



Parliament Staff

Backgrounds, Career Patterns and Behaviour of Officials in the European Parliament

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Abstract

Officials within parliaments have got marginal scholarly attention. This also holds for the European Parliament (EP) which contains a considerable administration. Similar to administrative personnel within executives, parliament staff deserves attention because they may take part in decision processes and thus might affect the content of decisions. Our study, based on an online survey (N=118), shows that political group staff are primarily committed to the concerns of their respective political groups, but also to the arguments of those *external* actors which have similar party affiliation. Since most group officials are, in addition, affiliated to a particular committee, they also emphasise sectoral interests, including the concerns of affected interest groups. EP-secretariat officials, on the other hand, give priority to sectoral and expert concerns. Both groups of staff rank European concerns above national ones, and pay more attention to the arguments of the Commission than to the arguments of any other institution.

Keywords

European Parliament - European Parliament Secretariat - European Parliament Group Staff - Parliament staff careers - Parliament staff behaviour

Introductionⁱ

Administrative personnel are present not only within political executives but also within legislative bodies. There are indications that the staff of parliamentary assemblies have grown and become professionalised, thus making parliaments less dependent upon the expertise and administrative capacity of the executive (see below). Officials within parliaments seem, however, to have got rather marginal scholarly attention: Scholars interested in parliaments have traditionally focused on the parliamentarians themselves, and those specialising in bureaucracies tend to concentrate on the executive branch, thus leaving parliament administrations in a 'no-man's land'. This lack of knowledge as regards parliaments' staff also holds for the European Parliament (EP) (Hix et al. 2003) which contains a considerable administration, both in the form of the EP secretariat and in the form of the secretariats of the various political groups.

In this paper we apply the same perspective on administrative personnel within legislatures as has been applied on such personnel within executives: such personnel deserve attention because they may take part in decision processes and thus might affect the content of decisions. Like government officials they may draft policy documents and give various kinds of advice and thus provide important decision premises, although not making the final political decisions. We draw on an organisational approach; focusing on the officials' organisational affiliation (EP secretariat vs. political group secretariat) in order to explain their actual behaviour (e.g. tasks, contact patterns, weight assigned to various concerns, considerations and arguments). However, since little is known about EP staff, we also present data on their backgrounds; such as nationality, education and careers.

Like other parliaments, the EP's organisational structure reflects three different principles of specialisation: ideological, sectoral/functional, and territorial. EP officials are formally anchored either in the ideologically arranged structure (i.e. political party groups) or in a mainly sectorally/functionally arranged structure (i.e. EP secretariat). Our study, based on new survey data (N=118), shows that although political group officials tend to have more political careers than EP-secretariat officials, the two groups of officials nevertheless share important characteristics; such as national and educational profiles. Political group officials are networking considerably with external actors sharing their party-political leaning, be it within the Commission, the Council Presidency, national governments, or

national or European-level political parties. Moreover, they are primarily committed to the concerns of their respective political groups, and tend to assign particular weight to the arguments of those external actors which have similar party affiliation (within the Commission, Council Presidency or national governments). EP-secretariat officials, on the other hand, give priority to sectoral and expert concerns. However, since most group staff are also affiliated to a particular committee, they also emphasise sectoral concerns, including the concerns of particularly affected interest groups. Finally, given that both groups of officials have a European-level organisation as their primary affiliation, it makes sense that both are clearly inclined to rank European interests above national interests, and to emphasise the arguments of the Commission more than the arguments of any other institution. This finding may be interpreted as being at odds with the widespread statement that the Commission is losing ground and placed at the bottom of the Commission-Council-EP triangle (e.g. Dinan 2011: 118).

The paper is organised as follows: The next two sections offer a short description of formal characteristics of EP staff and a 'state-of-the-art' presentation. Then the theoretical argument is outlined, followed by a section on data and method. The subsequent part gives the empirical observations before a final conclusion is drawn.

The structure of EP administration

Since the EP was established there has been a dramatic growth in its General Secretariat. According to Corbett et al. (2007: 199) the number of posts increased from 37 in 1952, almost 2000 in 1979, nearly 3000 posts by 1984, to the around 6000 officials currently working for the EP. The expansion of the EP administration has come in the wake of increase in the number MEPs (from 78 to 785), nationalities (six to 27) and working languages (four to 23), as well as the major task expansion of the EP.

