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An Institutional Perspective on Representation. Ambiguous representation in the European Commission

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Abstract

This study explores the multiple representational roles evoked by an under-researched segment of the European Commission: temporary Commission officials. The article has a dual ambition: The first is to outline an institutional perspective on representation that seizes a middle-ground between intergovernmental and neo-functional notions of representation. The second ambition is to empirically illuminate this perspective inside the Commission. It is argued that temporary Commission officials offer a crucial test-bed of institutional dynamics of representation inside the Commission writ large. Based on survey and interview data on temporary hired officials in the Commission, this study supports an institutional perspective on representation in two ways. First, temporary Commission officials tend to evoke multiple representational roles. Secondly, the composite mix of representational roles evoked by these officials reflects the organisational boundaries and hierarchies embedding them. Representation within the Commission is indeed a balancing act that is considerably biased by the formal organisation of the Commission, the multiple organisational embeddedness of the staff, their degrees of organisational affiliation towards the Commission, their modes of interaction within the Commission, as well as their educational backgrounds.

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Introduction

Representation is one essential but under-researched dimension of executive governance. Representation entails balancing multiple competing, inconsistent and loosely coupled demands and concerns, often simultaneously. This article argues that governance dynamics are reflected by the way trade-offs are handled between competing representational roles in everyday decision-making (Wilson 1989, 327). The study confronts one classical problem in executive governance beleaguered of the inherent trade-off between loyalty to politico-administrative leadership, departmental autonomy and professional neutrality (Jacobsen 1960, Wilson 1989, 342). Moreover, this triangular role repertoire is supplemented by a fourth element: supranational representation. The European Commission (Commission) is one pivotal international executive institution where the staff is constantly ripped between these four competing representational roles (Egeberg 2006; Hooghe 2005; Laffan 2004, 76). This study outlines an institutional perspective that accounts for the conditions under which Commission officials are likely to evoke *particular* representational roles. The second ambition of the article is to empirically illuminate this perspective among an under-researched segment of the European Commission: temporary Commission officials. It is argued that temporary Commission officials offer a crucial test-bed of institutional dynamics of representation inside the Commission writ large. The empirical observations presented support an institutional perspective on representation in two ways. First, temporary Commission officials tend to evoke multiple representational roles. Hence, the uni-dimensional approaches on representation offered by intergovernmental and neo-functionalist accounts are challenged.

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Secondly, the composite mix of representational roles evoked by these officials reflects the organisational boundaries and hierarchies embedding them. Representation within the Commission is a balancing act that is considerably biased by the formal organisation of the Commission, the multiple organisational embeddedness of the staff, their degrees of organisational affiliation towards the Commission, their modes of interaction inside the Commission, as well as their educational background.

An institutional perspective on representation is outlined as a middle-ground between intergovernmental and neo-functional approaches on representation. An intergovernmental perspective pictures the Commission as an arena for bargaining between national government representatives. According to this view the possibility for role ambiguity is not acknowledged. Implicit in the intergovernmental perspective is a notion of 'imperative representation' (see below) where civil servants are expected to behave solely as national representatives. A neo-functional approach claims that civil servants may over time shift loyalties from a national to a supranational level; thus alluding to an idea of 'liberal representation' (Sandholtz and Stone Sweet 1998). This article argues that an institutional perspective may occupy a middle ground between an intergovernmental and a neo-functional notion of representation. In an era of increased "post-territorial diplomacy" (Hevener 1986, 69), an institutional perspective highlights the potential conflicts that may arise between competing, inconsistent and ambiguous representational roles. An institutional perspective alludes to a notion of 'ambiguous representation' (see below), where the civil servants act upon multiple, and sometimes, poorly understood roles. The ambiguity lies in the fact that it is not always clear to whom the representative is responsible to. Secondly, an institutional approach suggests *scope conditions* that specify the conditions under which each representational role is likely to be evoked. This article suggests that the representational roles enacted by Commission officials are considerably biased by the following five scope conditions:

1. the formal organisation of the Commission apparatus,
2. the degrees of organisational compatibility between the Commission services and domestic government institutions,
3. the organisational affiliations of the officials,
4. the intensity and sustainability by which these officials interact within the Commission, and finally,
5. the educational backgrounds of the officials.

The institutional perspective is empirically illuminated by observations among seconded national experts (SNEs) in the Commission. Of the Commission workforce of 25 000 officials, some 1000 officials are seconded on temporary posts. Outside the Commission, government officials are increasingly hired on temporary posts, rendering their perceived organisational memberships vague, unstable and ambiguous (Bartel and Dutton 2001, 116; Hall 2002). SNEs are recruited to the Commission on short term contracts (maximum four years), paid by their home government, and the majority foresee a return to past positions in domestic ministries or agencies when their temporary contracts come to an end (CLENAD 2003). 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. In practice SNEs make decisions within the Commission *almost* on the same footing as permanent A-officials. According to the old rules for SNEs, "national experts have the same rights and obligations as EU officials…" (Commission 2002, 50). However, new Commission rules on SNEs, Art. 6, grants SNEs a B-status compared to ordinary Commission officials (1)

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Studying SNEs in the Commission can demonstrate how institutional ambiguities trigger representational ambiguities. SNEs are a *crucial* test-bed for measuring the extent to which the Commission impact on the representational roles of its staff writ large. We argue that, compared to the permanent Commission staff, SNEs serve as a critical case and as an under-utilised laboratory for illuminating institutional dynamics of representation inside the Commission.

