

THE EU's NOMADS: national Eurocrats in European policymaking

Renita Thedvall
Score (Stockholm Centre for Organizational Research)
Stockholm University, Sweden

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For correspondence: Renita.Thedvall@score.su.se

Abstract

The paper focuses on the EU bureaucrats – Eurocrats – and their work. Special attention is placed on the Eurocrats’ work in EU Committees, working groups and council meeting. I have followed and observed their work first, through a trainee position at the Commission and second, by following the Swedish delegation to the Employment Committee meetings. The ethnographic study of the Eurocrats brings them to life as people of flesh and blood – beyond the stereotype. It shows that going by the book and forming technocratic EU decisions is not an option for these bureaucratic elites. They have to be flexible in handling their multiple roles and knowing when to play – and when to stop playing – the game. The paper shows that the roles Eurocrats play shift through the process: pendulum between articulating and defending ‘national’ positions and acting in the interest of the EU swings back and forth. In this way, the Eurocrats’ shifting roles contribute to the process of europeanisation. Sooner or later, playing the game in Brussels forces them to put on the hat of a ‘European’ formulating postnational EU decisions. These Eurocratic practices fashion that which we identify as the EU. We may debate if these EU policy decisions are changing the member states’ policies in any significant sense. Regardless, these Eurocrats are through their practices forming EU decisions that go beyond the nation state in a sense forming, if not to its fullest than at least, an embryo towards a postnational European community.

Introduction

In the popular view of the EU, its bureaucrats are often seen as the epitome of what Herzfeld (1992: 71) identifies as the stereotype of a bureaucrat, namely a rigid, inflexible, boring person working for his bureau rather than its clients or society at large. EU bureaucrats are frequently associated with forming useless, interventionist policies, such as prescribing the size of a strawberry or the curve of a banana. Moreover, like its national counterparts, the EU bureaucracy is held to be a hierarchical system akin to that envisaged by Weber (1958: 196ff) with its emphasis on rules, uniformity and compliance.

The bureaucratic stereotype only goes so far in describing the real world of EU policymaking processes. As one is drawn into that world it becomes clear that the individual bureaucrats who populate it are people of flesh and blood with different personalities and driven by different goals. Some of them are motivated by the urge to make the world a better place, some are just trying to do their job and perhaps climb the career ladder, some see themselves mainly as experts living up to the standards of their profession. Only few of them match the stereotype of the bureaucrat strictly following the rules. Overwhelmingly, bureaucratic players in EU policy processes are, of necessity, flexible people (Albrow, 1997: 74). They don't just apply rules. They take part in complex policymaking and organizational games. The skills they need to do well in these games vary markedly from the classic role description of the bureaucrat.

In this chapter I describe how EU bureaucrats (from now on, Eurocrats) handle these games. I focus on those Eurocrats who have to accommodate the potentially conflicting roles of both national representative and member of an EU-level expert community. The notion of Eurocrat symbolises the entanglement (Callon, 1998; see also Hasselström, 2003; and Garsten and Montoya, 2004) of the member states in the EU. If bureaucrats have mainly been studied in their settled environment of the national ministries or the European commission, this chapter focuses on the nomadic life of the bureaucrats who travel to and from their home base and the EU meeting rooms in Brussels to design policies and make decisions.

Studying Eurocrats at work in EU committees, working groups and councils are in focus, highlights the clash between the national and the supranational in a multinational arena such as the EU. National participants in these arenas have their institutional home in one member state, while regularly meeting with their peers from other countries in another – in this case the so-called city of Europe. They are bound by their national identification and their government's official position. But when they meet with their counterparts from across the EU, it is to make common EU decisions.

The travelling to these meetings here signifies a 'liminal' phase (Turner 1969: 95), an in between position. Literally as well as mentally, Eurocrats are moving from one part of their work - forming joint positions in the national bureaucratic arena characterised by interdepartmental fault lines and negotiations - to another part - that of being 'national' representatives in an arena characterised by international divisions and alliances. They have to shift their concentration and focus between these areas of work. This chapter focuses on EU issues and the way bureaucrats turn into real 'Eurocrats'.

