

Is the European Commission a Hothouse for Supranationalism?

Theorising and exploring the world of Commission civil servants

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Abstract

Does the European Commission (Commission) manage to transform and re-direct the roles played by Commission civil servants? To test the old neo-functionalist claim on loyalty transfer among civil servants, this article provides fresh survey and interview data on seconded national experts in the Commission. The transformative powers of the Commission are tested by assessing the extent to which seconded national experts adopt *supranational* role perceptions. Theoretically, the emergence of supranational role perceptions is accounted for by considering (i) processes of pre-socialisation outside the Commission, (ii) processes of re-socialisation inside the Commission, and (iii) organisational incompatibility between the Commission and domestic ministries and agencies from which the secondees originate. The empirical analysis shows that secondees evoke multiple loyalties, notably towards own profession, own DG and Unit and towards the EU and the Commission as wholes. Crucially, the data reported demonstrate that the Commission indeed instils supranational role perceptions into secondees. This observation reflects processes of re-socialisation inside the Commission, the organisational composition of the Commission as well as organisational incompatibilities between the Commission and domestic ministries and agencies. The data does not report robust evidence of pre-socialisation outside the Commission. Hence, the Commission is indeed a 'hothouse for supranationalism'.

Keywords: European Commission, organisational incompatibility, role perception, seconded national expert, socialisation, actor-level supranationalism

Introduction¹

Does the European Commission (Commission) manage to transform and re-direct the roles played by Commission civil servants? To test the old neo-functionalist claim on loyalty transfer among civil servants (Ruggie et al. 2005), this article provides fresh survey and interview data on seconded national experts in the Commission (SNEs in Commission phraseology). The transformative clout of the Commission is tested by assessing the extent to which SNEs adopt *supranational* role perceptions. Theoretically, the emergence of supranational role perceptions among SNEs is accounted for by a composite institutional perspective. According to this perspective, SNEs may evoke a supranational role due to: (i) processes of pre-socialisation outside the Commission, (ii) processes of re-socialisation inside the Commission, and (iii) organisational incompatibility between the Commission and domestic ministries and agencies from which SNEs originate. The empirical observations show that the Commission indeed instils supranational role perceptions into SNEs. SNEs evoke multiple loyalties, notably towards own profession, own DG and Unit and towards the EU and the Commission as wholes. These observations reflect processes of re-socialisation inside the Commission, the organisational composition of the Commission as well as organisational incompatibilities between the Commission and domestic ministries and agencies. The data does not report robust evidence of pre-socialisation of SNEs outside the Commission. Hence, our findings challenge the claim by Hooghe (2005) that processes of socialisation of Commission officials mainly occur at the national level and not inside the Commission. The Commission is indeed a ‘hothouse for supranationalism’.

This article has two ambitions: First to assess the extent to which SNEs evoke a supranational role (relative to other roles) and secondly to theoretically account for actor-level supranationalism. The Commission is a crucial test-bed for assessing the extent to which the

international executive institutions (IEIs) impact on the role perceptions of individual civil servants. Arguably, if actor-level supranationalism is not observed among Commission officials, we are less likely to discover it inside other IEIs (Trondal, Marcussen and Veggeland 2005). One under-utilised laboratory thereof is Commission SNEs. Arguably, if supranational role perceptions do emerge among SNEs, this is indeed a robust test of the transformative clout of the Commission. SNEs are hired on short term contracts (from 3 months to maximum 4 years), they remain paid by their home government, and the majority of SNEs return to previous positions in domestic ministries and agencies when their secondment period expires (Trondal 2004a). Despite being under Commission instructions, SNEs retain their organisational affiliation to their national ministry or agency.²

Recent literature characterise the Commission by competing images. Whereas some scholars picture the Commission as strongly penetrated by national interests (Coombes 1970; Kassim and Menon 2004; Menon 2003), other sees at as a neutral brooker (Nugent 2001:115).

Moreover, whereas some scholars picture the Commission as a transformative institution that is able to redirect the behaviour and roles of its incumbents (Egeberg 2005a), other see the Commission as a reacting institution to the socialising processes at the member-state level (Hooghe 2005). Conflicting images of these kinds reflect (i) surprisingly few empirical studies of the decision-making dynamics inside the Commission, (ii) competing theoretical approaches to assess Commission governance, (iii) empirical observations from different segments of the Commission, and (iv) a variety of dependent variables to assess Commission governance.³