The EP's administrative support structure is organised in three main parts. 1) The General Secretariat 2) the staff of the EP's political groups, and 3) the MEPs' personal assistants. The *General Secretariat* constitutes the main part of the EP administration. It is an elaborate organisation headed by the General Secretary as the EP's highest official. It is divided into eight Directorates-General and the EP Legal Service. These basic units perform a wide-ranging set of tasks, from e.g. information, translation/publishing, infrastructure/interpretation, assisting in the daily operations of the EP, to managing the finances and budget of the EP. The majority of these posts are either assigned to language services of the EP or to maintain the three

locations of the EP and its information offices in the Member States. Three directorates (*Directorate-General for the Presidency, Directorates-General for the Internal Policies and for External Policies*) (see also Table 1) in particular have tasks closely related to decision-making process of the EP, such as coordinating legislative work and providing technical and expert assistance to parliamentary bodies and MEPs. The permanent officials in the General Secretariat are employed under the same conditions as civil servants working in other EU institutions, and the political groups and MEPs have relatively little influence over their appointments (Corbett et al. 2007: 191-194). The *staff of the EP political groups* is the second main part of EP administration, currently about 900 posts (Corbett et al. 2007: 100). These posts are funded by the Parliamentary budget and allotted to each of the political group according to their size. The political groups are reserved the right to hire this category of EP staff (Raunio 1997: 45). The MEP's *personal assistants*, the third component of the EP administration, are on the other hand hired by the individual MEPs as part of their secretarial allowance, and the MEPs have considerable discretion over their assistants' terms of employment and how they are used. This staff, which is not included in our study, tends to be junior personnel with high turnover (Michon 2008).

Research on parliament staff: state of the art

Particularly in U.S. scholarship, legislative staff has been a subset of legislative studies (Erikson 1981; Salisbury and Shepsle 1981; DeGregorio 1988; Hammond 1996), and these studies are useful as a backdrop for research also in the context of the EU. This literature identifies how staffing of parliamentary assemblies vary in terms of size and organisational differentiation - from US Congress where elected member and committees have a vast body of professional staff at their disposal, to parliament committees that borrow expertise from executive branch's bureaucracy (Strøm 1998). This variation is found to be systematically linked to the *constitutional principles* of political systems. In particular the principle of separation of powers is associated with having a well-developed administrative apparatus within the legislative assembly, with the US Congress as the prime example (Dann 2003).

Concomitant to the expanding role of the EP in EU decision-making, MEPs have received growing scholarly attention. However, little research has so far addressed the question of the internal organisation of the EP (Hix et al. 2003) and the literature on its administrative apparatus remains even sparser. The

expanding scholarly work on EP does however *indirectly* concern the EP's staff and secretariat, in particular when seen as part of the EP's internal resources. The study of the influence of the EP from an inter-institutional perspective, for instance, calls to the attention how the EP's institutional resources affect its capacity to exert influence over policy. The staffing of parliamentary assemblies is generally viewed as a component of such resources (Judge et al. 1994, 47). The literature that looks at legislative behaviour from the perspective of information theory (see e.g. Krehbiel 1992), indirectly addresses how the administrative resources of legislative bodies affect their internal operations. Ringe (2010: 52), for instance, notes how EP staff resources matter for how MEPs handle the 'informational deficit' they are confronted with when making policy choices and in their voting behaviour. Yet none of these studies, however, are concerned with the role of EP staff as such.

Then, what does previous literature tell us about the EP administration more explicitly? In general most presentations of the considerable institutionalisation and empowerment of the EP leave the role of its administration unaccounted for (see e.g. Scully 2005), yet some observe how the role of EP staff has changed over time. Gungor (2009) notes how the incremental increase in the complexity and volume of EP administration is testament to the institutionalisation of the EP. The dramatic increase in the administrative support structure that came in the wake of the introduction of direct elections to the EP also contributed to the EP's basis for autonomous action. The EP administration has been seen as particularly independent and important prior to direct elections of MEPs. The absence of MEPs during large parts of the year prior to 1979 'provided for considerable independence of the secretariat' (Neunreither 2002: 46). Westlake (1994: 197) makes a similar observation pointing to how recruitment waves to the EP's general secretariat brought in young, gifted institutionally committed officials that became engaged in 'creative exploration of the Parliament's potential'. Costa (2003) also point to the administrative apparatus as a key to parliaments' counter-power vis-à-vis executive power, yet he warns against seeing the increase and internal differentiation of the EP administration as a sign of increasing administrative power *within* the EP.

