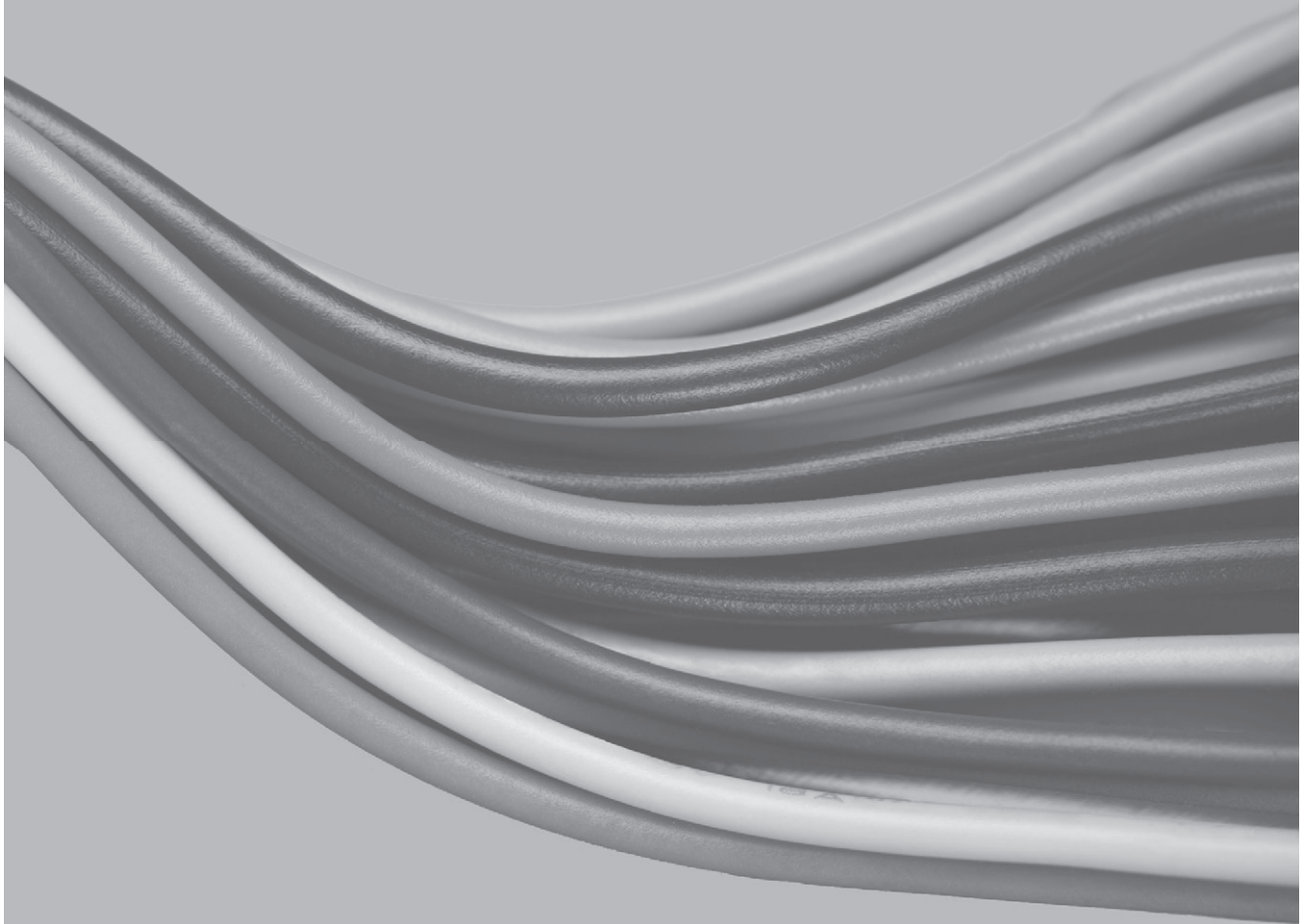


PART II

Managing the Union



CHAPTER 8

The Commission's Services

Liesbet Hooghe and Hussein Kassim

Introduction	174	Recruitment and training	188
Origins and evolution	174	Assessing the reform	189
The Monnet model	176	Commission officials' attitudes to EU governance	190
National bureaucratic models	176	Agenda-setting, nationality, and primacy	191
International organization models	177	Rank and file vs top, and East vs West	196
Powers, structure, and functioning	177	Conclusion	196
The college and the services	177		
Powers and functions	178		
Structure	181		
The Commission under pressure	182	NOTES	197
The reform programme	184	FURTHER READING	198
Externalizing Commission work	186	WEB LINKS	198
Streamlining personnel policy	187		

I Summary

The European Commission has always been considered one of the 'engines of Europe.' However, an increasingly sceptical public, the managerial challenge of Eastern enlargement, and allegations of mismanagement have forced the Commission to rethink its role. In 2000, the Commission embarked on an administrative overhaul to professionalize its services. According to some observers, this reform was to lead to the 'normalization' of the Commission into a traditional bureaucracy—but has it? How has the reform programme affected the organization, functions, and people of the Commission services? We conclude that the reforms have probably not weakened the Commission's capacity nor will to play a policy role, although we note distinct changes in appetite: the Commission bureaucracy has become more wary of bold political initiatives.

Introduction

Commentaries on the European Commission tend to focus more on the college, the political arm of the Commission (see Chapter 5), than on the services, the Commission's permanent bureaucracy. This disparity is not surprising. Commentaries on national political systems also tend to pay more attention to political executives than to bureaucracies. But in the case of the Commission, it is unwise to focus overly on the college, for the Commission services are not a normal bureaucracy. They exercise a central role—sometimes in a leading and sometimes in a supporting capacity—in virtually everything the Commission does. Few initiatives are launched, proposals made, or decisions taken by the Commission without being extensively examined and approved by the services.

The Commission was initially designed by the founding fathers to be one of the 'engines of Europe', and it has generally lived up to this role. But, over the past decade, European integration has changed dramatically. Three exogenous shocks—the emergence of an increasingly politicized climate, the resignation in 1999 of the Santer college, and the 2004 'Big Bang' enlargement—have forced the Commission to rethink its role. This rethinking provided the context for a reform programme, launched in 2000 by Commissioner Neil Kinnock, which reshaped the organization and the culture of the Commission services.

This chapter examines how the reform programme has affected the Commission's role as the engine of Europe. Has the institution been weakened, as some anticipated? How have the reforms affected the organization and functions of the services, and how have they influenced the people who work within them? We bring to bear evidence from a large-scale survey among Commission officials (N = 1,901) conducted in 2008 that taps into their political beliefs and attitudes on reform.¹

Origins and evolution

The Commission's services have their origins in the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). Jean Monnet, the High Authority's first President, wanted it to be small and informal. Shortly after becoming President, Monnet (1978: 405) remarked to a fellow member of the High Authority: 'If one day there are more than two hundred of us, we shall have failed.'

Monnet's hopes were quickly dashed. Following its foundation in 1952, the High Authority rapidly acquired more staff, a more formal organization, and more bureaucratic procedures than Monnet had envisioned. When, in 1957–68, the Commissions of the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) were established, their administrations were built on

the High Authority model. With the mergers of the High Authority and the two Commissions in 1967, the single Commission that we know came into existence. Over the intervening years, the Commission's services have expanded their tasks as the European Union has come to touch ~~on~~ many aspects of European citizens' lives. Yet core features of the services have remained durable, as follows.

