



Post-Lisbon Policy-Making in the European Commission

Juncker's Politics of (Re-)Structuring Intra- Commission Policy Formulation Processes

Kristina Ophey



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Kristina Ophey is PhD Fellow at University of Cologne.

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ARENA Centre for European Studies
University of Oslo
P.O.Box 1143, Blindern
N-0318 Oslo Norway
www.arena.uio.no

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Abstract

The article tests one of the most central and still most controversial hypotheses of organization theory: the influence of organizational structures on actors' decision behavior in intra-institutional policy-making processes. As a recently restructured core executive, the European Commission is the case of investigation. Based on interview data, actors' cooperation and coordination behavior is evaluated and compared in interdepartmental initiation processes in three policy areas before and after the Juncker reform. The systematic difference in actors' behavior speaks for a causal effect of organizational variables. Given the alternative perspective that has long dominated administrative science theorizing, emphasizing the causal effect of informal, cultural factors, the strength of the effect astonishes and draws attention to the conditions of the effect of organizational variables.

Keywords

Administrative Reform - Core-Executive Policy-Making - European Commission - Organization Theory - Organizational Structure

Introduction

Does deliberate organizational (re)design of public institutions systematically affect actors' decision behavior in policy-making processes and thereby, ultimately, public policies? The question of the effects of organization on actors' cooperation and coordination behavior in policy-making processes within administrative apparatuses is key in both institution-oriented political science and organization-theoretical administrative science. Both discuss the possibilities of conscious organizational manipulation to influence actors' behavior in policy-making processes and thus, ultimately, policy content. The central and still controversial hypothesis is that organizational structures and processes can influence actors' decision behavior in intra-institutional policy-making processes.

However, not only does a plethora of empirical examples of lacking, ambiguous or hard-to-anticipate reform effects call this hypothesis into question; prominent theoretical alternatives also question this central organizational theoretical assumption (Olsen 1997). Informal factors such as the organizational culture of the administrative apparatus or actors' pre-socialization are often discussed not only as alternative to organizational, structural factors, but also as antagonistic to them and have dominated the debate in administrative science for a long time (Egeberg 2012; Toonen 2012, p. 574; see also Meier & Krause 2005, p. 15). This article aims to make an empirical contribution to the debate by testing this hypothesis in detail on a concrete case of organizational restructuring of a public institution – the European Commission. With help of an over-time comparison covering three large policy areas of the Commission, the following research question will be answered: Is the decision-making behavior of actors in the European Commission after the changes of the organizational structure by the Juncker Reform different from the status quo ante? In particular, the article will study the changes in interdepartmental coordination and cooperation in legislative initiative development processes (initiation processes) in the European Commission.

When Jean-Claude Juncker took office at the end of 2014 as the first President of the Commission elected as Spitzenkandidat under the lead candidate procedure (Christiansen 2015), he initiated an organizational reform in the Commission – the Juncker Reform. He thereby aimed to influence the coordination and cooperation behavior of the actors of the individual organizational units in the Commission in such a way that legislative proposals are drawn up internally in a more inclusive, interdepartmental manner (European Commission 2014; Juncker 2014). Ultimately, Juncker wanted to achieve his political priorities by feeding more overarching initiatives (than before) into the European Union's interinstitutional legislative process. For example, at the Commission's political level and along vertical lines, the reform brought a structural change into the College of Commissioners by redefining the role of the Vice-Presidents, thereby creating a new hierarchical level. These should now coordinate and guide the work of policy related Commissioners and act as gatekeepers for legislative proposals coming from below. At the administrative level and along horizontal lines, the reform strengthened the position and influence of the Secretariat General (SecGen) in the internal policy-making processes. The SecGen will now promote and ensure interdepartmental cooperation and chair meetings of several

Directorates-General (DGs) on a legislative initiative (Bürgin 2018; European Commission 2014; Kassim 2016).