An internal study within DG II of the EP's General Secretariat in the early 1990s showed that as many as 80 per cent of the officials reported assisting parliamentary reports beyond technical and procedural questions (Neunreither 2002: 49). This suggests that the EP administration may conduct tasks of a politically important nature – and thus have political influence in non-trivial tasks. A more recent study also showed that the EP Secretariat officials see themselves as important when it comes to drafting a report or an

opinion (Neuhold and Radulova 2006: 57). This is corroborated by a recent study of two EP committees, building on interviews with committee officials, MEPs and MEP assistants. This study concluded that committee officials matter beyond a technical role and are substantively involved in political work of the EP particularly in shaping the informational foundations of policy making. Yet the boundaries of their role seem fluid and their autonomy is under the hierarchical constraints of political superiors (Winzen 2011). The added value of our study may first of all be that we start unveiling which concerns and whose arguments officials in the EP assign weight to when shaping the informational foundation for policy-making.

The theoretical argument

Students of the executive branch of government routinely focus on the role of bureaucracies in addition to that of executive politicians. Although politicians at the top formally decide on issues considered to be of political importance, one nevertheless realises that power and influence are also inherently linked to what takes place at other stages of the policy process, stages at which bureaucracy tends to play a crucial role. Thus, the exercise of discretion that might have policy implications could also be found in the agenda-setting phase, in the phase in which various policy alternatives are elaborated, during policy implementation and, finally, when interpretations of the effects of public policies are fed back into new policy processes (Page and Jenkins 2005; Olsen 2006). In a sense then, decision processes can be seen as endless streams of premises from which choices occasionally happen (Simon 1965). Thus, although the existence of administrative staff without doubt increases the action capacity of executive politicians, such staff simultaneously tends to acquire a powerful position vis-à-vis their political masters.

Our rationale behind studying staff in the EP is quite parallel to the one outlined above. Like in the executive, administrative personnel within legislatures may provide background information, give advice and draft documents for politicians, thus inserting premises for future policy choices. In institutions in which politicians come and go, administrators may play a vital role in taking care of institutional memory, knowledge of procedures and inter-institutional affairs. Even though the number of administrators in relation to the number of politicians is not as big in parliaments as in executives, staff size is considerable and has been growing (see above). Thus, arguably, parliament administrations deserve scholarly attention much in the same way as executive bureaucracies do.

Bureaucracies do matter in the policy process, but what kind of concerns, interests and arguments can we expect officials to assign weight to? In general, background factors, except for educational background, seem to have only modest impact on officials' actual behaviour: their organisational (departmental) affiliation tends to be more crucial (Meier and Nigro 1976; Olsen 1983; Egeberg 2003; Christensen and Læg Reid 2009). This seems to hold also for international administrations (Egeberg 1996; Trondal et al. 2010; Trondal 2010), although the importance of officials' nationality is somewhat contested (Hooghe 2005; Suvarierol 2008). In this paper, as indicated, we concentrate on the relationship between administrators' organisational position on the one hand and their careers, tasks and decision behaviour on the other. We expect the organisational context, within which officials are embedded, to make some behaviour more likely than others. Decision-makers are, due to limited cognitive capacities, unable to attend to all alternatives and consequences, however, organisational structure provides simplification that tends to focus decision-makers' attention on certain problems, solutions and lines of conflict rather than others (Simon 1965; March 1994).

One key organisational variable supposed to have behavioural consequences is the way in which the structure is horizontally specialised. E.g., while we expect a territorially arranged institution to induce spatial perspectives among officials and to focus attention along geographical cleavages, sectorial specialisation on the other hand is supposed to emphasise sectoral concerns that might cut across territorial borders (Gulick 1937). Like other parliaments, the EP's organisational structure reflects three different principles of specialisation: ideological (here: along EP political group lines), sectoral/functional (along standing committee lines) and territorial (here: along national lines). EP administrators are formally and primarily anchored either in the ideologically arranged structure (i.e. political party groups) or in the sectorally/functionally arranged structure (i.e. EP secretariat). However, political group staff may also be linked to the work of particular standing committees, thus giving such personnel an additional sectoral affiliation. We expect that this variation as regards organisational position of EP staff may make a difference as regards their actual behaviour: For example, we expect party group administrators to be primarily committed to the concerns of their respective political groups, to be networking considerably with external actors sharing their party political leaning (within the Commission, national governments etc.) and to pay particular attention to the arguments of such actors. However, group officials who are assigned to follow the work of particular committees might also become particularly attentive to various sectoral concerns, including the concerns of particularly affected interest

groups. As regards EP-secretariat officials on the other hand, we expect them to primarily emphasise expert considerations, as well as the concerns of the policy sector in which they work. Thus, the involvement of EP staff in EP decision-making may underpin patterns of cooperation and conflict (ideological and sectoral/functional) that cut across an intergovernmental pattern, thus contributing to transforming the inherited political order. Moreover, political group staff and EP officials have in common that they both have a European-level organisation as their primary affiliation: we can therefore expect them to be more inclined to pursue European interests rather than national interests.