- The services have always been relatively impartial (that is, neutral in their policy stances, save perhaps for a certain pro-integration bias) and independent (that is, autonomous from national and sectoral interference). This impartiality has facilitated close working relationships with a host of governmental and non-governmental organizations. More than any national or international administration, the work of the Commission is intimately interwoven with that of national, regional, and local administrations.
- The administrative structure, organized around the Brussels equivalent of ministries, Directorates-General (DGs), has remained essentially unchanged. The number of DGs—and services (such as the Legal Service, Anti-Fraud Office, and so on) increased from fifteen in 1958 to forty-five by the late 1990s. By mid-2011, there were twenty-five DGs, nineteen services, and four types of agency.²
- The Commission has always been small in size compared to national administrations. There are good reasons for this. National governments have been reluctant to keep the EU's administrative budget in step with the expansion in tasks. Also, the Commission rarely implements EU policies and does not undertake much routine administration—two common bureaucratic activities that require large numbers of civil servants. In 1959, there were just over 1,000 full-time staff in the EEC Commission for a population of 172 million; in 1970, there were close to 5,300 in the merged Commission. By 1990, the number had increased to 16,000 for 343 million; by mid-2011, there were 22,500 full-time officials for half a billion EU citizens in twenty-seven member states. In addition, the Commission employs some 8,400 temporary agents, contract agents, and seconded officials.³
- Recruitment has been primarily meritocratic. Officials are recruited through competitive procedures, although this method has not always been applied strictly at the most senior levels. National governments have often insisted on a broadly proportional representation of their nationals in the top layers of the bureaucracy, and some key posts, such as the Directors-General for agriculture, development, or trade, have until recently tended to be reserved for particular nationalities. Commissioners, too, sometimes bend the rules of competitive recruitment to reward cabinet members with a permanent appointment.
- The services have consistently been involved in political, as well as administrative, activities, with the relative importance of the political being

greater than in national administrations. Preparing EU legislation, managing funds, or conducting trade negotiations—tasks undertaken mainly by the services—have significant political ramifications. Monnet intended the Commission to set the agenda for Europe, and the services have generally lived up to his expectations.

What kind of bureaucracy does this make the Commission—or ‘the House’, in the language of Commission officials? The ~~foundations of most~~ core features can be traced back to three diverse bureaucratic models.

The Monnet model

Jean Monnet had a strong hand in shaping the early years of the Commission services. His vision was to recreate at European level a planning commission, based on the French *Commissariat du Plan* he had headed after the Second World War. The *Commissariat* was composed of a small high-level team of civil servants and experts outside the normal bureaucratic hierarchy, whose main job was to produce five-year national economic plans. In the same vein, Monnet wanted the High Authority to be made up of a small, organizationally flexible and adaptable, multinational nucleus of individuals. It was to be their role to develop ideas, and to stimulate and persuade others, but to leave implementation to national administrations. As François Duchêne (1994: 240) put it in his biography of Monnet, there was ‘a comic incompatibility of humour between Monnet and routine administration’. Monnet did not want a permanent core of civil servants.

This Monnet spirit is still palpable. By and large, Commission officials focus on designing policies and rely on national or regional administrations to implement most EU legislation. They are an exceptionally diverse and multinational collection of people. And though officials have career tenure, the Commission is more inclined than national administrations to attract experts from outside.

National bureaucratic models

Monnet was never able to mould the High Authority wholly according to his vision. From the start, the nature and range of its responsibilities and the watchful eye—if not suspicion—of member states meant that it came to have much in common with national bureaucracies. That is to say, from an early stage the services were strongly shaped by Weberian principles and modes of operation. Hierarchy, formality, and impartiality became key organizational principles.

Particular national bureaucratic traditions have also fed into the shaping of the services. The strongest national signature remains French, which, while weaker now than in the early years of European integration, is still apparent in the Commission’s organizational structure and terminology. For example, the terms for senior positions are borrowed from the French model: *directeur-général*; *directeur-général-adjoint*; *directeur*; *conseiller*; and *chef de cabinet*.

International organization models

The Commission also echoes features of an international bureaucracy. Indeed, the League of Nations and the United Nations secretariats were models for the High Authority. The influence of international organization bureaucratic models is evident in the special work conditions of Commission officials, such as their relatively high pay and special status in the host country. Generous terms of employment are designed to help officials to resist outside pressures. In return, Commission officials (as well as Commissioners) pledge neither to seek nor receive instructions from their home state. Like international civil servants, Commission officials also benefit from tax privileges and limited immunity against prosecution, although some of these privileges have been curtailed by the most recent personnel reform.

The international legacy is also evident in persistent conundrums that the Commission faces, including:

- how to wed meritocracy with national representation;
- how to guarantee officials' impartiality while recognizing their national allegiances; and
- how to provide political entrepreneurship in the absence of electoral accountability.

The Commission has always been an amalgam of diverse traditions, but these are now partially under revision. The unstated purpose is to make the Commission services look more like any other professional administration. However, as we describe below, after a decade of reform, the threads of continuity appear as strong as those of change.

Powers, structure, and functioning

What is the role of the services in the Commission as a whole? What are their powers and functions, and how are the services organized? As we will see, the basic structural features have remained relatively untouched by the Kinnock reforms launched in 2000. The thrust of the reform pertains to how the services organize their work—both in-house and in relation to member states, third parties, and the public—as well as to how they recruit and promote personnel, to which we turn in the next section.

The college and the services

If political and administrative tasks could be disentangled, the college would be responsible for politics and the services for administration. In the wake of the Santer college's resignation in 1999 (see Chapter 5), Commission President Romano Prodi

sought to make the distinction between political and administrative tasks clearer by 'reducing the grey areas which currently tend to blur demarcation lines of autonomy and responsibility between those performing more political tasks and those more involved with administration' (Prodi 1999).

In practice, the role of the services is not easily separated from that of Commissioners and their cabinets. There are a number of reasons why. To begin with, what is 'a political decision', and what is 'routine' or 'administration'? So, for example, deciding whether a new product is subject to an existing EU law on product standards may appear to be an administrative matter. However, the decision may be contested by important economic or social interests.

Second, Commissioners usually rely on the services for information, advice, and the preparation of documentation. The services are the main repository of accumulated wisdom in the Commission. While Commissioners and cabinets come and go, the services hold the fort.

Third, Commission officials are often the hub of policy networks involving key EU actors, and therefore inevitably influence political choices.

Finally, and arguably most importantly, Commissioners have to contend with a strong tradition of policy entrepreneurship among Commission officials, since the administration as a whole enjoys a monopoly on the right of initiative: no EU legislative decision may be made unless the Commission decides to propose it. Monnet's intent to create a team of creative thinkers echoes powerfully. This ethos is reinforced by the fact that officials often have career reasons to defend their right to make policy.