Overcoming coordination and cooperation problems between the (actors of) individual units of an administrative apparatus represent an almost omnipresent challenge for core executives, especially in the creative phase of legislative agenda-setting (Dunleavy & Rhodes 1990; Mayntz & Scharpf 1975). This very characteristic internal challenge for core executives is due to core executives' typically (and necessarily (Simon 1965)) highly differentiated internal organizational specialization along horizontal and vertical lines (Gulick 1937; Mayntz & Scharpf 1975). The high degree of organizational specialization directly influences both problem perception and preference-weighting of the actors depending on their localization within the organization. Along horizontal lines, actors clearly prioritize the interests of their respective department before all others. Actors' attention towards broader problem complexes correlates, along vertical lines, with their hierarchical positioning; the hierarchically higher an actor is in the administration, the broader and more comprehensive his view tends to be (to a certain degree, given cognitive limits (Simon 1965)) (Allison 1971; Mayntz & Scharpf 1975).

In this respect, the European Commission is undoubtedly a "normalized" bureaucracy (Wille 2013) and thus an exemplary case for examining the general hypothesis. Moreover, the Commission's internal policy-making processes are of political and social importance. The Commission has a central position in the multi-level institutional framework of the EU in general (Hartlapp, Metz, & Rauh 2014; Nugent 2000; Trondal & Bauer 2017, p. 79) and a privileged position in legislative agenda setting in particular. By preparing legislative initiatives, the Commission can influence the EU policy-making process from the very beginning (Peters 1994, p. 21; Schmidt 2000; Tsebelis & Garrett 2000, p. 279). Moreover, the Commission has also gradually become a more political institution, both in terms of staffing and contractually, through an increasingly more political composition of the College of Commissioners (Döring 2007; Peterson 2012; Spence 2006) and an ever stronger link to the European Parliament, particularly in the appointment procedure for the members of the College (Bürgin 2018; Christiansen 2015). The lead candidate procedure, which is based on a change in the treaty text (Article 17(7) TEU) but nowhere regulated explicitly, has once again brought the Commission closer to Parliament so that the resulting Commission President – one might argue – has more political legitimacy than ever before.

However, scholarly contributions on the Juncker Commission so far either have a broader, inter-institutional, partly normative focus or take an intra-organizational perspective, but do not directly investigate the possible effects on internal coordination through changes in actors' decision behavior (Bürgin 2018). On the other hand, studies on core executives in general, which take intra-institutional and organization-theoretical perspectives, have recently resurged (Toonen 2012, p. 574). This paper belongs to this group of administrative science contributions. In the following section, it presents central results of studies of intra-organizational structures and processes with an organization-theoretical perspective and with a focus on the Commission in order to grasp the status quo ante. At the same time, the Juncker Reform is introduced

in more detail, without, however, striving for completeness; rather, it is guided by the theoretical perspective this paper takes. In the third part, this theoretical perspective is presented in more detail and combined with the analytical framework proposed by Egeberg and colleagues (Egeberg 2012; Egeberg, Gornitzka, & Trondal 2016). Section four discloses the paper's methodological approach and justifies the selection of the three policy areas. Subsequently, the empirical material is presented and analyzed against the background of the analytical framework along vertical and horizontal lines. The last section discusses the possibilities and limitations of causal conclusions and embeds the results in the broader frame of the potentials for influencing core-executive actors' decision behavior in policy-making via organizational (re)design.

Status quo ante of intra-organizational cooperation in the European Commission and the Juncker reform

Information on the status quo ante of intra-organizational cooperation in initiation processes in the Commission is provided by the results of some important studies on the internal functioning of the Commission. All are primarily interested in power relations within the Commission bureaucracy and focus less on the effects of organizational factors on actors' decision behavior. Nevertheless, relevant conclusions can be drawn from the results of these studies. Along vertical lines, Kassim and colleagues have shown that the power and influence of the actors at the level of the College of Commissioners is also related to the way and intensity of their relations to the units on the administrative level (et al. 2017, p. 2). It is argued, for example, that the President's internal power, especially directly vis-à-vis the other Commissioners, has been strengthened by his increasingly strong vertical link to the SecGen and the SecGen's central position between the DGs (Kassim et al. 2017; see also Kassim 2006), so that the long-adequate characterization as *primus inter pares* is increasingly less accurate. Thus, it has been shown that in the pre-Juncker Commission, intra-organizational connectedness of individual units on a vertical dimension affects the scope of action of the actors in the respective units. With view to organizational role perceptions as an explanatory variable (Egeberg 2006), Hartlapp and colleagues showed on horizontal lines that the scope for the DGs to influence intra-organizational policy-making processes significantly depends on their positioning in the respective processes (2013; 2014). Thus, DGs that have the main responsibility in an initiation process have systematically more influence than the remaining DGs – even those whose portfolios are of substantive importance for the respective initiative. Those DGs in lead seem to use their privileged position strategically to enforce their policy preferences – filtered through the lenses of their respective policy departments – for example, by deliberately consulting or sharing information with potentially interested units as late as possible. Thus, it has been shown that the organizational structure of the pre-Juncker Commission reinforced actors' tendency to work in silos.

