Supranationalism in a Transnational Bureaucracy: The Case of the European Commission

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Abstract

While a significant body of scholarly works suggests that we can best understand the policy output of international bureaucracies by focusing on the preferences of their political masters, this article joins those looking “inside” such bureaucracies to comprehend their behavior. Using an original dataset from nearly two hundred interviewees, the article examines the policy preferences of top bureaucrats of the European Commission. It shows that top Commission managers favor deeper European integration regardless of their national background or their organizational experience. The tilt of the Commission bureaucracy toward supranationalism is indicated by a broader consensus within the organization on some of the most controversial initiatives in the EU like the constitutional treaty, Turkish accession and the directive for the liberalization of the services sector. This notable consensus suggests that despite occasional policy setbacks and perceived intergovernmental “trends,” the Commission will continue serving its integrative mission.
Introduction

Scholars are quick to reduce the behavior of international organizations to the dictates of their political principals. We instead suggest that the policy output of these organizations cannot be framed without examining the predispositions and preferences of those at their helm. The analytical focus of the article is on the transnational bureaucracies that form the core of international institutions. Joining efforts to see international organizations as bureaucracies that have a distinctive social form (e.g. Barnett and Finnemore 1999; 2004) we attempt to link institutional output to the preferences of their most senior bureaucrats. Unlike other works on the bureaucracies of international organizations, we are particularly concerned with the transnational nature of such bureaucracies. Transnationality creates particular expectations about the possible preferences of civil servants regarding the future direction of these organizations. How does national origin affect their vision about the future role of the organization they work for? Does the multinational nature of these bureaucracies limit their capacity to form a coherent vision hence undermining their ability to act independently of the wishes of their political principals?

To gain analytical traction over these questions the article examines the preferences of top civil servants in one of the most studied and important of international bureaucracies: the European Commission. To gauge these preferences, we use a survey of nearly two hundred top Commission officials. The survey documents the views of these senior bureaucrats on the present and future direction of the European Union. The emerging
view from the top management is that despite the multinational character of the bureaucracy there is a notable consensus in the Commission favoring deeper integration. A considerable majority of this very diverse group clearly favors a push toward more supranationalism in the next decade. This tilt toward supranationalism cuts across not just the national background but also the organizational experience of top officials. It is indicated by a broader consensus within the Commission on some of the most controversial initiatives in the EU like the constitutional treaty, Turkish accession and the directive for the liberalization of the services sector.

In examining the European Commission, the article seeks to contribute to the ever growing literature on the topic of policy-making. Some scholarly inputs in this literature question the analytical emphasis placed on the EU bureaucracy, viewing the organization as merely an agent of its political principals. Others treat the Commission as having a net effect on European integration, thereby assuming that its top executives – both in the College and the bureaucracy – have preferences for policy outcomes that differ from those of member states. The next section situates the article within this literature, highlighting its potential contribution to the broader body of works on European integration. The second section details the methodology and discusses the broader political context within which the survey was conducted. The third section reports how top Commission bureaucrats view the current state and future direction of the EU; and examines how their preferences relate to national and organizational influences. The fourth section discusses the findings pointing to the notable consensus among senior Commission officials. It then examines whether this consensus is part of a broader policy
outlook by gauging their views on some of the most controversial EU initiatives, like the drive to ratify a European constitution, the accession of Turkey and the Bolkestein directive. The article concludes with a brief summary and discussion of the findings.

**Supranationality in the Commission**

International organizations are often treated by international relations scholars as mere reflectors, or at best, facilitators of interstate cooperation (e.g. Keohane 1984; Krasner 1991; Mearsheimer 1994). Some European integration theorists, in turn, dispute the emphasis placed by their intellectual rivals on the role the Commission plays in integration outcomes. For intergovernmentalists this role is minimal. Viewing integration outcomes as a function of state preferences and interstate bargains, they reject “the bold claims about informal supranational entrepreneurship” exercised by the Commission because they are “greatly exaggerated” (Moravcsik 1999: 298; see also Garrett 1992). The dominance of states in the European policy process, they argue, leaves the Commission limited scope for independent action. The formal veto and appointment powers granted to states undermine the capacity of the Commission to act autonomously. Instead, the Commission needs to continuously predict the reaction of member states and to tailor proposals to match their preferences in order to avoid having them vetoed (Moravcsik 1995: 616). Whereas their rivals emphasize the agency of Commission presidents, like Jacques Delors (e.g. Ross 1995), or senior Commission officials, intergovernmentalists focus on the role of national leaders like Helmut Kohl, Francois Mitterrand and Margaret Thatcher in pushing the integration process forward.
National leaders aggregate domestic preferences and negotiate policies among themselves. The Commission is simply the facilitator of the process and does not have any distributional impact on the outcome (Moravcsik 1998; 1999).

Unlike intergovernmentalists, neofunctionalists consider the Commission to be the motor of European integration, providing the political leadership necessary for pushing the integration project forward. This is not only because of its formal institutional power but also due to its informal entrepreneurial authority (e.g. Pollack 1997: 121-127), especially its capacity to initiate innovative legislation that “upgrades” the common European interest (Haas 1961: 369-371). The process through which the Commission achieves this is particularly important: it relies on its privileged access to information, on its technical expertise, or on the vision and leadership of key individuals (e.g. Nugent 1995). Commission officials use these resources to achieve integration outcomes that would be harder to achieve without their input.