Powers and functions

The role of the European Commission is described in the Treaty establishing the European Community. The Commission has a constitutional obligation to set the legislative agenda in the European Union (Art. 211). Again, its most important power is that it has exclusive formal competence to initiate and draft EU legislation. The Council of Ministers and the European Parliament (EP) may request the Commission to draft an initiative, but the Commission can, and sometimes does, refuse to do so. The Treaty also instructs the Commission to serve the European interest, and it requires the Commission to be independent from any national government.⁴

Most powers and functions of the Commission apply to the services as well as to the college, and they combine to put the services in a position that is unparalleled among international and national civil services. It is true that ultimate political responsibility for Commission actions lies with the college, but, in practice, the services have considerable leeway to act on behalf of the Commission. Commissioners and their cabinets usually simply do not have the time, information, or political will to monitor their civil servants or to control their actions fully. Over 85 per cent of 'Commission' decisions are adopted without being put on the college of Commissioners' agenda for discussion.

The Commission's powers and functions can be grouped under six headings:

- policy initiator;
- legislative facilitator;
- executive roles;
- legal guardian;
- mediator and broker; and
- external representative and negotiator.

Policy initiator

The single most important power of the Commission is its exclusive Treaty right to draft legislative proposals. This prerogative guarantees the Commission pole position in initiating policies. The Commission maintains this position whether it deals with broadly based policy initiatives or proposals to develop/revise narrow 'technical' policies.

Many different actors in addition to the Commission may attempt to initiate EU policy. The European Council and the Council of Ministers regularly request policy papers from the Commission. The EP can prod the Commission to start initiatives. Member states, especially when they occupy the Council presidency, table policy documents and proposals at Council meetings. Interest groups make policy submissions to relevant DGs. However, to be turned into legislation, such proposals must be picked up by the Commission. No other body can draft legislation or direct how the Commission should respond to requests to bring forward legislative drafts.

There are a couple of dents in the Commission's monopoly of initiative. Most importantly, the Commission does not initiate legislation in common foreign and security policy (CFSP) and in some areas of police cooperation. In all other fields, the Council and Parliament can request legislation, although the Commission has the power to refuse, as it did in 2008 over transnational collective conventions. Since the Lisbon Treaty, EU citizens are also able to request the Commission to legislate in an area via a petition carrying 1 million signatures, but any such request is not binding.

Legislative facilitator

The Commission also acts as a key legislative facilitator. It is the only institution present throughout the legislative process—at meetings in the Council of Ministers, in the Parliament, and at inter-institutional meetings. This continuing presence gives it knowledge not only of what the legislators in the Council and the EP ideally want, but also what they are prepared to accept.

The bulk of EU legislation now uses the ordinary legislative procedure (previously called the codecision procedure). The Commission initiates a proposal and, after consultation of national parliaments and, where required by the Treaty, the Committee of the Regions (CoR) or the Economic and Social Committee (Ecosoc), it engages in a layered negotiation game with the EP and the Council of Ministers

that can stretch over three rounds. In the first two stages (first reading and second reading), the Commission's legislative role is pivotal: it can withdraw its proposal, amend it, or raise the voting hurdle in the Council of Ministers for amendments passed by the Parliament. Once the Council and the EP convene in a conciliation meeting, which is the third and last stage, the Commission loses the right to withdraw its proposal and it can also no longer raise the bar to unanimity in the Council if it disagrees with the Parliament's amendments. At that point, it is charged with taking 'all the necessary initiatives with a view to reconciling the positions of the European Parliament and the Council' (Art. 294, para. 11 TEU). These are the legal rules, but political practice has diverged. In the current political climate of resurgent intergovernmentalism, it has become increasingly difficult for the Commission to withdraw its proposal if not requested to do so by Parliament or Council.

The bottom line is pretty clear: with the exception of the few policy areas mentioned above, every initiative begins with the Commission. No national bureaucracy and virtually no other international governmental body has this kind of authority. Comparative examples that spring to mind are the Commission in the Economic Community of West-African States (ECOWAS) and, within much narrower parameters, the General Secretary of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Executive roles

In a few policy areas, the Commission has direct implementation responsibilities. The most important of these is competition, in which it has to decide, for example, whether state aids and certain types of takeover or merger are permissible under EU law. In most policy areas, however, the Commission relies on national or regional governments, or external agencies, to do the work. About 80 per cent of the EU budget is implemented by third parties. The Commission's role in respect of this 80 per cent is largely limited to putting an implementation framework in place—that is, rules that tell national or regional governments or agencies how to implement EU legislation.

Such implementation frameworks—for example, rules prescribing how to test technical product standards, or how to set prices for agricultural products—must normally be channelled through a so-called comitology committee, of which there were 266 in 2009.⁵ The comitology network is densest in enterprise and industry, environment, transport and energy, justice and security, and health and consumers. Here, member-state representatives, scientific experts, and interest-group representatives watch closely how the Commission monitors the implementation of EU policies by third parties. Comitology is the living embodiment of how different institutions and different levels of government have become intertwined. Unilateral action by one institution has become virtually impossible.

Legal guardian

The Commission—along with the European Court of Justice (ECJ)—is also charged with ensuring that EU law is applied uniformly throughout the member states. The Commission is heavily dependent on 'whistle-blowing' to be made aware of possible

breaches of EU law. Its limited resources mean that only a relatively small number of likely breaches can be pursued all the way to Court. The usual approach is to resolve the matter informally. But, from time to time, the Commission organizes dawn raids on suspected firms, which, if found guilty, may end up paying hefty fines. The Commission may impose fines of up to 1 per cent of a company's total turnover for the preceding business year for failure to provide accurate information or refusal to submit to an inspection. Since the 1993 Maastricht Treaty, the Commission can also take member states to court. The first fine imposed on a member state was in July 2000 when the ECJ ordered the Greek government to pay €20,000 for each day of continued non-compliance with a 1992 Court judgment concerning the disposal of toxic and dangerous waste at a plant on the island of Crete.

Mediator and broker

EU decision-making involves a multiplicity of actors eager to influence policy. Within this multilevel system, there is a strong need for mediation and brokerage, for which the Commission is particularly well placed. The Commission tends to have the best overall understanding of the positions of decision-making actors—a knowledge that stems from its contacts across the EU and its extensive involvement in EU policy processes. It is also more likely to be perceived as impartial, in contrast with, for example, the Council presidency, parliamentary groups, or interest-group representatives.

External representative and negotiator

The Commission negotiates trade matters on behalf of the EU. It takes the lead during enlargement negotiations and shares responsibilities with member states in foreign policy, development policy, and the external dimensions of such policies as transport, environment, and competition.

The Commission's influence depends on the character of the policy. It is greatest in policy areas such as those that:

- fall under what used to be called the first (EC) pillar (notably trade and the single market);
- have been subject to extensive transfer of competence, such as enlargement;
- do not normally raise too much political sensitivity, such as development;
- require impartial leadership, such as competition; and
- require technical expertise, such as agriculture or environment.

Structure

The Commission services are organized into DGs and general and internal services. DGs are normally concerned with policy sectors, such as trade, environment, competition, or climate action. Other services usually handle horizontal tasks, such as

the Secretariat General, the Legal Service, and the Publications Office, or they have a specific mandate, such as fighting fraud or compiling statistics. A recent development is the creation of agencies set up for a fixed period to manage Community programmes, such as the European Research Council or the Executive Agency for Health and Consumers.