I followed the Swedish as well as EU Commission Eurocrats around doing participant observation. First, I held a trainee position in the Directorate General of Employment and Social Affairs in the European Commission during the autumn of 2001. Throughout 2002, I became an 'observer-member' of the Swedish delegation to the EU Employment Committee. I attended its preparatory meetings at the Swedish Ministry of Industry, Employment and Communication, I went on its trips to Brussels, and sat in on the Employment Committee meetings in Brussels. The EU Employment Committee is the 'first' committee, in a hierarchy of EU committee, working group and council meetings, where the member states and the Commission discuss and negotiate on EU employment issues connected to the EU Lisbon

Strategy. It is there that most of the discussions and negotiations take place and in practice decisions are made before the formal decision is made in the Council of the European Union.

Bureaucratic ‘entanglement’: shifting roles, lurking tensions

The blurring of boundaries between the EU institutions and the member states has been described as ‘Europeanisation’. Most scholars portray Europeanisation as a process where the member states’ national policies, identities, beliefs, norms and institutional structures are influenced to some degree by their involvement with the EU institutions (see for example Cowles et al., 2001; Featherstone and Radaelli, 2003; and Jacobsson et al., 2004). States become more Europeanized when the European dimension penetrates their national arenas of politics, policy and bureaucracy (Radaelli, 2003: 29-30). The idea is, in fact, used by the EU institutions as a way of enhancing its power by redefining national ideas of territory and citizenship (Borneman and Fowler, 1997: 487).

EU membership in particular means that states surrender some of their independence to the EU institutions such as the European Commission, the European Parliament and the European Community Court of Justice. The idea of the nation state as controlling its people within a defined territory is also challenged by the movement of capital, goods, people, and services without hindrance across the EU. Cooper (2003: 36-7) argues that the idea of transparency between the member states has replaced national considerations about the balance of power and *raison d’état* as master ideas. In this way membership in the EU should make the member states’ policies and political institutions more visible to one another and weaken grounds for suspicion. As a result, the arena for conflict becomes the meetings in the EU rather than the battlefields of war (Cooper, 2003: 35-36). So it is possible to argue the nation state is gradually taking on another form, based on multinational identities and accepting that state affairs are internationally transparent and ‘meddled’ in by other member states in the EU. As I have put forward elsewhere (Thedvall 2006 paraphrasing Malkki 1999: 53ff), this may be seen as forming a post-national order.

‘Post-national’ refers to the notion that the nation state - both nation and state - is losing sovereignty to the EU. A post-national community is emerging in Europe where the nation and nationalism no longer constitute the prime legitimising ground for its existence (Delanty and Rumford, 2005: 190). And yet the Eurocrats who convene at EU meetings are there as representatives of their nation states and are expected by their superiors in the capitals to act in the ‘national’ interest. Jacobsson and Mörth (1998: 199) argue that, paradoxically, EU-membership has forced the member states to adopt a ‘national’ position in areas where until now they did not feel the need for one. In this way participating in the EU’s post-national project serves to uphold notions of the ‘national’ and the ‘nation state.’ Regardless of their aims, the way of working of institutions such as the EU assumes and even reinforces the national order of things (cf. Ben-Ari and Elron 2001: 275-276). Nonetheless, the Eurocrats still have to agree on common EU decisions where they, in part, surrender and modify their ‘national’ interests to make possible an EU agreement. For Eurocrats therefore, it is not so much a question of being part of one or the other; instead their role as national or European agents shifts as the policy-making process evolves.

Below, I seek to show the Eurocrats’ pendulum movements between acting in the interest of their nation state and acting on behalf of the EU making decisions that contribute to the process of Europeanisation. Even if the final decisions do not penetrate national policies, nonetheless they are forming a post-national EU community through these EU decisions. The contours of the national are continuously being negotiated in EU arenas, and the national communicates and negotiates with the post-national. Eurocrats are central to this process. It is their off-stage bureaucratic work as much as the on-stage politics of European leaders that fashions the EU identity.