The Juncker reform involves organizational changes of processes and structures on horizontal and vertical lines in the Commission's initiation processes. It has been clearly communicated that the reform aims to influence and intensify the coordination and cooperation behavior of the actors in the Commission bureaucracy and to

strengthen the President's control over the policy development processes. On a vertical dimension, the reform restructured the College of Commissioners. By renewing the role of Vice-Presidents and creating a new post, the First Vice-President, Juncker increased the number of hierarchical levels and roles in the College. There had always been Vice-Presidents but in the pre-Juncker Commission they could be distinguished from the other Commissioners only formally. Under Juncker, broad policy areas have been allocated to the Vice-Presidents, each covering a small number of portfolios of Commissioners whose work they are to coordinate and guide in so-called 'project teams'. With two exceptions, the Vice-Presidents no longer have their own DG at their disposal; instead, they can call on the services of the SecGen. At the administrative level, along horizontal lines, the reform has strengthened the position and influence of the SecGen in internal policy-making processes. His responsibilities have always included coordination between DGs initiation processes. The Juncker reform, however, provided the SecGen with a stronger organizational anchor in these processes. Now, the SecGen convenes and chairs interdepartmental meetings that were formerly managed by the lead DG. The aim is to ensure and intensify cooperation and coordination between the DGs and decrease siloization.

Coordination between and coupling of intra-organizational units

The pronounced internal specialization typical for core executives goes along with the need for coordination, especially in the case of tasks of interdepartmental interest, such as the development of legislative initiatives. This is by no means a young insight of administrative science, but can be found in the work of Gulick (1937; cf. Hustedt & Veit 2014; Radtke, Hustedt, & Klinnert 2016). This raises the question of how this quasi-institutionalized coordination dilemma can be addressed and overcome. A reduction of the degree of functional differentiation is hardly possible (Mayntz & Scharpf 1975; Simon 1965). At the same time, the organizational role of an actor, determined by his localization within the organization, influences his perception and preferences in that he analyses problems from the point of view of his assigned role and develops appropriate preferences to solve those problems. Thus, the limited, if at all, interdepartmental view of most bureaucratic actors in the respective organizational units is part of their role expectations - in particular, the more differentiated and specialized the roles are along horizontal lines. Actors in higher hierarchical positions tend to have a more overarching view (Allison 1971; Mayntz & Scharpf 1975).

As a rule, core executives are characterized by "negative coordination" due to the organizational specialization that focuses the attention of the actors to their areas of responsibility. Negative coordination means that legislative initiative proposals are primarily developed within the organizational unit that has primary responsibility for the respective proposal. Only once an initiative proposal has reached a fairly developed stage, other units with a policy-based interest in the proposal are consulted. Interdepartmental cooperation and coordination is mainly focused on clarifying whether the proposal conflicts with their interests or areas of competence (Mayntz & Scharpf 1975). If this is the case, the main organizational unit responsible can make changes to the proposal to avoid a veto by the other units. This often leads to proposals

based on the lowest common denominator. There is no early interdepartmental exchange and pooling of interests. "Positive coordination," on the other hand, can, as is assumed, lead to more interdepartmental, coherent and sustainable legislative initiatives. While this causal relationship cannot be tested directly in this paper, the idea of conscious organizational design of core-executive initiation processes to influence the coordination behavior of actors will be investigated.

