Supranationalization of Government and Governance

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Abstract

This paper deals with the development of a supranational political executive at the European level, and how such an institution might affect EU governance processes and policies. The paper starts by outlining some theoretical explanations of organizational changes and their consequences for governance processes and policies. It then presents some key steps in the modern history of European international cooperation before focusing on the birth and development of a supranational political executive, i.e. today's European Commission. Arguably, the coming about of EU agencies should be seen as complementing the consolidation of a supranational executive. Although the EU polity might be considered as *sui generis* within the current state system, its development and characteristics nevertheless have much in common with former centralization of political power in Europe, e.g. modern state-building. Finally, the paper turns to how a supranational executive actually makes a difference to EU governance processes and policies. An intriguing and important question is to what extent a supranational organization delivers policies that are qualitatively different from those policies that originate from intergovernmental organization?

Keywords

EU agencies – European Commission – Governance – Political Executive – Supranationalization

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Introduction

This paper deals with the development of a supranational political executive at the European level, and how such an institution might affect European Union (EU) governance processes and policies. The paper starts by outlining some theoretical explanations of organizational changes and their consequences for governance processes and policies. It then presents some key steps in the modern history of European international cooperation before focusing on the birth and development of a supranational political executive, i.e. to-day's European Commission. Arguably, the coming about of EU agencies should be seen as complementing the consolidation of a supranational executive. Although the EU polity might be considered as *sui generis* within the current state system, its development and characteristics nevertheless have much in common with former centralization of political power in Europe, e.g. modern state-building. Finally, the paper turns to how a supranational executive actually makes a difference to EU governance processes and policies. An intriguing and important question is to what extent a supranational organization delivers policies that are qualitatively different from those policies that originate from intergovernmental organizations.

Why and how the relationship between states becomes organized

This section presents a couple of theories that aim at explaining organizational change; here applied to understanding why and how the relationship between states becomes organized. *Functionalist explanations* deal with how we can account for such organizing by identifying trans-boundary problems among states. Such problems may range from threats to international security to the need for a common gauge for an integrated rail network. Standard organizational solutions have been bilateral diplomacy, international congresses and international organizations. In this respect, the logic of functionalism is akin to ideas about rational problem-solving: a problem (here: a cross-border problem) is identified, and an adequate solution is searched for (Mitchell and Keilbach, 2001; Scott, 2008).

However, in the real world one may observe that even serious transborder challenges related to e.g. security or climate change are not responded to, or responses are considerably delayed. Thus, functionalist explanations face problems when it comes to accounting for such 'historical inefficiency'; i.e. the sometimes lack of timely coupling between environmental demands and organizational responses (March and Olsen, 1989). On this point, *historical institutionalism* comes in as an alternative or complementing perspective: if existing organizational arrangements have evolved into institutions, i.e. become infused with value 'beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand', it follows that they are not easily expendable or reformed on rational grounds (Selznick, 1957, p. 17-22). Thus, given their organizational and material resources, they represent a conservative bias that makes reforms path-dependent and incremental (March and Olsen, 1989; Steinmo et al., 1992; Thelen, 2003). This said, radical change and innovation do sometimes happen,

as we will see later in this paper. In order to cope with this fact, historical institutionalists brought in exogenous shocks as potential catalysts for profound reorganization. Major crises may serve to delegitimize existing institutional arrangements, to create new windows of opportunity, and to get actors to accept alternatives they would not accept under normal circumstances. However, organizational innovations do not necessarily replace existing orders; they may rather be layered around already existing structures (March and Olsen, 1989; Steinmo et al., 1992; Thelen, 2003; Olsen, 2007).

A third perspective deals with the role of *institutionalized environments*. The idea is that under conditions of uncertainty and legitimacy concerns reformers will look for organizational solutions that are similar to forms already adopted and considered successful, modern and broadly accepted (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). For example, when developing a supranational executive, decision-makers will, according to this approach, ask 'how does a political executive look like in a well-governed nation-state? How is it organized and staffed, which are its functions, and to whom is it accountable?'

The three theoretical explanations outlined above should probably be considered more as complementary than as competing. For example, while international cooperation often seems to reflect functional needs, the timing of such cooperation may have been enabled by serious crises, and the forms chosen could very well mirror already legitimized organizational forms. When it comes to supranationalization in particular, Hooghe et al. (2019, p. 17) remind us that a precondition for 'thick international governance' may be individuals who share common understandings and basic values.