The argument is presented in the following steps: The next section unpacks the concept of representation and suggests four representational roles available to SNEs: an intergovernmental role, a supranational role, a departmental (portfolio) role, and an epistemic (professional) role. Next, an institutional perspective is outlined suggesting five scope conditions that systematically impact on these four roles. Finally, to test the merit of the institutional perspective, this study offers fresh survey (N=72) and interview (N=22) data on SNEs. One caveat is needed: Due to the limited size of the data as well as the overly Scandinavian bias of the samples, conclusions are drawn with caution. Nevertheless, the empirical observations presented are the only available observations on temporary Commission officials at present, thus rendering the observations vital.

1. On the concept of representation ⬆ (2)

The concept of representation is poorly understood and rarely studied empirically in the world of government officials (Mansbridge 2003; Mayntz 1999, 83; Pitkin 1972). At the etymological level, representation means, "making present again" (Pitkin 1972, 8). Thus, representation means "the making present *in some sense* of something which is nevertheless *not* present literally or in fact" (Pitkin 1972, 8-9 - original emphasis). The term representation "directs attention first of all, to the attitudes, expectations and behaviours of the represented" (Eulau et al. 1959, 743). As such, representation depends, amongst other things, on how it is conceived by the actors. Symbolic representation in this sense requires that the connection between symbol and referent "is believed in" by the actor, creating perceived systems of cognitive orientations for the actor (Pitkin 1972, 100; Ashford and Mael 2004, 136). Thus, an individual is representative in a symbolic sense" by what he is or how he is regarded" (Pitkin 1972, 113). The role perceptions evoked by civil servants are thus vital in determining their representational status. In this study the representative status of SNEs is measured by the role perceptions evoked by them (3).

Role perceptions are important to study because they have "a significant influence on human behaviour", particularly when actors have behavioural discretion at their disposal (Sen 1998, 5; Wilson 1989, 54). Hence, studying roles as conceived by the actors themselves may help explaining their actual behaviour (Searing 1994, 14; cf. Eulau 1959, 746; Wish 1980, 535). A further rationale for studying the symbolic aspects of representation is the lack of such research (Ashford and Mael 2004, 137).

Representation always involves a relationship between the representative(s) and those represented (Eulau 1959, 743). Theories of representation have been mainly occupied with the relationship between the electorate and the elected. This study emphasises the relationships between individual civil servants and the executive institutions in which they are embedded. This relationship may be based on trust or enmity, on formal or informal rules, on shared notions of representative quality or on contending notions of true representation. The symbolic relationship between representatives and their constituents may vary between two extremes. At one extreme, representation means evoking representational roles that are closely and solely knit to constituents (an imperative notion of representation). On the other extreme, representation means having the free will to evoke representational roles that may deviate from this default position (a liberal notion of representation).

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The middle-ground between these extremes is occupied by an institutional perspective on representation where representation is gauged at balancing a complex repertoire of representational roles (an ambiguous notion of representation).

The Commission, like most executive institutions, has an inbuilt tension between different governance dynamics, notably between intergovernmental, supranational, departmental and epistemic dynamics (Trondal 2006). The repertoire of representational roles available to SNEs includes (i) an intergovernmental role guided by loyalty to their home government, preference for national interests, and contacts with their home base, and (ii) a supranational role coached by the top leadership of the Commission, an internalised loyalty towards - and a feeling of membership in - the Commission as a whole, and a preference for "the common European good" (Mayntz 1999, 83). Thirdly, a departmental role predicts SNEs to be "neutral, intelligent, generalist professionals who advice ministers" (Richards and Smith 2004, 779). Thus, 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 are highly educated officials, recruited on the basis of past merits, and with a professional esteem attached to their educational background. The epistemic role predicts SNEs to enjoy a great deal of behavioural autonomy, prepare, argue and negotiate on the basis of their professional expertise, and legitimate their authority on neutral competences (Haas 1992). Their selection of role is expected to be guided by considerations of scientific and professional correctness and the power of the better argument (Eriksen and Fossum 2000). This is the 'Monnet official' who is institutionally autonomous and a high-flying technocrat.

2. Seizing the middle ground: Towards an institutional perspective on representation

Three models of representation are outlined below. However, these models have different analytical purposes. The notions of imperative and liberal representation are outlined as analytical extremes from which the institutional perspective serves as a middle-ground. The institutional perspective theorises how the potential mix of different representational roles may shift under different institutional conditions. Our ambition is to unpack the latter approach and test it empirically inside the Commission.

