

Transcending intergovernmentalism?
Identity and role perceptions of national officials in EU decision-making

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ABSTRACT

Focusing on the identity and role perceptions of national officials in EU policy-making, intergovernmentalism may be transcended in two different ways. First, as asserted by neo-functionalists, national elites may shift their loyalty from a national to a supranational level owing to the effect of EU institutions. Second, as could perhaps be interpreted as the argument of the functionalists, functional role orientations acquired in sectoral ministries and specialized agencies at the national level may be sustained in the cross-border interactions of national officials. Based on an organizational and institutional perspective, the identity and role conceptions, and their conditions, are analyzed by applying interview data from 47 national transport ministry officials in five small member states.

INTRODUCTION

Those interested in the impacts of European integration on national institutions, decision-making processes and public policies have, during the last years, got several studies to consult (cf. for example Meny et al. 1996; Rometsch and Wessels 1996; Hanf and Soetendorp 1998). In order to understand the kind of multi-level system of governance evolving in Europe, studies on these relationships are of utmost importance. However, the potential effects of European co-operation and institutional structures on the loyalties, identities, and role orientations of national political and administrative elites, a theme that was at the core of neo-functionalist thought (Haas 1958), have not been subject to empirical inquiry to the same extent. Scheinman and Feld found that ten out of 23 interviewed national officials sensed that through their community experience they had adopted a more "European" orientation than they had before (Scheinman and Feld 1972:133). However, based on interviews with 82 national civil servants from all the member countries, Feld and Wildgen revealed no relationship between the degree of experience with Commission expert committees and the extent to which officials favoured the European Union (Feld and Wildgen 1975:256). Neither did the study by Beyers, based on a multi-national sample of 203 officials, show a clear relationship between experiences with EU affairs and positive attitudes towards supra-nationalism. Various *national* experiences seemed to be more important determinants of officials' attitudes in this respect (Beyers 1998).

That this topic is highly underresearched is clearly reflected in the fact that leading scholars in the field express quite opposite views on the issue without any empirical references at all. Wessels asserts that, contrary to certain neo-functional assumptions, no transfer of loyalty has taken place towards a centre which supersedes the pre-existing one (Wessels 1998:227). In the same issue of *Journal of European Public Policy* Laffan states that the interests and even the identities of national actors, who are involved in the iterative process of European negotiations, are shaped by European institutions (Laffan 1998:242).

In the *theoretical* literature on the European Union, however, a growing interest in identity formation can be traced. This may be due to the fact that an increasing number of scholars take an institutional (constructivist or sociological) perspective as their point of departure (Bulmer 1994; Olsen 1996; Aspinwall and Schneider 1998;

Checkel 1999; March and Olsen 1998). They thereby refocus the 'neo-functional relationship' between European level institution-making and the potential transfer of loyalties and identities from a national to an international level. In contrast to 'transactionalists' like Deutsch (1966), Haas allotted supra-national institutions a key role as vehicles for loyalty and identity shifts among national elites (Haas 1958: 7, 18-19).