The Commission's most senior official is the Secretary General. There have been only five Secretaries General in the history of the Commission: Émile Noël (1958–87; French); David Williamson (1987–97; British); Carlo Trojan (1997–2000; Dutch); David O'Sullivan (2000–05; Irish); and, since 2005, Catherine Day (also Irish and the first woman to hold this post). The Secretary General is the captain on the ship. She and her services ensure that all parts of the Commission coordinate activities, act in accordance with formal procedures, and liaise properly with other institutions—notably the Council of Ministers and the EP—and outside bodies. Under Émile Noël and, to a lesser extent, David Williamson, the Secretary General was also a formidable policy-shaper. Several important new policy ideas—including cohesion policy, justice and home affairs (JHA) policy, asylum policy, and foreign policy—were nursed in the Secretariat General. The two subsequent Secretary Generals interpreted their role in more strictly managerial terms. Catherine Day has steered between these poles and has, perhaps more than her predecessors, understood her role to be to extend the arm of the Commission President into the services.

Each DG or service is headed by a Director General, who may be assisted by one or more deputies. Directors General give instructions to Directors, who head a Directorate. An average-sized DG has between three and five directorates, each of which is composed of between three and seven units—the lowest organizational level in the Commission. A typical unit contains between twelve and fourteen officials, of whom, aside from the unit head, between four and six work on policy development, two or three are assisting clerks, and between three and five are mainly involved in secretarial and other administrative work. These people are often supplemented by one or two contractual positions.

The Commission under pressure

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the Commission's services came under intense pressure to reform. This pressure was largely a consequence of three external shocks to the system.

The first shock was the demise of the 'permissive consensus' on European integration. The Danish 'no' and the very narrow French 'yes' in referenda on the 1992 Maastricht Treaty heralded a new era—one in which European integration had become more politically contentious (Hooghe and Marks 2009). Governments found it increasingly difficult to control debate on key issues of European

integration. Should national sovereignty be diluted? Should further market integration be implemented? Should the EU be expanded? More people, from political parties to ordinary citizens, wished to have their say. The Convention on the Future of Europe was intended to bring the Union closer to citizens and involve them in a debate about the form that integration might take. But the 'no' votes in the 2005 referenda on the Constitutional Treaty in France and the Netherlands signalled that the exercise had not succeeded. Politicization has weakened the Commission's claim to be the primary agenda-setter for Europe (Kassim and Menon 2004). In a polity that struggles to be democratic, decisions by unelected Commission officials have questionable legitimacy. There has therefore been increased pressure on the Commission to justify what it is doing and to be more deferential to elected politicians. Under the (first, at least) Barroso presidency, it did precisely that.

Second, the EU moved towards the most challenging enlargement in its history to include a swathe of former communist states. With the 2004 and 2007 enlargements, the EU faced a policy environment in which problems became more diverse across the Union, resources scarcer, decisions more contentious, and implementation more haphazard. No institution has been left unaffected by enlargement, but the impact on the Commission services has been particularly great. The Commission has invested extensive personnel resources in the accession process and it will continue to do so for some time to come. It has also been overhauling its own organization to make space for new nationals. Such an exercise is never popular among existing staff, since it diminishes promotion opportunities. Moreover, there is considerable disillusionment among recruits from the new member states. Personnel reforms by the Commission that adversely affected both pay and promotion came into force on the same day as the accession of ten new members. A survey conducted in 2008 reveals that two-thirds (66.4 per cent) of staff either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposition that 'enlargement was handled with equity and fairness' (Kassim *et al.* 2012).

Finally, the EU struggled through a major institutional crisis in 1999, provoked by alleged malpractice in the Commission services. In March 1999, the Santer college resigned in the face of allegations of nepotism, fraud, and mismanagement of funds. The immediate cause was the publication of a report by a Committee of Independent Experts (1999a), which had been established at the EP's insistence to investigate accusations of maladministration in the Commission. Most media attention was directed to those parts of the Committee's report that detailed acts of favouritism by some Commissioners, but the real message of the report was that there were serious performance problems in the Commission services. A second Experts' Report, published in September 1999, exposed in great detail shortcomings in financial management (Committee of Independent Experts 1999b). This report provided the immediate context for a comprehensive reorganization of the services.

The reform programme

Aims

Against a backdrop of politicization, enlargement, and the 1999 resignation crisis, the Commission moved to overhaul its administration. The incoming Prodi college (1999) was compelled by the European Council to make internal Commission reform a top priority. Prodi himself announced a number of measures soon after his nomination as Commission President. But one of his first acts was to persuade Neil Kinnock, a Commissioner in the Santer Commission and a former leader of the British Labour Party (which he had reformed), to oversee the reform task as Vice President. Under the banner of modernization, Kinnock moved quickly to begin preparing a blueprint. The outcome was the reform White Paper, which set out a comprehensive programme and was adopted by the college in May 2000.

In the introduction to the White Paper, the Commission stated that:

We want the Commission to have a public administration that excels so that it can continue to fulfill its tasks under the Treaties with maximum effectiveness. The citizens of the Union deserve no less, the staff of the Commission want to provide no less. To fulfill that objective, we must keep the best of the past and combine it with new systems designed to face the challenges of the future. The world around us is changing fast. The Commission itself, therefore, needs to be independent, accountable, efficient and transparent, and guided by the highest standards of responsibility.

(Commission 2000, Part I: 3)

The central aims were to make the Commission more professional, more efficient, and more focused on core tasks.

Content

Box 8.1 outlines the main goals and measures of the reform programme. The Commission's basic organizational structure has remained unchanged. However, new systems have been introduced, operational principles amended, and the internal organization of individual DGs altered, with departments compelled to create new divisions or units responsible for managerial functions.

One set of measures is aimed at making the Commission more 'service-oriented' and more accountable to its principals—the EP, member states, interest groups, and Europe's citizens. The Commission has ensured faster payment of invoices, increased electronic access to documents, and adopted guidelines for consultation with civil society. Perhaps the single most important change is the introduction of a system of centralized strategic policy planning, which aims to ensure greater coordination, more predictability, and better matching of resources to objectives. The system tries to achieve a sensitive balancing act. On the one hand, the Commission's (2000: 5) responsibility to conceptualize policy is reinforced so as to 'fulfil its institutional role as the motor of European integration'; on the other, the Commission is induced to do less by prioritizing core tasks.

BOX 8.1 The Commission's internal reform programme

PRINCIPLES AND GOALS	MOST IMPORTANT MEASURES
<p>SERVICE-ORIENTED COMMISSION CULTURE</p> <p>Five core principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independence from national and sectoral interests • Clear division of responsibility • Accountability • Efficiency • Transparency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New codes of conduct for Commissioners and for relations between Commissioners and departments • Faster payment of invoices: no more than sixty days later • Framework agreement on relations with European Parliament • Whistleblower's charter • Improved public access to documents • Guidelines for consultation of civil society groups; public listing of interest groups in committees or working groups • E-Commission: electronic accessibility of documents and contacts
<p>PRIORITY SETTING, ALLOCATION, AND EFFICIENT USE OF RESOURCES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic planning • Externalization of non-core tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of new public management-influenced principles • Activity-based management (ABM): new system that organizes what Commission does in substantive rather than budgetary categories • Annual policy strategy (APS) combined with annual management programme (AMP): Commission sets policy priorities and allocates resources in APS, which provides basis for departments' AMP and is updated every three months • Detailed, regularly updated job descriptions for each official • New rules for externalization of non-core tasks: devolution to executive EU agencies, decentralization to national administrations, and contractual outsourcing to private parties
<p>A MERITOCRATIC PERSONNEL POLICY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Merit above nationality • Managerial training • Mobility and flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff reform: two-track career structure, reorganization of non-permanent staff, changes in pay and pension provisions • Training: fourfold increase of budget, management skills criterion for promotion • New statute for seconded national officials • Senior management: open competition, merit and experience, and no national quotas, compulsory mobility • Transitional rules for enlargement candidates
<p>EFFECTIVE FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decentralization • Faster and simpler procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separation of financial control and internal auditing; creation of two centralized services—one to help DGs to manage their finances, the other to conduct internal auditing • Financial accountability decentralized to DGs, if feasible down to official who decides a particular action • Enhanced cooperation with national administrations • Strengthening of OLAF, the anti-fraud office