2.1. An imperative notion of representation

At one extreme, the idea of imperative representation maintains that "true representation occurs only when the representative acts on explicit instructions from [their] constituents" (Pitkin 1972, 146). This notion of representation is vested in a vertical conception of accountability where delegates act on the basis of political and legal mandates issued by one principal (Pollack 2003). The agents are assumed to adapt optimally to the mandates (contracts) issued by utility-maximising principals. The classic model of diplomacy considered the exercise of behavioural discretion as a deviation from a default position governed by written mandates (Jönsson and Hall 2005, 101). From a symbolic viewpoint, true representation occurs when actors evoke representational roles that are tightly knit to this principal. The imperative notion of representation is based on the simplifying assumption of the necessity of coherence and on the primacy of instrumental rationality (Hay 2004; March 1988, 254). It also builds on the parsimonious assumption that there exist one unitary principal that successfully controls its agents, and that there exist one hierarchical chain of command from the former to the latter. "Defenders of this notion of representation tend to conceive of representatives *as if* they were *delegates* with uni-dimensional institutional affiliations and allegiances (Olsen 1988, 162).

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"[T]he possibility of conflict in role orientations is clearly envisaged and resolved in favour of subordinating one's independence to what is considered a superior authority" (Eulau 1959, 750). Hence, potential role conflicts are "seen as moving towards resolution" (March 1988, 17).

As seen from an imperative perspective, SNEs will evoke solely the role as a 'government representative'. The representational status is rigidly fixed and stable, and impossible to mould or remould during their Commission career. An imperative notion of representation is founded on a conservative ontology where roles are fixed, stable, coherent, precise and exogenous (March 1988, 277). The Commission is viewed as an intergovernmental institution established to maximise national preferences as pursued by their delegates. The choices made by delegates are based on the logic of consequentiality thereby striving to maximise the utility function of their principal (Hay 2004, 41). If SNEs, however, should take on representational roles that deviate significantly from the 'government representative' role ('free riding'), s/he may be recalled, either permanently or temporarily (Christophersen 1986). Delegates, thus, have clear *incentives* not to deviate from their default position (the government representative' role). The imperative notion of representation thus highlights a delegation problem (Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991). Chief to this problem is potential that civil servants (agents) act on representational roles of their own choosing rather than on those of their leadership (principal) ('shirking') (Pollack 2003, 26). This problem is omnipotent in situations where SNEs develop roles that are in conflict with their role as a government representative. The delegation problem and the problem of representation, therefore, are two sides of the same coin (Mayntz 1999).

2.2. A liberal notion of representation ⬆

At the other extreme lies the idea of "complete independence" of the representative (Pitkin 1972, 146). Examples of this are the delegation of executive and implementation authority to regulatory agencies within technically intricate policy areas (Pollack 2003, 23). It is assumed that true representation emerges only when the representative has the leeway to evoke representational roles which *may* deviate from the 'government representative' role. "Simply put, people do not do their best work when they are tightly controlled" (Mansbridge 2004; 8). The representatives must "not be bound by instructions, from whatever source, but must be guided by what Edmund Burke called 'his unbiased opinion, his mature judgement, his enlightened conscience'" (Eulau 1959, 744). Defenders of this notion of representation conceive of representation as a complex task, beyond the capacities of ordinary individuals. Representatives are typically highly educated experts with a great deal of behavioural discretion at their disposal, resembling Plato's 'wise men' pursuing "superior understanding of the subject and the procedures of decision-making" (Rometsch and Wessels 1996, 216). They represent expertise and superior knowledge (Radaelli 2003). According to the 'runaway-bureaucracy thesis', agents possess an information advantage over their principal, leaving the agents free to choose role (Pollack 2003, 39). Decisions are reached in closed rooms by *trustees* on the basis of 'the best argument' and their superior judgement. The liberal concept of representation thus builds on a deliberative perspective where free individuals argue, persuade and deliberate to reach the 'best' solutions on the basis of the 'best' arguments (Christophersen 1986, 37; Eriksen and Fossum 2000; Eulau 1959, 744). Accountability is ultimately horizontal, built on due procedures among other-regarding peers (Risse 2000). Vertical accountability, based on monitoring and sanctioning, is substituted by horizontal accountability built on professional norms and peer review (Mansbridge 2004, 17)

The liberal concept of representation signifies that weak ties *may* exist between representatives and those they represent. The representative have been authorised to act without a mandate or within the wide area of discretion provided by a broad or vague mandate (Jönsson and Hall 2005, 105; Pollack 2003, 22). Hence, considerations of transparency are relaxed. For example, SNEs with a long tenure in the Commission and who generally interact fairly intensive face-to-face with fellow colleagues in the Commission may over time develop a distinctive supranational role. Moreover, SNEs tend to deal with highly complex and technical dossiers. The technical content of the portfolios assigned to SNEs, together with their educational background as professionals, is conducive to the emergence of an 'independent expert' role among them. In short, SNEs are likely to depart from the 'government representative' role.