How organization structure affects governance and policies

Public governance presupposes an organizational basis. Without a certain number of organized personnel, policies cannot be developed and implemented across a specific territory. Although this sounds almost self-evident, the crucial role of organizational factors in public governance has not always been adequately acknowledged, and some authors have felt a need to rediscover it (March and Olsen, 1984; 1989).

An organizational approach to public governance does not, however, aim at providing a full account for governance processes and policies. The assumption is that organizational factors constrain and enable decision-makers, thus making some choices more likely than others. Rather than determining policy outputs, organization is expected to biasing decision processes in a systematic manner. The organizational factors usually considered are organization structure, organization demography (personnel composition), location and organization culture, of which the first three in particular stand out as potential design tools (Egeberg and Trondal, 2018). This paper focuses mainly on organization structure.

In this approach, organization structure is defined as a codified system of positions and their respective role expectations concerning who is entitled to do what and

how. According to Simon (1965), a person's (formal) organizational position determines largely what kind of information this person will look for, and the streams of communication he or she will be exposed to and shielded from. It follows that the informational basis for this person's thinking and acting primarily reflects his or her organizational position. Since decision-makers operate under the condition of "bounded rationality" due to limited cognitive capacities, they will have little capacity left to search for or digest information from other sources (Simon, 1965). In addition, rewards and punishments, as well as norms about appropriate behaviour, may serve to bring decision-makers' actual behaviour in line with the stated role expectations (March and Olsen, 1989).

This paper focuses on the following dimensions of organization structure: size, primary or secondary structure, horizontal and vertical specialization. 'Size' is the number of positions of a given structure. Size largely determines an organization's capacity to act. Without a certain number of filled positions, policies will not be initiated, developed or implemented. A person's 'primary structure' denotes the structure to which this person is expected to devote most of his or her time, energy and loyalty. 'Secondary structure' denotes a structure in which he or she is expected to be only a part-timer. A ministry or an agency exemplifies the first kind of structure, while collegial bodies, like management boards or councils of ministers, make up the second kind. Although actors' decision behaviour will be affected by participation in secondary structures, this effect will not be as strong as the effect of primary structures (Egeberg and Trondal, 2018). 'Horizontal specialization' was by Gulick seen to have four sub-dimensions: by purpose, territory, process (function) and clientele. Here, we focus on the first two of them. Specialization according to purpose (sector) means that lines of conflict and cooperation will follow sectoral divisions, and policies will tend to be standardized across territorial units. Specialization by territory (geography), on the other hand, will focus attention along territorial cleavages and trigger policy coherence within territorial units, but inconsistency across such units (Gulick, 1937). 'Vertical specialization' denotes division of labour between different levels within or across organizations. Decision-makers in higher-level positions within governments, and at higher levels of government, are exposed to broader streams of information than their colleagues at lower levels, and also tend to identify with wider parts of the system than those at lower levels (Christensen and Lægreid, 2009; Egeberg and Trondal, 2018).

In organizational terms, an intergovernmental organization (IGO) is characterized by having the main decision-making body (usually a council of ministers) composed of executive politicians who have their primary organizational affiliation within national governments. The *basic* principle of specialization is therefore territorial, although this principle may be complemented by e.g. sectoral specialization. Only the secretariat personnel has the IGO as its primary structure. A supranational executive is characterized by being organizationally separated from the council of ministers. Not only the bureaucrats, but also the political leaders, will have the organization as their primary structure. The basic principle of organizational specialization will most likely be non-territorial (Egeberg, 2012).

Organizing the relationship between states intergovernmentally

Bilateral diplomacy can be conceived as a kind of international institution although it lacks an organizational centre (Batora, 2005). The states' foreign offices and their missions abroad make up the organizational components and an overarching system of norms embodies a code of conduct on what is deemed appropriate inter-state behaviour. Thus, although diplomats' allegiance relates primarily to their respective nation-states, they nevertheless tend to share a corporate feeling that transcends differences of nationality and language (Nicolson, 1969, p. 40). When, subsequent to the Peace of Westphalia, resident ambassadors became more common even among Europe's smaller powers, diplomats might have started to evoke also a third kind of loyalty, namely to their respective host countries (cf. "going native") (Cross, 2007). Thus, bilateral diplomacy can be seen as an international institution which, notwithstanding its lack of an organizational centre, makes states components of a state *system*.