Source: Kassim (2004b)

At first sight, this new system seems at odds with the Monnet tradition of policy activism and political entrepreneurship. But the implications of the new rules are ambivalent. To the extent that the services' energies are refocused on 'core functions such as policy conception, political initiation and enforcing Community law' and 'away from managing programmes and projects and directly controlling the latter' (Commission 2000: 5), the services may end up doing *less* hands-on routine administration and *more* policy initiation—and that would be close to Monnet's heart.

There have also been major changes in personnel policy. Meritocracy is now given clear preference over the claims of nationality in recruitment and promotion. Structures and procedures have been put in place intended to make it more difficult for national governments to interfere with Commission personnel policy. Research on promotion in the wake of the reform suggests that the reform has succeeded in giving the Commission a new independence from the member states in the appointment of senior officials (Egeberg 2003). The Kinnock reforms also encourage mobility throughout the services, especially at the most senior levels, where Directors General can no longer spend more than five years in the same post, and management training is mandatory.

Finally, there has been a comprehensive overhaul of the Commission's financial management and control procedures. Under the old system, an official wanting to implement a particular proposal was compelled to secure a 'visa' to approve the associated expenditure from a central finance department. In other words, policy-making took place independently of financial planning or budgetary awareness, and there was no incentive for policy officers to incorporate financial planning or value for money in their decision-making. The reform has decentralized financial responsibility to units and even to individual officials, separated financial control and auditing, simplified accounting procedures, and reorganized and intensified cooperation with national administrations, which are often the culprits in the mismanagement of EU funds.

The thrust of the reform reflects principles of the new public management (NPM) philosophy, which applies principles and practices from the private sector, such as competition, cost-effectiveness, outsourcing, and customer satisfaction, to public service (Hood 1991). Thus the Commission has followed the wave of NPM-inspired reforms that has swept across most democratic states since the 1980s. Because its direct delivery functions are limited, the Commission has not adopted the model wholesale. Nevertheless, the effect has been to shift the Commission in the direction of the Anglo-Saxon bureaucracies and away from the Franco-German influences that have historically shaped its practices (Balint *et al.* 2008; Kassim *et al.* 2012: ch. 7).

Externalizing Commission work

A particularly contentious aspect of the reform programme concerns the externalization of financial, administrative, and support tasks to agencies outside the Commission. Externalization is not a new phenomenon; many subsidy programmes in

agricultural or regional policy have been managed by contractors, who organize (but do not decide on) project selection and administer funds. The main purposes of externalization are to allow Commission staff to concentrate on policy-making, and to save money. However, the Commission is walking a fine line between economizing, on the one hand, and ensuring accountability, on the other. This was the flashpoint in the 1999 crisis, when the Commission was accused of having encouraged mismanagement in outsourced offices because it did not have proper supervision in place.

The reform package distinguishes between three kinds of externalization: devolution to EU agencies; decentralization to national administrations; and outsourcing through contracts with private parties. For each category, rules of engagement and oversight have been standardized and tightened. The basic principle is that the Commission remains responsible for making policy, but external agents take on implementation. By streamlining the rules, Kinnock paved the way for a substantial increase of externalization, even over and beyond substantive policy programmes and into administration. For example, in January 2003, the DG for Personnel spun off part of its tasks to three offices: one for the payment of all Commission staff, and the other two for managing Commission buildings and infrastructure in Brussels and Luxembourg. The Commission justified the decision by pointing out that externalizing these tasks should shave 18 per cent off operational costs.

Streamlining personnel policy

Contrary to the myth that Brussels is a sprawling bureaucracy, the Commission services are small in size, totalling just under 31,000 officials in 2011. The Commission's core of full-time officials consists of about 12,600 policy-making officials who make policy, negotiate with other EU institutions and outside bodies, and represent the EU abroad. Prior to the reforms, these officials were known as 'A-category' officials in what was a four-category personnel career structure. Now, they are described as 'administrators' in a two-grade system. There are also about 700 temporary agents at administrator level. Members of Commission cabinets fall into this category, as do individuals attracted to meet temporary staff shortages or to provide short-term expertise (for example, to evaluate Commission-funded research programmes).

Administrators are assisted by administrative assistants, clerks, and translators, of whom there are about 11,300 in total. Before the personnel reforms, these people populated 'B' and 'C' grades; they are now called 'assistants', and constitute the second group of the new two-track system. There are also some 3,500 researchers, half of whom are employed in the Ispra/Varese facilities of the Commission in northern Italy on fixed-term contracts. Just over 70 per cent of Commission staff reside in Brussels; the other 30 per cent work in Luxembourg (such as for the Statistical Office), in Italy, or in one of the manifold EU agencies across the EU. The 2,000 officials previously located in the 120 Commission delegations in third countries are absorbed into the new European External Action Service (EEAS).

One goal of the reform programme is to scale down non-*fonctionnaire* numbers by reducing temporary staff, and by off-loading non-core tasks to national administrations or to contract staff. Conversely, two important categories outside the core are set to grow: seconded national officials; and contract agents. Seconded national officials are usually sent from national or regional civil services to work in the Commission for up to four years (until the Kinnock reform, up to three years). Exceptionally, they may be detached from the private sector or from non-profit organizations. New rules make it easier for DGs to attract national officials, although the number is not to rise above 30 per cent of a DG's permanent policy-making staff. Secondment allows the Commission to attract specialist expertise from the national administration or from the private sector. It also gives national, regional, or local civil servants the opportunity to gain experience with EU programmes, which is particularly important for new member states. There were just over 1,000 seconded national officials in the Commission in 2011.

The second category to expand consists of contract agents. Most of these agents work in the outsourced agencies: some are temporarily employed as in-house 'consultants', 'experts', or 'advisers' (previously called 'auxiliary staff'), whilst others are locals working in the various Commission representations and delegations in and outside the EU. Before the reforms began to take effect, the Commission employed about 1,250 contract agents. There are now close to 5,900.

Seconded national officials and contract agents are cheaper for the Commission than permanent staff. Seconded national officials are almost 'freebees': they receive their salary from their national employer, and only a top-up for daily living expenses from the Commission. Contract staff are usually paid 10–15 per cent less than comparable Commission staff. It is also easier for managers in the departments to employ a seconded national official or contract agent than to rely on the Commission's time-consuming procedures for recruiting full-time administrators.