This study measures supranational roles as the extent that individual actors feel (i) loyalty and allegiance towards the Commission as a whole and/or (ii) feel loyalty and allegiance towards

their Director General (DG). A supranational role perception denotes that a shared system of rules, norms, principles and codes of conduct is inducted, internalised and taken for granted among individual actors. This is consistent with the “type II socialization” as suggested by Checkel (2005: 804) whereby actors acquire a positional “organisational personality” inside the Commission that is rather distinct from national, professional and departmental roles previously internalised (Searing 1991:1249; Simon 1957: 278). A supranational role prescribes how SNEs should act and provides categories for belongingness. A role perception is a generalised receipt for action as well as a normative system of self-reference that provides feelings of allegiance to organised communities. “To the extent that organization members identify with their organization, they are willing to act spontaneously in its interest, without being told exactly what to do” (Mayntz 1999: 83). Ultimately, role perceptions guide the behaviour of actors because roles provide “conceptions of reality, standards of assessment, affective ties, and endowments, and thereby with a capacity for purposeful action” (March and Olsen 1995: 30; Selden 1997:140). A supranational role thus implies a ‘shift of loyalty’ and a ‘sense of community’ that is integral and endogenous to actors’ self-perceptions (Deutch et al. 1957: 5-6; Haas 1958: 16; Herrmann and Brewer 2004: 6). This study carefully analyses supranational roles as perceived by the SNEs themselves.

This study builds on the notion of multiple roles, implying that actors may adopt supranational roles without sacrificing pre-existing roles (Herrmann, Risse and Brewer 2004). The Commission, like most executive institutions, has an inbuilt tension between different governance dynamics, notably between supranational, intergovernmental, departmental and epistemic dynamics (Trondal 2006). Different dynamics may “compete for relevance, even in a given context” (Sen 1998: 15). An intergovernmental role is guided by loyalty to their home government, preference for national interests, and close contacts with their home base. A

departmental role predict SNEs to be “neutral, intelligent, generalist professionals who advice ministers” (Richards and Smith 2004: 779). According to the departmental role, SNEs are expected to evoke classical Weberian civil servant virtues, attach identity towards their Commission Unit and DG, and abide to administrative rules and proper procedures (Barnett and Finnemore 2004: 167). Finally, SNEs may evoke an epistemic role: Commission officials are highly educated officials, recruited on the basis of past merits, and with a professional esteem attached to their educational background. According to the epistemic role, SNEs enjoy a great deal of behavioural autonomy. They are assumed to prepare dossiers, argue and negotiate on the basis of their professional competences and legitimate their authority on neutral competences (Haas 1992). Their decision-making behaviour is expected to be guided by considerations of scientific and professional correctness and the power of the better argument (Eriksen and Fossum 2000).

To theoretically account for supranational roles among SNEs a composite institutional approach is outlined. This composite approach combines insights from middle-range social constructivist approaches, institutionalist and organisation theory approaches. Recent social constructivist literature have carefully theorised, operationalised and empirically illustrated processes of pre-socialisation and re-socialisation within international organisation (e.g. Checkel 2005). Institutional and organisation theory approaches theorise the organisational structures within which social interaction occur (Trondal 2001). Arguably, by combining these theoretical building blocks our composite institutional approach may maximise the explained variance on actor-level supranationalism. The following set of independent variables is derived: (i) dynamics of pre-socialisation outside the Commission, (ii) dynamics of re-socialisation inside the Commission, and (iii) organisational incompatibility between the Commission and domestic ministries and agencies from which SNEs originate.

The article proceeds as follows: The next section outlines a composite institutional approach on actor-level supranationalism. Next, a record of survey and interview data on SNEs is presented. Finally, an empirical analysis is conducted in two steps. Step I present the multiple role perceptions evoked by SNEs. Step II present two OLS regression analyses that explain the emergence of supranational roles among SNEs.

A Composite Institutional Approach

SNEs may arguably evoke a supranational role perception due to (i) processes of pre-socialisation outside the Commission, (ii) processes of re-socialisation inside the Commission, and (iii) organisational incompatibility between the Commission and domestic ministries and agencies. Scholars tend to treat institutionalist and social constructivist approaches separately (e.g. Wiener and Diez 2004). However, the institutionalist – social constructivist divide is narrower than often assumed (Trondal 2001). Both sociological institutionalism and middle-range social constructivist account emphasise similar independent variables (notably dynamics of socialisation of individual actors) as well as fairly similar dependent variables (notably the transformation of role perceptions among individual actors). However, whereas middle-range social constructivist scholarship tend to under-theorise the *organisational* context within which social interaction occurs, institutional and organisation theory approaches tend to under-theorise the aspect of social interaction. By applying so-called “both/and” theorising, this study combines micro-mechanisms from institutional (cf. iii above) and social constructivist scholarship (cf. i and ii above) to account for supranational roles among SNEs (e.g. Checkel 2005; Egeberg 2005a; March and Olsen 2005). Our focus on social mechanisms enables the elaboration of fine grained hypotheses of actor-level supranationalism – that is, specifying the conditions under which and providing a plausible

account of why the independent and the dependent variables are linked in the suggested manner (Hedström and Swedberg 1998: 7).

