



***The Autonomy of Bureaucratic
Organisations***
An Organisation Theory Argument

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Abstract

The craft of international organisations is to a large extent supplied by the autonomy of its bureaucratic arm. The ambition of this paper is two-folded: The first and most important ambition is to theorise conditions for the autonomy of bureaucratic organisations. One secondary ambition is to offer some empirical illustrations of autonomy among office holders in international bureaucracies. Benefiting from interviews with civil servants from three international bureaucracies, two illustrations are suggested: First, actor-level autonomy is present among civil servants within three international bureaucracies embedded in three seemingly different international organisations. One second theoretical lesson learned is that international bureaucracies may possess considerable capacity to shape essential behavioural perceptions among its staff in particular, and foster behavioural autonomisation more generally. Two causal mechanisms are discussed: (i) behavioural and role adaptation through organisational rule-following, and (ii) behavioural and role internalisation through 'in-house' socialisation processes.

Keywords

Autonomy – International Bureaucracy – Organisational Approach – Socialisation – Supranationalism

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Introduction¹

This study argues theoretically and illuminates empirically that common political order necessitates the rise of *independent* administrative resources and capacities. One necessary, although not sufficient, factor in building common political order is the establishment of common institutions, including a permanent administration, independent of national governments serving the common interest (Trondal and Peters 2013). The rise of common political order through institutional capacity building and bureaucratic autonomisation is seen as one key ingredient of state formation (Bartolini 2005). Order formation above nation-state structures, however, is much less studied and poorly understood. If one focuses on order formation in a European context, what matters is the extent to which a common European political order is in practice independent from key components of an intergovernmental order, *not* whether it is independent in general. The ambition of this paper is two-folded: The first and most important ambition is to theorise conditions for autonomy of bureaucratic organisations. The paper argues that the autonomy of bureaucratic organisations is *supplied by* these organisations and not merely as a consequence of member-state cost-benefit analyses (Lipsky 1980; Moravcsik 1999; Wilson 1989) or socialisation processes outside bureaucracy (Hooghe 2007). One secondary ambition is to offer empirical illustrations on the autonomy of office holders in international bureaucracies. The empirical observations highlighted in this paper suggest that international bureaucracies may possess considerable capacity to shape essential behavioural perceptions among its staff through the two causal mechanisms: (i) behavioural and role adaptation through organisational rule-following, and (ii) behavioural and role internalisation through 'in-house' organisational socialisation.

Modern governments daily formulate and execute policies with consequences for society (Hupe and Edwards 2012). With the gradual increased role of international bureaucracies one unresolved question is to what extent and under what conditions such institutions may formulate own policies and thus transcend a mere intergovernmental role. The craft of international organisations (IOs) is to a large extent *supplied* by the autonomy of its bureaucratic arm, that is, by the ability of international bureaucracies – and their staff – to act relatively independently of mandates and decision premises

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from member-state governments (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Biermann and Siebenhuner 2009 and 2013; Cox and Jacobson 1973; Oestreich 2007, 2012; Reinalda 2013; Trondal 2013). Increasingly '[i]nternational rules are prepared [and implemented] by top-rank [international] administrators' (Papadopoulos 2013: 84). '[A]utonomy is about discretion, or the extent to which [an organisation] can decide itself about matters that it considers important' (Verhoest et al. 2010: 18-19). As an area of research, the extent to which and the conditions under which international bureaucracies are independent of member-state governments has become increasingly vibrant, however, still offering inconclusive findings (e.g. Beyers 2010; Checkel 2007; Moravcsik 1999). It is thus essential to know how autonomous these administrators are, and what can explain it.

The empirical focus of this study is *actor-level* autonomy as enacted by international civil servants. There are at least two rationales for applying an actor-level focus. First, the discretion available to bureaucracies is made real by individual office-holders (Cox and Jacobson 1973). Secondly, institutional transformation – as with the rise of relatively autonomous international bureaucracies – requires that international civil servants' 'preferences and conceptions of themselves and others [...]' are affected (Olsen 2005: 13). Moreover, one often neglected proxy of actor-level autonomy is the extent to which they activate a supranational behavioural logic (hereby termed 'actor-level supranationalism'). Arguably, international organisations in general and their bureaucracies in particular, may possess considerable clout to form actor-level supranationalism among its personnel (Marcussen and Trondal 2011). Classic theories of European integration – such as neo-functionalism – assumed that integration essentially was about the shift of individual loyalties from the national to the international level (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2006). International institutions were assumed to create a sense of community beyond the nation-state, i.e. by socialising staff (Checkel 2007). Actor-level supranationalism denotes the rise of some shared norms, values, goals and codes of conduct among international civil servants. This entails that they are loyal towards the mission and vision of the IO – or towards parts of it. The civil servants are expected to become 'defenders of the system' and to acquire collective behavioural perceptions independent of particular national interests. The appearance of actor-level supranationalism thus denotes actors' feelings of loyalty and allegiance towards the IO as a whole – or towards parts of it (Deutch et al. 1957: 5-6; Haas 1958: 16; Herrmann et al. 2004: 6). Actor-level supranationalism contains both the 'true believers' – those who believe in the overall mission of the organisation, even as a 'force for good' – and the 'sector enthusiasts' – those who believe in particular issues that the organisation deals with and in the organisation's role in solving and handling these issues.

