongst the seconded civil servants. Arguably, supranational allegiances are likely to be evoked under the following conditions: **(H1)** if the officials have the European Commission as their primary institutional affiliation; **(H2)** if the European Commission is organised according to principles that challenge the

governance dynamics of domestic government systems; (*H3*) if the seconded personnel are employed in the European Commission for long periods of time and participate intensively in the day-to-day decision-making processes of the Union; (*H4*) if the seconded personnel are weakly pre-socialised before entering the Commission; and (*H5*) if the seconded personnel are strongly integrated into the inner life of the Commission. Based on these conditional hypotheses on system integration this study outlines a middle-range research agenda for future empirical analyses.

## **THE PARALLEL ADMINISTRATION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

There is a surprising dearth of in-depth empirical studies of the European Commission (Christiansen 1997: 83; Egeberg 1996; Shore 2000: 127). Most studies of the Commission are focused on the President, the Commissioners, the formal organisation, the permanent bureaucratic staff and the historical evolution of the Commission. Thus, it should not surprise that the parallel administration of the Commission is severely under-researched (Christiansen 1997: 84).

Organisations often consist of two parallel procedures for recruitment and two sets of personnel: permanent and temporary officials recruited on the basis of merit and quotas, or *parachutage*, respectively. The construction of new organisations often warrants hiring external officials on temporary basis. This was also the case when constructing the High Authority in the 1950s. However, envisaging an independent European bureaucracy, Jean Monnet rejected the model of delegated and temporary seconded national civil servants at the centre of the Community executive (Shore 2000: 177). This vision of Jean Monnet largely collided with the wishes of the French government in the 1950s and 1960s. The French

government “had made a strong case for the Commission to be comprised solely of temporary officials seconded from national administrations” (Cini 1996: 120-121). For federalists, like Monnet, secondments represented the opposite of an independent civil service at the EU level. Accordingly, the parallel administration of the Commission represented, for federalists like Monnet, a ‘Trojan Horse’ threatening the coherence and autonomy of the core executive body of the emerging European Community.

However, recruitment to the High Authority of the Coal and Steel Community and to the Commission(s) of the EEC was mainly based on national officials on short-term contracts (Nugent 2001). Today, few international organisations have institutionalised a parallel administration to the same extent as the European Commission. Reflecting increased workload, functional differentiation and a need for external assistance, the non-statutory staff of the Commission has increased to about 30 per cent of the current Commission’s workforce (European Commission 1999: 18). The Council of Ministers, the Council Secretary and the European Parliament have “practically no temporary staff” (Bodiguel 1995: 451). However, different EU institutions often second officials among themselves (Christiansen 2001). The size of the current parallel administration of the European Commission has even forged counter-reactions from the Commission, highlighting that “the high percentage of non-permanent officials in the Commission cannot be justified” (European Commission 2000: 37). The parallel administration of the Commission makes up a considerable part of the institution, making the Commission a multi-faceted organisation with respect to recruitment practises, personnel, career paths, and, perhaps, institutional allegiances and individual loyalties.

Being largely an understaffed institution, the Commission is heavily dependent on external assistance. This assistance is brought into the Commission through the web of EU committees

and more permanently through the non-statuary staff. However, whereas ‘comitology’ has grown into a big “research industry”, secondments have been given only scarce scholarly attention. At present, about 16 000 permanent officials work on established posts in the Commission (Nugent 2001: 164; Stevens and Stevens 2001: 17). Additionally, the Commission has about 4 200 non-permanent officials on various short-term contracts (European Commission 1999: 9). This system of non-permanent staff is divided into three different sub-groups: temporary agents (N = 2400), auxiliary staff (N = 1000), and seconded national experts (N = 760) (European Commission 1999: 9; Stevens and Stevens 2001: 17). This study focuses particularly on the latter, that is civil servants from member-state administrations “loaned to the Commission for up to three years” (Spence 1997: 9). Temporary agents and auxiliary staff, by contrast, come from various research institutes, interest organisations, etc. Indicative of the increased salience of seconded personnel in the Commission, these officials numbered 200 in 1989, 250 in 1990, about 600 in 1994, and in 1995 the number was 650 (Bodiguel 1995: 442; Edwards and Spence 1997: 79). At present, seconded national officials number 760, accounting for 15 per cent of all A-grade staff of the Commission and probably for about 25 per cent of A4 to A6 staff (Nugent 2001: 165; Stevens and Stevens 2001: 20). Hence, the parallel administration of the Commission has increased about 250 per cent in the 1990s, especially in the top ranks.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, this part of the Commission will be extended substantially with the EU enlargement in 2004. The Commission has estimated a need of over 5000 new recruits from the candidate countries, mostly based on non-permanent posts (EUobserver 2003).