Civil servants live with a constant overload of potential and inconsistent information that may be attended to at particular decision situations. Formal and informal institutions guide the decision-making behaviour of civil servants due to the computational limitations among the latter (Simon 1957). Formal organisations “are collections of structures, rules and standard operating procedures that have a partly autonomous role in political life” (March and Olsen 2005: 4). Accordingly, to Schattschneider (1975: 30) “organization is itself a mobilization of bias in preparation for action”. Institutions are systematic devices for simplifying, classifying, routinising, directing and sequencing information towards particular decision situations (Schattschneider 1975: 58). Causal mechanisms that connect institutions and actor behaviour are logics of appropriateness, incentive systems and bounded rationality. For example, the limited cognitive capacities of civil servants are systematised by vertical and horizontal specialisation of formal organisational charts. By specialising organisations each civil servant is assigned a formal role that specifies what problems, solutions and consequences s/he should de/emphasise (Egeberg 1999). Organisational specialisation lead to local rationalities and local and routinised learning cycles among the incumbents (Olsen 2005: 12). The logic of appropriateness also guide officials to decision-making behaviour deemed appropriate by internalised perceptions of proper conduct (March and Olsen 2005). Moreover, actors often have multiple organisational embeddedness, rendering the impact from each institution ambiguous to the actor. Independent variables that measure organisational compatibility and incompatibility across level of government take this particular concern into account. The independent variables derived from this composite institutional approach are discussed in the following.

Dynamics of pre-socialisation outside the Commission

The following two proxies are applied to test the impact of pre-socialisation on SNEs' supranational roles: (i) the educational background of SNEs (national vs. international), and (ii) their desire of leaving the Commission.

The seminal neo-functional studies of elite socialisation did not systematically control for the effect of pre-socialisation and self selection (Pollack 1998). This section suggests ways of controlling for the effect of pre-socialisation (cf. Beyers 2005; Hooghe 2005). The theory of representative democracy claims that in order to understand government decision-making the demographic characteristics of the officials are pivotal (Pfeffer 1982: 277; Selden 1997).

Important demographic attributes of actors are their sex, age, nationality and education.

Demographic characteristics of the officials also include his or her past, present and future careers. With respect to past careers, studies of the social biographies of civil servants demonstrate that *educational background* is the most important background factor for understanding the decision-making behaviour of government officials (Christensen, Lægveid and Zuna 2001). According to the neo-functional school, epistemic communities of highly educated experts support the development of supranational roles. Both the length of education as well as type of education matters. Suggestively, an international educational background may be conducive to supranationalism among SNEs. SNEs with educational experiences from outside their home country or from truly international universities (e.g. the *College of Europe*, Brugge) are more likely to adopt a supranational role perception *prior* to entering the Commission than SNEs with a national educational background.

Individual demography and organisational demography interact in complex ways. For examples, the recruitment procedures of organisations interact with the background variables of actors. SNEs are recruited outside the standardised written Commission procedure based on merit. SNEs are in fact recruited through a “submarine procedure” that resembles a quota system. The quota system typically recruits officials on more temporary contracts on the basis of, for example, political, sectoral or territorial loyalties (Bekke and van der Meer 2000: 281-282; Ingraham, 1995: xix). Recruitment by the quota procedure is conducive to strengthen the impact that the demographic background of officials has on their role perceptions. *Ceteris paribus*, temporary positions increase the likelihood that the background of actors becomes relevant for their roles. Officials employed on temporary contracts have a fairly short tenure within the organisation and are therefore less subject to organisational re-socialisation than full-time officials.

Government officials sometimes have a wish of *leaving* their organisation. This is likely to weaken their loyalty towards the organisation. By contract, SNEs have to leave the Commission when their term expires (after a maximum of four years). However, not all SNEs have a wish of leaving the Commission, upholding an aspiration of becoming *parachuted* into permanent positions in the Commission services or in the Cabinet. Still, most SNEs foresee a return to national government institutions after their visit to the Commission. *Ceteris paribus*, anticipation about future career prospects outside the Commission is conducive to weakening supranational role perceptions among SNEs.

Dynamics of re-socialisation inside the Commission

A large literature argues that the impact of pre-socialisation on actors’ role perceptions is modified by organisational re-socialisation (e.g. Checkel 2005; Meier and Nigro 1976).

National officials that enter the Commission are subject to an organisational “exposure effect” (Johnston 2005: 1039) that may contribute to re-socialise actors over time. Re-socialisation processes are often uni-directional in the sense that the socialisator educates, indoctrinates, teaches or diffuses his norms and ideas to the socialisee. The re-socialisation variable claims that officials’ role perceptions may change due to *enduring* experiences with institutions, accompanying new perceptions of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour (Herrmann and Brewer 2004: 14). Chief to the neo-functionalist approach, the potential for re-socialisation to occur (‘shift of loyalty towards a new centre’) is assumed positively related to the *duration* and the *intensity* of interaction among actors (Checkel 2001: 26; Haas 1958: 16). This claim rests on socialisation theory that emphasises a positive relationship between the intensity of participation within a collective group and the extent to which members of this group develop perceptions of group belongingness and an *esprit de corps*. Socialisation is a dynamic process whereby individuals are induced into the norms and rules of a given community. Phrased otherwise, “more informal, face-to-face interaction increases the likelihood that individuals will do things they believe will be liked by liked others” (Johnston 2005: 1032). Protracted and intensive actor-interaction is conducive to internalisation of the norms, rules and interests of the community (Checkel 2005). Henceforth, the length of stay at the Commission may foster a re-socialisation of SNEs towards supranational role perceptions (Trondal 2004b). Moreover, SNEs are likely to re-evoke supranational roles ones they have become internalised and thereby strengthen this internalisation through repetition (Johnston 2005: 1022).