This study shows empirically that bureaucratic autonomy may be fostered equally inside bureaucratic organisations if they supply fairly similar organisational capacities and in-house socialisation processes. This study shows that actor-level supranationalism is present among civil servants embedded in three different international bureaucracies. These observations benefit from a large and novel set of 121 interviews with civil servants working in these international bureaucracies: the secretariat of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the secretariat of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the European Commission (Commission) administration. Our findings also resonate to a burgeoning literature on the 'public administration turn' to IO studies (Trondal 2007). Studies demonstrate that international bureaucracies, not only the Commission, may have the craft to make the administrative staff relatively independent (Oestreich 2007). Barnett and Finnemore (2004: 3) demonstrate that the Secretariat of IMF, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the UN Secretariat 'were not simply following the demands issued by states but instead acting like the bureaucracies that they are'. Similarly, Lewis (2007) observes organisational socialisation inside the COREPER whereby national officials internalise new community roles. Conzelmann (2008) shows that international secretariats may have some leeway in organising and structuring debates and, moreover, that secretariats may gain influence and authority in IOs based on their expertise in technical complex areas. Others have also stressed the importance of the (legal) expertise of international bureaucracies (Marcussen 2004; Mathiason 2007; Schmeil 2004; Yi-Chong and Weller 2008). As Mathiason (2007: 16) has phrased it: 'The source of legitimate power is essential legal'. Yi-Chong and Weller (2004: 278–279) concludes their study of GATT/WTO by stating that secretariats '[...] provide the continuity and the cement, the credibility and the connections [...] the final decision may not be theirs, but the creativity surely is'. Finally, Johnston (2005: 1037) observes 'some evidence that those individuals most directly exposed to intensive social interaction [...] are more likely to have a positive attitude towards multilateralism.' Thus, international bureaucracies may nurture actor-level supranationalism 'from within'.

The paper proceeds in the following steps: The next section outlines an organisational theory approach to public sector organisations to explain variation in actor-level supranationalism among international civil servants. The subsequent sections outline the methodology and data used to illuminate actor-level supranationalism, followed by an empirical section reporting key findings.

Theorising Bureaucratic Autonomy: An Organisation Theory Approach

A Weberian bureaucracy model assumes that bureaucracies possess *internal* capacities to shape staff through mechanisms such as socialisation (behavioural internalisation through established bureaucratic cultures), discipline (behavioural adaptation through incentive systems) and control (behavioural adaptation through hierarchical control and supervision) (Page 1992; Weber 1983; Yi-Chong and Weller 2004, 2008). These mechanisms ensure that bureaucracies perform their tasks relatively independently of outside pressure, but within boundaries set by the legal authority and (political) leadership of which they serve (Weber 1924). Causal emphasis is thus put on the internal organisational structures of the bureaucracies. The Weberian bureaucracy model provides a picture of formal organisations as creator of ‘organisational man’ (Simon 1965) and as a stabilising element in politics more broadly (Olsen 2010). According to this model, bureaucracies develop their own nuts and bolts quite independently of society. The model implies that civil servants may act upon roles that are shaped by the organisation in which they are embedded. It is assumed that organisational dynamics and decision-making behaviour is framed by ‘in-house’ organisational structures (Radin 2012: 17). Organisations create elements of robustness, and concepts such as ‘historical inefficiency’ and ‘path dependence’ suggest that the match between environments, organisational structures, and decision-making behaviour is not automatic and precise (Olsen 2010). An organisational approach thus suggests that the supply of organisational capacities have certain implications for how organisations and incumbents act. This approach departs from the assumption that formal organisational structures mobilise biases in public policy because formal organisations supply cognitive and normative shortcuts and categories that simplify and guide decision-makers’ search for problems, solutions and consequences (Ellis 2011; Schattschneider 1975; Simon 1965).

The organisational structure of international bureaucracies consists of the bureaucratic structure, as well as how this structure is embedded in the wider IO structure. This paper suggests two organisational mechanisms to explain actor-level supranationalism among international civil servants: *Adaptation* through organisational rule-following and *internalisation* through ‘in-house’ organisational socialisation. This study thus makes an analytical distinction between actor-level supranationalism caused by the *internalisation* of roles and behavioural perceptions on the one hand (e.g. Checkel 2007), and actor-level supranationalism caused by behavioural and role *adaptation* through control and discipline on the other (e.g. Trondal et al. 2008). Whereas much existing literature argues that actor-level supranationalism originate from outside of the international bureaucracies (e.g. Dehousse and Thompson 2012; Hooghe

2007; 2012) this paper argues that actor-level supranationalism may largely emerge from within the structures of international bureaucracies.