The organizational approach to public governance developed by Egeberg and colleagues (2012; Egeberg et al., 2016) is very well suited for investigating this relationship. It provides an analytical framework for the investigation along various generic structural dimensions that could systematically and predictably influence actors' decision behavior (Egeberg, Gornitzka & Trondal 2016, p. 34). Four organizational characteristics are distinguished: organizational capacity, specialization, affiliation, and coupling (cf. Egeberg 2012). Organizational capacity means the (relative) personnel size of the units within an organization. It is argued that more heavily staffed units can process larger amounts of information, identify more problems and devote themselves more intensively to cross-departmental initiation processes. The dimension of organizational specialization refers to the way in which organizations are internally differentiated along horizontal and vertical lines. Horizontal specialization – structurally anchored division of labor along horizontal lines – can follow different logics. The most common division is based on purpose or function, but it can also be based on geography or target group. It is expected that the actors of the same unit will be able to work more closely together and, consequently, that the composition of the organizational units can influence their decision behavior. Vertical specialization refers to tasks that are distributed along vertical lines, both within an organization and between different organizations. This could influence the degree of political influence in the initiation processes. Organizational affiliation of an actor describes whether he belongs primarily or secondarily to an organizational unit or organization. If an actor works in an organization most of the time, this is called a primary affiliation; a secondary affiliation is given if an actor belongs only part-time to an organization, for example to a committee or network. It is expected that the actors prioritize the tasks and interests of organizations of primary affiliation. Organizational coupling means the strictness with which intra-organizational units are structurally and procedurally linked. It is argued that looser coupling would be anarchy-like and lead to fluid cooperation and coordination, which could overall lead to surprising results. Less loose coupling, on the other hand, increases the foreseeability of the results, but goes hand in hand with less flexibility and leads to more siloization. This gives rise to the expectation that looser coupling will lead to reduced siloization and more intensive interdepartmental cooperation.

Selection of policy areas and interview data

To test whether organizational factors, here with a focus on the analytical dimension of organizational coupling, influence the coordination and cooperation behavior of actors and thus the character of intra core executive policy-making processes, an over-time comparison is conducted. The European Commission is a well-suited case, as the

independent variable varies with the Juncker Reform. Three policy areas were selected to systematically record the behavior of actors on the basis of concrete initiation processes that were finished at the time of the main round of interviews.¹ A selection was necessary due to the costly data collection process. At the same time, the selection of the policy areas of consumer, social market and internal market policy should allow generalization of the results to a certain extent to all initiation processes in the Commission. This is because the policy areas are typically confronted with problem complexes that require or make desirable intense interdepartmental (positive) coordination and are therefore significant and representative policy areas against the theoretical background of this paper. Most of the interview partners selected were already members of the Commission's bureaucracy in the pre-Juncker Commission and were thus able to make comparative statements.

The interviewees were selected on the basis of concrete initiation processes, which constitute the research unit of the work, in the most frequently involved DGs of the selected policy areas. These are the DG for Justice and Consumers (DG JUST), Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL) and the Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (DG GROW). Approximately the same number of interviews were conducted in these three DGs and in the cabinets of the respective Commissioners and Vice-Presidents. In addition, interview partners were recruited from the most relevant central organizational units, i.e. the SecGen, the cabinet of the President and the First Vice-President. As can be seen in Table 1, the number of interview partners in central units is deliberately overrepresented compared to the number in the policy area related units.

Table 1: Interviewees along horizontal and vertical lines

		Central	Policy area	Total
Political level	Ultimate decision makers	0	0	0
	Coordinators and specialists	6	4	10
Administrative level	Ultimate decision makers and overall coordinators	1	3	4
	Coordinators and managers	5	7	12
	Specialists	3	4	7
Total		15	18	33

Source: Own compilation

In addition, the interview partners were selected in such a way that the entire hierarchy of the Commission, with exception of the level of the ultimate decision makers on the political level, i.e. the Commissioners and the President, is represented. The concept of core executive (Dunleavy & Rhodes 1990) has guided the distinction between functionally different types of actors along vertical lines. Together with the distinction between central and policy area related units, this leads to a differentiation between ten different types of actors relevant to legislative initiative development within the Commission bureaucracy, as shown in Table 2. This functional distinction

¹ 27 of the 33 interviews were conducted in mid-2016; six in early 2015 in a pilot project.

is referred back to in the empirical analysis and corresponds to the established organizational theoretical framework applied here. It can be assumed that not only the problem perception and preferences of the actors are related to their intra-organizational positioning, but also their perception and evaluation of the cooperation and coordination behavior of actors of other organizational units.