2.3. An institutional perspective on representation ⬆

A middle ground between the imperative and the liberal models of representation is seized by an institutional perspective. According to this approach the Commission is a transformative institution that systematically redirects the representational roles amongst the staff. Whereas the basis for representation is largely uncontested and linear in the two former models (Mansbridge 2003, 516), the institutional approach pictures representation as ambiguous and dynamic. Representatives are seen as having multiple institutional affiliations and roles to play (Ashford and Johnson 2001; Pescosolido and Rubin 2000, 65). Representatives have multiple, shifting and often unclear principals (Jönsson and Hall 2005, 109). The binary and uni-dimensional models of representation outlined above are replaced by a notion of multiple representation, introducing role conflict as a constitutive aspect of representation (Barnett 1993, 276; Elster 1986; March and Olsen 1989; Stryker and Statham 1985, 336). The institutional perspective is dynamic by allowing for variations in the composite mix of representational roles among actors. Moreover, this perspective is focused on the *balances* that may occur among different representational roles. Finally, this approach highlights that particular balances of roles are conditioned by the organisational context that embeds the actors (Simon 1997, 283).

According to an institutional perspective roles tend to be fuzzy, inconsistent and changing over time (Mansbridge 2003; March 1988, 269). The multiplicity and ambiguity of roles reflect that organisations tend to embody multiple and competing principles of organisation, goals and missions (Wilson 1989, 26). When actors strive to cope with role conflicts, existing roles may be "strengthened, combined with other identities and roles, modified or dropped" (Christensen and Røvik 1999, 168). Complementary strategies for coping with role conflicts are

1. to live with them and to cultivate the differences (Smith 1992);
2. to de-couple conflicting roles or role elements (DiMaggio and Powell 1991);
3. to attach sequential attention towards contending role perceptions (Simon 1997); or
4. to specialise organisational structures in order to separate and buffer between different roles (Egeberg 2006).

Hence, coping with role conflicts is not synonymous with resolving them (Stryker and Statham 1985). According to an institutional perspective actors enact different roles in different situations and at different times.

An institutional perspective introduces organisational variables as scope conditions that bias actors' choice of representational roles. Representatives are embedded within multiple formal organisations that focus on selected aspects of reality (Olsen 1988, 167-168; Schattschneider 1960).

Each organisational membership offers the official with a simplified cognitive representation of the world that constrains and enables role enactment (Gavetti and Leventhal 2000, 117). Roles compete for relevance, and organisational structures allocate systematic attention to certain roles in certain situations (March, Schulz and Zhou 2000, 57). Each organisational structure provides cognitive scripts that simplify search for alternatives, and thus the subjective uncertainty of actors' perceptions (Hogg and Terry 2001, 6; March 1988, 3). Hence, organisational boundaries limit the connections among representational roles within the organisation (March, Schulz and Zhou 2000, 192). Officials' connections to institutions are "multiple and often temporary, not single and lifelong" (Pescosolido and Rubin 2000, 62). Representatives have multiple organisational sub-memberships and true representation is a function of the mix of different representational roles stemming from these memberships. Accordingly, the representative quality is a result of the interplay between various representational roles (Augier and March 2004, 23; March and Olsen 1989; Olsen 1988, 169). The notion of representative ambiguity therefore views government systems as fragmented, with multiple representative channels, and where it is difficult to determine who the representatives actually are and who they represent (March 1988; Olsen 1988: 170; Rokkan 1966). According to this institutional perspective, we expect SNEs to evoke a mixed set of representational roles in different institutional contexts. In the following we identify five scope conditions that systematically bias the representational roles evoked by SNEs.

1. First, the representational roles evoked by SNEs are likely to be affected by the formal structure of the Commission services, that is, the horizontal specialisation into DGs and units, and the vertical specialisation of the Commission hierarchy. 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 likely to represent the organisation as a whole (a supranational role), whereas SNEs in bottom rank positions (for example A8) are more likely to represent their unit (departmental role) and professional expertise (epistemic role) (Mayntz 1999, 84). With respect to the horizontal organisation of the Commission, the DG and unit structure is largely specialised according to two conventional principles of organisation: purpose and process (Gulick 1937). Whereas the principle of purpose is likely to trigger the enactment of a departmental role among SNEs, the principle of process is more likely to strengthen an epistemic role perception among them. Because officials consume most of their time and energy within organisational sub-units, they tend to make affective ties primarily towards their sub-unit and less towards the organisation as a whole (Ashford and Johnson 2001, 36).