Lipsky (1980: 19) claimed that bureaucratic autonomy is driven by actors' conspicuous desire for maximising their own autonomy. By contrast, it is argued here that bureaucratic autonomy is *organisationally contingent*. It is the formal rules established in a bureaucracy that regulate, constitute and bias the decision-making behaviour and role perceptions evoked by civil servants, ultimately advancing bureaucratic autonomy (Barnett and Finnemore 2004: 3). Civil servants live with a constant overload of potential and inconsistent cues that may be attended to at decision situations. Formal organisations guide the decision-making behaviour of civil servants due to the computational limitations and the need for selective search. Organisations provide collective order out of cognitive disorders by creating local rationalities among the organisational members (March and Shapira 1992). Formal organisations are systematic devices for simplifying, classifying, routinising, directing and sequencing information towards particular decision situations (Schattschneider 1975: 58). Formal organisations 'are collections of structures, rules and standard operating procedures that have a partly autonomous role in political life' guiding officials to systematically de/emphasise certain aspects of organisational realities (March and Olsen 2006: 4). Derived from this organisational approach, two propositions follow:

Organisational Rule-Following

First, an organisational approach suggests that the supply of organisational capacities have certain implications for how organisations and humans act. An organisational approach assumes that organisational capacity-building supply government institutions with leverage to act independently (Trondal and Peters 2013). This approach departs from the assumption that formal organisational structures mobilise biases in public policy because formal organisations supply cognitive and normative shortcuts and categories that simplify and guide decision-makers' behaviour (Schattschneider 1975; Simon 1965). The behaviour role and identity perceptions evoked by international civil servants are expected to be primarily directed towards those administrative units that are the *primary supplier* of relevant decision premises. In this study, international bureaucracies are arguably primary suppliers of relevant decision premises for international civil servants.

Organisations tend to accumulate conflicting organisational principles through horizontal and vertical specialisation (Olsen 2005). When specialising formal organisations horizontally, one (among several) important principle is of particular relevance to international bureaucracies: organisations by major

purpose served – like research, health, food safety, etc. This principle of organisation tends to activate patterns of co-operation and conflicts among incumbents along *sectoral* cleavages (Egeberg 2006; Gulick 1937). Co-ordination and contact patterns tend to be channelled within sectoral portfolios rather than between them. Arguably, organisation by major purpose served is likely to bias decision-making dynamics inwards towards the bureaucratic organisation where preferences, contact patterns, roles and loyalties are directed towards sectoral portfolios, divisions and units. This mode of horizontal specialisation results in less than adequate horizontal co-ordination *across* departmental units and better co-ordination *within* units (Ansell 2004: 237). This principle of specialisation is uppermost among most international bureaucracies. For example, the Commission administration is a horizontally pillarized international bureaucracy specialised by purpose and with fairly weak organisational capabilities for horizontal co-ordination at the top through Presidential command (Dimitrakopoulos and Kassim 2005). Similarly, the WTO and OECD Secretariats are horizontally specialised administrations consisting of divisions or directorates responsible for different areas of cooperation (such as agriculture, environment, development, statistics etc.) (Trondal et al. 2010). Essential to our argument, international bureaucracies serve as the primary organisational affiliation for international civil servants, rendering them particularly sensitive to the organisational signals and selections provided by this organisation. As argued, the horizontal specialisation of international bureaucracies by major purpose is conducive to the behavioural independence of incumbents. This argument derives the following proposition:

H1: International civil servants embedded within international bureaucracies specialised by purpose are likely to evoke supranational ‘sector e nth usiasm’ based on the stated purpose of the IO and the underlying and linked purpose of the specialised bureaucratic unit. More generally, we assume that formal organisational structures matters regarding the civil servants’ enactment of supranational roles.

‘In-house’ Organisational Socialisation

Secondly, a vast literature reveals that the impact of *pre*-socialisation of actors is modified by organisational *re*-socialisation (e.g. Checkel 2007). Officials entering international bureaucracies for the first time are subject to an organisational ‘exposure effect’ (Johnston 2005: 1039) that may contribute to such re-socialisation. Socialisation processes are conducive to ‘autonomisation’ of the socialisees because the socialisator may educate, indoctrinate, teach or diffuse his or her norms and ideas to the socialisee. Socialisation is a dynamic process whereby individuals are induced into the norms and rules of a given community. By this process individuals come to internalise some shared

norms, rules and interests of the community (Checkel 2007). The socialisation argument also claims that behavioural autonomy is conditioned by enduring experiences with institutions, accompanying perceptions of appropriate behaviour (Herrmann and Brewer 2004: 14). The potential for socialisation to occur is assumed positively related to the *duration* and the *intensity* of interaction amongst the organisational members. Chief to the neo-functionalist approach, the potential for re-socialisation to occur ('shift of loyalty towards a new centre') is assumed positively related to the duration and the intensity of interaction among actors (Haas 1958: 16). This claim rests on socialisation theory that emphasises a positive relationship between the intensity of participation within a collective group and the extent to which members of this group develop perceptions of group belongingness and an *esprit de corps*. Intensive in-group contact and interaction is conducive to the emergence of relative stable social, normative and strategic networks that provide autonomous impact on the participants' perceptions of strategic and appropriate behaviour (Atkinson and Coleman 1992: 161; Börzel 1998: 259; Hay and Richards 2000; Knox et al. 2006: 120). Often, such networks resemble 'ego-networks' 'between a given individual and his or her "alters"' (Knox et al. 2006: 118). The network literature suggests that networks are transformative entities that considerably bias the behaviour of the participants (Börzel 1998: 258; Windhoff-Hèritier 1993). However, as an explanatory tool-kit, network approaches have to be supplemented by more generic causal mechanisms, such as socialisation mechanisms, in order to explain behavioural implications (Marin and Mayntz 1991: 44).