Table 2: Five hierarchically and functionally different types of core-executive actors and their job title in the Commission bureaucracy in central and policy area related units

		Central	Policy area
Political level	Ultimate decision makers	President	Commissioner or Vice-President
	Coordinators and specialists	Head of Cabinet, Deputy Head of Cabinet, Cabinet Member, assistant	Head of Cabinet, Deputy Head of Cabinet, Cabinet Member, assistant
Administrative level	Ultimate decision makers and overall coordinators	Secretary-General, Deputy Secretary-General, Director, assistant	Director-General, Deputy Director-General, Director, assistant
	Coordinators and managers	Head of Unit, Deputy Head of Unit, assistant	Head of Unit, Deputy Head of Unit, assistant
	Specialists	Desk, legislative or policy officer, assistant	Desk, legislative or policy officer, assistant

Source: Own compilation

In order to account for possible (intentional or non-intentional) biased perceptions of the interviewees and to ensure analytical accuracy appropriate to the theoretical perspective, statements are always evaluated against the background of an interviewee's organizational positioning and compared to statements of interviewees with a different organizational positioning. Anonymity of the interviewees is ensured; the numbering of the interviews is random.

Empirical analysis: The effects of the Juncker reform on actors' decision behavior

This section will answer the research question on the empirical basis of the insider interviews and against the theoretical background of the work. Is the decision-making behavior of the actors regarding interdepartmental coordination and cooperation in initiation processes in the European Commission after the Juncker Reform different from that of the status quo ante? First, the actors' understanding of the restructured organizational roles along vertical and horizontal lines is described. On vertical lines, this is the extension of hierarchical levels within the College of Commissioners, and on horizontal lines, it is the strengthening of the SecGen vis-à-vis the policy area related units, the DGs. Second, it is shown to what extent the organizational changes have led to a change in actors' coordination and cooperation behavior in the initiation processes.

Vertical dimension: Tendency towards a “coordinated approach”

The central innovation along vertical lines of the Commission's bureaucracy took place in the College of Commissioners. Here, the number of hierarchical levels was increased

by the introduction of Vice-Presidents whose role is different from that of the “usual Commissioners” (int. 32). While some, usually more experienced, Commissioners have always been additionally appointed as Vice-Presidents, this role has so far had little more than a formal character: “The role of the Vice-Presidents was just an honorific role but they didn't have any special task” (int. 8; also int. 1). Their tasks were also identical to those of the other Commissioners, especially with regard to policy-making. Their structural link to the administrative level was also identical: each Commissioner had a DG appropriate to his portfolio. Now, as a rule, the Vice-Presidents no longer have their own DG whose services they can rely on in the initiation processes. Instead, the Vice-Presidents can call on the services of the SecGen. They should coordinate and guide the work of Commissioners with related policy areas. Within the “more encompassing” (int. 16) portfolios assigned to them, the Vice-Presidents are to lead flexible project groups – “project teams” (int. 33) – consisting of several commissioners, and prepare legislative initiative proposals in the light of the political priorities defined by Juncker. There has never, not even formally, been a First Vice-President in the Commission before Juncker. The introduction of this position has further expanded the hierarchical specialization of the College of Commissioners. The role of the First Vice-President, occupied by Frans Timmermans, is different from that of the other Vice-Presidents. He is also expected to coordinate the work of related Commissioners. In addition, he should be involved in all initiation processes and check whether these are in line with the “better regulation principles” (int. 1). The First Vice-President is located close to the President: “Timmermans is Juncker's right hand man. Juncker will have Timmermans [...] always right next by his side” (int. 29).