Data and method

This study builds on an on-line survey among staff in the EP, comprising officials employed by the EP secretariat as well as officials employed by the various political groups within the EP. Two basic criteria were applied in order to establish the population: First, we decided to concentrate on staff at the level of administrator/advisor and those above this level (so-called 'AD category'). In this way we hope to cover those who are most likely to be involved in the policy process, very much in accordance with selection criteria used in studies of executive bureaucracies. Second, among staff at this AD level, we have aimed at including those most clearly taking part in the policy process; thus, excluding those in important support functions such as translation/interpretation, information, internal (e.g. personnel) administration and information technology. Pertaining to the EP secretariat this means that only relevant AD officials within DG Presidency, DG Internal Policies and DG External Policies have been selected. As shown in Table 1, we ended up with 327 group officials and 209 secretariat officials. Information about names, positions and addresses were found on the EP's website.

Table 1 Number of recipients, respondents, and response rates across organisational units

<i>Political groups</i>	<i>Recipients</i>	<i>Respondents</i>	<i>Response rate %</i>
ALDE	43	11	26
GUE-NGL	34	6	18
ECR	37	2	5
EFD	31	5	16
EPP	69	7	10
Greens	35	8	23
S&D	78	13	17
Total	327	52	16
EP DGs			
DG internal policies	137	46	34
DG external policies	43	13	30
DG presidency	29	10	34
Total	209	69	33
Total (survey)	536	118¹	22

1) 118 submitted a filled-in questionnaire. Summarising the number of group respondents (52) and EP secretariat respondents (69) gives 121. This is due to the fact that some respondents had marked that they were employed both places

Before the on-line questionnaire was circulated, the secretary general of each of the seven political groups as well as of the EP secretariat were informed about our project in a formal letter. After two reminders 99 responses had been registered. We then informed the recipients about the low response rate, particularly as regards the political groups, with the result that the number of respondents climbed to 118 (22 per cent). Table 1 reveals a striking difference in terms of response rates between the political groups on the one hand and the secretariat's directorates general on the other, a difference we are not able to account for. The difference implies that while group officials make up a clear majority among recipients, they constitute a minority among those who have responded. Thus, as regards the variable 'organisational affiliation' (whether one is employed by a group or the EP secretariat), we know that the data are not representative for the selected population as a whole. In the data presentation this fact will be handled by all the time controlling for officials'

organisational affiliation. We do not know the extent to which the material is representative or not along other dimensions. Since the response rate ended at 33 per cent within the EP secretariat, it is more likely that representativity is, in general, better here than among group officials, but it is not necessarily so. It follows that one has to interpret results carefully, and particularly so regarding group staff. On the other hand, if understandable and significant patterns are observed across several variables, one might probably ascribe more trust to the findings. In the end, our best argument might be that these are the only available data of this kind for the time being; to quote Rogelberg and Stanton (2007: 198): 'In the absence of good information about presence, magnitude, and direction of non-response bias, ignoring the results of a study with a 10% response rate – particularly if the research question explores a new and previously unaddressed issue – is just as foolish as assuming that one with a response rate of 80% is unassailable'.

Findings from the EP administration survey

Background of officials in the EP

The data-set contains 67 per cent male and 33 per cent female officials, equally distributed among those employed by the EP and political groups. The mean age of these officials is 44 and 42 among those employed by the EP secretariat and political groups, respectively. The sample covers officials of all EU nationalities, and the following table distributes officials by four waves of enlargement.

Table 2 Country of origin, by organisational position (per cent)

	<i>Employed by the EP</i>	<i>Employed by political groups</i>
Founding members	39	42
Countries of the enlargements 1973-86	30	35
Countries of the enlargement 1995	9	2
Countries of the enlargements 2004-07	21	21
N	100 (66)	100 (48)

Key: Founding members: France, Germany, Italy, Luxemburg, Netherlands, and Belgium. The enlargements 1973-86: Denmark, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, and UK. The enlargement 1995: Austria, Finland, Sweden. The enlargements 2004-07: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia

The vast majority of the officials in our survey hold master's degrees as the highest level of education (70 per cent). 17 and 12 per cent hold bachelor and PhD degrees. A majority of the surveyed EP officials did take part/all of their higher education outside their country of origin (53 and 64 per cent among those employed by the EP and political groups, respectively). EP officials report being largely educated in law and social sciences, although law dominates among EP-secretariat staff (Table 3).

Table 3 EP officials' educational background, by organisational position (per cent)

	<i>Employed by the EP</i>	<i>Employed by political groups</i>
Law	39	32
Economics and business administration	15	4
Social sciences	25	36
Humanities	9	10
Natural sciences/technology	3	2
Other	9	16
N	100 (67)	100 (50)

As expected we see significant variation in party political membership among EP officials.