The Commission also hosts about 1,200 trainees per year—known as *stagiaires*. These are usually graduate students, who spend up to five months in the Commission gaining work experience. Competition for these jobs is cut-throat, especially for popular DGs such as external relations or press and communication. To be appointed, it can help to know someone in the services who can make a recommendation from the long list of candidates. *Stagiaires* perform supportive tasks, which can range from copying, to researching background information, to assisting discussions in Commission committees.

Recruitment and training

The reform programme leaves existing recruitment policy basically intact, but upgrades training. Nearly all new officials in policy-making positions are recruited by written and oral examination: the *concours*. Competition is intense and there are usually, for each vacancy, well over a hundred qualified candidates—that is, people with a good academic qualification and high proficiency in at least one

language in addition to their mother tongue. Candidates who pass the *concours* are placed on a reserve list from which they may be cherry-picked by an interested DG. Nationality is in principle not a criterion, but overrepresented nationalities, such as Belgians and Italians, find it more difficult to jump from the reserve list to a permanent job.

A minority of middle- and higher-level officials are recruited directly. The rules for recruitment from outside have been tightened and, as a result, there are fewer external appointments: between 2000 and 2002 the figure was about 20 per cent among the most senior level (Directors-General) and about 8 per cent among Directors, down from about 50 per cent in the mid-1990s. All vacancies need to be posted publicly and require a competitive process. There are good reasons for maintaining flexibility at senior levels. For one thing, recent member states would otherwise have to wait a very long time before they would have nationals in the senior ranks. Lateral appointments also make it possible to attract scientific or managerial talent to take on specialist jobs.

The biggest change in personnel policy is the virtual elimination of nationality as a criterion for the Commission's top management. National quotas—'geographical balance' is the official expression—used to be very strict at the most senior level and included informal country flags for some key positions. For example, Germans were usually in strategic positions in the Competition DG, French officials were prominent in the Agriculture DG, Italians in economic and monetary affairs posts, and British in external affairs positions (Page 1997: 54). However, the rules now explicitly state that merit and experience should prevail over nationality: 'The nationality of the outgoing post holder is not a factor in the appointment of the new occupant' (Commission 2002). The only nod to nationality is that 'each nationality should have at least one post as Director General, Deputy Director General or equivalent', although this aspiration is not always fulfilled.

The training budget has increased substantially. Much attention is given to enhancing managerial skills, with candidates for senior posts now needing to demonstrate solid management experience. The development of financial reporting and accounting skills has also been prioritized.

Assessing the reform

Although the design and enactment of the reform was an historic accomplishment, wide-ranging and implemented within a remarkably short timeframe, the extent to which it has succeeded in securing its objectives is not amenable to any clear-cut judgement. Certainly with respect to two of its chapters—financial management and control, and the staff rules—the reform has led to a replacement of practices and procedures that were antiquated and problematic (see Stevens 2001: ch. 5). In personnel policy, the reform has strengthened the Commission's independence from national governments. Yet while the underlying principles—greater accountability and better management accounting in financial management; merit and performance in staff policy—may be

sound, their implementation has not necessarily been sure-footed. The new system of appraisal, for example the career development review (CDR), was regarded as fundamentally flawed and the changes introduced by the Barroso Commission—tagged by critics ‘the reform of the reform’—have seemingly created new difficulties.

An important criterion in judging a reform is whether it has carried officials along with it. The evidence in the case of the Commission is, at best, mixed. Aside from the emphasis on training, which has been warmly welcomed by staff, officials appear not to be impressed (see Kassim *et al.* 2012: ch. 7). They generally register negative opinions on most elements of the reform programme. There are, however, some exceptions. Senior managers—Directors General, deputy Directors General, and Directors—are supportive of the reform, which introduced new tools that make it easier for them to perform their steering role. Officials from member states in which NPM-style reforms have been introduced—the UK and Ireland, as well as the Scandinavian countries and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe—tend also to take a more positive approach. More surprising, perhaps, is that longer-serving officials, as well as the most recently recruited, are more supportive of the reform.

At the same time, it is important to recall that administrative reform is a precarious enterprise, that it can rarely be qualified as successful, and that positive evaluations are, in fact, rare (see Wright 1997; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004). Certainly, support among bureaucrats is likely to be variegated. Moreover, reform of a multinational administration, especially one the supranational responsibilities of which distinguish it from most international secretariats, presents very particular challenges. To summarize, while it would be an exaggeration to claim that the Commission has been transformed into a modern administration, it has taken important steps in that direction.

Commission officials’ attitudes to EU governance

The Treaty creates clear expectations for Commission officials. It prescribes that they must put the Union’s interest first, set the agenda for the EU, and promote the Union’s interest independently from national pressures. The Commission’s internal staff regulations reinforce these prescriptions by instructing that:

an official shall carry out his duties and conduct himself *solely with the interests of the Communities in mind*; he shall neither seek nor take instructions from any government, authority, organization or person outside his institution. ... *He shall carry out the duties assigned to him objectively, impartially and in keeping with his duty of loyalty to the Communities.* [Emphasis added]

(Commission Staff Regulations 2005, Art. 11)

These norms have roots in the pioneering days. The Commission’s autonomy, all-European focus, and its exclusive power of initiative were crucial to Monnet’s

conception of the Commission as the engine of Europe, and he persuaded member states to enshrine them in the Treaty. In the early 1960s, Émile Noël, the Commission's first Secretary-General, institutionalized them in Commission staff rules and practices.

The norms were not challenged head-on by those seeking to reform the Commission. Thus the 2000 White Paper on reforming the Commission (2000: 7) states that:

the original and essential source of the success of European integration is that the EU's executive body, the Commission, is supranational and independent from national, sectoral or other influences. This is at the heart of its ability to advance the interests of the European Union.

But some observers anticipated that one by-product of the reform, intended or not, would be a cooling of the political agenda-setting ambitions of Commission officials. In other words, the Commission bureaucracy would become more like a normal civil service executing orders ~~taken~~ elsewhere.

Sixty years after the Commission's inception, to what extent do Commission officials still subscribe to Monnet's core philosophy? Has the most challenging decade in the Commission's existence weakened core norms? What has been the effect of the administrative reform, if any, on Commission attitudes? Have officials from the new member states adopted those traditional norms? We bring to bear evidence from three surveys of Commission officials in 1996, 2002, and 2008. The first two surveys were conducted among the senior ranks of the Commission bureaucracy: Director-Generals, Deputy Director-Generals, Directors, and principal advisers (Hooghe 2002, 2005.) The 2008 survey polled a representative sample of the Commission bureaucracy (Hooghe 2012; Kassim *et al.* 2012).

Agenda-setting, nationality, and primacy

To determine whether Monnet's core ideas have survived, we first have to be clear about what we mean by 'Monnet's ideas'. A narrow understanding emphasizes features of the Commission's immediate environment: the extent to which the Commission (rather than member states or the EP) initiates policy, and the role of nationality in the Commission's daily operation. A broader conception also considers the location of the Commission in the future EU institutional architecture—as the *primus inter pares* in a federal Union, the servant in an intergovernmental polity, or an indispensable, but not all-powerful, player in a multilevel system of governance. Surveys of Commission officials' attitudes enable us to monitor changing views on these elements over time.