Indeed, these structural changes within the College of Commissioners seem to have a systematic effect on the coordination and cooperation behavior of actors within the Commission bureaucracy and thus directly influence the initiation processes. For the actors directly involved in these processes at the administrative level, these “additional layers” (int. 33) in the College of Commissioners primarily mean that more gatekeepers on the vertical dimension need to be convinced of a legislative initiative proposal. Two “green lights” (int. 1, 8, 9, 15, 24) – those of the President and the responsible Commissioner – had always been needed to push a legislative proposal forward. In the pre-Juncker Commission, an idea was developed at administrative level and presented to the respective Commissioner via the hierarchy within a DG (int. 11). Commissioners were the main actor when it came to starting an initiation process and bringing the proposal to the President, while the other Commissioners (and DGs) often remained uninformed until later in the development process (int. 7, 9). Now, the agreement of two other actors, the Vice-President responsible and the First Vice-President, is required (int. 9, 32).

All types of core-executive actors interviewed agree that this has a significant impact on the character of the initiation processes. While legislative proposals in the pre-Juncker Commission were primarily developed in the administrative organizational units related to policy fields and resembled a bottom-up process – “ideas were cooked [...] in a service and [...] tried to push [...] upwards” (int. 13; also int. 3, 5, 23) –, the processes under Juncker are perceived as more top-down in character. “In the past an

official [...] had an idea, wrote it down, convinced his hierarchy, and then suddenly something came up” (int. 7).

Then Juncker announced that it should no longer be so. Now it is politically steered, top-down. So they see [...] a high political need, and say, 'please investigate this issue, prepare a proposal.' [...] President Juncker clearly said, 'We are not listening to these desk officers anymore, but we will ask them.'

(int. 5)

Only the tone of the interviewees differs depending on their location within the Commission bureaucracy. Political actors stress that the legislative proposals that have received “green lights” are congruent with Juncker's political priorities and do justice to the Commission's more political character and also avoid (too) sudden and uncoordinated ideas.

So, in the past it was different. Now the idea normally is born at the political level. And most of the time it's part of the political program of the President. That's how it is in this Commission. It is more top-down, because this is a political Commission, and these are political initiatives.

(int. 7; also int. 6, 10)

Meanwhile, actors at the administrative level, in particular policy area specialists, underline that “we are the experts, we have the knowledge” (int. 23). It is unlikely that legislative proposals in the Juncker Commission will receive “green lights” that originate in the lower administrative units and are not directly related to Juncker's priorities.

Nowadays, everything has to fit the priorities. All DGs are trying to fit under as many priorities as possible. Bottom-up is possible as well if you have a strong Head of Unit or Directorate, but it's rare, it's really rare and unusual now.

(int. 17)

A clear strategic response is emerging at the level of coordinators and managers in the policy area related DGs, i.e. those actors who form the bridge at the administrative level between the specialists in the individual organizational units and the administrative heads, and are the first internally to decide on the advancement of a proposal. While Barroso had also produced a document with political guidelines, Juncker's political priorities play a much more central role in the daily work of those actors and are “always on [their] table” (int. 11; also int. 10). Those actors expect considerably better chances of getting “their” proposal through if it is presented as part of a larger, narrative-like project; a clear trend towards “packages with initiatives” (int. 1; also int. 3) is discernible. “Stand-alone ideas for legislative proposals: no. They need to be part of a bigger policy package” (int. 2).

These actors seem to have strategically adapted their cooperation and coordination behavior to the changed structural conditions in order to convince decision-makers and gatekeepers at the political level of their proposals. For example, they try to make

interdepartmental agreements even before they submit a legislative initiative proposal, as this improves their chance of success – defined as getting a ‘green light’ to work on a legislative initiative proposal (cf. all int. of the actors in administrative policy area related units). This change in actors’ decision behavior is illustrated in the following words of an interviewee at the level of the ultimate decision-makers and overall coordinators, a Director, who has already managed to get through one of four initiatives of his Directorate in the preparation of the Commission's work program for 2017:

We’re still trying to find a way to have the others like to put in a package, to talk with other DGs. Because then you have initiatives that can be linked with other DGs. So we can talk to somebody else, say, ‘Can you propose this one? And then we jump on your boat.’ [...] So we are also trying to work across DGs. [...] The more DGs are on board in one initiative, the best it is. [...] There is a bit the tendency to have like a coordinated approach to things.