In this paper I want to investigate the role and identity perceptions of national officials involved in EU decision-making processes. To what extent do they replace or complement their national orientations? Under what conditions are supra-national identities more likely to emerge? Alternatively, nationalism and intergovernmentalism might be transcended by transgovernmentalism (Keohane and Nye 1977:25). By this I mean that national officials' role perceptions and identities, which may be seen as primarily generated in *functionally*-based rather than in genuinely territorially-based organizations, are *sustained* in cross-border interactions. According to realist and intergovernmentalist thought, such a feeling of belonging to particular government departments, professions or policy sectors will be replaced by an allegiance to the national government as a whole from the moment the civil servant interacts with foreigners. This shift of loyalty is underpinned by strengthened executive control by the Foreign Ministry or its equivalents (cf. Moravcsik 1993). From a transgovernmentalist point of view, however, role orientations of officials based in sectorally or functionally specialized departments are neither intrinsically 'national', nor inherently 'supra-national'. Such a non-territorial frame of reference tends to be strengthened by the pivotal role played by scientific and professional knowledge in sectoral policy-making. The extent to which functional identity perceptions might be maintained at the European level could depend on the institutional affiliations of officials, both at the national level and the EU level. Due to the quite different principles of organizational specialization underlying the Commission structure and the Council structure respectively, identities that are being evoked in an expert committee setting might turn out to be rather different from those being activated in a Council working party. Thus, it might be hypothesized that the purpose- and function-based (in organizational terms) Commission structure tends to evoke more 'functional' orientations, while the (in principle) territory- or geography-based Council structure tends to remind group participants of their national origins, and thus highlights their role as government representatives (Egeberg and Trondal 1999; Trondal 1998). The functional belongings that may be fertilized to a greater extent in Commission committees, and which are in a sense neutral as far as the national-supranational dichotomy is concerned, are supposed to become further underpinned if the national official comes from an agency separated from a cabinet level department. Thus, sweeping generalizations about the nature of committee work should be avoided. Rather than stating that meetings are in general business-like, depoliticized, consensual and technocratic (Peterson 1995:71; Wessels 1998:209), it should be taken into account that the character of the negotiations may vary considerably and be conditional upon the kind of committee considered.

ROLE AND IDENTITY IN ORGANIZATIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL THEORY

A basic premise in this analysis is that a single individual may have several roles and identities. The image of an internally coherent self is replaced by a conception of

individuals as collections of roles and identities that may even be loosely coupled (March 1994). By 'role' we usually mean a set of expectations (norms or rules) that more or less specify the desired behaviour of the role incumbent. An identity is a conception of self organized into rules for matching action to situations. To make decisions within a logic of appropriateness, decision-makers need to be able to determine what their identities are, what the situation is, and what action is appropriate for persons such as they in the situation in which they find themselves (March and Olsen 1995). Within a logic of consequentiality, Simon states that a person identifies himself/herself with a group when, in making a decision, he or she evaluates the several alternatives of choice and their consequences for the specified group (Simon 1965:205). Since this person also may find it quite appropriate to apply the aims of a particular group as the value-indices which determine his or her decisions, this illustrates how the two logics may operate simultaneously in concrete decision situations. However, both sides agree on the importance of identities for framing action; guidelines and decision premises are thus to some degree specified beforehand. Should a more clear distinction be drawn between 'role perception' and 'identity'? I would suggest that talking about a person's identity rather than role conception implies that the values and goals of a certain group have become *internalized* in that particular person to a greater extent, thus making external control mechanisms more or less superfluous.

To say that individuals follow roles and identities is not to say that their behaviour is always easily predicted. Since individuals may be conceived as collections of roles and identities, the crucial question is: *Which* role or identity becomes evoked in a particular decision situation? Roles, identities, and situations can all be ambiguous (March 1994:61). The further discussion focuses on the organizational and institutional roles and identities of civil servants. But even when we exclude a considerable part of an individual's role and identity collection from consideration (for example his or her role as parent or neighbour), multiple loyalties remain. Let us start by considering the *primary* institutional affiliation of a national official.

Organizational and institutional arrangements are normative systems that are supposed to structure the occasions for evoking one identity or another. They are also incentive systems. Officials learn to evoke a particular role orientation or identity by experiencing the rewards and punishments of having done so in the past (March 1994:70). Organizations are in addition cognitive structures that focus conflict along some lines of cleavage rather than others, and create biased information networks that shape the perceptions and values of decision-makers, whose capacity for processing information is seen as limited (Simon 1965). In order to underpin particular role and identity perceptions, bureaucracies may also separate activities in time and space (March 1994:72). Physical structures have been shown to affect patterns of communication in government organizations (Egeberg 1994). Space and the objects within it, like furniture and physical symbols, become what might be thought of as nonverbal commentary about people, culture, politics and the past (Goodsell 1977; 1988).