Seconded national experts have a potential for generating system integration across levels of governance “by allowing [national] civil servants ... to learn about [EU] procedures and administrative culture” (Spence 1997: 79). According to the Commission (1999: 63),

seconded national experts “are a way of forging stronger links between national administrations and the Commission...”. Moreover, studying the emergence of supranational loyalties amongst temporary national experts within the Commission can identify mechanisms of re-socialisation at the heart of the European Union. According to Shore (2000: 152), “[t]hey find it a wonderfully mind-expanding experience: most who come here want to stay after their secondment has finished. Like the *agents temporaires*, once they get one foot in the door they want to get the rest of their body through”.

## **TWO CONCEPTS OF SYSTEM INTEGRATION**

This section outlines a weak and a strong concept of system integration. A weak concept views system integration as the web of contacts, networks and relationships that emerges between politico-administrative systems. A strong concept measures system integration as transformational change – that is, the basic dynamics of governance, decision-making, and individual roles and identities change.

System integration, both in the weak and strong sense, is a relatively embryonic field of study, remains under-studied and poorly understood. System integration or *engrenage* may be understood as processes and not fixed states of affairs (Held 1999: 27). The mutual relationships between politico-administrative systems constitute ever-changing phenomena in political-administrative life. Just like single organisations are in constant states of flux, the relationships between organisations are constantly evolving. Moreover, system integration is relational - covering the relationships, interdependencies and interconnections between different systems and between the members of these systems (Spinelli 1966). Finally, system integration is a continuum, not a dichotomy, ranging from weak to strong modes of



integration (Trondal 1999). As discussed more thoroughly below, weak system integration requires that actual contacts occur between at least two systems. A stronger notion of integration requires, in addition, that these contacts mutually affect the systems and the individual members within them.

Several suggestions as to how to conceptualise system integration have been addressed in the literature. Rosenau (1969: 46) defines system integration as penetrative processes whereby “members of one polity serve as participants in the political process of another”. March (1999: 134) conceives of system integration as gauged at measuring the “density, intensity and character of the relations amongst the elements of [different systems]”. Moreover, “integration” signifies some measure of the density, intensity and character of the relations among the constitutive elements of a system’ (Olsen 2001: 4). Referring to system integration in the EU, Scheinman (1966: 751) sees system integration as the “intermingling of national and international bureaucrats in various working groups and committees in the policy-making context of the EEC”. Similarly, Majone (1996) “refers to the idea of *copinage technocratique* to denote the interaction between Brussels officials, experts from industry, and national civil servants” (quoted from Radaelli 1999: 759 – original emphasis). Common to all these conceptualisations is an emphasis on the mutual relationships and contacts between systems and the members of these systems. In that sense, these conceptions of system integration represent fairly weak definitions of this phenomenon, emphasising that different systems actually come into mutual contact of some sort.

Approaching a stronger notion of system integration, Barnett (1993: 276) asks, “[w]hat happens when state actors are embedded in two different institutions ... that call for different roles and behaviour?” Similarly, Olsen (1998: 2) asks, “[w]hat happens to organised political

units when they become part of a larger unit?" More assertive, Eriksen and Fossum (2000: 16) argue that "integration, in the true meaning of the term, depends on the alteration, not the aggregation of, preferences". System integration thus denotes processes whereby organisational dynamics and behavioural logics are transformed amongst European institutions and decision-makers (Held 1999: 18). This represents a stronger definition of system integration by emphasising how governance systems are mutually affected due to increased and intensive interaction. Moreover, whilst Olsen emphasises system level analyses, Rosenau and Barnett apply the individual government official as the unit of analysis.