Eurocrats at work

What Eurocrats do

Who are these Eurocrats and what do they do? In this case they are so-called experts on employment policies working to form a common European employment strategy with EU guidelines for employment and an agreed set of instruments to evaluate if these guidelines are followed by the member states. Broadly speaking, they are highly educated people with degrees in law, the social sciences and economics and with experience and expertise in labour market policy, labour law and econometrics. They are not street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980) trying to implement policies. They are policy designers. As in classical bureaucratic theory, they offer advice to politicians, based on technical, politically neutral expertise. In reality, the implied difference between ‘politics’ and ‘administration’ becomes blurred (Weiss and Wodak, 2000: 76). The notion of expertise becomes especially problematic in the context of the EU since these Eurocrats have to act in the name of their nation state presenting ‘national’ positions and argue in their member states’ political interest. The EU meeting format of having to adopt national positions emphasises the national, compelling Eurocrats to make their contributions as representatives of a nation state rather than as experts on employment policies. It politicises their work.

Eurocrats handle their double roles as technocrats and politicians by acting as politicians but with the implicit understanding that they officially work according to the ideal of the Weberian-style bureaucrat (Thedvall 2006). In the meetings I saw them use both expertise-based and political arguments. Yet the former were clearly privileged above the latter in the meetings. So, it was a pivotal part of their craft to identify technical if not scientific arguments that would work in the interest of their member states’ political ambitions. As participants in meetings, the Eurocrats had to keep in touch with the other member states’ political traditions and ambitions to understand their arguments. I also observed, however, that putting forward these differing national positions is only part of the policy-making game. It is most evident in the early stages of a policy process. When it came to collective decisions, Eurocrats put on their other hat. They worked towards compromise in order to arrive at a joint, EU decision. That done, they would switch roles again, reporting and explaining that decision back at their national ministries. In the sections below we follow the swings of the pendulum.

Fashioning a ‘national’ position

In the lead up to the EU committee meetings different activities took place within the national governments and the EU institutions. What happened at the meetings was connected to what had been discussed, written or thought of in other places. There were the Commission’s reports and the committee’s opinions that would form the basis for discussions in the meeting. And there were ‘national’ positions prepared in response to the reports and the opinions of the other member states’ Ministries. In the particular case reported here, the member states’ and the Commission’s representatives were going to meet in the EU Employment Committee to agree on indicators for quality in work. They were to be used as instruments for evaluating the quality member states’ labour markets. The Employment Committee consisted of two representatives from every member state with two alternates. These members were selected ‘among senior officials or experts possessing outstanding competences in the field of employment and labour market policy in the member states’ (Council of the European Union 2000: 21-22). Most of the members, at least one of the two, came from the Ministry of Labour (of some sort) in their member state.

In a preparatory meeting before an Employment Committee meeting a group of civil servants in the Swedish Ministry of Industry, Employment and Communication met for a couple of hours to prepare national positions. The following day the Swedish delegation was to travel to Brussels. The Commission's report on the 'quality in work' indicators had been sent to the member states for the delegates to consider earlier. It was my second preparatory meeting in the Ministry. As I walked towards the office of Anders¹, a Swedish representative in the Committee, at the end of the corridor I exchanged pleasantries with Malin, another representative. When we arrived at Anders' corner office in the old part of the Ministry Anders, Susanne and Peter, all Swedish representatives in the committee from the Ministry of Industry, were already seated round Anders' meeting table. Also present were Hedda, an expert on health and safety at work in the Ministry of Industry; Tage, a Swedish representative in the Social Protection Committee from the Ministry of Health and Social affairs, and interested in the indicator on stress; and Erik an expert on taxes from the Ministry of Finance there to discuss the indicators on tax-benefit systems (not part of the quality in work indicators). They began to discuss the different policy issues at on the Committee's agenda. What were the Swedish positions? Which position could conceivably be carried at the Committee's meeting?

One of the areas to be discussed in the Committee was a table and a possible composite indicator measuring the 'flexibility and security' facet of the 'quality in work' indicators. The Commission had proposed developing a composite indicator on the 'extent to which part-time and fixed-term workers enjoy equivalent and commensurate entitlements to social protection and legal rights as full-time and permanent workers' (Internal document from the meeting of the Employment Committee indicators group 4-5 July 2002). During the previous year the Committee had agreed on an indicator in this area: 'number of employees working part-time, voluntarily and involuntarily, as a per cent of the total number of employees and of those with voluntary and involuntary fixed-term contracts as a per cent of total number of employees'. The proposed new composite indicator was meant to complement that indicator. It would be derived from a form that member states were encouraged to complete (see Table 7.1)