2. SNEs have a multiple organisational embeddedness in Europe, beyond the Commission (Trondal 2000). To illuminate how multiple organisational embeddedness may affect the representational roles among SNEs, "the domestic [is brought] back in" by considering organisational incompatibility across levels of government (see Bulmer and Lequesne 2005; Zurn and Checkel 2005, 1047). Recent studies of socialisation and identify change in Europe clearly point to the importance of domestic institutions and processes (Herrmann, Risse and Brewer 2004). Generally, organisational identifications are most likely when different organisations are perceived as distinct and incompatible (Pratt 2001, 19). Arguably, the enactment of a supranational role by SNEs is conditioned by some degrees of organisational incompatibility between the domestic ministries and agencies from which SNEs originate, and the Commission (Egeberg 2006). Organisational incompatibility creates a perceived mutual insulation of actors and organisations (Ashford and Mael 2004, 140). Organisational incompatibility also creates an exposure to new cognitive scripts and new codes of appropriate behaviour, challenging officials to change their role perceptions (Hooghe 2005). SNEs who receive portfolios within the Commission that *depart significantly* from previous domestic portfolios are likely to experience a cognitive challenge to develop a new supranational role. Moreover, the mere *perception* of organisational incompatibility is arguably conducive to the

enactment of a supranational role among SNEs. We also assume that organisational compatibility strengthens epistemic and departmental role perceptions among SNEs. Working on similar dossiers in national ministries as well as inside the Commission is likely to strengthen perceptions of sector expertise as well as perceptions of portfolio belongingness.

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3. The representational roles evoked by SNEs may also be affected by their degrees of <u>organisational affiliation</u> to the Commission. The bounded rationality of humans reduces their capacity to attend to more than one organisation at a time (Simon 1997, 288). The logic of primacy implies that <u>primary</u> institutional affiliations of civil servants affect their role perceptions more extensively than their secondary affiliations (Egeberg 1999). Arguably, primary institutions create salient roles whereas secondary institutions create less salient roles for actors (Ashford and Mael 2004, 141). Consequently, secondary institutions may modify the effect of primary institutions only marginally, and the effect of secondary institutions are shaped and biased by primary institutions. SNEs have their primary institutional affiliation inside the Commission. Hence, they are likely to be more supranationally than intergovernmentally oriented while staying in the Commission.

4. Fourth, it is assumed that <u>intensive and sustained participation</u> among SNEs inside the Commission is conducive to SNEs enacting a supranational role. Officials who devote a great deal of time and energy inside the Commission are likely to be slowly re-socialised and start identifying with the Commission as a whole (Trondal 2006). This claim rests on socialisation theory that predicts a positive relationship between the intensity of participation within a collective group and the extent to which members of this group develop taken-for-granted perceptions of group belongingness (Checkel 2005; Keck and Sikkink 1998, 35). In other words, repeated interaction among actors encourages them to experiment with new roles (March 1988, 261; Mattern 2005, 52).

5. Finally, according to an institutional perspective the <u>educational background</u> of actors may affect their selection and perception of role (Selden 1998). Studies of the social biographies of civil servants demonstrate that the *educational background* variable is the single most important background factor for understanding the decision-making behaviour of government officials (Christensen, Lægreid and Zuna 2001). According to the neo-functionalist school, epistemic communities of highly educated experts fuel the development of both a supranational and an epistemic role (Haas 1992). Both the length of education as well as type of education matters. In this study we measure the effect of international versus a national educational background with respect to the representational roles evoked by 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 compared with SNEs having a national educational background.

According to the institutional perspective outlined, organisational scope conditions may systematically affect the composite mix of representational roles enacted by SNEs. The next section offers primary data that illuminates the causal relationships suggested above. Table 1 summarises the predicted causal relationships.

Table 1

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3. 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, which gives a response rate of 58 percent. This response rate is low compared to surveys in domestic central administrations, but higher than recent studies of the Commission (Hooghe 2005). The final sample covers SNEs from 15 Commission DGs (5), 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 of SNEs, not on a random sample. 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 institutional perspective outlined above. However, the low number of respondents requires that conclusions are drawn with caution.

4. Ambiguity and representation in the Commission⬆

The representational roles evoked by SNEs may be measured by the loyalties deemed important to them. Table 1 reveals the relative importance attached to supranational, intergovernmental, departmental and epistemic loyalties among SNEs.

Table 2

As predicted, Table 2 demonstrates that SNEs evoke multiple loyalties. Being multiply embedded SNEs have several representational roles to play. The two loyalties evoked most strongly by SNEs are epistemic and departmental. As predicted, SNEs who are positioned in medium rank positions in the Commission hierarchy attach stronger loyalty towards their own DG and profession than towards the Commission as a whole. SNEs also evoke fairly strong supranational loyalties as compared to intergovernmental loyalties. This observation challenges previous studies of SNEs that underscore their national loyalties (Coombes 1970; Smith 1973; Smith 2001). The observations reported in Table 2 reflect the perceived 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 following phrase seems to cover the impression of most SNEs: "Out of sight, out of mind" (CLENAD 2003, 26). SNEs receive "very little feedback from capitals … and … in general they had expected to be in closer contact with their employer" (EFTA Secretariat 2000, 2). These observations reflect the *primacy* of the Commission for SNEs and the *perceived* autonomy and insulation of SNEs vis-à-vis their home government.