The stagnation of European integration in the 1970s belied the somewhat deterministic and teleological predictions of early neofunctionalists but the successful drive toward the Single European Market (SEM) revived scholarly interest in the theory. As in earlier incarnations (Haas 1958; Lindberg 1963), later neofunctionalist accounts ascribed the Commission a major role in the unfolding reinvigoration of the European project. The emphasis was on the leadership capacity of the Commission: “1992 emerged because the institutions of the European Communities, especially the Commission, were able to exercise effective policy leadership” (Sandholtz and Zysman 1989: 96).
Commission capitalized on the opportunities available in the broader international environment to push for a new European orientation that emphasized greater unity. This orientation was turned into policy by the nearly three hundred proposals drafted by Commission bureaucrats and by their continuous and conscious mobilization of support for deeper integration. According to neofunctionalists, the effective maneuvering of the Commission limited the range of choices available to member states (Tranholm-Mikkelsen 1991: 15). Once the integration process was set off, it gained a dynamic of its own, limiting the capacity of states to control policy outcomes (Stone Sweet and Sandholtz 1997: 299-300). Through this process the Commission was able to push integration beyond the point that would otherwise be possible. Moreover, the Commission has been able to extend its influence beyond areas strictly related to the SEM, like technology policy (e.g. Sandholtz 1992), regional policy (e.g. Hooghe 1996), and even social policy, which is usually a closely guarded domain of states (e.g. Cram 1993; Ross 1995; Wendon 1998). It is in this sense that neofunctionalists see the Commission as an autonomous agent that has a net effect on integration outcomes.

The emphasis of neofunctionalist accounts is usually on the College of Commissioners and their Cabinets but the administrative services of the Commission are also important. Top Commission bureaucrats have considerable leverage over the policy process due to their expertise, their control of administrative resources and their permanency. While elite studies have trouble tracing policy outcomes to bureaucratic input, Commissioners have been known to grumble about the College’s “loss of control over its own services
pursuing special interests” complaining that “the power within the Commission has inexorably shifted to the services.”

At the core of neofunctionalism lies the conception of the Commission as a bureaucratic organization that has an interest to preserve and expand its basic functions by pushing for a more supranational Europe. People working within this organization are said to have a professional stake and to consciously pursue the expansion of integrative tasks (Schmitter 2005: 260; Tranholm-Mikkelsen 1991: 15). The scholarly literature on the Commission provides some support to this idea. One of the most cited scholars on the topic suggests that “there is strong evidence that European Union officials share an enthusiasm for building the institutions of Europe and thus a sense of common purpose unlikely to be found in member state bureaucracies” (Page 1997: 39). This common purpose is molded by the geographical concentration and high earnings of Commission officials as well as by the clear commitment outlined in staff regulations to “act ‘solely in the interests of the European Union in mind’ neither seeking nor taking instructions from anyone other than their hierarchical superiors” (Cited in Stevens with Stevens 2001: 44).

The mere inclusion in staff regulations of such a clause, though, alludes to the possibility that Commission officials might simply act as agents of their respective states. While this might not be particularly surprising to those who view the European Union through intergovernmental lenses, it would it a major blow to neofunctionalism, which presumes the existence of supranational preferences among Commission officials. Indeed, a

rigorous empirical analysis of career trajectories within the Commission casts doubt on the presumption of a supranationalist agenda. Analyzing biographical data for 2,300 EU officials, Edward Page finds that “national balance” or “national flag” considerations are important determinants of promotion or parachutage to the top positions of the European bureaucracy (Page 1997, Chapter 3; see also Stevens with Stevens 2001, Chapter 6). The importance of national background for the career advancement of European officials creates dependence on their respective state at the expense of their loyalty to European institutions (Cini 1996: 125-131). Moreover, the diverse national backgrounds of the 24,000 Commission officials expose the organization to distinct administrative cultures and management styles, especially among northern and southern Europeans. It is also a potential source of miscommunication, affecting the daily functions of the organization. As early as 1979, when the Community only had nine member states, the Spierenburg Report noted that multinationality was a constant source of fragmentation for the Commission (Spierenburg 1979). Another source of fragmentation results from the functional differentiation of the various directorates. Different policy tasks create a diverse set of interests and distinct subcultures that generate internal tension and conflict. The contrasting approach of the Transport Directorate General and the Employment and Social Affairs Directorate General on the use of state aid for national airlines constitutes one of many examples of such tension (Nugent 2001: 184). Along with national diversity, conflicts between directorates cast doubt on the conception of the Commission as a unitary actor in pursuit of supranational interests.
Detailed case studies of the Commission highlight the complex and fragmentary nature of the organization but do not provide direct clues about its preferences. To gauge these preferences, one must go beyond the organizational set up of the Commission, and focus on the views of its employees. Are Commission officials committed to deeper European integration along supranationalist lines, as neofunctionalists tend to assume? Or do they see Europe through the intergovernmental lenses that their respective states want them to use? Lisbet Hooghe’s comprehensive survey of top Commission officials gives significant insights into the range of preferences within the organization. Confirming earlier findings (e.g. Coombes 1970), she detects “extensive dissension among top Commission officials” (Hooghe 2001: 77). Contrary to scholarly assumptions regarding the pro-integration bias of the Commission, she finds that her 105 interviewees were only marginally inclined toward supranationalism (but see Hooghe 2005). More importantly, Hooghe discovers that the “widespread assumption that the Commission is a greenhouse for supranationalism has little basis in reality” (Hooghe 2001: 209). While Haas viewed the integration process as the impetus for a shift in political loyalties toward a supranational entity (Haas 1958: 16), Hooghe shows that even those working within supranational institutions are not likely to change their views on the European Union. The views of top officials are largely shaped by contexts external to the Commission, such as their tenure in national administrations, their experience in certain political systems and their partisan affiliation (Hooghe 2001; see also 1999; 2005).