In sum, the length of stay in international bureaucracies – or the individual seniority of incumbents – may foster socialisation towards actor-level supranationalism. Hence, behavioural and role autonomy is fostered by the sheer quantity and quality of actor-interaction inside international bureaucracies. Ultimately, such actor-interaction contributes to the surfacing of tight networks inside international bureaucracies rather insulated from member-state influence. This argument derives the following proposition:

H2: International civil servants with long seniority within international bureaucracies are likely to evoke a 'general' supra national enthusiasms (true believers). In other words, we assume that long tenure among employees and thus persistent interaction with the norms and values of the IO (formal and informal), increase the capacity of the organisation to create defenders of the system and supranational enthusiasts.

Data and Methodology

The empirical illustrations benefit from synchronised comparative studies of permanent officials in the Commission administration, the WTO Secretariat, and the OECD Secretariat. The study is synchronised in the sense that the same interview guide has been applied to all three bureaucracies and with respect to the selection of administrative sub-units within each bureaucracy. The 71 interviews were semi-directed, using a standardised interview guide that was applied flexibly during interviews. The interviews were carried out during 2006 and 2007 in Brussels, Geneva and Paris. All interviews were taped and fully transcribed. All interviewees are treated with full anonymity. Consequently, quotations from interviews are referred to as follows (Commission 2, WTO 15, etc.). The questions posed in the interviews were directed at measuring the behavioural perceptions among the civil servants. Key themes covered during interviews were: interaction patterns, the role of nationality, the development of *esprit de corps*, the emergence of shared perceptions of identity among staff towards different institutions and actors, and the role perceptions deemed important by staff when doing daily work (see Appendix 1).

Interviewees were selected from similar administrative sub-units in all three international bureaucracies in order to control for variation in policy sectors. These sub-units were first trade units (such as DG Trade in the Commission and the numerous trade units in the OECD and WTO Secretariats) and secondly the general secretariats (such as the Secretariat-General of the Commission, the offices of the Deputies of the Director General in the WTO Secretariat, and the General Secretariat of the OECD). General secretariats represent the bureaucratic centres of international bureaucracies and the trade units represent one among several policy sectors of international bureaucracies. Finally, interviewees were selected from different levels of rank in these sub-units – from director generals to executive officers. However, by concentrating on officials at the ‘A’ level we aim to study officials who are involved in policy-making activities. Two general caveats are warranted: First, the selected cases are merely illustrative devices to examine actor-level supranationalism within international bureaucracies. Secondly, these cases also merely illuminate causal mechanisms. Table 1 summarises the interviews conducted.

Table 1 List of interviewees among *permanent* officials, by formal rank

	Top managers (director-generals, deputy director- generals, or equivalent)	Middle managers (directors, heads of unit, deputies, or equivalent)	Desk officials (advisors, counsellors, case handlers, analysts, officers, or equivalent)	Total
The Commission	1	9	14	24
The OECD Secretariat	0	10	18	28
The WTO Secretariat	2	4	13	19
Total	3	23	45	71

Actor-level Supranationalism Among International Civil Servants

Organisational Rule-Following

Socialisation sometimes cannot occur fully if the mechanisms of internal and external control and discipline operate alone (Checkel 2007; Gheciu 2007). As predicted, this section shows that the mechanism of organisational rule-following mainly fosters supranational ‘sector enthusiasts’ among international civil servants. However, this mechanism also accompanies general supranational enthusiasm among the ‘true believers’.

The formal structures of organisations often provide ambiguous cues for action among the personnel. Under such conditions, an informal structure may complement the formal rules with informal norms of action. As observed in the Commission and the OECD Secretariat, the formal hierarchy is constantly supplemented by different informal hierarchies that partly crisscross the formal hierarchy. Most of the permanent officials interviewed in the Commission attach strong identity to the Commission services. However, the vast majority report that their main Commission identity is attached to the administrative sub-units (Directorate Generals (DGs)) and that only secondary identification is directed to the unit and the Commission as a whole. One explanation for the DG identification is that for most officials the personnel rotation system accompanies fairly short tenure within each unit although a more enduring tenure within the DG as a whole. Whereas previous research underlines the importance of loyalty towards the Commission as a whole (Suvarierol 2007: 122), our data suggests sub-systemic DG loyalties, identities and roles:

I don't identify just with the unit, because I have been here three years and I have done so many other units before. So for me it is one step up in the DG. I have done so many things in this DG, so my identification with the DG is stronger, I would say.

(Commission 8)

I would say [I attach more identification towards] the DG than the Commission. I feel an attachment to the DG Trade, rather than to the Commission as a whole. It is a certain team spirit – the DG Trade – a hard working DG.

(Commission 16)

There is an *esprit de corps* at the level of the directorate. I think it is the culture of this work that is already here. It is something that you cannot see, but you have it there. And it has been probably introduced years ago in order to ensure that the 25 different nationalities end up producing the same thing, irrespective of the fact that I am Greek and somebody else is German or French.