Our data demonstrate that SNEs rarely feel a conflict of loyalty. A bivariate correlation analysis (Pearson's R) reveals positive correlations between intergovernmental loyalties on the one hand and departmental loyalties (.27*) and epistemic loyalties (.25*) on the other. Hence, the representational roles evoked by SNEs seem partly complementary. SNEs tend to manage multiple roles. Hence, the assumed loyalty conflict between intergovernmentalism and supranationalism is challenged by the

observations presented in Table 2. The representational roles evoked by SNEs thus seem to complement rather than exclude each other.

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

Table 3

Table 3 confirms the observations of Table 2: SNEs report that other SNEs play mainly two representational roles – that as an 'independent expert' (the epistemic role) and as a 'DG/Unit representative' (the departmental role). Of less importance is the role as a 'Commission representative' (the supranational role). These observations partly reflect the horizontal specialisation of the Commission services by purpose and process, and partly the formal ranks of SNEs (the majority of SNEs are enrolled at the A7 and A8 levels). The 'government representative' role (the intergovernmental role) is perceived marginal to most SNEs. Hence, the lack of intergovernmental representation as shown in Table 2 is also evident among SNEs coming from other countries (Table 3), for example French and British SNEs. We thus see a triangular role repertoire among SNEs that largely transcends intergovernmentalism. Still, some SNEs report that French SNEs have a stronger intergovernmental representation than other SNEs: "France use the French SNEs to the maximum. They are consulted directly by the French Government" (interview – author's translation).

Table 4

Table 4 confirms that SNEs play multiple roles. The allegiances emphasised by SNEs are ranked as follows: departmental allegiances, epistemic allegiances, supranational allegiances, and intergovernmental allegiances. A bivariate correlation analysis (Pearson's R) reveals strong positive correlations between SNEs' allegiances towards the EU system and the Commission (.70**), their allegiances towards the Commission and their DG (.37**), and their allegiances towards the DG level and the Unit level (.63**). Hence, the SNEs studied have developed multiple complementary allegiances inside the Commission apparatus. Owing to the fact that the Commission is the *primary* institutional affiliation to SNEs, they rank supranational allegiances significantly higher than intergovernmental allegiances. Moreover, because SNEs are enrolled into DGs and since they are highly educated officials, they evoke stronger allegiances towards their DG, Unit and professional background than towards the EU and the Commission as wholes. 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 argue 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).

The SNEs were also asked if, before entering the Commission, they thought of EU co-operation as mainly advantageous or disadvantageous. Prior to the secondment period, the majority of the SNEs reports being favourable to EU integration. Moreover, 52 percent of the SNEs confirm that they have not changed attitude in this regard during their Commission career. Among those that indeed changed opinion during their secondment period, the net tendency is towards developing *more* favourable attitudes towards EU integration. Hence, having a temporary career within the Commission contributes only marginally to attitude changes. Similar observations are made among national officials attending EU committees (Egeberg, Schaefer and Trondal 2006, 72).

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As predicted, however, we find a significant positive Pearson Correlation between seniority within the Commission (sustained interaction) and the tendency of SNEs becoming more pro-integration in general (r = .33*) as well as within their portfolio in particular (r = .32*). Moreover, some SNEs are pre-socialised through their educational background (e.g. the *College of Europe*, Brugge) and through a multi-national family background. Prior international experiences may also be conducive to supranationalism. According to Edward Page (1997, 60), SNEs generally have contacts with the Commission prior to entering it. Frequently, they "indicate a wish to spend three years in Brussels" (Page 1997, 60). This indicates that a supranational role may reflect processes of pre-socialisation outside as well as re-socialisation inside the Commission.

Finally, four OLS regression models are offered to assess the clout of the theoretical predictions set out in Table 1. The dependent variables applied in the regression analyses are based on the following question that was posed to the SNEs: "To what extent do you think seconded national experts from other countries act like 'government representatives', 'Commission representatives', 'DG/Unit representatives', or 'independent experts'? The regression models apply the following independent variables: The formal rank of SNEs, the degree of informal interaction with fellow colleagues with other national origins outside office, the seniority of SNEs, the degree of incompatibility of portfolios assigned to SNEs across levels of government, and finally their educational background (7). The results from the four OLS models are presented in Table 5 (8).