Table 4 Per cent of EP officials who are member of political party, by organisational position

	<i>Employed by the EP</i>	<i>Employed by political groups</i>
	23	78
N	100 (65)	100 (50)

Career patterns of officials in the EP

Table 5 shows that there first of all is no single dominant 'breeding ground' for EP officials as there are multiple career tracks leading to a position in the EP administration. However, officials employed by the EP are chiefly coming to current position directly from other positions in the EP administration, business, national public administration or EP political group secretariats. By contrast, officials employed by the political groups tend to be recruited more through party political channels such as political group secretariats - both in the EP and in national parliaments.

Table 5 Per cent of EP officials who came to current position directly from the following entities:

	<i>Employed by the EP</i>	<i>Employed by political groups</i>
Education (i.e. studies, schools)	4	4
European Commission administration	9	8
EU Council Secretariat	2	0
EP Secretariat	24	4
Other EU institutions	6	2
EP political group secretariats	10	14
National public administration	13	14
Political group secretariat in national parliament	2	12
International organisations	2	2
Interest groups	3	4
Business	15	6
University/research institute	2	4
Political career	0	6
Other	10	20
N	100 (68)	100 (50)

Next, when asked about what factors were important for getting current the job, ability and merit are reported to be most important among both groups of officials. However, whereas officials employed by the EP mainly emphasise this factor, officials employed by political groups also emphasise their party political leaning and nationality.

Table 6 EP officials who think the following factors were important for getting current job, by organisational position (per cent and Pearson's r)

	<i>Employed by the EP</i>	<i>Employed by political groups</i>	<i>Pearson's r^a</i>
Ability/merit	93	80	.16
Nationality	18	48	-.36 **
Seniority	24	27	-.13
Party political leaning	10	57	-.63 **
Mean N	68	49	114

**) $p \leq 0.01$

Key: The table combines values 4 and 5 on the following five-point scale: Not important/very little important (value 1), fairly unimportant (value 2), somewhat (value 3), fairly important (value 4), very important (value 5), do not know (value 8)

a) Organisational position is coded as follows: Employed by political groups (value 1), employed by the EP (value 2). The dependent variables contain the five-point scale described in the key above, thus coding value 8 as system missing

As regards seniority in the EP administration – that is, number of years in current position, in the EP as a whole, and in EU institutions generally -, our data show no variation among officials employed by the EP secretariat and those employed by political groups. Contrary to what might be expected – due to their temporary posts - officials employed by political groups do not have lower seniority than officials employed by the EP. Consequently, political group officials are not more transitory nor significantly younger than officials employed by the EP.

One proxy of the future work preferences of EP officials may be whether they have taken the 'concours' arranged for recruitment to EU institutions. Our data reveals systematic variation among officials employed by the EP secretariat and those employed by political groups in this regard (93 per cent and 42 per cent, respectively). This observation is supported by Table 7 which reports EP officials' perceived future work preferences. For both groups, officials have their future number one work preference in the closest organisational proximity of their current position. Moreover, officials employed by the EP tend to prefer future administrative career – chiefly within the EP secretariat, international organisations, and (perhaps) surprisingly also within the newly established European External Action Service (EEAS). Their career horizon, however, is not preferred to be at national level. By contrast, officials employed by political groups wish for a future political career – mainly within the EP political group secretariats. These officials also want to continue working primarily at international level. 16 per cent of these officials, however, prefer to work for political group

secretariats also in national parliaments to a significantly stronger degree than officials employed by the EP ($r = -.33^{**}$).

Table 7 Future work preferences, by organisational position
(per cent and Pearson's r)

	<i>Employed by the EP</i>	<i>Employed by political groups</i>	<i>Pearson's r^a</i>
The European Commission administration	31	18	.20 *
Council secretariat	15	13	.12
EU agency	24	15	.04
EP secretariat	69	30	.39 **
European External Action Service	51	40	.15
Other EU institutions	12	18	-.05
EP political group secretariat	17	62	-.38 **
National public administration	13	16	-.07
National parliament secretariat	13	12	.01
Political group secretariat in national parliament	0	16	-.33 **
International organization	62	57	.06
Interest group	8	16	-.23 *
Business	17	26	-.18
University/research institute	34	33	-.01
Political career	18	30	-.20 *
Mean N	60	45	105

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

Key: The table combines values 4 and 5 on the following five-point scale: Not at all/very little (value 1), fairly little (value 2), somewhat (value 3), fairly much (value 4), very much (value 5)

a) Organisational position is coded as follows: Employed by political groups (value 1), employed by the EP (value 2). The dependent variables contain original five-point scale

The behaviour of officials in the EP

Table 8 shows that EP officials conduct a multiplicity of tasks, including tasks that might provide ample potential for exerting influence on MEPs, such as drafting documents, giving advice and facilitating compromises. As could be predicted, officials employed by the political groups tend to spend significantly more time on political advice than officials employed by the EP secretariat. Group staff also spends more time on facilitating compromises

within the EP. This makes sense since such activity mainly involves national as well as EP party groups.