Surveying top Commission officials: Methodology and sample
Our survey of nearly 200 top Commission bureaucrats seeks to build on Hooghe’s work by gauging their views on where the locus of authority lies within the European Union. The survey was carried out between March and December 2005 through semi-structured interviews. All Directors-General (28), Deputy Directors-General (21) and Directors (195) were asked in writing to participate in the survey and to grant us hourly interviews. We interviewed everyone who responded positively to our request – 68% of Directors-General (19), 59% of Deputy Directors-General (12) and 52% of Directors (102). All granted us interviews of up to one hour. To this notable pool of 133 top managers, we added a convenience sample of 55 middle managers or Heads of Unit to explore if views vary across managerial levels. We guaranteed anonymity to everyone we contacted and we believe that the request for so much time and lack of interest in our scholarly endeavor were the chief impediments to even higher response rates.

The total sample includes officials from all directorates and from most of the Commission’s general and internal services (Appendix 1). The geographical distribution of the sample is also balanced and roughly corresponds with the national composition of the top ranks of the European bureaucracy documented elsewhere (e.g. Spence and Stevens 2006: 199). More than half of the respondents come from the five most populous member states: Britain (13%), France (13%), Spain (11%), Germany (10%) and Italy (10%). The Belgians make up 10% of the sample, the Dutch and the Greeks 6% each, while only 2% come from the 10 new members states. The overwhelming majority of the interviewees had worked for the Commission for at least 10 years: 40% joined the Commission between 1986 and 1995; 28% joined the preceding decade; and 17% before
1976. On average top European bureaucrats have worked for the Commission for 19 years, which is similar to the figure recorded in earlier studies of senior Commission bureaucrats (e.g. Hooghe 2001: 55).

The survey asked top officials about the structure and culture of the Commission, their professional experience, their views of EU policies and their ideas about citizen input in the European policy process. A battery of questions dealt with their vision of the EU, gauging their perceptions of where the locus of authority currently lies within the Union as well as their views on where authority should lie in the future. The timing of the survey could not have been better, as it coincided with the fervent debates across a number of European countries over the ratification of a European constitution. In 2005, European elites and publics were asking similar questions to ours. Should more authority be vested in supranational institutions and be taken away from member states? What should the EU look like in a decade? The rejection of the European constitution in France and the Netherlands brought to the surface the wide gap separating politicians from voters, exposing widespread public apprehension over the social and economic effects of the recent Eastern enlargement and over the possibility of Turkish accession (Majone 2006). The ratification process in member states and the resulting gloom after the French and Dutch rejections gave our interviewees the opportunity to reflect on the current and future state of the EU.

**The supranational tilt of the Commission: Survey findings**
The main finding of the survey is that a large majority of top officials are committed to a supranational vision of the European Union, one that sees increasing authority being vested in European institutions. While there is a notable minority of officials that view the EU through intergovernmental lenses, the majority think that community institutions should be given more authority in the next decade. The “supranational tilt” of the senior bureaucrats cuts across the national background and the organizational experience of senior European bureaucrats. The remaining of this section presents these findings in more detail.

To gain insights on how top officials envision the future direction of the EU the survey asked them to locate themselves on a scale that gauged their views on where authority lies within the European Union. A brief description introduced the respondents to the two main scholarly conceptualizations of the EU: the “intergovernmental” vision that places emphasis on power being vested in member states, and the “community-oriented” vision, which was used as a proxy for supranationalism. The survey then asked officials to place themselves on a 1-10 scale representing the two visions, 1 standing for intergovernmentalism and 10 for supranationalism. Top officials generally acknowledged the interplay of these two visions within the Commission but only a minority of them (23%) thought that power within the EU today is mostly vested with member states. A clear majority (58%) placed the EU on the supranational side of the scale and about 19% in the perceived middle of the scale.² On average, senior

² Technically, the middle of the scale is 5.5 but the interviewees seemed to perceive 5 as the middle. Hence only one respondent placed themselves at 5.5 compared to 34 respondents who located themselves at 5.
Commission officials placed the EU at 5.61, markedly higher than the middle of the scale.

The picture emerging from the top of the Commission changed significantly when we asked our interviewees to state where the EU should be on the scale ten years down the road. The average response was 6.99 out of 10. Only 12.8% chose a spot lower than the middle of the scale and only 2.3% chose a number lower than 3. This contrasts with 47.1% who thought that the EU should be at 8 or higher suggesting that there is a widely shared supranational vision in the top echelons of the organization. Is this vision realistic? Most officials seem to realize that there are important constraints to the realization of their vision and recognize that there is a gap between preferred and likely outcomes. Hence, when we asked senior bureaucrats where the EU will be in ten years the average response dropped from 6.99 to 5.90 out of 10.

One of the major goals of this battery of questions was to examine whether officials thought that their views about the current state and future direction of the EU are shared within the Commission. We hence asked the respondents to point out where their colleagues in the Commission would place the EU today and to speculate on where other officials thought the EU should be in the future. Although we did not get to ask all our interviewees these two extra questions, their responses suggest that top officials consider their views to reflect a broader consensus within the Commission. Their average response to the question of where their colleagues think the EU stands today was 5.74, which is very close to where the interviewees would place the EU today. Similarly, the
average response to the question of where their colleagues think the EU should stand in the future was 6.88, which approximates their own preferences.