Table 7.1: The Commission's form on entitlements

Social protection	Entitlement to	
	Part-time workers as % of all part-time workers	Fixed-term workers as % of all fixed-term workers
Unemployment benefits (pro rata entitlements)		
Retirement pension (pro rata entitlements)		
Health insurance		
Average entitlement coverage (composite indicator)		

Malin explained that the Commission now wanted to compile a table from the completed forms. She asked rhetorically if Sweden thought it was okay to draw up this table. She continued, saying she doubted Sweden wanted the Commission to distil a composite indicator from this table. She explained that the Commission wanted to divide the number of people working part-time or have fixed term contracts and have access to unemployment benefits and other social entitlements by the total number of people working part-time or have fixed-term contracts. Anders asked Hedda if there had not been a change in the law recently. Should not all who work part-time have the same rights as those who work full-time? Hedda answered

that this was the case. There was an EU directive to this effect. Anders replied that then it should be a 100% and the indicator would be unnecessary. Hedda answered that the law was written to prevent discrimination against part-time workers while allowing many different ways of interpreting the law. In which case Anders replied, the indicator might be feasible after all since there will be different interpretations in different member states. Nevertheless, he said they should be sceptical about the composite indicator. To develop the table was acceptable, but the arguments for developing a composite indicator were not convincing. It seemed impossible to measure reliably comparative entitlements. Malin also reminded us that at the last Committee meeting Sweden had said that parental-leave should be in the table. Anders said that we would have to point that out at the next meeting. ‘It is a typically Swedish question’, he said. At the time, the Swedish Minister for Employment Policy was concerned about gender equality. Parental leave was a hot topic for her. Anders recalled the minister had even stressed the issue of parental leave in a recent EU speech.

There was little sign of bureaucratic conflict in the discussions. The atmosphere of the meeting was collegial and bland. The Swedish representatives understood the issue was a priority for the Swedish Minister of Industry, Employment and Communication. There was no disagreement on how this should translate into a Swedish national position at next day’s Committee meeting in Brussels. When they reached this conclusion, the representatives from other Ministries had already left. ‘Their’ questions had already been addressed and they had no concern with the bigger picture.

The Committee meeting: Proposing ‘national’ positions

Anders, Malin, Susanne and I entered the Commission’s conference centre in Brussels. We walked through the security check before taking the lift to the third floor. The conference centre has at least four meeting rooms on each floor in the five-storey building, and just before 10 a.m. there are always many people rushing to different meetings. In the hall on the third floor different languages were being spoken. People had flown in or taken trains or cars from their member states to attend the meetings today.

The meeting room’s furnishing met my stereotype of what a bureaucratic institution would look like. It had old-fashioned furniture and grey-beige-brownish surroundings. There were floor-to-floor grey carpets. The tables were made of fake mahogany and the chairs were covered with beige cloth of the ‘office chair’ variety. The interpreters sat in booths behind glass windows. Their presence along the walls revealed that the meeting was multilingual; the languages translated that day were English, French and German, as shown on a board in a corner of the room.

I found a seat behind the Swedish delegation, where I would be out of the way. The members were seated in a circle in front of me, with the member states in alphabetical order, taking the native spelling as the reference point.² In front of each member state’s row of seats was a sign showing that member state’s name. The Secretaries of the Committee, the President, and the Commission were seated between the United Kingdom and Belgium; that is, at the apex of the circle. Behind the circle there were seats for observers, like myself, for alternates to the members, and for the Commission’s presenters. These presenters were Commission officials who had worked on particular policy issues. They would take their seat beside the Commission’s representatives when it was time for their issues to be discussed. The presenters thus changed often according to the items on the agenda.

The national delegations and the Commission’s representatives arrived and the room slowly filled up. There was a constant buzz around me of members greeting and kissing each other. The interpreters were taking their place in the translators’ booths. I examined my headset and made sure that it was set to ‘English’. I looked around the room and saw that one-third of the members were women and that about half the delegations had brought an expert

along. He or she would be an alternate member of the group who changed depending on the question under discussion. The members were taking their seats. At about 10.15 a.m., the President of the Committee rang the bell, everyone fell silent and the meeting began.