This study suggests two proxies of re-socialisation: (i) The *length* of stay within the Commission (individual seniority among SNEs). Recent social constructivist literature suggests that the length of interaction increases the socialising potential of institutions (Checkel 2005: 811). Our test of the length variable is crucial because SNEs have short

careers within the Commission (maximum four years). Hence, if we indeed see an impact of the length variable among SNEs, a similar and even stronger effect is likely among permanent Commission officials. (ii) Re-socialisation is also measured by the *intensity* by which SNEs interact within the Commission. Studies of COREPER and Council working groups demonstrate that intensity of actor-interaction is positively related to the development of internalised norms like diffuse reciprocity, thick trust, mutual responsiveness, consensus and a “we-ness” (Lewis 2005: 949). Our proxy of the intensity variable is the amount of contact between SNEs and fellow colleagues with other national origins, as well as the amount of face-to-face interaction between SNEs and fellow colleagues during formal meetings in the Commission.

Organisational incompatibility

To illuminate how formal organisations may foster supranational roles among SNEs, this section brings “the domestic back in” by considering organisational incompatibility across levels of government (see Bulmer and Lequesne 2005; Zurn and Checkel 2005: 1047).

Behavioural transformation among SNEs requires some degree of *organisational incompatibility* between the domestic ministries and agencies and the Commission (Egeberg 2005b). Organisational incompatibility creates mutual insulations of actors and organisations. This novelty argument claims that people that experience new situations are likely to change their role perceptions, notably towards a supranational logic (Hooghe 2005). Hence, SNEs with Commission portfolios that *depart significantly* from previous domestic portfolios are likely to experience a cognitive challenge towards shifting role perceptions towards a new centre. SNEs who enter the Commission for the first time are likely to discover non-compatible working environments (March 1994: 70). For example, the physical structure of the Commission building, the presence of blue flag with the golden stars together with the

member-state flags may strengthen perceptions of novelty and organisational incompatibility. *Perceptions* of organisational incompatibility are arguably conducive to the evocation of new supranational behaviour among SNEs.

When analysing organisational incompatibility the organisational structures of the composite parts need to be addressed. Organisations tend to accumulate conflicting organisational principles through horizontal and vertical specialisation (Olsen 2005). Political orders are often hybrids and inconsistent collections “of institutions that fit more or less into a coherent system” (Ansell 2004: 234; March and Olsen 2005: 8). When specialising formal organisations horizontally, two conventional principles have been suggested by Luther Gulick (1937). First, formal organisations may be specialised by the major *purpose* served – like research, health, food safety, etc. This principle tends to activate role perceptions among incumbents along sectoral (departmental) cleavages. Arguably, organisation by major purpose served is likely to bias the role perceptions of SNEs towards the departmental logic. The Commission DG and unit structure is a prominent example of this horizontal principle of specialisation (Egeberg and Trondal 1999). The Commission is a horizontally pillarised system of government specialised by purpose and with fairly weak organisational capabilities for horizontal co-ordination at the top through Presidential command (Dimitrakopoulos and Kassim 2005). Domestic central administrations are also typically organised according to the principle of purpose (Peters 1995: 158).

A second principle of horizontal specialisation present within the Commission is the principle of the major *process* utilised – like administration, legal service, personnel services, etc. (Gulick 1937). This organisational principle encourages the horizontal integration of functional departments and the disintegration of the major purposes served. Within the

Commission the Legal Service and the DG for Translation illustrates the process principle.

Moreover, domestic ministries are often organised by process, like ministries of administration, ministries of planning, etc. Arguably, organisation by major process is conducive to departmental and epistemic role perception among SNEs.

Horizontal specialisation of these kinds is conducive to strengthening sub-unit roles and weakening allegiances towards the organisation as a whole (supranational). Moreover, lack of cross-unit mobility, as is the case among most SNEs, weakens the potential for supranational roles to emerge. However, the sheer fact that the Commission serve as their *primary* organisational affiliation may foster supranational behaviour among SNEs (Egeberg 2005b). The logic of primacy may thus trump the logic of recency. Moreover, organisational incompatibility across levels of government tends to create organisational insulation and thereby increase the likelihood that new role perceptions are discovered by actors.

We suggest two proxies of organisational incompatibility: (i) The first proxy is the degree of compatible portfolios, as perceived by the SNEs themselves, across levels of government: did SNEs previously work in domestic ministries or agencies with a compatible or incompatible portfolio to their current Commission portfolios? (ii) The second proxy is the vertical organisational specialisation of the Commission. Officials tend to make affective ties primarily towards their sub-unit and less towards the organisation as a whole because most of their time and energy is consumed within organisational sub-units. One proxy of the vertical organisation of the Commission is the formal rank position of SNEs. Arguably, SNEs in top rank positions (for example A1) are more likely to identify with the organisation as a whole than SNEs in bottom rank positions (for example A8).