Table 8 EP officials spending much time on the following tasks, by organisational position (per cent and Pearson's r)

	<i>Employed by the EP</i>	<i>Employed by political groups</i>	<i>Pearson's r^a</i>
Drafting documents for MEPs	63	63	-.09
Providing scientific, technical, legal advice to MEPS	54	56	-.07
Giving political advice to MEPs	31	88	-.57 **
Providing background information for MEPs	67	74	-.02
Meeting/contacting people on behalf of MEPs	34	50	-.18 *
Facilitating compromises within the EP	46	70	-.19 *
Facilitating compromises with the Commission and/or the Council	39	38	.06
Monitoring executive bodies (Commission, EEAS, EU agencies)	27	12	.16
Mean N	67	50	117

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

Key: This table combines values 4 and 5 on the following five-point scale: No time/very little (value 1), fairly little (value 2), somewhat (value 3), fairly much (value 4), very much (value 5)

a) Organisational position is coded as follows: Employed by political groups (value 1), employed by the EP (value 2). The dependent variables contain the original five-point scale

Next, Table 9 reveals the contact patterns of EP officials. EP officials have a multiplicity of contacts as part of their daily work. Most important contact points are the Commission, the Council, EU-level interest groups and firms, national governments, and political parties. Patterned variation among the two groups of EP officials, however, is also reported. Contacts towards political bodies – such as Commissioners' cabinets and political parties (both national and European) – are pursued significantly more by officials employed by political groups than those employed by the EP Secretariat. These officials also tend to have more external contacts towards interest groups and firms. A rather modest proportion of political group officials (12 per cent) mention the Council Secretariat as a key interlocutor. This may reflect that this Secretariat is less interesting from a political point of view subsequent to the transfer of executive functions within the areas of justice and home affairs and foreign policy to the Commission and the EEAS, respectively.

Table 9 EP officials having much contact (meetings, e-mails, phones etc.) with the following institutions, by organisational position (per cent and Pearson's r)

	<i>Employed by the EP</i>	<i>Employed by political groups</i>	<i>Pearson's r^a</i>
Commission DG(s)	52	36	.17
Commission General Secretariat	14	16	.02
Commissioner(s)/Cabinet(s)	17	35	-.19 *
European External Action Service	15	6	.08
Council Presidency	26	18	.12
Council Secretariat	30	12	.38 **
EU agency(ies)	6	4	.02
Other EU institutions	12	18	-.06
EU-level interest group(s)/firm(s)	25	43	-.20 *
National-level interest group(s)/firm(s)	6	22	-.21 *
National government(s), incl. missions in Brussels	24	38	-.14
National parliament(s)	12	12	-.01
National party(ies)	6	32	-.61 **
European party federation(s)	9	28	-.42 **
International organisation(s)	20	20	-.02
University(ies)/research institute(s)	11	4	.04
Mean N	66	50	116

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

Key: This table combines values 4 and 5 on the following five-point scale: Never/very seldom (value 1), fairly little (value 2), somewhat (value 3), fairly often (value 4), very often (value 5)

a) Organisational position is coded as follows: Employed by political groups (value 1), employed by the EP (value 2). The dependent variables contain the original five-point scale

The next two tables reveal what reasons EP officials give for having contacts with Commissioners and cabinets (Table 10) and national governments (Table 11). Reflecting most officials' sectoral affiliation towards standing committees, they mainly have contacts with Commissioners and cabinets with a similar sectoral or functional portfolio. Our data show that officials employed by the EP secretariat and political groups are equally affiliated to particular EP committees (77 and 74 percent, respectively). However, those employed by political groups also tend to emphasise contacts based on the party political leaning of Commissioners and cabinets ($r = -.47^{**}$). Moreover, officials employed by political groups have contacts with national governments due to the party political leaning of the government significantly more than officials employed by the EP secretariat (Table 11).