Let us follow first senior officials, for whom we have data for 1996, 2002, and 2008. There is a noticeable upward trend in support for Commission agenda-setting power from 1996 to 2008 (see Table 8.1). Large majorities of senior Commission officials (between 60 and 85 per cent) find it desirable that the Commission retains its monopoly of initiative rather than shares it with the EP. Interestingly, while previous surveys detected a tendency among senior officials to give precedence to management

TABLE 8.1 Commission officials and support for Monnet norms (percentages)

Monnet norms	1996 (senior officials)	2002 (senior officials)	2008 (senior officials)	2008 (rank- and-file)	2008 (new member states)	2008 (old member States)
Agenda-setting						
Commission should <i>not</i> give up sole right of initiative to European Parliament	62.1	83.7	72.8	56.0	50.9	60.9
Administration or management should <i>not</i> be the Commission's priority	42.9	36.6	86.5	78.1	78.4	80.2
Nationality in Commission						
Qualifications should prevail over national quotas/posts should <i>not</i> be distributed according to national quotas or geographical balance*	74.7	62.4	44.0	48.3	31.1	53.2
The Commission's role in the EU institutional architecture						
Member states should <i>not</i> be the central pillars of the EU	65.0	83.7	81.9	78.6	75.2	80.4
College of Commissioners should be the government of the European Union	48.6	60.2	41.9	38.8	33.8	42.2

Note: Percentage supporting a statement: N = 105 in 1996; N = 93 in 2002; N = 186 (senior officials), N = 1540 (ranks), N = 418 (new member states), and N = 1292 (old member states) in 2008. For details on the 1996 and 2002 surveys, see <http://www.unc.edu/~hooghe>. For details on the 2008 survey, see Hooghe (2012) and Kassim *et al.* (2012).

*Statement wording varies over time (see text).

over initiative, the 2008 survey observes a counter-movement away from management towards initiative. Contrary to what many pundits claim, politicization, enlargement, and the Commission crisis have (thus far) not weakened the view that the Commission should be able to initiate policy; on the contrary, this preference has intensified.

One major objective of the administrative reform programme was to focus attention on administrative management. This move ran counter to Monnet, who saw a basic contradiction between the need to provide political leadership and the duty to administer, and, when forced, relegated the Commission's administrative and managerial tasks to second place—a choice not always appreciated by his colleagues. By the mid-1990s, the Commission's senior officials were not so sure about the wisdom of Monnet's choice. The glorious years of Commission leadership under Jacques Delors (1985–95) left a sour aftertaste when, a few years later, accusations of mismanagement and nepotism were slung at the college and the Commission bureaucracy. Many senior officials had seen it coming and supported a correction (Hooghe 2001). As Table 8.1 shows, already in 1996—before the Santer crisis—a majority of senior Commission officials wanted to make management and administration a priority. By 2002, at the cusp of the administrative reform, support for this view had grown, with only 37 per cent of officials agreeing with the statement that administrative management should *not* be a priority. The administrative reform was implemented in the subsequent years. However, by the end of 2008, the overwhelming majority of senior officials (86 per cent) wanted the Commission to focus *more* on initiative again. Perhaps the administrative managerial pendulum had swung far enough or perhaps the challenges of enlargement had made the Commission leadership change its mind.

Most Commission officials explain the need for strong Commission agenda-setting power in pragmatic terms. They argue that Commission leadership tends to produce better results than member-state guidance. Time and again during interviews, officials contrast the relatively smooth handling of enlargement or climate change, in which the Commission has taken the lead, with well-documented examples of inefficient or botched member-state guidance, such as the failure to manage the break-up of Yugoslavia, the aborted attempt to negotiate external trade in services, deadlocks in immigration and asylum policy, and, more recently, the financial crisis. Furthermore, many top officials warn that enlargement will grind EU decision-making to a halt unless the Commission gains more power and can preserve its right of initiative.

Monnet also emphasized the need for officials to be independent of national interests. The strongest tool for this is a personnel policy that allocates posts on the basis of merit instead of nationality. Administrative reform has reinforced this shift by asserting that merit, not national quotas, should determine promotion and recruitment, especially at the highest ranks. In Table 8.1, support amongst senior officials for this principle is considerable, but it softened from 75 per cent in 1996 to 62 per cent in 2002. In 2008, the support base had shrunk to a plurality of senior officials (44 per cent, with another 17 per cent neither agreeing nor disagreeing). Direct comparison is complicated because the question wording changed between 2002 and 2008. In 2008, the question was whether posts should be 'distributed according

to geographical balance'; in 2002, it was whether posts should be 'distributed across nationalities proportionate to their respective populations'. So the sharp dip in support may be caused in part by a change in the question—but it is difficult to believe that this alone explains the sea change.

Interviews reveal that many top officials take a more nuanced view than either Monnet or the administrative reform on nationality in the Commission. Officials resent *parachutage*, the practice of appointing individuals outside the normal recruitment procedures, but see merit in geographical balance. As *parachutage* has become a thing of the past, the once-deep suspicion against national colonization has mellowed.

As late as the mid-1990s, 35–40 per cent of top positions were filled by outsiders parachuted from national administrations, diplomatic services, or from Commissioners' cabinets into the Commission's top bureaucracy. These individuals bypassed competitive examinations or conventional internal promotion procedures, and blocked careers for officials who had worked their way up through the ranks. Moreover, there were no guarantees that these parachuted officials had the necessary skills for the task or that they would be independent from the national capital that landed them the job. One outcome of the 2002 personnel reform is the virtual elimination of *parachutage* and, in the rare occasions that it is still used, it is subject to competitive examination.

Geographical variation among Commission officials, on the other hand, ensures a range of views in policy-making and bestows greater legitimacy on EU policy. A policy blind to the realities of a diverse multilevel polity could do more harm than good. Senior officials' instincts about how to balance national sensitivities and impartiality have been honed by the hard school of the last decades. A Commission that speaks in a foreign tongue is vulnerable to Eurosceptic rhetoric, while a Commission perceived to be the handmaiden of particular national interests loses credibility. That is one reason why officials make a sharp distinction between talking with compatriots and making policy for compatriots. While the former finds broad approval, the latter meets widespread reticence. When asked in 2002, only 12 per cent believed that Commission autonomy would be better served if officials were to avoid contact with compatriots, but 80 per cent agreed that national policy dossiers are better *not* handled by officials of the same nationality.

In 2008, we asked a slightly more probing question: namely, whether it is problematic for Commission officials to manage dossiers of special interest to their own member states. We found that an absolute majority (53 per cent) finds it unproblematic. Allocating national dossiers to nationals remains contested, but sometimes it is wise to strike a balance between the ideal and the practical. As a top official observed, there are not many non-Estonian officials who speak Estonian, and so to the extent that good policy relies on local knowledge, one needs to use the human capital that one has. Moreover, one major outcome of the new personnel policy is that even when geographical balance influences hiring and promotion, it happens after candidates have gone through the fire of meritocratic examination.

The last two statements in Table 8.1 gauge Commission official preferences on the constitutional future of Europe. The first echoes de Gaulle's call for intergovernmentalism, and the second taps Monnet's (or Hallstein's—see Chapter 5) notion of

supranationalism/federalism. If Monnet's political ideas were to determine Commission preferences about Europe's architectural design, one would expect to see solid majorities opposing member states being central pillars and solid majorities supporting the idea of the Commission as a sort of 'government for Europe'. The expectation that member states should *not* run the EU is confirmed (from 65 per cent in 1996, to 84 per cent in 2002 and 82 per cent in 2008), but support for the Commission as the embryonic European government is less widespread than expected (49, 60, and 42 per cent, respectively). On basic issues of EU governance, senior Commission officials are distinctly divided.