The kind of multilateral diplomacy instituted by the Vienna Congress 1814-15 comes closer to an international organization in the sense that representatives from more than two countries are exposed to each other simultaneously. However, the Concert of Europe and its Great Power conferences at ministerial as well as ambassadorial level did not meet on a regular basis and had no permanent location or secretariat attached to it (Schroeder, 1994). Although this way of organizing European politics did not at all challenge the Westphalian order, it nevertheless may have contributed to transforming a system of states into a *community* of states (Schroeder, 1994). Accordingly, the Concert decided on the admission of new "members to Europe" as when it declared that Serbia could "enter the European family" (1878) provided the country recognized religious freedom, described as one of "the principles which are the basis of social organization in all States of Europe" (Claude, 1964, p. 22). However, it was the highly specialized sectoral or functional international organizations established during the second half of the nineteenth century (e.g. the International Telegraphic Union and the Universal Postal Union) that produced inventions like regular meetings and the permanent secretariat with a fixed location (Claude, 1964).

However, it was not until the establishment of the League of Nations (1919) that what had already been achieved organizationally in the sectoral or functional fields became realized in the security domain. Its founders embraceed the basic principles of the Westphalian order; they accepted the independent sovereign state as the basic entity and the great powers as the predominant actors. However, in the "high-politics" area the League also represented a considerable proportion of organizational innovation: for the first time a central structure consisting of a general conference, a council and a secretariat with a fixed location had been created. According to Claude (1964, p. 175), "nothing essentially new has been added by the multilateralization and regularization of diplomacy until the secretariat is introduced; this is the innovation that transforms the series of conferences into an organization". In addition, the role of the Council president, the permanent missions of the member states in Geneva and numerous specialized committees in several

sectoral and functional policy fields added a new dimension to the older forms of diplomacy (Steiner, 2005).

While the founders of the League of Nations had accepted Europe as the central core of the world political system, the establishment of the United Nations (1945) clearly signalled a more global orientation. However, in organizational terms the United Nations could mainly be described as a moderately revised version of the League. It reformed somewhat the arrangement for collective security, for example by conferring upon the secretary general a more "political" role as regards policy formulation, and developed further the network of intergovernmental, specialized organizations, however, without launching real innovations (Claude, 1964). Neither other post-WWII organizations, like the Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC) (1948), NATO (1949) or the Council of Europe (1949) deviated in their set-up from the intergovernmental decision structure inherited from the past, although the two last ones incorporated consultative, indirectly elected parliamentary assemblies.

The birth and development of a supranational executive

Arguably, significant organizational innovation did not take place before the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1952, predecessor of the EU. For the first time, a state-like institutional system at the international level, although in embryo, could be identified, consisting of an executive body (the High Authority) organized *separately* from the Council of Ministers and with its own political leadership on a full time basis, two legislative bodies (the Council and the Assembly) and a Court of Justice. Thus, four key institutions of today's EU, namely the European Commission, the Council, the European Parliament (EP) and the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), were already operating from 1952 on, although in a nascent form. Also important as regards the system's innovative character is the fact that core institutions had been structured on a non-territorial basis. The Council, however, reflected in its composition and functioning the legacy from the classical international organization.

Concerning the Commission, the basic principle of organizational specialization is sector and function rather than geography. Thus, its departmental structure has much in common with a national ministerial organization consisting of sectoral departments as well as horizontal services like those for budget and administration. Importantly, such a structure is also reflected at the political level. This means that commissioners are in charge of sectoral or functional portfolios rather than particular country portfolios. Equally noteworthy is the fact that not only the bureaucrats but also the commissioners have the Commission as their primary structure. Over time, commissioners' background has changed from being overwhelmingly technocratic to becoming genuinely political. Thus, recent colleges have been composed of former prime ministers, ministers and parliamentarians, national as well as European (Wille, 2013).

Various treaty changes indicate more Commission independence from national governments. Consider, for example, the enhanced role of the EP in appointing commissioners, the coupling of the outcome of the EP elections and the choice of Commission President, and the empowerment of the Commission President as regards the distribution of portfolios among college members (for an overview, see Wille, 2013). So-called 'presidentialization' is also expressed in the strengthening of the Secretariat General as the office of the President, the President's political guidelines for the work of the College, and the recent hierarchization of the College, with some commissioners acting as executive vice-presidents and vice-presidents. Thus, although only the choice of Commission President (and not the other commissioners) is coupled to the outcome of the EP elections, one might nevertheless argue that presidentialization has actually brought the EU polity closer to a parliamentary system. Moreover, the *cabinets,* i.e. the small 'private', political secretariats of commissioners, formerly portrayed as national enclaves and Trojan horses within the Commission, have over time been transformed into genuinely multi-national entities (Egeberg and Heskestad, 2010).