Data and method

The observations reported below are based on a recent survey and interview study among SNEs in the Commission. The survey data results from a postal inquiry conducted in 2004 on a sample of 125 SNEs from different EU member-states and the EEA countries Norway and Iceland.⁴ After three rounds of reminders the final sample totals 72, giving a response rate of 58 percent. This response rate is low compared to surveys in domestic central administrations, but higher than in recent studies of Commission officials (e.g. Hooghe 2005). The final sample covers SNEs from 15 Commission DGs⁵, five EU member-countries and two EEA countries.⁶ Moreover, the survey is supplemented by in-depth interviews among a sub-sample of SNEs. 22 interviews were conducted in the winter 2004 - 2005 on the basis of a semi-structured interview-guide. The next section is illustrated with direct quotations from transcribed interviews.

The survey and interview data are based on a systematic selection procedure. This procedure does not allow for empirical generalisations. Still, “[s]mall Ns *can* yield big conclusions” (Andersen 2003: 3 – original emphasis). One road to empirical generalisations is by reference to other empirical studies that support or reject our findings. In addition, our empirical observations are interpreted by reference to the composite institutional approach outlined above. However, the moderate number of respondents implies that conclusions are drawn with caution.

Observations from the world of Commission SNEs

This section is sequenced in two sub-sections: Step I reveals the relative primacy of supranational roles among SNEs as compared to intergovernmental, departmental and epistemic roles. Step II present two OLS regression analyses to illuminate how supranational

roles among SNEs is caused by (i) processes of pre-socialisation, (ii) processes of re-socialisation, and (iii) organisational incompatibility across levels of government.

Step I: The relative primacy of supranational roles among SNEs

This section applies several proxies for measuring the four role sets outlined above. First, Table 1 reveals the relative importance of supranational, intergovernmental, departmental and epistemic loyalties among SNEs.

[Table 1 about here]

Table 1 demonstrates that SNEs evoke multiple roles. Being embedded into multiple institutions simultaneously SNEs have several representational roles to play. Importantly, SNEs activate fairly weak intergovernmental loyalties as compared to the supranational loyalties. This observation challenges previous studies of SNEs that underscore their national loyalties (Coombes 1970; Smith 1973; Smith 2001). The observations reported in Table 1 may reflect the factual insulation of SNEs vis-à-vis their home governments (Trondal 2006). According to one SNE, “I have very little contact with my ministry back home, almost nothing” (interview – author’s translation). The two strongest loyalties observed among SNEs are epistemic and departmental. Hence, as expected, SNEs in medium rank positions in the Commission hierarchy attach stronger loyalty towards their own DG and profession than towards the Commission as a whole.

Next, the respondents were asked to evaluate the roles played by *other* SNEs.

[Table 2 about here]

Table 2 confirms the observations of Table 1: SNEs report that other SNEs play mainly two representational roles – that as an ‘independent expert’ (epistemic role) and as a ‘DG/Unit representative’ (departmental role). Of less importance is the role as a ‘Commission representative’ (supranational role). The role as a ‘government representative’ (intergovernmental role) is perceived marginal to most SNEs.

Moreover, our data demonstrate that SNEs rarely feel a conflict of loyalty between different constituencies, concerns and role ideals. SNEs tend to manage multiple roles (cf. Herrmann and Brewer 2004: 12). One SNE argue that, “my loyalty lies here with the Commission” (interview – author’s translation). Yet, many SNEs agree to the dictum, “I think in my heart I still represent my self” (interview – author’s translation). Hence, the assumed loyalty conflict between domestic and supranational constituencies is challenged by the observations presented in Table 1. However, we observe an inbuilt conflict between the role as a departmental official (‘DG/Unit representative’), an epistemic official (‘Independent expert’) and a supranational official (‘Commission representative’) among SNEs. We thus see a triangular role repertoire among SNEs.

[Table 3 about here]

Table 3 confirms the observations above: The allegiances emphasised by SNEs are ranked as follows: departmental allegiances, epistemic allegiances, supranational allegiances, and intergovernmental allegiances. Importantly, supranational allegiances rank significantly higher than intergovernmental allegiances. According to one SNE, “I travel around as a representative for the Commission and speak on behalf of the Commission in mass media. I

have a stronger responsibility for external contacts in the Commission than home in the ministry” (Interview – author’s translation). Another SNE argued that, “[w]e do not think according to nationality here. That is irrelevant. Nationality is only interesting over a cup of coffee” (interview – author’s translation). SNEs also have a supranational orientation when measured as follows: “I put forward proposals I think is in the best interests of the member-states as a group” (73 percent strongly agree), and “I put forward proposals I think is in the best interest of the EU” (87 percent strongly agree). However, as expected, SNEs evoke stronger allegiances towards their DG, Unit and professional background than towards the EU and the Commission as wholes.