<div align="center">Table 5</div>

Table 5 demonstrates that most of the theoretical predictions are supported, and that the organisational variables have the relative strongest explanatory power. Having a low rank positions as SNE is associated with evoking an independent expert (epistemic) role (-.42**) and a DG/Unit (departmental) role (-.30). Somewhat surprisingly, having a higher rank position is associated with enacting a government representative role (.60**). This may be explained by the multiple organisational embeddedness of SNEs. It might also echo that high rank officials tend to have more contacts with external partners (for example national government institutions). As predicted, Table 5 shows that SNEs who have compatible portfolios across levels of government tend to evoke a government representative role (-.28). Moreover, organisational incompatibility is associated with SNEs evoking an independent expert (epistemic) role (.65**), a DG/Unit (departmental) role (.34), and a Commission representative (supranational) role (.29). The interaction variables show few effects, although informal face-to-face interaction among fellow colleagues with other national origins shows a negative score on the 'government representative' role (-.37*). Hence, intensive interaction within the Commission weakens the role as a government representative among SNEs. Table 5 also reveals that having an international educational background is positively associated with evoking an independent expert (epistemic) role (.33*). This observation may reflect the pre-socialisation processes that occur among peers within universities. Finally, Table 5 shows that the first and the fourth regression models have explained variance above 40 percent. The second and the third regression models have a significant lower explained variance.

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Conclusions ↑

An institutional perspective occupies a middle ground between intergovernmental and neo-functional approaches on representation. According to an institutional perspective, representation is a complex and multifaceted endeavour gauged at integrating and balancing competing roles. Secondly, an institutional approach assumes that the composite mix of representational roles is affected by the organisational embeddedness of the representatives. True representation involves balancing multiple competing roles in different situations and at different times. It is argued that the representational roles enacted by Commission officials are considerably conditioned the following five scope conditions: the formal organisation of the Commission apparatus, the degrees of organisational compatibility between the Commission services and the ministries and agencies from which the officials originate, the organisational affiliations of the officials, the intensity and sustainability by which the officials interact within the Commission, and finally, the educational backgrounds of the officials.

The empirical observations presented support an institutional perspective on representation in two ways. First, SNEs tend to evoke multiple representational roles. Hence, the uni-dimensional conception of representation provided by intergovernmental and neo-funcationalist approaches are indeed challenged. Moreover, the binary representational model as presented in neo-functionalist scholarship (national versus supranational representation) is shown empirically to be of less importance. SNEs tend foremost to evoke a tripartite representational repertoire (departmental, epistemic and supranational representation). Secondly, the vast majority of the predicted causal relationship, as presented in Table 1, is supported empirically. As shown in studies of organisational identities within national administrative systems (Egeberg and Saetren 1999), the representational roles emphasised by SNEs are clearly related to organisational boundaries and hierarchies of the Commission. The total sum of observed causal relationships is presented in Table 6.

<u>Table 6</u>

As predicted by the institutional perspective, the organisational embeddedness of SNEs affects their role enactment. Thus, the Commission seems to have a fairly strong impact on its incumbents. The data demonstrates that SNEs evoke departmental and epistemic roles more strongly than the supranational role. The intergovernmental role is barely emphasised. Behaviour that transcends the imperative logic of intergovernmentalism is also seen within the College of Commissioners (Egeberg 2006), among top Commission officials (Hooghe 2005; Suvarierol 2006) and among the vast majority of national officials who attend Commission and Council committees (Egeberg, Schaefer and Trondal 2006). Supranational, departmental and epistemic roles are also observed within the secretariats of other international organisations – such as the WTO and the OECD (Trondal, Marcussen and Veggeland 2005). As predicted, Table 6 underscores that departmental and epistemic representation is positively associated with the horizontal organisation of the Commission as well as organisational incompatibility across levels of government. Epistemic representation is also positively associated with having an international educational background. As predicted, departmental and epistemic representation is also negatively related to formal ranks within the Commission. The role as a supranational representative is foremost associated by having a top position in the Commission, experiencing organisational incompatibility across levels of governance, having the Commission as the primary affiliation, as well as interacting intensively within the Commission.

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In sum, representation within the Commission is indeed a balancing act that is considerably biased by the formal organisation of the Commission, the multiple organisational embeddedness of the officials, their degrees of organisational affiliation towards the Commission, their mode of interaction inside the Commission, as well as their educational backgrounds. Hence, the institutional dynamics of representation inside the Commission is more complex than assumed by intergovernmental and neo-functionalist perspectives.

However, one important caveat is important to reiterate: Due to the limited size of the data as well as the overly Scandinavian bias of the samples, the conclusions drawn above should be treated with some caution. Nevertheless, the empirical observations presented are the only available observations on temporary Commission officials at present, thus rendering the observations vital. Moreover, further studies on temporary Commission officials are needed, notably covering officials from more member-states as well as officials who have left the Commission after their contract has expired. Comparing present and past SNEs may demonstrate whether deep socialisation occur inside the Commission, keeping SNEs supranationally oriented also after they have left the Commission buildings.

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Endnotes

(1) For example, Art. 6:2 claims that "[a] SNE shall take part in missions or external meetings only if accompanying a Commission official or temporary agent, or acting alone as an observer or for information purposes".

(2) This section is inspired by Trondal and Veggeland 2003.