(int. 19)

The interview data therefore suggests that the changes in the organizational structures on vertical lines by the Juncker Reform have caused a change in the behavior of the actors. This is reflected in an increase in interdepartmental coordination (which is, so to speak, necessary from the point of view of the policy area related actors at administrative level). Nevertheless, the actors seem to continue to think in silos. This is “normal, because the change in an organization of 35,000 to overcome silos is a long process [...] in every ministry, in every organization this exists” (int. 7). In order to avoid this, structural changes were also made to the horizontal dimension.

Horizontal dimension: More intensive interdepartmental coordination “for our own precaution”

On horizontal lines, the reform has strengthened the position and influence of the SecGen in the intra core-executive policy-making processes at the administrative level. The strengthening of the SecGen was already established in the pre-Juncker Commission (int. 9, 24, 27). This was mainly based on the ever-closer connection between the President and his cabinet and the SecGen, which became the service of the President. The SecGen has also always been responsible for coordination between the DGs in initiation processes, as it, through its organizational positioning in the Commission bureaucracy, has a predestined position among the DGs. However, the Juncker reform has given the SecGen an even stronger procedural and structural foothold. It is now the SecGen that convenes and chairs meetings of several DGs; this is assessed by the actors as “one of the big changes to the Barroso Commission” (int. 2, also int. 27). While the SecGen was previously passively invited to an interdepartmental meeting by the DG responsible in each case (the lead DG), the SecGen now has a more active role in the initiation processes. The overall aim is to ensure and intensify cooperation and coordination between the DGs. In addition, the Vice-Presidents now also rely on the service of the SecGen. Thus, the SecGen can be expected to think even more politically, as the structural links to the College of Commissioners have increased.

These structural changes on horizontal lines introduced by the Juncker reform also seem to systematically influence the behavior of actors in the intra-organizational initiation processes. For the actors in the policy area related organizational units at administrative level, the enhanced role of the SecGen means that they have less scope for strategic action, for example the timing of interdepartmental consultation or information, especially if their organizational unit is primarily responsible for the development of a legislative proposal. The SecGen has always been involved in the initiation processes. In the pre-Juncker Commission, however, it was common practice that an idea at the administrative level was first developed relatively far within an organizational unit before interdepartmental exchange took place, so that the respective unit could steer the proposal “much more in [their] own direction” (int. 22; also int. 6, 7, 9, 11, 18) in order to have it politically approved – as described above – first of all within their department. The SecGen now has procedurally stronger opportunities to push a lead DG to interdepartmental cooperation.

As on vertical lines, there is a broad consensus among the interviewees regarding the effect of these organizational changes on actors’ behavior in initiation processes. The processes of the pre-Juncker Commission were characterized by pronounced silo behavior of the policy area related actors. The Juncker Commission still also generally appoints a DG with primary responsibility, “because it is practically speaking the best way to move forward” (int. 6; also int. 4), but the process is nevertheless perceived as more inclusive.

There will be processes which are driven by one DG, but in a different way, I would say, than in the Barroso Commission, where basically one DG simply then prepared everything, and at the end of the process, you would consult the others; and now everybody is involved from the start.

(int. 2)

More than that, in particular the actors at coordinator and manager level emphasize that this more pronounced type of interdepartmental cooperation was largely lacking during the Barroso Commission and would have been desirable, especially with view to the consistency of the legislative proposals:

This way of working together, I think, is something where everybody understood that this is missing in the Commission. So, and of course, dependent on the personal habits it’s more difficult to overcome the traditional way of working or less difficult, but it’s kind of understood that we need to do it. Not only because the political masters say it; because it’s simply obvious that we need to do it.