[Insert Table 1 somewhere here]

Overall, our evidence shows that top Commission officials want to see authority within the EU shift to community institutions and away from state governments. Senior bureaucrats realize the limitations to the implementation of the vision but tend to think that these are exogenous, as they are under the impression that their colleagues within the Commission share their vision. The clear inclination of top managers towards supranationalism must not divert attention from the considerable heterogeneity of views among them. The standard deviation of the responses suggests that there is a divergence of preferences among top officials. Dissension in the top echelons of the Commission is higher when senior bureaucrats discuss the future direction, rather than the current state, of the EU. The standard deviation on the two questions about where the EU should be in the future is 1.92 and 1.98 whereas the average difference of responses on where the EU stands today is 1.38 and 1.42.

_National background and supranationalism_

The notable divergence of EU visions among top officials draws attention to the sources of relative discord within the Commission. What shapes their vision of Europe?
Do the views of senior Commission bureaucrats match those of their countries of origin? If so, this would be a major blow to the neofunctionalist conception of the Commission as an autonomous agent of European integration: its supranational tilt would merely reflect the dominant view among the member states. Alternatively, though, the divergence of opinion might cut across the national backgrounds of top managers. In that case, the supranational vision of top officials might be harder to reduce to the preferences of their home countries.

To examine how the views of top managers on the future direction of the EU relate to their national background we examined a number of hypotheses. The first hypothesis was whether officials who are more attached to their country of origin have substantially different views than those who are less attached. As mentioned in the theoretical section of the article, the basic premise of arguments viewing international bureaucrats as agents of their states is that they remain loyal to their countries of origin instead of transferring their loyalty to the supranational organization they work for. They are hence inclined to look after the interests of their home countries instead of those of their employer. The degree of persistence of national loyalties is, of course, difficult to measure but it might be roughly gauged by how closely officials follow developments at home, especially national political discourses. We hence asked officials two experiential questions: whether they follow national politics closely and whether they still vote in national elections.
Our general finding was that despite their long absence from home officials remain quite attentive to developments at home. The vast majority or 74% of our interviewees follow national politics “very closely” or “closely.” Only nine individuals or 5% told us that they do not follow national politics “that much” and no one stated “not at all” though it was one of the options we gave. Moreover, less than a fourth of our top bureaucrats said they do not vote in national elections. But intergovernmentalists should not take comfort in these general findings because the examination of our specific hypothesis shows that our proxies for national attachment have a limited, if any, effect on international bureaucrats’ views about the future direction of the EU. In contrast to our hypothesis, those following national politics are more supranational than those who do not. The average response of those most attentive to national political developments was 7.12 whereas that of the least attentive was 6.93 (Table 2). Similarly, the views of those who vote in national elections do not differ substantially from those of non-voters. In fact, in line with our previous finding, voters are more supranational than non-voters, though marginally so.

[insert Table 2 somewhere here]

To further examine how the national affiliation of top officials affects their views on European integration we also looked at their international experiences. We hypothesized that those with such experiences are likely to have more supranational views than the rest. We focused on international education, expecting those studying abroad during the formative years of their lives to have more multicultural and internationalist perspectives

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3 This figure includes British officials who are not eligible to vote due to national voting restrictions.
than those who spent their young adulthood at home (Hooghe 2001). This hypothesis was premised on the understanding that international education breeds cosmopolitanism, making officials more supportive of the idea for a multinational union. To gauge the effect of international education we calculated the average response of the 63 officials who hold international degrees and compared it with that of the rest of our respondents (93). In all the cases we recorded, officials with international degrees spent at least a year in another European country or in the US to get a Master’s or a Doctoral degree. Our main finding is that there is no substantial difference in the views of international, and home degree holders on the future course of the EU. Although holders of international degrees held, on average, more supranational views, the difference between the two groups is only 0.43 on the 1 to 10 scale. The average response of those educated abroad was 7.33 compared to 6.90 of the rest (see Table 2).

The most immediate way of understanding the relationship between national background and the views of our interviewees on European integration is to see whether responses vary substantially across countries. Do officials from certain countries view the integration process differently than their colleagues from other countries? To answer this question, we compared the responses of officials from the original six, and from the rest of the member states. On account of the apprehension expressed by some of our interviewees that the eastward enlargement diluted the supranational vision within the Commission, we hypothesized, more generally, that officials from the original members are likely to have more supranational views than those from countries that joined later. Officials from countries with longer tenure in the EU are likely to be more accepting of
its existence and more at ease with the idea of a supranational union. Our findings do not yield any support to this hypothesis, as supranationalism cuts across the two groups. In fact, bureaucrats from newer member states have more supranational views (7.18) than those from the founding states (6.83).

We found this result to be somewhat puzzling because countries like Germany and the Netherlands are thought to be among the frontrunners of deeper European integration. We hence considered a fourth hypothesis: whether the divergence of views among top bureaucrats can be attributed to the actual economic benefit their home country receives from the EU (Hooghe 2001). Arguably, the important changes to the EU budget brought about by the eastward enlargement might have generated bitterness among top bureaucrats, especially to those who come from net contributing countries. To gauge the effects of national economic interest on the preferences of top managers we compared the views of those coming from net beneficiaries of, and net contributors to the first budget of the enlarged Union. Indeed, we found that the views of officials from net beneficiary countries were considerably more supranationalist than those from net contributor countries. The difference of 0.60 on the 1 to 10 scale was the largest one we found in our different measures but not enough to point any significant pattern. Although bureaucrats from net contributors are less supranational in their responses than their colleagues from net beneficiaries, they are firmly on the supranational side of the scale (6.78).