(3) At least four concepts of representative quality may be identified in the literature. First, representation as "acting for" (Pitkin 1972: 112). This notion of representation claims that "true representation entails responsiveness to the represented, attention to his wishes or needs" (Pitkin 1972: 113). Representation entails acting in accordance with the wishes and interests of those they represent. Second, demographic representation "depends on the representative's characteristics, or what he is or is like, on being something rather than doing something" (Pitkin 1972: 61 - original emphasis). Third, formalistic or promissory representation "defines representation in terms of a transaction i.e. election that takes place at the outset, before the actual representing begins" (Mansbridge 2003, 516; Pitkin 1972: 39). Fourth, symbolic representation means representation "by what he is or how he is regarded" (Pitkin 1972: 113). The loyalties and identities enacted by the representatives determine whom they represent (cf. Birch 1971: 15; Olsen 1988: 157-158). However, symbolic representation need not involve role internalisation; it could merely entail role play as assumed by social identity theory (Ashford and Meal 2004, 136).

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

(7) The regression analyses did not include the independent variables (i) formal specialisation of the Commission (by purpose or process), and (ii) the organisational affiliation of SNEs (primary vs. secondary). The reason for not including these variables in the regression analyses is that they are not available in the SPSS file and thus not readable for the computer programme. The causal effect of these two variables are accounted for in Tables 2, 3 and 4.

(8) Diagnosis of collinearity between the independent variables in Table 5 unveils no indications of extreme multicollinearity. Thus, the independent variables have independent causal impact on the dependent variables.

Table I

Correlates of theoretical predictions

	Intergovernmental representation	Supranational representation	Departmental representation	Epistemic representation
Formal organisation of the Commission				
Specialisation by purpose	≠	≠	+	≠
Specialisation by process	≠	≠	≠	+
Formal rank	−	+	−	−
Multiple organisational embeddedness				
compatible	+	−	+	+
incompatible	−	+	−	−
Commission affiliation				
primary	−	+	≠	≠
secondary	+	−	≠	≠
Actor interaction inside the Commission				
Intensive interaction	−	+	≠	≠
Sustained interaction	−	+	≠	≠
Educational background				
international education	−	+	≠	+
national education	+	−	≠	−

key:

+ Positive correlation

– Negative correlation

≠ No predicted correlation

Table II

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

	Fairly much or very much	Both/and	Fairly little or very little	Total
Intergovernmental loyalty:				
Loyalty towards the member-states as a group	47	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 III

SNEs' perception of the representational roles evoked by other SNEs (percent - absolute numbers in parantheses)

	Strongly agree	Both/and	Strongly disagree	Total
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 IV

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

	Fairly strongly or very strongly	*Both/and*	*Fairly weakly or very weakly*	*Total*
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 V

Factors that relates to SNEs' perception of the representational roles evoked by other SNEs (Beta)[a]

	A 'government representative' role	A 'Commission representative' role	A 'DG/Unit representative' role	An 'independent expert' role
Formal organisation of the Commission				
Formal rank[b]	.60**	-.16	-.30	-.42**
Multiple organisational embeddedness				
Incompatible portfolios across levels of government[f]	-.28	.29	.34	.65**
Actor interaction inside the Commission				
Interaction with fellow colleagues with other national origins outside office[c]	-.37*	-.02	0	0
Seniority within the Commission[d]	-.07	.11	0	0
Educational background				
International educational background[e]	.18	-.12	0	.33*
	R^2=.41	R^2=.14	R^2=.19	R^2=.51

*) $p \leq 0.05$

**) $p \leq 0.01$

a) The dependent variables have the following values: Value 1 (strongly agree)), value 2 (do not know)), value 3 (strongly disagree).

b) This variable has the following values: Value 1 (A4 to A5), value 2 (A6 to A7), value 3 (A8), value 4 (scientific officer).

c) This variable has the following values: Value 1 (very often), value 2 (fairly often), value 3 (both/and), value 4 (fairly seldom), value 5 (very seldom).

d) This variable is continuous ranging from 1 year to 11 years. (Secondment contracts have a maximum length of four years. However, some SNEs may renew their contracts beyond four years).

e) This variable is dichotomous by default: Value 1 (international university education), value 2 (national university education)

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 VI

Summary of observed causal relationships

	Intergovernmental representation	*Supranational representation*	*Departmental representation*	*Epistemic representation*
Formal organisation of the Commission				
Specialisation by purpose	≠	≠	+	≠
Specialisation by process	≠	≠	≠	+
Formal rank	(+)	+	–	–**
Multiple organisational embeddedness				
compatible	+	–	(–)	(–)
incompatible	–	+	(+)	(+**)
Commission affiliation				
primary	–	+	≠	≠
secondary	+	–	≠	≠
Actor interaction inside the Commission				
Intensive interaction	–*	+	≠	≠
Sustained interaction	(≠)	(≠)	≠	≠
Educational background				
international education	(≠)	(≠)	≠	+*
national education	(≠)	(≠)	≠	–

Key:

+ Positive correlation

– Negative correlation

≠ No correlation

( ) Non-predicted correlation

* $p \leq 0.05$

** $p \leq 0.01$