(Commission 24 – emphasis added)

Most of the officials interviewed in the OECD Secretariat attach quite strong identities towards semi-autonomous directorates. The vast majority of our interviewees report that their main OECD identity is attached towards the sub-systemic level, and that secondary identification is directed towards the OECD as a whole. Similar to the Commission, the role and identity perceptions among OECD personnel reflect the formal organisation of the administration. Due to the formal embedment of the officials within the OECD organisation writ large as well as within the directorates and teams, we find role and identity perceptions attached to all these levels in the Secretariat.

Firstly, we observe fairly strong OECD-level identities among several interviewees. These identities are clearly multiple – being directed both towards the OECD Secretariat as a whole and towards sub-units inside the Secretariat. The following quotes reflect OECD-level roles and identity perceptions:

My role is to be here for the OECD, not to be a British civil servant at all. We are not here to represent our own countries in any way. I work as an international civil servant in the OECD. I am just surprised about your questions regarding the nationality and representation, because for me it should be clear for anybody working for the OECD that you are not representing your country, you are working for the OECD as a whole.

(OECD 2)

I think [the *esprit de corps*] is quite strong in the OECD. And within the unit or division, of course, the personality of the manager is very important in developing the *esprit de corps* and common purpose. In the OECD I would say that each directorate has its own personality, and that there is a very strong *esprit de corps* in the individual directorates. There is an OECD culture, but the subculture varies from one directorate to the next.

(OECD 9 – emphasis added)

As already indicated by the official above, the personal attachment at the directorate level is fairly strong in the OECD Secretariat:

My division has a strong *esprit de corps* [...] The organisation is kept largely because of the Head Office – the Secretary-General’s office – and that it’s a loose confederation of directorates.

(OECD 6)

I think all directorates have an *esprit de corps*.

Q: Would you say there is also an overall OECD *esprit de corps*?

Not enough, and for such reasons I said [...] I think it is a sort of ‘hub and spokes’, you know. The ‘hub’ is, if you like, the Secretary-General’s Private Office [...] and then you have the spokes, which are the individual directorates, which link out to the ministries.

(OECD 13)

Finally, the horizontal specialisation of the WTO Secretariat also plays out with respect to the role and identity perceptions reported by WTO staff. Most officials seem to attach an institutional allegiance towards their unit and teams, towards the WTO Secretariat as a whole and towards the whole WTO organisation. Similar to the Commission and the OECD Secretariat, most WTO officials evoke multiple allegiances inside the bureaucracy. To some extent, these identities may be seen as concentric circles where identification towards the unit level requires some degree of identification towards the Secretariat as a whole. Hence, unit identities may be seen as foundational for the subsequent emergence of higher-level identifications. Consequently, sub-unit allegiances towards units and teams would require allegiances towards the WTO Secretariat in the first place.

Similar to cutting-edge identity research (e.g. Herrman et al. 2004) and parallel to our observations in the Commission and the OECD Secretariat, officials in the WTO Secretariat tend to evoke multiple roles:

I think I sort of walk the line between being a WTO representative and needing to be impartial.

(WTO 6)

Moreover, role perceptions tend to shift when officials change organisational affiliations:

It is obvious that when we are operating outside the WTO, in other intergovernmental organisations, then we are representing the WTO as an institution, and we have to be aware of that. It might be that in some contexts, you know, if you are at an academic conference, you could try to pretend that you are speaking in a personal capacity.

(WTO 1)

The fairly small size of the WTO Secretariat and the fairly low turnover of personnel accompany elements of an overarching Secretariat identity. Our interviewees report that WTO officials attach fairly strong identities towards their specialised portfolios. In addition, officials in the WTO Secretariat seem to have a 'corporate' identity towards the Secretariat as a whole, and this identity is attached to the neutrality of being an international civil servant:

People talk about 'in the house' - this place like a house. I think it reflects a little bit a group feeling.

(WTO 5)

The WTO Secretariat is a strongly horizontally-specialised bureaucracy. Our interviewees testify that this horizontal specialisation of the Secretariat leads to strong divisional identities. Hence:

This co-operative culture doesn't exist in this organisation.

(WTO 9)

I have a loyalty to the [...] division. It is absolutely fatal for people to stay too long in one single division. It's absolutely fatal. And I see it around me every day. And that's something that needs to be addressed. Why? There is too much comfort, and you fall into a comfort zone if you are dealing with the same issue all the time.

(WTO 13)

One aspect of rule-driven actor-level supranationalism among international civil servants is related to their external representation as evident in the following quote: 'It is obvious that when we are operating outside the WTO, in other intergovernmental organisations, then we are representing the WTO as

an institution, and we have to be aware of that' (WTO 1). This WTO official indicates that s/he *has* to be aware of the supranational role; it is considered mandatory to represent the WTO as a whole. In their external representation, civil servants report that *if* they act in conflict with core rules of the organisation, they may be subject to sanctions. When asked about how to behave when representing the WTO externally, one WTO official responds:

Yes, of course you have to be careful not to say weird things and things that are totally just not acceptable, or contentious. To say things about the negotiations sort of [...] on some contentious issues [...] or to express a strong opinion that you support one view or another – that is dangerous and it is not to be tolerated. But it's not a question of asking permission. Now of course, to speak at conferences you have to get permission, for obvious reasons. But it's not so much that you send your statement to your boss to check.