From the late 1960s onwards, a growing literature on system integration emerged in the wake of accelerating processes of European integration. Studies of public administrations discovered how domestic administrative systems became increasingly embedded within international political orders. Consequently, the open-ended and multilevel character of domestic politico-administrative systems attracted increased attention from scholars of public administration. Early scholarly contributions to system integration demonstrated how the domestic-international distinction became increasingly blurred due to the intermingling of national and international bureaucrats (Cassese 1987; Egeberg 1980; Feld and Wildgen 1975; Hopkins 1976; Kerr 1973; Pendergast 1976; Scheinman 1966: 751; Scheinman and Feld 1972). Highlighting 'bureaucratic inter-penetration' across levels of governance, this literature emphasised that the description of the Community as 'above', 'alongside' or 'outside' the member states were oversimplifications (Rosenau 1969; Scheinman 1966). The national level and the Community level were described as mutually interwoven and intermixed in fundamental ways (Demmke 1998: 15). This body of literature highlighted that national government officials became regular participants at the EU level of governance (Rosenau 1969). However, only scarce attention was devoted to how such cross-level participation

affected the 'inner selves' of the participants, let alone their actual decision-making behaviour (see however Feld and Wildgen 1975; Kerr 1973; Pendergast 1976; Scheinman and Feld 1972). As such, a weak notion of system integration underpinned these early studies.

Going beyond a *sui generis* notion of the European Commission, the next section suggests a middle-range institutionalist approach to system integration. First, assuming that the Commission shares important characteristics with national bureaucracies, three general institutionalist arguments are outlined to render intelligible system integration through the parallel administration of the European Commission. Second, going beyond the question of institutional "mattering", I propose five hypotheses that specify five different institutional conditions under which seconded Commission officials are likely to evoke supranational allegiances.

## **TOWARDS A MIDDLE-RANGE FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS**

Departing from three general institutionalist perspectives suggested below (STEP I), I suggest a middle-range institutionalist account on system integration (STEP II). STEP II identifies scope conditions that are conducive to the emergence of supranational roles and allegiances among seconded Commission officials. Through this endeavour STEP II also specifies conditions under which pre-established national and sectoral identities and roles are sustained among these officials. Our aim is not foremost to theorise the various micro-foundations that underpin the three institutionalist approaches outlined below, only to suggest scope conditions that render the evocation of supranational allegiances intelligible. Hence, the main emphasis is put on STEP II in order to make the Janus-face metaphor less black-and-white and turn it into a more fine-grained heuristic device.

## **STEP I: Three institutional arguments**

STEP I introduces institutional arguments from Simon (1957), Selznick (1957) and March and Olsen (1989) which emphasise the *transformative potential of organisational structures*. The first perspective is a cognitive perspective on organisations (Simon 1957). According to the bounded rational approach in organisational science the attention of actors is limited. Humans have cognitive limitations, rendering them vulnerable to the systematic selection of decision premises and stimuli offered by organisational structures. Moreover, assuming that actors are multiple selves, organisational arrangements contribute to activate and deactivate particular repertoires of decision behaviour, identities and role perceptions. Political and administrative life is pictured as multi-faceted, contextualised and endogenous. More particularly, formal structures are pictured as political agendas that contribute to a mobilisation of bias (Hammond 1986; Schattschneider 1960). The identities enacted by organisational actors reflect their rational choices, however, biased and skewed in systematic ways by the organisational structures embedding them.

Formal organisations are sometimes “*infuse[d] with value beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand*” (Selznick 1957: 17 – original emphasis). Value-laden organisations acquire strong potentials for socialising the organisational members into loyal trustees. At the same time, however, actors affiliated to organisations with a strong institutional core are often disposed to resist changing pre-established identities and roles (Knill 2001). Accordingly, processes of socialisation make actors take particular identities and roles *for granted*. Actors become norm- and rule-driven as a result of the internalisation of roles and identities. A cultural perspective on organisations emphasises the “pre-packed” character of governmental actors. When seconded into the European Commission national civil servants will thus retain

and sustain pre-established national and sectoral institutional affiliations and evoke role perceptions that deviate only marginally from past roles. Processes of re-socialisation into supranational actors are subject to the logic of recency (March 1994: 70).