Step II: Explaining actor-level supranationalism

This section applies the independent variables introduced above to explain actor-level supranationalism among SNEs: (i) the pre-socialisation variable applies the following proxies: the international educational background of SNEs and their preference of leaving the Commission; (ii) the re-socialisation argument employs the following proxies: SNEs’ face-to-face contacts inside the Commission in formal meetings, their interaction with fellow colleagues with other national origins outside office, as well as their individual seniority within the Commission; and finally (iii) the organisational argument utilises the following proxy: Incompatible portfolios between SNEs’ current Commission position and their previous occupation in domestic ministries and agencies (see Tables 5 and 6). The OLS regression analyses presented beneath utilise two proxies of actor-level supranationalism: perceptions of loyalty towards the Commission as a whole and towards the Director General of their DG (Table 4), and attitude change among SNEs generally as well as within their own portfolio (Table 5).

[Table 4 about here]

Table 4⁷ demonstrates that organisational incompatibility across levels of government is conducive to supranational roles among SNEs. This relationship is stronger with respect to loyalties towards own DG (beta .36**) than towards the Commission as a whole (beta .31*). Hence, organisational incompatibility seems to challenge the cognitive frames of SNEs to redirect their loyalties towards a new centre – both towards the Commission as a whole as well as towards their DG. Notably, most SNEs stay in the same DG and the same Unit during their Commission career (97 percent and 88 percent, respectively).

The impact of the formal hierarchy of the Commission is not revealed by Table 4. The SNEs studied are located at the A6 and A7 levels – the administrative level – of the Commission. Compared to top ranked Commission officials SNEs are less likely to attach strong feelings of loyalty towards the Commission as a whole and more strongly towards the DG and Unit levels. Tables 1, 2 and 3 give ample support for this assumption. Moreover, a Gamma test of the bivariate relationship between the formal rank of SNEs and their perceptions of loyalty towards the Commission as a whole finds a positive and significant correlation of Gamma .46*. Hence, we find a positive relationship between formal rank position of SNEs and the degree to which they evoke a supranational role. Due to their formal location within the Commission hierarchy, SNEs tend to put stronger emphasis on departmental and epistemic role than on their supranational role.

Table 4 also demonstrates that SNEs are indeed re-socialised into supranational officials: The intensity of interaction within the Commission is conducive to supranational roles among SNEs (beta .31*). More precisely, SNEs with a fairly large amount of informal face-to-face

interaction among fellow colleagues during meetings in the Commission have stronger loyalty towards their own Director General than SNEs with less informal face-to-face interaction. Table 4 also reveals a weak positive relationship between informal interaction with other nationalities outside office and loyalty towards the Commission as a whole.

Table 4 reveals no significant effect of pre-socialisation among SNEs. For example, perceptions of loyalty towards the Commission as a whole are weakly associated with prior international educational experiences (beta .17). However, the SNEs were also asked if, before entering the Commission, they thought of EU co-operation as mainly advantageous or disadvantageous. A majority of SNEs reports being favourable to EU integration prior to the secondment period. Notably, 52 percent of the SNEs did not change attitude in this regard during their Commission career. Among those that changed opinion during their secondment period, the net tendency is towards *more* favourable attitudes towards EU integration. In sum, these observations demonstrate moderate dynamics of pre-socialisation of SNEs outside the Commission and strong processes of re-socialisation inside the Commission. This observation is confirmed by Table 5.

[Table 5 about here]

As predicted by the re-socialisation variable, Table 5 reports a significant positive relationship between the seniority of SNEs and their likelihood of changing attitude towards pro-integration in general. Seniority within the Commission also makes it more likely that SNEs become more positive to EU co-operation within their own portfolios. Some SNEs have prior experiences from other international organisations, transgovernmental committees and boards, and from the Permanent Representation in Brussels. However, Table 5 shows few indications

that SNEs are pre-socialised through their educational past. Moreover, our data indicates that most SNEs have a national family background (83 percent), and none of them have previously worked in other international organisations than the Commission. Henceforth, it seems unlikely that the supranational roles revealed in Tables 1,2 and 3 are caused by processes of pre-socialisation outside the Commission.⁸

Conclusions

This study demonstrates that the Commission manage to transform and redirect the role perceptions of individual civil servants. SNEs evoke multiple loyalties, notably towards their own profession (epistemic role), their DG and Unit (departmental role), and towards the EU and the Commission as wholes (supranational role). The old neo-functionalist claim that Commission officials may take on multiple roles is thus confirmed. Previous studies also show that departmental roles (portfolio roles) are rated higher than supranational roles within the College of Commissioners (Egeberg 2005a). The fact that SNEs evoke a stronger supranational role perception than an intergovernmental role perception is a crucial test of the transformative power of the Commission. These findings reflect both processes of re-socialisation inside the Commission (length and intensity of interaction among SNEs), the organisational composition of the Commission (vertical and horizontal specialisation), as well as organisational incompatibilities between the Commission and domestic ministries and agencies. The data does not report robust evidence of pre-socialisation of SNEs outside the Commission. Hence, our findings challenge the sweeping claim made by Hooghe (2005) that processes of socialisation of Commission officials mainly occur at the national level and not inside the Commission. The Commission is indeed a ‘hothouse for supranationalism’.