(int. 18; also int. 20)

Where you have conflicting interests, which is the case sometimes between different policy areas, by being less open and transparent and not involving everybody from the start of course you can steer it much more in your own direction than if it is coordinated [...]. So that was probably done on purpose in the past. Then the result was also that then you had different policy instruments,

so legislative instruments, driven by different DGs, which in the end are not really consistent. So therefore, again, I think that on the substance there was agreement that it makes more sense to work upstream together and then you sort out the conflicts there instead of having afterwards too conflicting instruments where nobody reaches the objectives.

(int. 22)

At the same time, the actors at the coordinator and manager level remind us that this cooperation is not necessarily immediately implemented comprehensively and that some individual actors in the Commission bureaucracy consciously try to circumvent it. Coordinators within the SecGen give the Commissioners a powerful leadership role in the cooperation and coordination behavior of “their” DGs. Central actors at the political level, in the President's cabinet, also admit that silo behavior still exists. However, they stress that the new system provides a clear sanction against silo behavior:

Sometimes a Cabinet or a Commissioner can have an impact on the culture in that way that he or she might want the DG to be very restrictive and not to collaborate with the SecGen. [...] That exists, and it's very difficult to live with this in my position, because in the end what will only happen, I have to reprimand my colleagues. [...] But it's unfair to reprimand them because this is triggered by their Cabinet, by their Commissioner.

(int. 4)

But here is a brutal sanction. Because if they do that, they will not get their proposal ever on the table of the College. They can work in their corner. But they will not get their proposal.

(int. 7)

Overall, none of the interviewees denies the importance and influence of the SecGen for horizontal coordination in the initiation processes. On the contrary, the SecGen, which already had an influential role in the pre-Juncker Commission, is now even considered a political actor and very active gatekeeper due to its broader and deeper links to the political level (int. 1, 25, 26).

They can kill a proposal. Definitely you must have the green light of the SecGen. You always needed the green light of the SecGen. But I would not say they were so terribly active before. The SecGen has always been involved, but maybe they didn't have so many instructions and they were not commenting on everything.

(int. 17)

There are strategic political actions where it's really driven by, centrally, the Secretariat General.

(int. 26; also int. 25)

Although a tendency towards silo behavior is still reported, this more political and active role of the SecGen even has an impact on the coordination and cooperation behavior of those actors who would obviously prefer to work in silo, mostly the

specialists in the policy area related organizational units. Thus, the changed structural conditions have an effect on actors' decision behavior – even where the actors would prefer the status quo.

For our own precaution we tend to consult as many as possible [...] because the SecGen would stop and check and ask, 'Why haven't you invited?' Now we consult more than before to avoid someone is excluded.

(int. 5)

In conclusion, it can be noted that organizational changes along horizontal lines also seem to have an effect on the decision behavior of the actors in the Commission's internal initiation processes.

Final discussion: Insights and limitations to this study

This study tested one of the oldest hypotheses in organizational theory using the empirical example of a recently reformed core executive. According to this theory, organizational, structural, procedural factors have a systematic impact on the decision behavior of the actors. The case is the European Commission, whose intra-organizational policy-making processes were changed in 2014 by the Juncker reform. The focus of the work is on the cooperation and coordination behavior of the actors in interdepartmental initiation processes, as this is regarded as a central challenge of intra core-executive policy-making processes – in the Commission bureaucracy as well as in national administrative apparatuses.

Against the background of the analytical framework of the organizational perspective, the data generated from more than thirty interviews along the central organizational changes initiated by the Juncker reform were evaluated on a vertical and horizontal dimension. The results clearly indicate that the cooperation and coordination behavior of the actors in initiation processes of the pre-Juncker Commission is different from that under Juncker. Due to the changed structural and procedural conditions under which the actors act, the results point to a causal effect. Strictly speaking, however, this has not been tested directly; it would be desirable if this question would be taken up by a more process-oriented approach. Although the results initially speak in favor of influences based on organizational theory, the strength of the change in actors' decision behavior directs even more attention to possible intervening variables or contextual factors of the relationship between organizational structure and actors' behavior. Against the background of alternative explanatory factors, primarily the emphasis on informal, cultural influences on the behavior of actors, which have long dominated the administrative scientific theoretical debate, the difference in actors' behavior between the Juncker and pre-Juncker Commission is remarkable.

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