In the afternoon, the group turned to the subject of 'flexibility and security' that I had seen discussed in the preparatory meeting of the Swedish delegation. The Committee agreed it was difficult to develop composite indicators and the Commission was invited to do more work on it. There was no time pressure. They had a few months before they had to make the final recommendations to the Council. Malin, the Swedish delegate, pressed for including 'parental leave' in the composite indicator, arguing that this component was as important as other benefits and social security schemes in the list. She said:

Sweden supports the use of the complementary data in the table. We think the Commission can conclude the table but we should see it before the Employment Committee sees it. However, we believe that parental-leave should be included in the table. (Employment Committee Indicators group 4 July 2002)

The Commission argued it would be too complicated. In addition, if it were to be included, conflicting ideas about gender equality politics in the member states would come to the fore. The member states had different institutional arrangements, reflecting different perceptions of gender roles and the responsibilities of men and women respectively. The Swedes certainly knew that Sweden would get an improved score if parental leave was included, but they also saw it as their responsibility to point out the omission whenever possible. The Swedish delegates, especially the women, spoke passionately about the issue of gender equality and work-life balance for both women and men. In the preparatory meetings as well as during lunches and dinner during the Committee's meeting days they discussed among themselves the need to point out whenever a gender equality perspective was lacking. Clearly, they went beyond the call of duty; these Eurocrats' personal passions and preoccupations coloured the amount of effort devoted to the issue.

The same phenomenon occurred when the Indicators group discussed the use of a possible 'labour market adaptability index.' The index was presented by a research centre that had worked on the index. In its report, one of the key adaptability indicators was labour mobility. It had measured transitions between different jobs as well as transitions to a job among people who had been studying or had not been working the year before. At some point the text of the report read: '...of those in education and women "fulfilling domestic responsibilities" the year before' (Scientific report presented by a research centre in the Employment Committee Indicators group, 5 July 2002).

Susanne, the Swedish delegate signalled her wish to speak and the President of the Committee gave her the floor. Her voice was full of contrived innocence when she remarked:

'There seems to be a mistake in the study. It only says "women fulfilling domestic responsibilities"' (Employment Committee Indicators group 5 July 2002).

The representative from the research centre replied in earnest:

'No, men are not in the graph. Men make up only 1% so it makes no difference' (Employment Committee Indicators group 5 July 2002).

Susanne persisted and now said sturdily:

‘Surely this varies between member states?’ (Employment Committee Indicators group 5 July 2002).

The representative from the research centre answered, now smiling:

‘Yes, I agree that it is higher in the Nordic member states. It could have been in but the graphs would not be different (Employment Committee Indicators group 5 July 2002).’

Many of the Committee members sat there observing this dialogue, smiling as if they were thinking: ‘Okay, this is to be expected from the Swedes but we really do not take it seriously.’ Apparently, Susanne was acting out a self-assumed role of the Swedish representatives – relentlessly pointing out any gender-biased passages in the texts discussed at the Committee. Afterwards, Susanne, Malin and I had lunch and Susanne said that she was a bit irritated with herself that she had smiled back when they were smiling at her contribution. She felt that she had, by doing so, somehow degraded her own input. She said that this was the typical reaction as soon as she started to talk about gender equality (5 July 2002). However, the Swedish Eurocrats, interested in gender equality issues, wanted to make the point nevertheless - as they were expected to. As Anders pointed out, gender equality issues were regarded by the other members as a typically Swedish question, and it was understood that Swedish representatives would miss no opportunity to point these things out.

Reporting back

As the Swedish delegation returned to the Ministry of Industry they wrote a report from the meeting. They explained what the Swedish position had been and what had been agreed during the meeting. Long before that, however, the members of the Swedish delegation had begun to discuss how they had interpreted what had been said, to come to a similar understanding. In fact, they started doing so immediately after the meeting as we were walking back to the hotel. This conversation was important, because the game was not over. This particular session would not be the last Employment Committee Indicators group meeting before a formal decision had to be made in the Council of the European Union. There was a need to fine-tune the Swedish position before the next meeting. The Swedish delegation’s meeting report was sent to the relevant colleagues: about 10-15 people within the Employment Ministry as well as in other Ministries such as Health and Social Affairs, Education and Science, and Finance. If any politically salient issues were discussed, the State Secretary of the Ministry of Industry would be briefed. In this case, a further briefing was deemed unnecessary. The Eurocrats were implicitly trusted to act in the interest of the Swedish government. Later on, when the Council meetings were impending, there were more frequent contacts between the Minister of Employment and the Employment Committee members; for example, Malin took part in the Swedish preparations for the Council meeting.