Table 10 EP officials reporting the following reasons for having contacts with Commissioner(s) and Cabinet(s), by organisational position (per cent and Pearson's r)

	<i>Employed by the EP</i>	<i>Employed by political groups</i>	<i>Pearson's r^a</i>
Because of Commissioner's/Cabinet's party political leaning	3	27	-.47 **
Because of Commissioner's/Cabinet's similar sectoral or functional portfolio(s)	69	72	-.02
Mean N	60	50	100

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

Key: This table combines values 4 and 5 on the following five-point scale: Not at all/very little extent (value 1), fairly little extent (value 2), somewhat (value 3), to a fairly great extent (value 4), to a great extent (value 5), no contact (value 8)

a) Organisational position is coded as follows: Employed by political groups (value 1), employed by the EP (value 2). The dependent variables contain the five-point scale described in the key above, thus coding value 8 as system missing

Table 11 EP officials reporting the reasons for having contacts with national government(s) is much due to the party political leaning the government(s), by organisational position (per cent and Pearson's r)

	<i>Employed by the EP</i>	<i>Employed by political groups</i>	<i>Pearson's r^a</i>
	3	47	-.66 **
N	100 (59)	100 (47)	100 (99)

**) $p \leq 0.01$

Key: This table combines values 4 and 5 on the following five-point scale: Not at all/very little extent (value 1), fairly little extent (value 2), somewhat (value 3), to a fairly great extent (value 4), to a great extent (value 5), no contact (value 8)

a) Organisational position is coded as follows: Employed by political groups (value 1), employed by the EP (value 2). The dependent variables contain the five-point scale described in the key above, thus coding value 8 as system missing

Next, we asked the officials how they emphasise particular concerns and considerations when doing their daily work. Table 12 shows that officials in the EP have a primary affiliation towards the EU level, by ranking common/overall European concerns far above national ones. Reflecting their educational background and sectoral affiliation towards standing committees, officials in the EP also tend to emphasise professional, scientific, and expert concerns as well as the concerns of the policy sector in which they work. Finally, patterned variation is also shown based on their internal employment in the EP. Party political concerns and the concerns of affected parties and

clientele are emphasised significantly more by officials employed by political groups than officials employed by the EP.

Table 12 EP officials who assign much weight to the following concerns/considerations, by organisational position (per cent and Pearson's r)

	<i>Employed by the EP</i>	<i>Employed by political groups</i>	<i>Pearson's r^a</i>
Party political concerns/considerations	27	84	-.61 **
The concerns of particularly affected parties, clientele	26	42	-.20 *
Professional/scientific/expert concerns	58	57	.07
The concerns of the policy sector in which I work	65	59	.16
National concerns	8	33	-.37 **
Common/overall European concerns	77	74	.20 *
Mean N	66	49	111

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

Key: This table combines values 4 and 5 on the following five-point scale: Not at all/very little extent (value 1), fairly little extent (value 2), somewhat (value 3), to a fairly great extent (value 4), to a great extent (value 5), no contact (value 8)

a) Organisational position is coded as follows: Employed by political groups (value 1), employed by the EP (value 2). The dependent variables contain the five-point scale described in the key above, thus coding value 8 as system missing

Table 13 reveals how much weight EP officials assign to arguments from different institutions. Most emphasis is put on arguments from the Commission, next to those from the Council. Scientists and academics also seem to be relatively highly regarded by both groups. Moreover, as might be expected, officials employed by political groups tend to emphasise arguments from national governments and interest groups and firms slightly more.

Table 13 EP officials who assign much weight to arguments from the following, by organisational position (per cent and Pearson's r):

	<i>Employed by the EP</i>	<i>Employed by political groups</i>	<i>Pearson's r^a</i>
Commission	81	68	.17
Council	70	50	.17
EU agencies	15	26	-.06
Other EU institutions	26	20	-.07
Particular national governments	15	32	-.23 *
EU-level interest groups/firms	19	36	-.13
National-level interest groups/firms	5	10	-.26 **
International organizations	31	24	.02
Scientists/academics	45	48	.02
Mean N	66	50	112

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

Key: This table combines values 4 and 5 on the following five-point scale: Not at all/very little (value 1), fairly little (value 2), somewhat (value 3), fairly much (value 4), very much (value 5), not relevant (value 8)

a) Organisational position is coded as follows: Employed by political groups (value 1), employed by the EP (value 2). The dependent variables contain the five-point scale described in the key above, thus coding value 8 as system missing

Finally, we asked the respondents how important party political leaning is when they assign weight to arguments from the Commission, the Council, and particular national governments. The observations in Table 14 strongly support the predicted pattern. The party political leaning of the respective institutions is significantly more emphasised by EP officials employed by political groups than officials employed by the EP secretariat.