Governments have been particularly reluctant to confer executive power on the Commission in areas considered as critical state functions, such as justice and home affairs and foreign policy. Nevertheless, task expansion within such areas has taken place, adding *dossiers* related to police and judicial cooperation, monetary union and crisis management (Kassim et al., 2013, p. 78). Although executive functions in the area of foreign and security policy have not been transferred to the Commission in the same way as in the area of justice and home affairs, one might nevertheless argue that the former functions have never been as close to the Commission as today. While the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) previously combined this position with being the secretary general of the Council, he or she now combines the role as head of the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the role as a vice-president of the Commission.

Not only has the College of Commissioners achieved more autonomy from national governments (although becoming more dependent on the EP). Also the Commission administration has gradually loosened its ties with governments: while an overwhelming majority of the officials today is permanently employed by the Commission, civil servants seconded from the member states dominated the scene in the early years. Moreover, while national governments previously could have a say even when permanent personnel was recruited, and in particular so to senior posts, this practice of attaching national flags to particular positions has come to an end due to new recruitment procedures (Fusacchia, 2009).

During the last couple of decades in particular we have witnessed the establishment of a considerable number of EU-level agencies. The more than 30 decentralized ('decentralized' because they are located in the various member states) regulatory agencies cover most of the EU's policy fields, including state-sensitive areas like border control and police cooperation. Most commonly, the purpose has been to contribute to more uniform implementation of EU policies across member countries, ensure impartial application of EU law through bodies working at arm's length from

the political executive (the Commission), bring in more technical and highly specialized expertise where needed, and to involve those groups particularly affected by various EU policies. In addition, the agencies' (often) more technical expertise was thought to complement the Commission's more generalist expertise also at the policy development stage. The instruments available to the EU agencies vary from facilitating networks for information exchange between national agencies, training of national agency personnel and issuing guidelines on implementation practices, to involvement in single cases (see e.g. Busuioc et al., 2012).

As we will see later in this paper, EU agencies can actually be portrayed very much as an integral part of the supranational executive, thus underpinning its position. However, an early interpretation was that these bodies came about as an organizational alternative to further growth within the Commission administration. Member states acknowledged that administrative capacity at the EU level had to be strengthened, but were reluctant to confer more power on the Commission. Instead, EU agencies working under the control of the member states came up as a solution (Kelemen, 2002). In order to ensure such control, EU agencies got installed management boards numerically dominated by member state representatives.

Summing up so far, we have observed that the organization of the relationship between states has grown considerably more subtle and complex over time. In accordance with functionalist ideas this can be interpreted as the political system's response to the economic and technological development and the more complex interdependence among societies that follows. However, as argued by historical institutionalists, this does not necessarily imply that organizational forms have smoothly adapted to a changing environment. It is probably no coincidence that real institutional innovations happened subsequent to major catastrophes; namely the Thirty Years War, the Napoleonic Wars and the First and Second World War. On a far smaller scale, several EU agencies have come about or been empowered as a result of various crises related to e.g. animal and human health, maritime accidents, financial markets and immigration. However, organizational innovations have not completely replaced former arrangements. The intergovernmental way of organizing has survived all shocks and seems indispensable and ubiquitous. Thus, path dependency is clearly visible also in the EU: most obvious is of course the existence of the European Council and the (Union) Council (the latter sharing legislative power with the EP). But even the Commission reflects the intergovernmental legacy, particularly the fact that each member state nominates a commissioner, although he or she is not meant to represent one's home country, as is the case for ministers in the two councils. Path dependency is also quite obvious concerning the organization of CFSP affairs: While the Lisbon Treaty arguably moved this portfolio much closer to the Commission than ever before, it was not completely transferred and stopped in-between the Commission and the Council in the form of the EEAS and a double-hatted High Representative. Also, the composition of the management boards of EU agencies neatly embodies the stickiness of the intergovernmental paradigm. Even bilateral diplomacy is still thriving within a densely integrated system as the EU (Bratberg, 2008). Thus, rather than replacing existing structures, organizational

innovations have been layered around former arrangements, resulting in a highly 'accumulated executive order' in Europe (Curtin and Egeberg, 2008).