The examination of a fifth hypothesis delivered weaker results. We examined whether the preferences of top Commission officials on the future of the EU are affected by public
opinion in their home countries. Since officials follow national politics rather closely, we hypothesized that top officials take important cues from the citizens of their home countries. We examined whether the views of our interviewees were shaped by those of their compatriots. Looking at aggregate responses to Eurobarometer questions on the EU, we divided countries based on whether the majority of their citizens thought that the EU was a “good thing” and “beneficial” for the country and on whether they were “satisfied with democracy in the EU.” In their responses to all three questions, officials coming from countries where public opinion is positive were slightly more supranational than the rest of their colleagues. But, again, the differences between the two groups are too small to suggest any firm association between domestic public opinion and the views of senior Commission managers on European integration.

*Organizational experience and supranationalism*

The above evidence shows that the supranational tilt of the Commission has little, if any, association with the national affiliation of senior bureaucrats. Can other factors, then, explain the preferences of senior civil servants on European integration? One plausible factor is the length of service of senior officials. Arguably, the longer one serves in an organization the more likely he or she is to internalize its values. This is especially the case with organizations that are “infused with value beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand” (Selznick 1957: 17, emphasis in original; cited in Trondal 2004: 74). In the case of the Commission, which has an institutional mandate to act in the interest of European integration, this means that seniority might predispose officials toward
supranationalism. After all, even national civil servants who are temporarily seconded to Brussels are thought to, under certain conditions, “take on supranational identifications” (Trondal 2004: 80). To examine, then, this hypothesis we averaged the responses of top officials who had served the organization for 0 to ten years; for 11 to 20 years; and for more than 20 years. Our basic finding is that supranationality does not increase with the length of service in the Commission. The most supranational views were recorded among those bureaucrats who had joined the organization between 1986 and 1995, not the longest serving officials. The responses of this former group of officials – roughly recruited during the Delors presidency – averaged 7.33 on the 1 to 10 scale, while those of the latter was 6.88. Our data partly validate the concerns expressed by a vocal minority of our interviewees that the Commission is increasingly becoming more intergovernmental, as the youngest serving bureaucrats are the least supranational (6.44). At the same time, however, the notable difference between the least and the more senior civil servants must not divert attention from the clear inclination of younger serving officials toward supranationalism.

[Insert Table 3 somewhere here]

Apart from seniority, another plausible explanation for the preferences of top Commission managers is their policy area or function (see also Egeberg 1996). As our interviewees remarked, officials working in certain directorates are known to have different views on specific policies than their colleagues working elsewhere. Those focusing on regulating competition, for example, can be expected to have stronger
preferences for integration than those working in areas like social or foreign policy, where authority is largely vested with member states. Moreover, different directorates have distinct subcultures, which are largely formed by their function – e.g. those dealing with environmental issues have been called “environmental freaks” by their colleagues.

To examine the effect of policy function on the preferences of top officials on integration we grouped the directorates and services of the Commission in accordance with their broader purpose (see also Hooghe 2001). For example, we distinguished between those directorates dealing with the common market (e.g. Competition, Internal Market, etc.) and those dealing with social regulation (Health and Consumer Protection, Justice, Freedom and Security, etc.). We then sought to examine whether the preferences of top officials varied by policy function. As before, we did not find any significant variation across policy areas. In line with our basic expectations, those working in market-oriented directorates held the most supranational views (7.24), while those in social regulation (6.83) or social provision and redistribution (6.86) were the farthest away from the supranationalist pole of the scale. But overall, the differences among the various subgroups suggest that the preferences of top Commission managers cut across policy areas.

We finally explored whether the degree of supranationality observed at the top echelons of the Commission varies by rank. We hence compared the preferences to top and middle managers on the future direction of the EU. Given the prevalence of “national balance” and “national flag” consideration at the most senior ranks of the organization,
we expected the topmost officials to be less “supranational” in their views than their colleagues in middle management. Unlike senior bureaucrats, who are often thought of as flag bearers of individual states, the heads of Commission units are considered the real “policy entrepreneurs” (Bauer 2008), those in charge of executing the integrative function of the Commission through the formulation of innovative policies. To our surprise, we did not find substantial variation in the preferences of top and middle managers regarding the future direction of the European Union. In fact, contrary to our original expectations, senior bureaucrats were slightly more supranational (7.17) than their more junior colleagues (6.67). Both groups, though, want to see a more supranational Union in the next decade.

Discussion: A broader tilt

While there is considerable divergence of preferences among the top managers of the organization, the majority of them believe that more authority should be vested in European institutions and away from member states. Our findings are in line with more recent work on the Commission, which also found senior bureaucrats to be predisposed toward supranationalism (Hooghe 2005). Unlike earlier work, though, we show that the views of our interviewees are independent of influences coming from their home countries. Given the importance of national background in the recruitment and promotion of top officials (e.g. Page 1997) or the significance of national socialization (e.g. Hooghe 2005), the lack of a strong association between nationality and preferences on European integration might point to the instrumental nature of their association with
their home countries. Although states might view these officials as the representatives of their interests in the Commission, and hence try to facilitate their career advancement, the bureaucrats might see their home countries as the means to further their career interests without feeling the obligation to advance the objectives of their states in return. This might be the particularly the case for very senior or high ranking bureaucrats who have limited chances of further career advancement before retirement, either because of age or because they have already reached the top ranks of the Commission.