Agreeing on an EU decision

Back at the Committee meeting, on other issues, there were more obvious disagreements, with member states sometimes changing their opinion during the meetings. They did so, for example, because new information was being disclosed. Or they were swung by the arguments put forward by other member states. Or they had been lobbied during the breaks. Or there was horse-trading going on. The Swedes, for example, did not think that ‘days lost in strikes’ was a good measure of the quality of the ‘social dialogue and workers involvement.’ They went along because another indicator (‘the percentage of employees covered by collective agreements’) liked by them but not by many other member states was also included

as a measure of ‘quality in work’. Sweden, with a relatively low number of strikes but with a high number of collective agreements, would score rather badly on the former but well on the latter.

Sometimes member states had to abandon their initial national position because there was an overwhelming lack of support. The Dutch delegation, for example, agreed to including indicators measuring transitions between permanent contracts, fixed-term contracts and temporary contracts even if it thought that doing so implied a certain prejudice against non-permanent jobs. For a member state such as the Netherlands with a high number of employees with fixed-term and temporary contracts, this measure would not be in its best interest. Yet the delegation saw it had little support from other member states and made the concession. Under unanimity rule, states sometimes simply have to give up part of their national interests for the sake of reaching an EU decision.

As this amendment bargaining was going on, the Secretaries of the Employment Committee, with the President, did their best to keep track of which member wanted changes, which did not. When the members seemed to have exhausted their contributions and everyone fell silent, the President tried to suggest a ‘conclusion’. Some members were not happy with it, and the discussion continued. The President then tried again to conclude until everyone could agree. This way of agreeing is normally described as consensus decision-making, where issues are discussed until everyone is satisfied and convinced the best solution is on the table. That is not what happens, though. It was not a case of members discussing and deliberating until everyone actively supported a particular result. It was more of a ‘majority consensus’ emerging, forcing some members to compromise (Thedvall 2006). This was made clear in one of the Employment Committee meetings when the Italian delegate did not get support from other members for Italy’s preferred, particular wording of the Committee’s opinion on so-called ‘National action plans’ for employment, drawn up by the member states each year. He wanted the Commission’s opinion to note explicitly that only a majority of the Committee had supported that particular indicator. One of the British delegates answered that they understood the point, but that *de facto* most decisions in the Committee were decided by majority vote (Committee Meeting, 21 November 2001). The Italian delegate continued to insist on the committee dropping the paragraph on the National action plans in the opinion paper. However, he was isolated, and the suggested changes to accommodate Italy were rejected by the other members. Finally, he was forced to agree for the sake of reaching an EU decision.

Cultures of conflict and compromise

EU compromises are thus made by finding solutions that can be accepted by everyone, and – if need be – by producing majorities that are big enough to induce (potential) dissenters to cease resisting the emerging majority opinion. This process is not a linear one. Opportunities for consensus come and go. Yet there is a bottom line. According to the EU calendar, at the last meeting before the Council – where the political decisions are made - there has to be a final Committee decision on the issues up for discussion at the Council. These deadlines pressure the Committee’s decision-making process. No matter how unsure the Eurocrats felt about certain aspects of their report, they had to collectively submit it to the Council. Not achieving consensus meant burdening the ministers with delays and complications. Nobody wants to take that message home unless it involves the essential political priorities of the government.

And so there is a subtle change in the dynamics of Eurocrats’ work during a series of Committee meetings on any given issue. The discussions and negotiations at the beginning of the policy making process display a ‘culture of conflict’ (Ross 1993, also see Thedvall 2006). Eurocrats defended their national opinions and differences between national positions were highlighted not fudged. Later, when the process gravitated towards a decision and producing

reports for the Council, conflict and compromise become two sides of the same coin and a 'culture of compromise' emerged (Abélès 1993, also see Thedvall 2006) in the Committee meetings. This culture of compromise makes it possible for the Eurocrats to agree, as 'Europeans', in making a common EU decision.