In order to understand the forging of a supranational executive, theory on the impact of already legitimized organizational forms ('institutionalized environments') may contribute as well. For example, well-functioning political executives in the member states consist of executive politicians who most commonly are in charge of sectoral or functional portfolios rather than particular territorial portfolios. And most national executives have set up semi-detached regulatory agencies, in particular since the 1990s. Moreover, executive politicians are accountable to a parliament at the same level of government. Accordingly, the Commission itself declares that the College of Commissioners is responsible to the EP for decisions taken (Commission, 2020). This view is radically different from the view held by intergovernmentalists who persistently consider the Commission as an agent for national governments (e.g. Moravcsik, 1998).

As said in the introduction, although the EU polity might be considered as *sui generis* within the current state system, its development and characteristics display several similarities with former centralization of political power related to nation-state building. For example, students of the unification of the North-American states (1789) and the German states (1871) reported that it proved more difficult to establish an independent executive power at the federal level than an assembly and a court of justice (Skowronek, 1982; Clark, 2006), probably because a federal executive most directly would challenge the position of those actors most involved in the unification process, i.e. the constituent governments. Accordingly, in Germany in 1871 the body of the member states, the Federal Council, was meant to serve both as the second legislative chamber *and* as a federal executive, although a poorly resourced federal chancellery was put in place simultaneously (Clark, 2006). In this way, the former sovereign states wanted to get control over federal executive tasks, not quite unlike how EU member states have sought to keep control, as we have seen, by organizing state-sensitive executive portfolios within the Council. As in the EU, the German constitution was not so much a constitution as a treaty among sovereign states. German states continued to exchange ambassadors after the unification, and the power to set and raise direct taxes rested exclusively with the member states (Clark, 2006).

How a supranational executive makes a difference to EU governance

Most scholars in the field look at the Commission as one of the key actors in the EU. They most typically refer to the important role the Commission actually plays in agenda-setting, policy development and implementation, to its considerable organizational capacity and expertise to act given its about 30.000 officials, and to its growing expansion into most policy fields, including 'state-sensitive' fields such as justice and home affairs and foreign policy. However, the literature is inconclusive on the Commission's power compared to other EU institutions, and on whether its power is declining or increasing (Kassim, 2020). It is almost obvious that the

Commission’s actual power largely reflects organizational characteristics, such as its size, expertise, and type and number of policy sectors arranged under its umbrella. The question asked in this section, however, is whether the *particular* organizational features that *distinguish* the Commission from intergovernmental bodies make a difference to EU governance. As argued above, a supranational executive is characterized by being organized independently from the council of ministers with its own political leadership. Moreover, not only the bureaucrats, but also the political leaders will have the body as their primary organizational affiliation, and the body will be specialized according to sector or function rather than territory.

On the other hand, IGOs and bodies organized in a similar manner as IGOs, such as the EU’s European Council and Council, are characterized by applying territory as the basic principle of specialization, although often supplemented by sectoral specialization. Moreover, their political leadership, i.e. heads of state and government as well as ministers, have their respective national governments as their primary organizational affiliation. (One exception is the European Council, in which the leadership also includes two EU politicians; the President of the European Council (Chair) and the Commission President.) As expected, given the organizational structure of the councils, research has documented that patterns of cooperation and conflict tend to coincide with territorial (i.e. national) borders, and that actors overwhelmingly pursue their national interests (Cox and Jacobson, 1973; Tallberg and Johansson, 2008; Bailer et al., 2015). Thus, IGO-like bodies seem to share some of the weaknesses that other horizontal structures (like inter-municipal councils, interdepartmental committees, networks etc.) are facing concerning their ability to cope with wicked cross-border challenges. Such bodies may strengthen interaction, coordination and trust among the participating entities, but only to a modest degree (Klijn and Koppenjan, 2012; Jacobsen, 2015; Lægreid et al., 2016). Interestingly, studies indicate that officials in the secretariats of IGOs and inter-municipal councils are important contributors to trans-boundary problem-solving; i.e. the only participants who have these bodies as their primary structures (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004; Jacobsen, 2015). Their organizational affiliation means that the bureaucrats, in contrast to their political masters, may be able to raise their decision horizons above the concerns of the individual member organizations, adopt a more general view, and identify more broadly with the whole system (Egeberg and Trondal, 2018). It is reason to believe that if political leaders also have the overarching unit as their primary organizational affiliation, they too will adopt a more comprehensive, cross-border perspective.