As predicted by the composite institutional approach outlined above, previous studies show that permanent Commission officials evoke a stronger supranational role orientation than SNEs (Hooghe 2005). This is also shown within the College of Commissioners (Egeberg 2005a). The stronger supranational orientation of permanent officials compared to SNEs may reflect processes of re-socialisation as well as the recruitment of permanent officials by merit (Shore 2000: 131; Wodak 2004: 107). However, whereas Hooghe (2005) see no significant effects of the *length of time* spent in the Commission on supranationalism among top Commission officials, this study shows that *seniority* among SNEs is significantly related with the emergence of supranational roles. The maximum seniority for a SNE is four years. Hence, it seems that the re-socialisation effect occur fairly quickly upon entry into the Commission (cf. Franklin and Scarrow 1999). Finally, the stronger supranational orientation among Commissioners as compared to SNEs may reflect the effect of the vertical specialisation of the Commission: Commissioners in top rank positions are more likely to identify with the organisation as a whole than SNEs in lower rank positions.

Comparative studies of IEIs demonstrate that they have a fairly strong re-socialising power at the actor-level. Barnett and Finnemore (2004: 3) demonstrates that the Secretariat of IMF, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the UN Secretariat “were not simply following the demands issued by states but instead acting like the bureaucracies that they are”. Lewis (2005) also observes re-socialisation dynamics inside the COREPER whereby national officials internalise new community roles. Similarly, Johnston (2005: 1037) observes that the comparative study of international organisations find “some evidence that those individuals most directly exposed to intensive social interaction ... are more likely to have a positive attitude towards multilateralism...”. Similarly, a comparative study of the European Commission, the WTO Secretariat and the OECD Secretariat observes supranational roles

among the IEI personnel (Trondal, Marcussen and Veggeland 2005). The study of Trondal, Marcussen and Veggeland (2005) shows that supranational roles among IEI personnel are associated with long tenure and a high intensity of actor-interaction among IEI officials. These observations support our findings on re-socialisation among SNEs in the Commission.

Few studies have hitherto convincingly illuminated empirically how organisational compatibility/incompatibility is associated with actor-level supranationalism. This study merely indicates that supranational roles among SNEs are associated with organisational incompatibility across levels of government. Similarly, Jacobsson (1999) demonstrates that officials from Swedish sector ministries who enter the Council of Ministers redirect their role perceptions from a departmental role towards an intergovernmental role. Their national roles were “re-discovered” through exposure to the territorially organised Council of Ministers. Hence, organisational incompatibilities across levels of government may cause actor-level supranationalism.

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² By swearing an oath of neutrality and loyalty to the Commission, SNEs transfer their primary organisational affiliation from the member-state administration to the Commission. According to Art 7:1a in the new Commission rules for SNEs (2004), “the SNE shall carry out his duties and shall behave solely with the interest of the Commission in mind”.

³ For example, Hooghe (2005:861) concludes that “support for supranational norms is relatively high, but that this is more due to national socialization than to socialization in the Commission”. Hooghe finds no significant effect of Commission socialisation (measured as the length of service in the Commission). This conclusion, however, rests on a fairly broad definition of supranationalism, “in essence, peoples’ beliefs about how the EU should be constituted” (Johnston 2005:1033).

⁴ The initial sample resulted from a short-list of SNEs provided by the EFTA Secretariat and by CLENAD.

⁵ The DGs covered by the study are: DG Education and Culture, DG Employment and Social Affairs, DG Enterprise, DG Environment, DG Energy and Transport, Eurostat, DG Fisheries, DG Health and Consumer Affairs, DG Information Society, DG Research, DG Taxation and Customs Union, DG Economic and Financial Affairs, DG Trade, DG Competition, and DG Development.

⁶ EU member-states: Sweden (N=37), Denmark (N=3), Ireland (N=2), Germany (N=4) and France (N=1). EEA countries: Norway (N=20) and Iceland (N=2). Three respondents did not report their country of origin.

⁷ Diagnosis of collinearity between the independent variables in Tables 4 and 5 unveils no indications of extreme multicollinearity. Thus, the independent variables have independent causal impact on the dependent variables.

⁸ Moreover, the majority of SNEs arrive at the Commission from national ministries and agencies (83 percent). Only a small number of SNEs originate from universities or research institutes (four percent), private sector institutions (10 percent) and national non-governmental organisations (3 percent).