It may be surprising that a plurality of the Commission's bureaucratic leadership is lukewarm on a federal Europe with a government-like Commission. One reason appears to be our tendency—in academia as well as in public debate—to oversimplify the array of Europe's jurisdictional options. Often, the choice is presented as one of federalism/supranationalism and intergovernmentalism/state-centrism, which prevents us from picking up plurality.

Supranationalists are those who agree that the college of Commissioners should be the government of Europe and disagree that member states should remain the central pillars. Intergovernmentalists disagree with the former and agree with the latter. But many officials believe that *neither* the college of Commissioners *nor* the member states should be the kernel of European government, or they believe that *both* should lead Europe. This third group does not want to be lumped together with one of the other two. We call them 'institutional pragmatists' on account of the fact that they prefer to side-step institutional battles. They favour a jurisdictional design in which Commission and member states are interlocking and complementary institutions: the Commission on account of its monopoly of initiative; the member states on account of their legitimacy to legislate and implement EU policy.

Table 8.2 shows how each of these visions finds a constituency among senior Commission officials and how it has done so since the mid-1990s. One group supports a proto-federal or supranational EU, which conceives of the Commission as the primary authority. Another favours a more intergovernmental or state-centric Union that reserves that role for the member states. A third wants a multilevel polity that conceives the

TABLE 8.2 Supranationalists, institutional pragmatists, and intergovernmentalists among senior Commission officials

	1996	2002	2008
Supranationalists	35.2%	53.1%	39.3%
Institutional pragmatists	37.0%	26.1%	33.5%
Intergovernmentalists	22.2%	8.8%	12.6%

Note: N = 105 in 1996; N = 93 in 2002; N = 186 (2008)

Commission and member states as complementary institutions. Plurality, not hegemony or polarity, describes most aptly the political views of senior Commission officials.

Rank and file vs top, and East vs West

The 2008 poll surveyed the whole Commission, thus providing us with an opportunity to explore the breadth and depth of Monnet norms across the Commission. To what extent do rank and file share the views of the senior bureaucracy? We were also interested in whether officials from the most recent member states have the same or different preferences than their Western colleagues. As of June 2011, 24.2 per cent of Commission policy-makers (AD grades) came from the twelve most recent member states (EU12), a group sizeable enough to shift the preferences of the Commission services.

The last four columns in Table 8.1 compare rank and file with senior officials and new with 'old' member state officials, respectively. In all but one instance, rank and file are less in favour of Monnet positions than are senior officials. The one exception is that relatively junior officials are somewhat more circumspect about applying geographical balance to hiring and promotion. On no dimension is the difference particularly striking.

The differences are greater between officials from new member states and those from the EU15. In every instance, EU12 officials are less supportive of Monnet norms than officials from the EU15, and the distinctions are particularly great on geographical balance and on whether the college of Commissioners should be the government of Europe. Supranationalism is considerably less popular among officials from the new member states (30.2 per cent against 38.6 per cent for the EU15), intergovernmentalism slightly more (14.7 per cent against 12.8 per cent), and institutional pragmatism about the same (30.8 per cent against 30.1 per cent). Almost one in four new member officials (24.2 per cent) declare neutrality or have no position on whether power should reside with the Commission or with the member states.

All in all, Monnet's vision seems to have resilience in the Commission. But it is less entrenched among rank and file than among senior officials, and it musters considerably less support among officials from the newer member states. Are the differences we detect early tidings of impending change? Or will they wash out as junior and middle management move up the ranks, and as EU12 officials carve out work experiences and careers at the heart of the EU? Perhaps only time will tell.

Conclusion

After an eventful decade—shaped by politicization, enlargement, and administrative reform—the Commission services have emerged more unchanged than changed. The reforms have put the organization on a more professional footing, most particularly by upgrading on-the-job training, focusing more on managerial skills, scrapping national quotas and country flags, and decentralizing accountability. However, contrary to what pundits had thought, there are few signs that these changes have weakened the

Commission's traditional role of being the engine of Europe. A central purpose of the reforms has been to free the 12,600 Commission administrators from routine administration and implementation, so that they can focus on initiating policy—in the spirit of Jean Monnet's original ideas.

The many changes in staff policy and work practices seem to reaffirm, not weaken, the special role of the Commission in the EU architecture. And thus organizational change paves the way for institutional continuity. Surveys of the Commission's senior officials before and after the reform corroborate this conclusion. Support for agenda-setting—understood here as a preference for a privileged role for the Commission in setting Europe's agenda—has grown among Commission officials.

Does this trend suggest that more policy may flow from the services? This result is unlikely since a major goal of the reform programme has been to constrain the Commission's penchant for policy entrepreneurship. Measures such as the introduction of the Commission's annual policy strategy and its associated annual management programme are designed to entrench this restraint, by compelling Commission officials to pursue initiatives within the guidelines set by the college. Combined with the 'completion' of the internal market, and a market-liberal turn in the college and among top Commission officials, these measures may well keep the Commission services' entrepreneurship within bounds. But perhaps most decisive are a political environment of resurgent nationalism and a receptive college of Commissioners. Strong signals are sent to the Commission services to tread lightly.



NOTES

1. Data collected as part of The European Commission in Question project, funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (grant no. RES-062-23-1188) and conducted by the authors, along with Michael Bauer, Sara Connolly, Renaud Dehousse, John Peterson, and Andrew Thompson. The online survey was administered by the polling organization YouGov in September and October 2008. A sample of 4,621 policy administrators was drawn from a population of over 14,000. The sample was stratified to ensure proportionality by gender, age, and nationality; officials from the ten new member states were over-sampled. The response rate was 41 per cent (1,901 responses). Iterative proportional fitting was used to create a weighted sample that reflects the population distributions by gender, age, nationality, and DG location. For further information, see online at <http://www.uea.ac.uk/psi/research/EUCIQ> or see Kassim *et al.* (2012).
2. http://ec.europa.eu/about/ds_en.htm
3. http://ec.europa.eu/civil_service/about/figures/index_en.htm
4. Both the injunction to serve the 'European interest' and the Commission's independence are set out in Art. 213, para. 2.
5. Annual report from the Commission on the working of committees during 2009 (COM(2010)354 final).



FURTHER READING

The academic literature on the Commission has grown considerably in recent years. The list of further reading provided here concentrates on sources that include extensive discussions and analyses of the services. The full findings from the 2008 survey of Commission officials is reported in Kassim *et al.* (2012).

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WEB LINKS

http://europa.eu/about-eu/institutions-bodies/european-commission/index_en.htm

The Commission's website.

http://ec.europa.eu/reform/index_en.htm

Provides access to Commission (2004) *Reforming the Commission: Reform of Europe's Public Services*.

http://ec.europa.eu/civil_service/docs/toc100_en.pdf

Provides access to Commission (2005) *Staff Regulations of Officials of the European Communities: Conditions of Employment of Others Servants of the European Communities*.