If the national background of top officials does not shape their views on the future direction of Europe, can we then automatically attribute their preferences to factors endogenous to the organization they work for? Does the Commission shape the preference of its senior employees? The article has examined three organizational factors and found that length of service in the Commission, policy area and rank have a limited, if any, effect on the preferences of top officials regarding the future direction of Europe. Top managers hold similar views on supranationalism regardless of how long they have served in the organization, the policy function they perform or their rank. At one level, this might point to the limited influence the organization has on the preferences of its employees. But at a different level, it might suggest the breadth of supranational preferences in the organization. The firm commitment of a large majority of top Commission officials to supranationalism reflects a notable consensus within the organization, which cuts across the national origin or the organizational experience of its multinational managers.
Regardless of how it is formed, the supranational tilt of the Commission might have important implications if it is part of wider currents within the organization, which privilege particular policy outputs. The remainder of this section, then, examines whether the supranational inclination of the Commission constitutes part of a particular policy outlook of the organization or, if it should be viewed in isolation from specific policy issues. The link between political attitudes and policy outcomes, of course, is difficult to establish with survey data, and our effort is only exploratory. To examine, then, the linkage between the supranational vision of top officials and their policy preferences we asked them to comment on three of the most controversial initiatives of the European Union: the drive for the ratification of a European constitution, Turkish EU accession and the Bolkestein directive for the liberalization of the services sector. All three enjoyed the unambiguous support of the college of Commissioners but met considerable resistance in certain states, especially by citizens. Amidst the fervent debate stirred in various countries by the three issues, we asked the top management of the organization to reflect on these initiatives.

To our surprise, we encountered strong support for each of the three initiatives despite the visible resistance encountered by significant segments of European voters. In the midst of the crisis created by the rejection of the European constitution in France and the Netherlands, the top management of the Commission stood firmly by the ratification initiative. Asked if “it was a good idea to propose a European constitution” four out five respondents answered “yes.” Only 16% of our interviewees thought that it was not a good idea, while
4% said they “do not know.” Two out of three officials who said they were supportive of the idea said that the constitution would be good for simplification and clarification purposes. In their supplementary comments to this question, senior bureaucrats perceived the problems encountered in the ratification process largely as a labeling issue. “This is an aggregation of treaties, not a constitution” said a Belgian official who stated he was still in favor to the idea. The reaction of a British official was similar: “It is not a constitution! This is a pompous title, which is bound to be provocative.” Top bureaucrats thought that this was a good idea badly executed, and focused on the wording and length of the document as well as on the timing of the process. One Spanish official focused on the problems related to the information process: “this is a long complex text that ordinary people did not understand.” Officials also noted that it was “too soon” to propose a constitution. The top management of the Commission largely thought that that the constitution was a step in the right direction that needed enhanced packaging, more simplification and better timing. Interestingly, only a handful of officials perceived the ratification problems as a signal from European citizens about the speed or depth of EU integration.

The rejection of the constitution coincided with a debate across Europe about the initiation of accession negotiations with Turkey, decided in December 2004. Although the rationale of top Commission officials on Turkish accession varied considerably, 61% of them stated they are in favor of it. A third of officials (33%) said they were against it and another 7% could not make up their mind. The views of top managers contrast with
those of European publics. At around the same time when senior Commission bureaucrats expressed their support for Turkish accession, a clear majority of EU citizens told Eurobarometer pollsters the opposite. Asked whether they would be in favor or against Turkey becoming part of the European Union in the future, 52% said they were against. Only 35% said they were in favor of Turkish accession while 13% said they do not know.

Top Commission officials were also supportive of the Bolkestein directive for the liberalization of services across the EU. Originally tabled in 2004, the directive caused a furor among stakeholders feeding into the subsequent debate about the ratification of the constitution, especially in France. It was eventually adopted in 2006 with hundreds of amendments by the European Parliament that seriously limited its scope. In the midst of the debate stirred in 2005 by the drive for the liberalization of the services sector, we told officials that the Bolkestein directive is one of the big controversies at this moment in several EU countries and then asked whether they would like to see it adopted. Despite the strong reactions against the directive a strong majority (71%) of top officials said “yes.” Only one out of six officials (15%) said “no” while 14% said they do now know. In their supplementary comments, bureaucrats qualified their support of the directive saying that it needed amendment because it was “radical,” “revolutionary” or “premature.” Supporters also insisted that the directive was misunderstood or misrepresented. One official even said that “this furor over the directive is nonsense.”

Conclusion
To the extent that bureaucrats have a “sure power instinct” (Weber 1991: 232) that facilitates the preservation and expansion of their administrative tasks, the findings of our article should not be surprising. Once the Commission is viewed as a bureaucracy, the preferences of its top employees for deeper European integration are only to be expected: through deeper integration European bureaucrats can sustain and expand their power. If the results are puzzling, it is only because the European Commission is an atypical bureaucracy, one partly recruiting and promoting civil servants on the basis of their national origin. This transnational nature of this bureaucracy could have arguably weakened the “sure instincts” bureaucracies are known to have for “maintaining [their] power” (Weber 1991: 220). Transnationality could have made European bureaucrats – especially, those at the top of the organization – to be sensitive to the policy preferences of their home states or, even, to merely act as their agents. It could have been a source of fragmentation within the organization hindering its capacity to promote and further its interests.