A related institutional perspective views actors' identities and allegiances as reflecting logics of appropriateness (March and Olsen 1989). Actors often have several institutional affiliations simultaneously that provide different cues for action and senses of belonging. Based on the following questions actors make *deliberate* choices as to what identity and role to apply in particular situations: (i) Who am I?; (ii) What kind of situation is this?; and (iii) What should a person such as I do in a situation such as this (March and Olsen 1989: 23)? According to the logic of appropriateness actors are basically rule- and identity-driven, however, not in the sense of taken-for-grantedness (cf. above). Actors are consciously geared towards evoking identities that associate with particular situations and that has several points of resemblance. According to a logic of novelty, actors tend to evoke new identities and roles that deviate only marginally from past identities and roles (March and Olsen 1989: 34).

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We have now addressed three institutional arguments. First, a bounded rational argument emphasising that organisations have a transformative potential with respect to the identities and allegiances evoked by the organisational members. According to this perspective, organisational structure bias and skew role and identity perceptions in systematic ways. However, the impact of socialisation processes is modest both with respect to *depth and permanence*. Actors' roles and identities are pictured as contingent and endogenous, but at the same time malleable and not very deep-seated. The second and third institutionalist

approaches picture a stronger transformative potential of institutionalised organisations. Officials not only 'go native' in Brussels, they tend to 'stay native' in the sense that new supranational loyalties are internalised and/or considered appropriate. However, this transformation and re-socialisation process easily becomes subject to inertia, path-dependency and a logic of recency (March 1994).

Bearing these different institutionalist insights in mind, the next section suggests an institutionalist middle-range research agenda that specifies *the conditions under which* seconded Commission staff is likely to evoke or construct supranational allegiances.

## **STEP II: Towards a middle-range approach**

Assuming that 'institutions matter', the next question is under what conditions institutions matter in particular ways. Despite arguing that the European Commission socialise Commission officials into supranational agents and 'European elites' (Christiansen 2001; Shore 2000), less effort has been put on studying under what conditions Commission officials evoke supranational loyalties. Based on the above institutionalist arguments, this section suggests five scope conditions to account for system integration in general, and the emergence of supranational allegiances in particular:

- The primary and secondary institutional affiliations embedding the seconded officials,
  - The organisational dynamics underpinning these institutional affiliations,
  - The length and intensity of affiliation towards secondary institutions (the Commission),
  - The degrees and patterns of pre-socialisation within the primary institution (domestic),
- and

- The social and physical structures embedding the civil servants.

Suggestively, supranational identifications are likely to be strengthened and fostered amongst seconded Commission personnel under the following conditions. That is,

*H1*: if the officials have the European Commission as their primary institutional affiliation,

*H2*: if the European Commission is governed by dynamics that challenge the core dynamics of national government systems,

*H3*: if the seconded personnel are employed in the European Commission for long periods of time and participate intensively in the day-to-day decision-making processes of the Union,

*H4*: if the seconded personnel are weakly pre-socialised before entering the Commission, and

*H5*: if the seconded personnel are strongly integrated into the social and physical environments in the Commission.

In the following these five hypotheses are elaborated on theoretically and illustrated empirically. However, due to the present lack of empirical studies of seconded personnel in the European Commission, the discussion applies empirical observations of a more general kind. The empirical data presented illustrate how the above scope conditions affect the strength and weakness of supranational allegiances amongst permanent *Commission decision-makers* and among national civil servants who attend *EU committees*. Further empirical data should be collected that provide solid tests of the above conditional hypotheses in the case of the parallel administration of the European Commission.