Table 14 EP officials who assign much weight to party political leaning, by organisational position (per cent and Pearson's r)

	<i>Employed by the EP</i>	<i>Employed by political groups</i>	<i>Pearson's r^a</i>
When assigning weight to the arguments from the Commission, this is much due to the party political leaning of the Commissioner/cabinet	5	34	-.52 **
When assigning weight to the arguments from the Council, this is much due to the party political leaning of the Council Presidency	8	34	-.44 **
When assigning weight to the arguments from particular national governments, this is much due to the party political leaning of the government	15	42	-.47 **
Mean N	65	50	108

**) $p \leq 0.01$

Key: This table combines values 4 and 5 on the following five-point scale: Not at all/very little (value 1), fairly little (value 2), somewhat (value 3), fairly much (value 4), very much (value 5), not relevant (value 8)

a) Organisational position is coded as follows: Employed by political groups (value 1), employed by the EP (value 2). The dependent variables contain the five-point scale described in the key above, thus coding value 8 as system missing

Conclusion

We have ascertained that, except for studies on staff in the US Congress, research on national parliament administrations as such is almost non-existent. This also holds for the EP. Although the EU polity displays some semi-parliamentary features, such as the coupling of European elections' outcome and the choice of Commission President, the current EU, like the US, seems to be perceived mainly as a system characterised by the separation of powers. Thus, since the availability of adequate expertise and administrative capacity within parliaments might be deemed more critical in the latter case, the lack of focus on the role of EP staff is even more surprising. We have witnessed that such staff has grown considerably over the years, both within the political groups and within the EP secretariat. In this paper we have applied the same perspective on legislative personnel as has been applied on administrative personnel within ministries: since influence may be exercised also at stages at which initiatives are taken and policy alternatives elaborated (although not formally decided upon), scholarly attention should also be drawn to those

who provide information and advice, and draft documents. Our study has shown that officials in the EP actually do perform tasks that might involve 'policy-shaping'; tasks such as providing background information and various kinds of advice, drafting documents, facilitating compromises, etc.

In order to account for the interests, arguments, concerns and considerations that officials emphasise in the policy process, researchers in the field of administrative behaviour tend to assign more weight to organisational variables than to variables describing officials' backgrounds. In this paper, therefore, we have concentrated on the organisational position of officials as the independent variable. However, since this seems to be the first survey on EP staff, we chose to present some data on backgrounds and careers as well for descriptive purposes. As could be expected, data confirm that political group staff tends to have more political career-paths than their counterparts in the EP secretariat, and relevant party affiliation plays a significant role as recruitment criterion. This said, staff in the EP, across organisational entities, nevertheless shares important characteristics, such as educational and national profiles.

From an organisational perspective, structure provides simplifying cues for individual action in a complex and information-rich world. Political group officials find themselves mainly embedded in an ideologically specialised setting, although often complemented by a sector-committee connection. Accordingly, we have observed that their actual behaviour (contact patterns, concerns and arguments emphasised) to a considerable extent reflects their respective political group affiliations in the sense that attention tends to be directed towards actors sharing their political leaning (within the Commission, Council Presidency, national governments or political parties). However, in addition, expert as well as sector concerns both loom large on their agenda, including the interests of particularly affected clientele. We notice that group staff pay more attention to interest groups than EP-secretariat officials. This may reflect that the former, as 'political appointees', have more leeway as regards incorporating various external demands into policy documents. EP-secretariat officials, on the other hand, anchored in an overwhelmingly sectorally arranged structure, emphasise primarily sectoral and expert considerations and arguments. Both groups of staff have an EU-level organisation as their primary affiliation. Accordingly, our data have unveiled that both groups, in their work, clearly rank European concerns far above national ones. This EU-level affiliation may also help to explain why officials in the EP, across units, tend to pay more attention to the arguments of the Commission than to the arguments of any other institution. This finding may be interpreted as being at odds with the widespread statement that the

Commission is losing ground and placed at the bottom of the Commission-Council-EP triangle (e.g. Dinan 2011: 118).

In sum, the activities of staff in the EP, mainly revolving around ideological and sectoral concerns, underpin patterns of cooperation and conflict that characterise the behaviour of members of the EP (Hix et al. 2007; Corbett et al. 2007). Ideological and sectoral cleavages have also been observed in the Council of Ministers (Hayes-Renshaw and Wallace 2006; Hagemann and Hoyland 2008) as well as within the College of Commissioners (Egeberg 2006; Wonka 2008). Interestingly, we have found in this study that officials in the EP contribute to the *spanning* of such cleavages *across* institutions as well. These observations may be seen as deviating from a basically intergovernmental portrayal of the EU (e.g. Kassim and Menon 2010). Since ideological and sectoral cleavages cut across intergovernmental patterns of cooperation and conflict, they challenge the inherited intergovernmental order and may contribute to its transformation.

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