Studies show that EU commissioners, although themselves often being former ministers, behave differently from their counterparts in the Council and the European Council. By examining seventy controversial legislative proposals from the Commission, Thomson (2008) aimed at unveiling the level of agreement between a Commission proposal and the position of the home government of the commissioner in charge of the relevant portfolio. He found that this level of agreement was not significantly different from the level of agreement between a Commission proposal and the position of governments not having the lead commissioner. So, if commissioners are not primarily pursuing the interests of the countries from which

they originate; whose concerns are they actually catering for? By interviewing key observers of College behaviour, Egeberg (2006) found that commissioners most frequently seem to evoke their portfolio role and their role as European Commissioner. Next, they are paying heed to the concerns of their home countries, and to the programmes of their political parties. Thus, commissioners' actual behaviour seems to reflect perfectly well their highly composite role expectations: They find themselves in an organizational position in which they are expected to primarily champion the EU executive's policy ambitions and their respective DG interests (cf. their primary organizational affiliation), although simultaneously, but more informally, also to take into consideration concerns in their home countries and the platform of their respective political parties. The changing demography of commissioners' cabinets may serve to further underpinning commissioners' supranational orientation. The de-nationalization of the cabinets in terms of composition (see above) has resulted in behavioural changes as well; cabinets have toned down their role as liaison office between commissioners and their respective home governments (Kassim et al., 2013).

The College acts overwhelmingly on the basis of policy proposals developed in the Commission departments, which provide administrative capacity and expertise. The actual decision bahaviour of Commission officials reflects very much their organizational position and the sectoral or functional specialization of the organization in which they are embedded, thus further strengthening the supranational character of the political executive (Egeberg and Trondal, 2018). Research also indicates that the foreign department, the EEAS, similarly seems to act relatively independently from member-state governments, and that it in practice functions very much like a Commission department (Riddervold and Trondal, 2017). Moreover, studies indicate that EU-level agencies work more or less as integral parts of their respective Commission departments; i.e. departments that have overlapping portfolios (Egeberg et al., 2015). Ossege (2016) reported that this holds in particular when it comes to rule-formulation, as compared to scientific outputs and individual decisions. The management boards of EU agencies, although numerically dominated by member-state delegates, have other characteristics (such as their considerable size, low frequency of meeting, representation by national agency heads rather than ministry officials etc.) that make them less suitable as vehicles for national control (Busuioc et al., 2012). EU agencies usually constitute nodes in networks composed of member-state agencies within their respective policy areas. For example, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) coordinates authorization processes among similar member-state agencies. Research reveals that such agency networks tend to autonomize further national agencies that already operate at arm's length from their parent ministries, thus making such networks more available for policy development on behalf of the Commission (Bach et al., 2015). In the same vein, such networks become conducive to more uniform application of EU law and practicing of EU policies across member countries since agencies come to work more sheltered from national politics (Eberlein and Grande, 2005; Maggetti and Gilardi, 2011; Egeberg and Trondal, 2018).

As said, the Commission and EU agencies are involved in most policy fields, ranging from market regulation to typically 'state-sensitive' areas like police cooperation and border control. Given its organizational characteristics, no wonder that the EU executive has a particular focus on wicked cross-border issues. For example, infrastructure compatibility and interoperability across member-states as regards transport, communication and energy are key priorities (e.g. Jevnaker, 2015). Another example is the preparation of EU-wide crisis packages related to e.g. climate change, immigration or pandemics.

Conclusion

The history of international organization reflects functional needs. However, organizational reforms do not automatically reflect environmental change: Path dependency seems unavoidable, and profound innovations seem to happen only subsequent to serious systemic shocks such as major wars. The birth of the first supranational political executive, the European Commission, illustrates very well such a trajectory. The leap from organizing nation-states purely intergovernmentally to adding a new level of government proved particularly challenging. The two councils remain basically intergovernmental, but the EP and the Commission clearly represent a new level of government since the politicians, and not only the administrative staff, have the EU institution as their primary organizational affiliation.

Throughout history organizational forms between (nation-) states have become increasingly sophisticated and subtle, and thus with greater potential for coping with serious trans-border challenges. It is reason to believe that the latest innovative leap focused on in this paper, namely the adding of a *supranational* political executive, endows its incumbents with a more genuinely European perspective.

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