First, seconded national civil servants to the Commission retain their primary institutional affiliations to their national ministries and agencies (*H1*). When seconded to the Commission

these civil servants remain largely paid by their national employer. Moreover, their stay in Brussels is only temporary. When the secondment period reaches the end most civil servants return to prior positions within the national civil service. Seconded officials are thus heavily “pre-packed” and pre-socialised when entering the Commission (H4). They also anticipate potential future career paths within the national civil service after their stay in Brussels. Consequently, the Commission should be considered a secondary institutional affiliation to the seconded personnel. Even when staying in the Commission, their national ministry or agency remains their primary institutional affiliation. Accordingly, the identities and roles evoked by seconded personnel are likely to be more national than supranational. They are likely to attach weight to their national identities and roles while working as non-statutory staff in the Commission. A study of seconded officials from the Scottish Office of the UK central administration to the European Commission supports these arguments (Smith 2001). Smith (2001) observes that seconded officials reinforce their national administrative cultures and allegiances rather than becoming more supranationally oriented during their stay at the Commission.

I argue that the internal organisational structures of the European Commission are conducive to weakening national allegiances amongst seconded personnel (H2). The dominating organising principle of the Commission is sector (Egeberg and Trondal 1999). This organising principle challenges the dominating territorial principle in international relations and inter-state politics. The sectoral principle of the Commission is especially strong at the DG and the unit levels. Most seconded personnel are employed at the A1 and A2 levels within the DGs. Reflecting the general low level of inter-DG co-ordination and mobility, seconded personnel mostly work within *singular* DGs during their short Commission careers (Edwards and Spence 1997; European Commission 1999: 57-58). Hence, seconded personnel



are affiliated to organisational units within the Commission that are organised according to a sectoral principle. Prolonged and intensive exposure towards sectoralised decision-making premises within the Commission DGs increases the likelihood that the role and identity perceptions of the seconded personnel become denationalised and strongly sectoralised (H2 and H3).

Egeberg (1996), McDonald (1997), and Shore (2000) support these propositions empirically. Egeberg (1996) shows that *permanent* Commission officials put only marginal emphasis on national allegiances (H1). Moreover, Cini (1997: 86) observes that institutional identities among the statutory staff of former *DG Competition and Environment* are directed more towards the DG level than towards the Commission at large (H2). Hence, the horizontal organisation of the Commission affects the identities of the incumbents. Moreover, officials employed in top rank positions within DGs having broad horizontal mandates and portfolios are likely to identify with the Commission as a whole more strongly than officials employed in medium or lower rank positions within DGs having specialist tasks descriptions. Overall, sectoral allegiances are likely to precede national identifications amongst permanent Commission officials. However, Egeberg (1996) also reveals that the nationality of permanent Commission officials affects their decision-making behaviour. This stems partly from the territorial principles of organisation underpinning the Commission machinery (the cabinets, national quotas, etc.) and partly from their national institutional affiliations. Accordingly, seconded personnel to the Commission are *likely to* put particular emphasis on pre-established national and sectoral roles due to their primary domestic affiliations and their sectoral affiliations within the Commission DGs (H1 and H2).

Most seconded personnel have lifelong careers in the national civil services. Hence, they are heavily pre-socialised before entering the Commission (H4). They remain mostly paid by their national employer while working for the Commission. Most of them also return to prior positions in the national civil service after finishing their stay in Brussels. Furthermore, the European Commission is a relatively young and small institution compared to national central administrations. These factors render it difficult for the Commission to instil new identities and roles into officials with pre-established loyalties. Hence, supranational allegiances are likely to be modified and conditioned by pre-existing national and sectoral allegiances (Franklin and Scarrow 1999; Hooghe 2001; Kerr 1973; Scully 2002). Supporting these arguments, national officials attending EU committees tend to evoke national roles more strongly than supranational roles (Egeberg 1999; Egeberg, Schaefer and Trondal 2003; Trondal 2001; Trondal and Veggeland 2003). This is due to the fact that the national government machinery represents their primary institutional affiliation. However, it also reflects the fact that only a segment of the EU committee participants attend the EU committees with a high degree of energy and intensity (Trondal 2001).

Most of the officials seconded to the Commission are national experts from sector ministries or agencies organised beneath the ministry level. These officials have permanent positions within national government institutions that mostly are organised according to sectoral and functional principles. Most seconded Commission personnel are therefore accustomed to the organising principles within the Commission apparatus. Accordingly, these officials are likely to put particular weight on sectoral identities, considerations and interests. Together, the above arguments suggest that officials seconded to the European Commission are likely to enact a mix of national and sectoral allegiances.