(WTO 13)

When asked about the possible sanctions for going against these norms, the same official says: 'You are fired [...] or you are called in'.

(WTO 13)

Q: Even though the assessments are made according to the WTO rules, do you, as a Secretariat official, have to be careful about making formulations such as 'This is the best solution according to what I believe'? Because if that sentence is there, is there a risk that the paper will just be 'shot down' by the member states?

Oh yes, oh yes, there are things you have to be aware of and, you know, sometimes you get caught by surprise. There's a sensitivity that you weren't aware of and somebody reacts very strongly to something and you [...] 'Oh, where did that come from?'

(WTO 15)

This quote shows that civil servants have to 'tread a careful path' because of the awareness and control of member-states. The following quotes from OECD officials are also illustrative:

As an OECD person, you should be kind of neutral. I'm not working for the French or US government; I am working for the OECD. Period.

(OECD 26)

It is quite imperative not to be biased by your nationality.

(OECD 15)

So I am aware of the OECD line and agreed position, and I know it is incumbent upon me to reflect that agreed line and the conclusions of the work that we have done. It's not my position to bolster independent opinions on some policy issues that we have not done any research on or where my research hasn't been done as part of an agreed OECD process.

(OECD 17)

When asked if they all consider themselves international civil servants, one OECD official responds: 'Yes. You have to, in that job; you wouldn't last long otherwise. We are not here to represent our own countries in any way' (OECD 2). In sum, external and internal control and discipline seem to enhance the adoption of the supranational enthusiasts among international civil servants. Some officials seem to enact a supranational role in the form of 'guardians of the system'. A quote from one WTO official illustrates this. S/he was asked whether the WTO agreements amount to a kind of constitution that the civil servants have to relate to at all times:

Exactly! But I don't really think [...] I don't think I will ever come across someone who doesn't really believe in that. But some people have different views about [...] you know, some people look at it more from a developing-country perspective and other people from other perspectives. Some of the people might think that some of the rules are more or less equitable.

(WTO 1)

These observations show that even though civil servants may become 'guardians of the system' and have to constantly relate to the organisation's rules, they do not necessarily believe in or agree with all rules. Internal control from the bureaucratic leadership and external control from the member states, in addition to discipline through career opportunities, may foster a supranational role among civil servants in the sense of appearing as 'guardians of the system'. Civil servants gain authority and credibility through their expertise and impartiality against particular national interests, and through their emphasis on the aims and rules of the organisation. Organisational rule-following within international bureaucracy thus mainly accompany supranational 'sector enthusiasm' within the boundaries set by the vision and mission of the IO.

'In-house' Organisational Socialisation

Even though pre-socialisation remains as a factor to be considered in relation to supranational enthusiasm, an important finding in this study is that the civil servants are further shaped by the organisation setting in which they operate. Our data clearly shows that international civil servants are affected by internal factors, i.e. they are shaped and socialised towards supranational enthusiasm through experience. This form of socialisation is linked to the Weberian bureaucracy model, i.e. socialisation within organisations. In the following, we look in particular at how experience from working within an international bureaucracy can affect civil servants' commitment and loyalty to the organisation. Re-socialisation, however, does not exclude the effect of pre-socialisation: someone who shares the norms of the IO before working there may be further socialised within the organisation. To illustrate this dual mechanism, one civil servant responds:

Oh yes, I am convinced. I saw [...] as a junior diplomat I participated in the making of this organisation. I saw this organisation being born. I was here in Geneva when the organisation was created, and I was here in Geneva when these agreements were negotiated. So I truly believe in the ideas.

(WTO 9)

This official thus relates his or her beliefs in the organisation to the close contact s/he had with the WTO in previous jobs. One Commission official also mentions that his or her commitment to the EU began a long time before s/he joined the Commission:

But I always bore in mind the possibility to work for the institutions, maybe not from 16 years old but certainly from 22 years old.

(Commission 20)

When asked if it was a wish early on to come to the Commission, she replied:

I was very much conscious of the project of building Europe [...] And I knew about Jean Monnet [...] and I thought 'It's a big project, an important project, and it is a project qui vient fédérer les états'. It's politically a very difficult project but it is certainly a project I want to work for with my very small means, my very small competencies and capacities.

(Commission 20)

Q: Is it easy to follow that vision – your European vision – in your day-to-day work?

Yes, because the vision is very strong. My vision of what I want to do and of what the Commission wants to do is very coherent. They match one another. But also that vision is stronger than, let's say, the everyday life and problems I can have. That is my view. Some other people are more concerned with their own career.

(Commission 20)

These observations illustrate how pre-commitment to the vision and mission of an IO can enhance the subsequent enactment of general supranational enthusiasm after being hired. Civil servants may thus share some norms of IOs before entering. These civil servants are predisposed to become loyal to the organisation's vision and mission quite quickly upon arrival. Moreover, if such pre-socialisation is salient, there is a potential for a biased (self-) selection among the respondents. In line with the idea of representative bureaucracy, the international bureaucracy will in such cases be representative mainly of the enthusiasts and true believers in the organisation. Some civil servants indeed start working for an IO because they truly believe in the organisation. It is, however, less clear from our data how such beliefs affect actual decision-making behaviour among staff. Despite pre-socialisation occurring, however, this seems to be less important in order to understand decision-making behaviour among international civil servants.