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Tables

Table 1: Percent of SNEs emphasising the following four loyalties (absolute numbers in parantheses)

	<i>Fairly much or very much</i>	<i>Both/and</i>	<i>Fairly little or very little</i>	<i>Total</i>
Intergovernmental loyalty:				
- Loyalty towards the member-states as a group	27	30	23	100 (66)
Supranational loyalty:				
- Loyalty towards the Commission as a whole	65	15	20	100 (66)
- Loyalty towards the Director General of own DG	66	16	18	100 (67)
Departmental loyalty:				
- Loyalty towards the Director of own Directorate	78	12	10	100 (68)
- Neutral enforcement of decisions and established regulations within the Commission	75	22	3	100 (64)
Epistemic loyalty:				
- Professional neutrality within own position	88	9	3	100 (65)

Table 2: SNEs’ perception of the representational roles evoked by other SNEs (percent – absolute numbers in parantheses)

	<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Both/and</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Total</i>
A ‘government representative role’	6	33	61	100 (69)
A ‘Commission representative role’	39	53	8	100 (64)
A ‘DG/Unit representative role’	74	22	5	100 (65)
An ‘independent expert role’	74	20	6	100 (69)

Table 3: Percent of SNEs feeling an allegiance (identify or feel responsible to) towards the following (absolute numbers in parentheses)

	<i>Fairly strongly or very strongly</i>	<i>Both/and</i>	<i>Fairly weakly or very weakly</i>	<i>Total</i>
Intergovernmental allegiance:				
- The government of own country	5	19	77	100 (65)
Supranational allegiance:				
- The EU system as a whole	63	23	14	100 (64)
- The Commission as a whole	69	22	9	100 (67)
Departmental allegiance:				
- The DG in which SNEs work	84	9	7	100 (68)
- The Unit in which SNEs work	84	10	6	100 (68)
Epistemic allegiance:				
Own professional (educational) background and expertise	76	16	8	100 (67)

Table 4: Factors that relates to SNEs' perception of loyalty towards the Commission as a whole and towards the Director General of their DG (Beta)^a

	<i>Loyalty towards the Commission as a whole</i>	<i>Loyalty towards the Director General of their DG</i>
Pre-socialisation outside the Commission:		
International educational background ^b	.17	.12
Wishes of leaving the Commission ^c	.09	-.01
Re-socialisation inside the Commission:		
Face-to-face contacts inside the Commission in formal meetings ^d	.11	.31*
Interaction with fellow colleagues with other national origins outside office	.18	.03
Seniority within the Commission ^e	.06	.11
Organisational incompatibility:		
Incompatible portfolios across levels of government ^f	.31*	.36**

*) $p \leq 0.05$ **) $p \leq 0.01$

$R^2 = .15$

$R^2 = .20$

Key:

- a) The dependent variables have the following values: Value 1 (very much), value 2 (fairly much), value 3 (both/and), value 4 (fairly little) and value 5 (very little).
- b) This variable is dichotomous by default: Value 1 (international university education), value 2 (national university education)
- c) This variable is dichotomous by default: Value 1 (yes), value 2 (no)
- d) This variable, and the next one, has the following values: Value 1 (very often), value 2 (fairly often), value 3 (both/and), value 4 (fairly seldom), value 5 (very seldom).
- e) This variable is continuous ranging from 1 year to 11 years
- f) This variable has the following values: Value 1 (incompatible portfolio = previous professional occupation within domestic ministry or agency that do not correspond to current Commission portfolio), value 2 (compatible portfolio = previous professional occupation within domestic ministry or agency that correspond to current Commission portfolio).

Table 5: Factors that relates to attitude change among SNEs during their Commission career, generally as well as within their portfolios^a

	<i>Attitude change generally</i>	<i>Attitude change within their portfolio</i>
Pre-socialisation outside the Commission:		
International educational background ^b	.10	.10
Wishes of leaving the Commission ^c	.07	.02
Re-socialisation inside the Commission:		
Face-to-face contacts inside the Commission in formal meetings ^d	.01	-.11
Interaction with fellow colleagues with other national origins outside office	.04	.06
Seniority within the Commission ^e	-.34*	-.27
Organisational incompatibility:		
Incompatible portfolios across levels of government ^f	-.27	-.22

*) $p \leq 0.05$ **) $p \leq 0.01$

$R^2 = .21$

$R^2 = .14$

Key:

- a) The dependent variables have the following values: Value 1 (very much), value 2 (fairly much), value 3 (both/and), value 4 (fairly little) and value 5 (very little).
- b) This variable is dichotomous by default: Value 1 (international university education), value 2 (national university education)
- c) This variable is dichotomous by default: Value 1 (yes), value 2 (no)
- d) This variable, and the next one, has the following values: Value 1 (very often), value 2 (fairly often), value 3 (both/and), value 4 (fairly seldom), value 5 (very seldom).
- e) This variable is continuous ranging from 1 year to 11 years
- f) This variable has the following values: Value 1 (incompatible portfolio = previous professional occupation within domestic ministry or agency that do not correspond to current Commission portfolio), value 2 (compatible portfolio = previous professional occupation within domestic ministry or agency that correspond to current Commission portfolio).

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