However, Shore (2000: 131) observes that an *esprit de corps* and a ‘community method’ emerge among new recruits to the permanent staff of the Commission. Similarly, some national officials who attend EU committees tend to evoke supranational loyalties – especially among those who are based at the Permanent Representations in Brussels (Lewis 2000; Egeberg, Schaefer and Trondal 2003). Similar observations are likely in the case of seconded Commission personnel, because these officials are affiliated to the Commission for longer periods of time than EU committee participants. Seconded personnel are also likely to be involved in the social milieu within the Commission services more extensively than the EU committee participants. Together, these factors render it likely that seconded Commission personnel evoke supranational identifications more strongly than national officials who participate in EU committees.

Moreover, seconded officials on long-term contracts are likely to become re-socialised into supranational actors more strongly than officials on short-term contracts. Officials employed within the Commission for one-year periods are less strongly exposed towards the supranational interests, actors, decision premises and identities of the Commission than officials employed on three-year contracts. Acknowledging this, the Commission argues that secondment contracts “can be so short that they sometimes make it difficult to incorporate the expert effectively into a department or for them to adapt to the working environment in the Commission” (European Commission 1999: 63). Seconded personnel are also de-coupled in time and space from domestic institutions and decision-processes, providing circumstances under which additional roles and identities are more easily evoked (Egeberg 1999: 461).

The potential for being affected by institutional dynamics relates to the duration and intensity of exposure towards certain organisational structures (Checkel 2001a; Risse and Sikink

1999). The potential for being socialised and re-socialised increases with protracted memberships within organisations (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Checkel 2001b: 26). This general argument rests on socialisation theory that emphasises a positive relationship between the intensity of participation within a collective group and the extent to which members of this group take the world for granted (Meyer and Rowan 1991), become victims of ‘group think’ (Janis 1982), or develop particular ‘community methods’ (Lewis 2000). Socialisation is seen as a dynamic process whereby actors come to internalise the norms, rules and interests of their government institution and task roles. Socialisation processes are uni-directional in the sense that the ‘socialisator’ educates, indoctrinates, teaches or diffuses his norms and ideas to the ‘socialisee’. The potential for socialisation to occur is assumed positively related to the duration and the intensity of interaction amongst the organisational members (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 150; Kerr 1973; Pendergast 1976).

According to Ernst Haas (1958), participants become ‘locked in’ and socialised by the sheer intensity of interaction. Similarly, present neo-functionalist scholarship assumes that the emergence of supranational allegiances is “a function of the *duration* of the socialisation impact” (Niemann 1998: 437 - emphasis added). “[T]he relative intensity of transnational activity ... broadly determines variations [in supra-nationalism]” (Stone Sweet and Sandholtz 1998: 4). According to Deutsch, “common identities are the product of intensive transactions and communications” (quoted in Rosamond 2000: 46). Accordingly, national civil servants on secondment in the European Commission are likely to identify with EU institutions due to “daily reinforcement” and intensive exposure towards information, stimuli and decision premises at the EU level.

Most Commission officials have long working days. They often interact with officials from other nationalities, talk foreign languages or apply 'Euro-speak'. According to Shore (2000) 'Euro-jargon' and 'Commission-speak' characterise the working language used by most Commission officials. Over time, seconded officials are likely to adapt to the same set of grammar and semantics as permanent Commission officials. 'Euro-language' may represent an identity-mark that establishes buffers towards the 'others' and underscores shared practises among themselves (Bellier 1997: 95). A shared vocabulary contributes to bind actors together and assist in the construction of a distinct European elite (Christiansen, Jørgensen and Wiener 2001: 15).