Observing Eurocrats: doing meeting ethnography

The shifting between the roles as a national representative and a European representative also, in some ways, matched my own experiences of the fieldwork. My fieldwork among the Eurocrats moved between different localities: the Directorate General of Employment and Social Affairs in the Commission, the EU meeting rooms and the Swedish Ministry of Industry, Employment and Communication. From the start of my fieldwork, when I had an internship in the Commission, I was moving between the Directorate General and the meeting rooms, while living in Brussels during that time. During the second part of my fieldwork, I was doing participant observation in the preparatory meetings of the Swedish Ministry of Industry and followed the Swedish delegation to the EU committee. I was yoyo-ing (Wulff 2002) in and out of the field, and back and forth to the meetings. In a sense I was moving between different roles of being an intern in the European Commission, an observer in the EU meetings and the Swedish preparatory meetings and being a researcher in a university environment.

The different EU committee, working group and Council meetings became important for my research. It was there the work of the European Commission (with the member states) was debated, negotiated and decided on by the member states and the European Commission. It was in the meetings I was introduced to the work in the Commission that I could see existed on the intranet and knew was taking place but did not take part in myself. Thus, a substantial part of my field notes from my internship in the European Commission came from the EU meetings.

My 'strategically situated ethnography' (Marcus 1986: 177) was mainly based in a particular EU committee focused on EU employment policy, the Employment Committee. However, the field of the Employment Committee was made up of different localities. The central nodes in the network were the Employment Committee's meetings, but for the meetings to work as intended, that is as decision-making arenas, other nodes in the network had to play their part. The member states' representatives had, for example, to adopt 'national positions' to be able to negotiate their case in the Employment Committee. In this way the negotiations and decisions made in the Employment Committee were influenced by discussions, negotiations and decision-making processes elsewhere.

The view from the Employment Committee made it possible to see the different negotiations, discussions and decisions made by all the member states. In this sense it became a multi-local fieldwork, but in one place. It enabled me to see how member states were able to form decisions on the 'quality in work' indicators. To work in the Commission was important, since it was there that all the documents, papers and opinions were prepared before they were discussed in the Employment Committee. However, to better understand why members said what they did in the Employment Committee meetings, I also had to study how member states prepared for the meetings. To do participant observation in all the member states, I would have had to be in several different places at the same or nearly the same time to grasp all the participants' perspectives on the same issue. This was physically impossible. To get at the process, I concentrated on following it through from the perspective of one member state, Sweden. I shadowed the Swedish members in the Employment Committee. I took part in their preparatory meetings in the Swedish Ministry of Industry and then went with them to Brussels to Committee meetings.

Conclusion: Eurocrats entangled in parallel worlds?

This chapter has focused on Eurocrats and their work. I observed the bureaucratic games in EU committees, working groups and councils and Eurocrats' shifting roles of defending 'national' interests and acting in the interest of the EU by making EU decisions. The ethnographic study of Eurocrats brings them to life as people, moving beyond the stereotype. Their shifting roles and subtle handling of bureaucratic rules and regulations becomes visible only when we use such methods as participant observation. It shows that following rules and making technocratic EU decisions are not options for these bureaucratic elites. They have to be flexible in handling their multiple roles and knowing when to play, and when to stop playing, the game of 'consensus' decision making (cf. Egeberg, 2006).

The roles Eurocrats play shift through the process; the pendulum between articulating and defending 'national' positions and acting in the interest of the EU swings back and forth. In this way, the Eurocrats' shifting roles contribute to the process of Europeanisation. Eventually, playing the game in Brussels forces them to put on the hat of a 'European' formulating post-national EU decisions at least some of the time. The role of the Eurocrats as 'national' representative is to a great extent limited to the meeting occasions and the preparatory meetings surrounding them. Their nomadic periods - going to and from the meetings - signify a time of preparation for being a true *Eurocrat*, and then withdrawing from it again.

These Eurocratic practices fashion and construct the entity we know as the EU. Although one may debate whether these EU policy decisions are changing the member states' policies in any significant sense, there can be no doubt that, through the practices described here, these Eurocrats make decisions that go beyond the nation state. In short, these practices are a significant part of the fabric of an emerging post-national European policy community.

Notes

1 All the names of the officials are fictional to ensure their anonymity.

2 In alphabetical order, they are: Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom. This study took place before the ten new member states joined in 2003 and the EU-15 became EU-25.

3 The emic is an anthropological concept that means informants have a different understanding of a concept or a phenomenon to that of the researchers.

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