General supranational enthusiasm is emphasised in the following quotes from two WTO officials:

We are the guardians of the book. We have to believe in what is in here, because if we don't believe, nobody believes. Then we might as well go home.

(WTO 9)

I think we have to be committed to what the WTO is as an institution, which basically is for trade liberalisation, and so clearly you have to believe in that. Otherwise it could be very difficult, personally, if you don't believe in the goal of your organisation, that the WTO is an institution which basically is a force for good – you know, the goals of the WTO [...].

(WTO 3)

One OECD official indicates that s/he has had been a general supranational enthusiast for a long time, not in relation to the OECD in particular but in relation to IOs in general. Another OECD official indicates that his or her enthusiasm towards the OECD comes from his or her prior experience in private sector:

I think there was probably something philosophical in the beginning, because when I finished university I was very attracted by the international organisations: the values, the mission, things like that.

(OECD 27)

I am the treasurer of the OECD, and I have a business card. And I am proud of the OECD. That is one of the things I like about working at the OECD: I like what the OECD does, it has a positive influence in the world. Coming from the private sector as an American, I am very much in favour of a lot of the things the OECD does - like free trade; like intelligent government policy over business, over taxation; having environment regulations that work, that businesses and people can work with. That governments can promote better policies in areas such as taxation thanks to the work that the OECD does, is very positive.

(OECD 23)

One WTO official stated that s/he believed in the GATT/WTO before starting working there, but s/he emphasises particular aspects of the organisation's mission:

I believed that market access for products, and how countries become less dependent on money by helping them to sell abroad [...] I believed in that [...] but across the border, random trade liberalisation [...] when I came, no I didn't think [...] But the GATT never stood for that either. The GATT was not about free trade, the GATT was about, the WTO is about, breaking down certain barriers and trade-distorted measures so that countries at least have more opportunity to sell abroad [...].

(WTO 2)

These observations illustrate pre-socialisation towards a general supranationalist enthusiastic orientation towards the vision and mission of an IO. As indicated above, pre-socialisation within international bureaucracies mainly accompany 'true believers' - those who believe in the overall mission of the organisation, even as a 'force for good'. Our data also shows, as predicted, that general supranational enthusiasm is nurtured by long tenure among international civil servants within IOs. The following quote from an OECD official illustrates how long tenure in an international bureaucracy can nurture a re-socialisation of staff towards a general supranational enthusiasm:

Fundamentally, my impression is that when people have joined the OECD, and they have worked here for a while, they no longer behave as nationals of any particular member country, but they serve the interests

of the organisation. And it doesn't really matter whether they are Canadian, Australian or Belgian - they work towards the common aim of the organisation.

(OECD 11)

When asked about his or her general commitment to the goals of their organisation, two officials respond as follows:

Yes, I think so. I mean I've spent 30+ years of my life here, so it would be bizarre if I did not. I do feel commitment to the organisation. [...] Yes, I feel a commitment. I think it would be difficult if you didn't believe in an open-rules-based trading system, that it was in the basic interest of humanity.

(WTO 1)

[...] But, as I said, I think that being an international civil servant and the more years you do that type of job, the more you tend to represent the organisation rather than individuals or divisions or whatever.

(OECD 16)

'In-house' organisational re-socialisation into the norms of IOs can also be illustrated by the following response from a WTO official when asked what kind of advice s/he could offer the members: 'Of course it has to be WTO-friendly, and then after a while you get [...] you cannot go against the philosophy of what this institution stands for' (WTO 2). When asked to what extent the WTO Secretariat should be the 'guardians of the treaties', one WTO official confirmed that s/he had taken on the role of a 'guardian'. However, s/he also includes a more proactive role, i.e. as an agent for improving the system:

I think this is what has been agreed, but I have my views, and I think there are things that should be changed in this agreement to make it fairer, to make it more effective, and I will be happy to defend my views. But I think it has to be changed by negotiation in this organisation. You are not going to change it by destroying the WTO. That is the message. I am the guardian of the book. The book is not perfect. So my task is to convince people that this book should be improved, here. That is the mission. The mission is to make a multilateral trading system which is fair, which is fair to the developing countries, and which is better than what it is now.

(WTO 9)

This observation illustrates both a sense of commitment to the organisation while at the same time seeing the Secretariat's role as being more than a neutral facilitator. This WTO official emphasises the role as a defender of the system, but s/he even includes in his or her role the task of suggesting needs for change. Re-socialisation within international bureaucracies can also strengthen civil servants' feeling of being part of a collective, being part of something 'beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand' (Selznick 1957: 17). In-house re-socialisation like this thus tends to foster general supranational enthusiasm among staff. Two Commission officials also report supranational enthusiasm by emphasising that their feeling of belonging is aimed towards European integration generally and not towards particular EU institutions or member-states:

Definition-wise, I am working for the European Commission and, in a broader sense, for the Union. So I wouldn't have any ideological problems working for the Council Secretariat, for example.

(Commission 11)

Well, it is the Community interest in the matter which is prime, and this interest of the Community is not necessarily identical with the interests of any single member state - even if you take them all together.