As a consequence of interacting frequently with fellow colleagues within the European Commission seconded civil servants are likely to take on supranational identifications (H3) (Christiansen 2001). However, some seconded officials also have prior experiences from international organisations, trans-governmental committees and boards, and from the permanent representations in Brussels. Moreover, some seconded officials are pre-socialised through their educational background (e.g. the *College of Europe*, Brugge), or through a multi-national family background. Suggestively, prior international experiences are conducive to supra-nationalism (H4). Moreover, seconded personnel may have constructed supranational loyalties prior to entering the European Commission. According to Page (1997: 60), seconded officials generally have contacts with the Commission prior to entering it. Frequently, they "indicate a wish to spend three years in Brussels" (Page 1997: 60). This indicates that supranational identities may reflect processes of pre-socialisation as much as processes of re-socialisation. However, studies of EU committees indicate that supranational allegiances reflect processes of re-socialisation more than processes of pre-socialisation (Trondal 2002). Yet, such conclusions are plagued with methodological difficulties of causation. Further

empirical studies are warranted to “verify” the different pathways to supranationalism among permanent and temporary EU bureaucrats.

Finally, supranational allegiances may reflect the social and physical milieu embedding seconded personnel while staying in Brussels (H5). The physical symbols and artefacts dominating the Commission buildings remind the seconded staff about their current supranational embeddedness. The blue flag with the golden stars in the reception area, in the corridors of the Commission buildings and in the meeting rooms constantly remind the officials of their current ‘European’ affiliation. Seconded personnel live in exile in Brussels, talk several non-native languages, often applying ‘Euro-talk’ or ‘Commission speak’, socialise with other nationalities, and live in ‘EU-ghettos’ in Brussels. Commission bureaucrats and the Belgian population of Brussels “constitute two parallel social universes” (Abèlès, Bellier and McDonald 1993: 26). Hence, the social environments surrounding seconded officials may be conducive to the evocation of supranational identities. However, many Commission officials also socialise with colleagues of the same nationality and take weekends off in their home country (Stevens and Stevens 2001: 132). Hence, they are reminded of their national origins on a daily or weekly basis. However, a high level of cross-border mobility may also be conducive to the construction of supranational identities and roles. Hence, a blend of national and supranational identities and roles is likely to be evoked by seconded Commission personnel.

## **CONCLUSION**

Few studies have empirically penetrated the inner life of the European Commission. The dynamics and behavioural logics that govern this supranational executive have attracted minor

scholarly attention. The current study has a dual goal: First, to identify scope conditions rendering the transformative character of the European Commission intelligible. We ask, under what conditions are Commission officials likely to construct or activate supranational roles, identities and loyalties? Second, determining the transformative power of the European Commission is warranted when studying system integration across levels of governance. Arguably, the parallel administration of the Commission is an important laboratory for studying system integration and transformation in Europe.

Going beyond a *sui generis* view of the Commission, the current study applies institutional arguments to account for the transformative power of the European Commission. According to the institutional approaches outlined above organisational members often have multiple institutional affiliations that generate multiple cues for action and role enactment. Seconded personnel to the European Commission have two major institutional affiliations: the national central administrative system and the European Commission. The former is considered primary to these officials, even after being hired on fixed-term contracts within the Commission (H1). The Commission DGs are deemed secondary affiliations to most seconded personnel, however, more among newcomers than among senior secondments. Hence, national and sectoral allegiances are likely to exceed supranational allegiances amongst the vast majority of seconded personnel.

However, under certain institutional conditions seconded personnel are likely to evoke supranational allegiances more vigorously. That is the case among officials employed within national ministries and agencies which are organised according to a sectoral principle (H2), officials on long term contracts with the Commission (H3), officials who have prior socialisation experiences from international organisations and universities (H4), who interact

intensively with officials from several other nationalities, who apply ‘Commission-speak’, and who live in typical ‘EU-ghettos’ in Brussels (H5).

The scope conditions outlined above are not exhaustive, only suggestive. Making explicit references to operational dimensions are vital in order to determine the conditions under which institutions matter generally, and in order to identify the conditions under which the European Commission contribute to system integration and transformation across levels of governance in particular. Further empirical studies, however, are needed to test the conditional validity of the hypotheses suggested here.

## NOTES

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<sup>2</sup> Seconded personnel are also *parachuted* into top positions of the Commission (A1 and A2 positions). Reflecting both individual aspirations, a need for technical expertise from outside the Commission, informal national quota systems, as well as new states joining the EU, “nearly half of senior appointments [in the Commission] are recruited through *parachutage*”



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(Hooghe 1999: 399 – original emphasis). Even more, the vast majority of those parachuted to the Commission are national civil servants (Page 1997: 85).

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