Our survey of nearly two hundred top bureaucrats shows that even at the top echelons of this transnational organization, where national balance and national flag considerations are thought to be important, this is not the case: national origin has little bearing on what top civil servants think about the future of the EU. The vast majority of senior bureaucrats want more power to be vested in community institutions regardless of where they come from. Interestingly, though, this preference does not appear to be related to their organizational experiences either. The breadth of supranationalism within the Commission indicates that there is a consensus in the organization in favor of deeper
European integration. The survey suggests that this consensus is not confined to the views of senior managers on European integration but is part of a broader policy outlook, one that possibly distances the Commission from significant segments of European societies. Hence, in the midst of the crisis caused by the rejection of the European constitution in 2005, top Commission officials were overwhelmingly supportive of the constitutional treaty, Turkish accession and the Bolkestein directive.

In combination with the supranational tilt of the organization, the high levels of support for such controversial initiatives suggest the possibility that there is an esprit de corps in the Commission, an organizational culture that binds its multinational bureaucrats together to work for a common purpose. This culture seems to revolve around a teleological vision of the EU, one that sees deeper integration as the means for achieving broader political goals. On account of the limited effect that national origin and organizational experience have on this culture, it is worth speculating about other possible determinants of bureaucratic culture. One possibility is that bureaucrats joining the Commission are already predisposed to supranationalism, viewing the organization as the defender of deeper integration. It is likely that the clear mandate the Commission has to promote European integration makes it most attractive to those who are already favorably predisposed to this integrative function. Given that these bureaucrats could have had (or already had) successful careers elsewhere, they might have chosen to work for the Commission because they already share a supranational vision of Europe. As a Director in DG Research put it, “Working for the Commission is like working for a cause.” That this cause is clearly signaled by the institutional architects of the European
Union makes it plausible that the Commission attracts an overproportionate number of “believers.”

Alternatively, the organizational culture of the Commission might be a reaction to the questioning of the EU enterprise and of the Commission itself. Instead of pointing to the sources of public apprehension about the European project, integration setbacks like the rejection of the constitution might have turned the Commission into a more fervent defender of supranationalism. There is some evidence to suggest the plausibility of this link. Capturing the mood we came across in Brussels, one senior bureaucrat pointed out that “we have a common desire to serve the European project. Perhaps because of difficulties we have become stronger in our convictions.” The external challenges confronted by the organization might have helped the European bureaucracy close ranks, enhancing the cohesiveness of the organization. The adverse external environment, then, might inadvertently make it easier for the Commission to counter those trends that are seemingly causing its decay. While the 2004 enlargement and administrative reforms might be pushing the Commission toward a more intergovernmental outlook (Peterson 2008), the institutional and policy setbacks might moderate these effects, enhancing organizational solidarity and allowing the Commission to continue serving its integrative function.

In the context of a weaker and more fragmented College, the persistent supranationalism at the top ranks of the European bureaucracy might have particular importance for the future direction of the European project. Under certain conditions, it might allow the
bureaucracy to exert a bigger influence in shaping the policy agenda and, perhaps, in affecting policy outcomes. The economic crisis that struck global economies in 2008 might be one such condition. Crises like this can change the political dynamics within the EU exposing national differences about possible policy solutions. In situations like this, the Commission might be able to capitalize on the uncertainty about desired solutions to push for integrative solutions. Instead of dancing to the tunes of their home governments, top European bureaucrats might use such crises as pretext to “upgrade” common European interests and enhance their power position within the EU institutional framework.

[Word count: approx. 8.904 including footnotes and bibliography]
Bibliography


Table 1: Visions of Europe
Respondents asked to locate EU on 1-10 scale, 1 being intergovernmental and 10 being community-oriented

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vision on:</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Where the EU stands today</td>
<td>5.58</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where the EU should be in 10 years</td>
<td>6.99</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where the EU will be in 10 years</td>
<td>5.91</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where colleagues think EU stands today</td>
<td>5.72</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where colleagues think EU should stand in 10 years</td>
<td>6.88</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Vision of the EU and national affiliation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Yes N</th>
<th>No N</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Yes-No</th>
<th>Total N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follows national politics closely*</td>
<td>7.12</td>
<td>6.93</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Still votes in national elections</td>
<td>7.06</td>
<td>7.03</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has international education</td>
<td>7.33</td>
<td>6.90</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From original member state</td>
<td>6.83</td>
<td>7.18</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>-0.35</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From net beneficiary</td>
<td>7.38</td>
<td>6.78</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From state, where citizens think EU &quot;a good thing&quot;</td>
<td>7.07</td>
<td>6.78</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From state, where citizens think EU &quot;beneficial&quot;</td>
<td>7.07</td>
<td>6.71</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From state, where citizens satisfied with democracy in EU</td>
<td>7.20</td>
<td>6.88</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Yes includes those who said they follow politics in their own country "very closely" and "closely." The rest said "pretty much" or "not much." No one said "not at all."