(Commission 14)

This last quote indicates that the civil servant sees the Community interest as something more than the aggregate of member-state collective interests. It alludes to a general belief in a supranational interest - a collective EU interest relatively independent of member-states. Another Commission official illustrates beliefs shaped by the organisation. However, in this case re-socialisation within the Commission seems to have made him or her *less* dedicated to the 'EU project':

I am more focused on what I do. I am very happy with the job I have, with the colleagues I have, I couldn't be happier. I have to struggle to remain faithful to Europe. I am still, but when I joined the Commission, I was for a very long time enthusiastic. I mean I was very proud working in the Commission. Not only proud, I thought we were going to take us very far. But today I am much more sceptical.

(Commission 24)

This quote illustrates that re-socialisation within organisations may sometimes result in less enthusiastic attitudes towards the organisation. Socialisation should thus not be conflated with the emergence of 'pro-norm behaviour' (Zurn and Checkel 2007) or 'pro-social' behaviour (Lewis 2007). 'Socialisation

processes do not necessarily entail harmony and the absence of conflicts' (Beyers 2010: 912). Lack of organisational enthusiasm may more easily emerge when organisations face periods of enlargement or internal reforms, potentially challenging pre-existing norms and long-cherished beliefs among the personnel (see Ban 2013; Bauer 2012: 469; Dehousse and Thompson 2012: 126).

Conclusion

The most important ambition of this paper has been to theorise mechanisms of bureaucratic autonomy. The empirical illustrations above suggest that actor-level supranationalism tends to arise foremost through processes *internal* to IOs. This study thus substantiates that international bureaucracies may possess considerable capacity to act relatively independent of member-state governments. This capacity is demonstrated when international civil servants develop a supranational mind-set through the mechanism of organisational rule-following and organisational re-socialisation. The data reported suggests that supranational sector enthusiasm is mainly nurtured by organisational rule-following and supranational enthusiasm is promoted mainly by in-house organisational socialisation through the mechanism of tenure. As a consequence, a larger variation in actor-level supranationalism is observed within, rather than between, international bureaucracies. The supranational sector enthusiasts are civil servants who are enthusiastic about the international organisation because of particular issues that the organisation deals with, but they are not necessarily enthusiastic about everything the organisation does. The general supranational enthusiasts - the true believers - are civil servants who truly believe in the overall goals of the organisations and view the organisation as a force for good. Both types of actor-level supranationalism are present among civil servants both in the WTO Secretariat, the OECD Secretariat and the Commission administration. The Commission is not any different in this regard.

What is surprising about these observations is not the presence of actor-level supranationalism among international civil servants, but that the same behavioural logic is observed among international civil servants serving within international bureaucracies that are embedded in three seemingly different IOs. One theoretical lesson learned is thus that international bureaucracies may possess considerable capacity to shape essential behavioural perceptions among its staff in general, and foster behavioural autonomy in particular, through the two causal mechanisms: (i) behavioural and role *adaptation* through organisational rule-following, and (ii) behavioural and role *internalisation* through 'in-house' organisational socialisation. In line

with the Weberian model of bureaucracy, international bureaucracies thus have capacity, through socialisation as well as discipline and control, to create codes of conduct and senses of community that are relatively independent of constituent states.

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Appendix 1

Interview guide to officials at the European Commission, the WTO Secretariat, and the OECD Secretariat

Background:

- Nationality?
- What is your educational and professional background?
- For how long have you worked in current institution/unit/portfolio?
- When, why, how and from where were you recruited to this institution?
- What are the main differences between working here and in previous positions?

General institutional questions

- How would you generally describe your daily work?
- Currently, what issues are central in your work?
- What is your current position, rank, unit?
- Do you have a clear-cut work-description?
- Inside your unit/division/portfolio, what issues cause divisions of opinion/conflicts? (Are these large or minor conflicts)

Behavioural questions

- With whom do you regularly interact at work?
 - o Colleagues in your unit/division?
 - o Other units/divisions/?
 - o Head of unit
 - o The top administrative leadership of your institution?
 - o Domestic government institutions? – ministries/agencies? (within your own portfolio or across portfolios?)
 - o External experts/universities/research institutions?
 - o Industry/consultancies etc?
 - o Other international secretariats/organizations
- With whom do you regularly interact outside office?
 - o Colleagues in your unit/division?
 - o Own nationals?
 - o Other nationals?

In general, what would you consider to be the most important contacts in your position?

Personal perceptions

- Does your nationality or the nationality of your colleagues, 'matter' with respect to your daily work?
- Has an *esprit de corps* developed within your unit/division?
- To what extent do you identify with or feel a personal attachment towards:
 - o Your unit/portfolio?
 - o Your organization as a whole
 - o Your profession, educational background
 - o The member-state administrations
- What kind of roles do you regularly emphasise at work?
 - o As representative for the institution as a whole?
 - o As representative for the unit/portfolio?
 - o As representative for your professional expertise?
 - o As representative for the member-states or for your own country of origin (country)?
- What considerations are vital for you?
 - o Your institution as a whole? (e.g. goals, mission etc.)
 - o Your unit/division?
 - o Your profession/expertise?
 - o The member-states?
 - o Your policy sector/portfolio?

Formal rules and procedures within your institution/unit?

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