**Note:** Data on public opinion from Eurobarometer 63, Sept. 2005, pp. 94-98.

Yes includes all countries in which over 50% of respondents thought the EU is a "good thing" or thought it was "beneficial" for country.
Table 3: Years of service and vision of where the EU should be (N=166)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of service</th>
<th>Aver.</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std Dev.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-10</td>
<td>6.44</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>7.33</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>1.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-</td>
<td>6.88</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>2.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: DG-type and Vision of EU future (1-10 scale) (N=171)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administration</th>
<th>Aver.</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>External affairs</td>
<td>6.92</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market-oriented</td>
<td>7.24</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supply-side</td>
<td>7.03</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision and redistribution</td>
<td>6.86</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social regulation</td>
<td>6.83</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Administration = 24-37; External affairs = 18-23; Market-oriented = 2, 3, 6, 11, 16; Supply-side = 7, 10, 12, 15, 17; Provision and redistribution = 1, 8, 14; Social regulation = 4, 5, 9, 13. Each number refers to a directorate or service. See Appendix 1.

Table 5: Rank and vision of EU future

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Std. Dev</th>
<th>Total N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Top management*</td>
<td>7.17</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle management**</td>
<td>6.67</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*DGs, DDGs, and Directors
**Heads of Unit
### Appendix 1: Interviewees by directorate/service

| 1 | Agriculture and Rural Development | 17 | 9 |
| 2 | Competition | 8 | 4 |
| 3 | Economic and Financial Affairs | 7 | 4 |
| 4 | Education and Culture | 3 | 2 |
| 5 | Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities | 8 | 4 |
| 6 | Enterprise and Industry | 10 | 5 |
| 7 | Environment | 14 | 7 |
| 8 | Fisheries and Maritime Affairs | 4 | 2 |
| 9 | Health and Consumer Protection | 3 | 2 |
| 10 | Information Society and Media | 16 | 8 |
| 11 | Internal Market and Services | 6 | 3 |
| 12 | Joint Research Centre | 2 | 1 |
| 13 | Justice, Freedom and Security | 4 | 2 |
| 14 | Regional Policy | 7 | 4 |
| 15 | Research | 13 | 7 |
| 16 | Taxation and Customs Union | 3 | 2 |
| 17 | Transport and Energy | 3 | 2 |
| 18 | Development | 3 | 2 |
| 19 | Enlargement | 6 | 3 |
| 20 | EuropeAid - Co-operation Office | 17 | 9 |
| 21 | External Relations | 11 | 6 |
| 22 | Humanitarian Aid Office - ECHO | 3 | 2 |
| 23 | Trade | 7 | 4 |
| 24 | European Anti-Fraud Office | 2 | 1 |
| 25 | Eurostat | | |
| 26 | Publications Office | | |
| 27 | Secretariat General | 7 | 4 |
| 28 | Press and Communication | | |
| 29 | Budget | 4 | 2 |
| 30 | Informatics | | |
| 31 | Interpretation | | |
| 32 | Legal Service | | |
| 33 | Personnel and Administration | 2 | 1 |
| 34 | Translation | | |
| 35 | Bureau of European Policy Advisers | | |
| 36 | Infrastructures and Logistics | | |
| 37 | Internal Audit Service | 2 | 1 |
| **Total** | **192** | **103** |

Note: Missing data for 2 interviewees; total over 100% due to rounding
Appendix 2: Questions in semi-structured interviews with top European Commission officials, 2005

Biographical details

1. Name of interviewee...........................................................................................................................

2. Country of origin: ..............................................................................................................................

3. Position in European Commission....................................................................................................

4. Education:
   - Main degree in: ............................................................................................................................... 
   - International degree: ....................................................................................................................... 

5. Date of joining EU administration: ............ (Year)

Experiential information

6. How closely do you follow politics in your own country?
   A. Very closely
   B. Closely
   C. Pretty much
   D. Not much
   E. Not at all

7. Do you still vote in elections in your country?
   Yes
   No

Vision of EU

8. If we look at the academic literature and the popular literature too on the EU, quite often we find two visions of the EU. On the one hand, we have an intergovernmental vision. On the other hand, we have a community-oriented vision. In the community-oriented vision it seems as if the emphasis is being placed on consensus between the constituent parts. In the intergovernmental vision, it seems as if the emphasis is being placed on power vested in the member-states.

Would you say that these two visions are alive and at play within the Commission today?
A. Strongly Agree  
B. Agree  
C. Disagree  
D. Strongly Disagree  
E. Don’t know

9. If you were to think of a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being intergovernmental and 10 being community-oriented, where would you place the EU on that scale as it stands today?

(Intergov) 1---------------------------------------------------------------10 (Comm)

10. Where do you think the EU should be in on this scale in 10 years?

(Intergov) 1---------------------------------------------------------------10 (Comm)

11. Where do you think it WILL be in 10 years?

(Intergov) 1---------------------------------------------------------------10 (Comm)

13. With your substantial experience in Brussels, where do you think your colleagues here in the Commission would place the EU on this scale today?

(Intergov) 1---------------------------------------------------------------10 (Comm)

14. And where do you think they think it should be in 10 years?

(Intergov) 1---------------------------------------------------------------10 (Comm)

**Issue and policy positions**

15. One of the big controversies at this moment in several EU countries is the so-called Bolkestein directive. Would you like to see it adopted?

A. Yes  
B. No  
C. Don’t Know

16. Do you think that it was a good idea to propose a European Constitution?

A. Yes,  
B. No  
C. Don't know
17. Why?
   A. Clarification/Simplification
   B. Symbolic
   C. Educational
   D. Other

18. Are you in favor of Turkish accession?

   A. Yes
   B. No
   C. Don’t Know