Institutionalists of all kinds seem to agree that actors' strategies, or the ways in which they want to achieve their goals, are affected by their organizational and institutional affiliation. Opinions also differ, however, on the extent to which actors' preferences,

interests and identities are reformulated (Rothstein 1996). Those adhering to what has been termed 'sociological institutionalism' have most consistently argued that preferences and interests, and even identities, can be endogenously shaped, i.e. furnished by the institutional fabric in which decision-makers are embedded (March and Olsen 1995). It may be worth noting that in the new institutionalist wave, and particularly in its rational choice variant, Selznick's original distinction between 'institutions' and 'organizations' has been left out. Most rules are considered to be of an 'institutional' character. However, according to Selznick, institutions are, in contrast to organizations, infused with value beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand (Selznick 1957:17). This could mean that people relate to institutions in a more personal and 'internal' way than they do to organizations. Thus, the potential for resocializing individuals, in the sense of reshaping their interests and identities, without having to rely heavily on external control mechanisms, may be considerably greater in institutions than in organizations.

It seems as if government bureaucracies, which quite often may be characterized as highly institutionalized organizations, are able to endogenize officials' preference formation to a considerable degree. Individuals' interests in economic outcome, prestige and power may of course be rather constant over time. However, when the content of the proposals and decisions they make in their capacity as officials is to be explained, knowledge of their private interests seem to add little to our understanding so far (Egeberg 1999). In their empirical appraisal of the theory of representative bureaucracy, Lægreid and Olsen (1984) found that professional affiliation was the only background factor that proved to have any significant effect on the decision behaviour of officials.

Within their national governments, officials may develop somewhat divergent identities on the 'functional expert-government representative dimension', conditional upon their institutional affiliation. Those employed by agencies that are organizationally separated from cabinet level departments tend to assign considerably less weight to signals from the minister than their colleagues within cabinet-level departments. At the agency level, professional and technical concerns seem to dominate (Egeberg 1999). Agency personnel therefore could be expected to identify themselves primarily with functional expert roles. Officials at the ministerial level, on the other hand, tend to juxtapose political and professional concerns (Egeberg 1999). Thus, conditional upon the setting in which cabinet level personnel operate, expert roles or government representative roles might be evoked respectively.

In order to ensure co-ordination horizontally across bureaucratic entities and vertically between different levels of government, and to incorporate external experts and affected parties, government bureaucracies are often complemented by collegial bodies. Participants on these committees are usually *part-timers* as far as their group work is concerned. This fact has important implications as to what can be expected regarding role perceptions and identities: the bureaucratic units to which officials belong will continue to prevail as their main reference points. However, committee participation may *add* some reference points and create broader horizons. The setting that the collegiate structures provide imposes new expectations and obligations on the participants, and they become exposed to other problems, solutions and participants. Committees are arenas in which discussion and persuasion through

arguing are *the* legitimate ways of reaching decisions. Thus, groups may be sites for educating and (slightly) resocializing people. Officials might find participation rewarding for several reasons; interorganizational conflicts may be resolved, crucial information may be revealed, friendship could be developed, career options might be discovered, and stimulating discourses may take place (cf. March and Olsen 1976). However, bad experiences are also possible: committee work can increase an already intolerable overload, decision processes may grow in complexity, and potential contests might turn into real conflicts because new battle fields have been created. Our empirical knowledge of the impact of secondary affiliations on how people conceive of their roles and identities is rather tiny. A study showed that, although committee members' external (i.e. primary) affiliations were by far the most important factor in order to understand their attitudes and behaviour within committees, it was however possible to link some ways of behaving to characteristics of the committees as such (Stigen 1989). The identity formation potential of collegial bodies may depend on the extent to which meetings are separated in time and space from other activities. As regards officials, meetings they attend are often convened on the premises of their own ministry or agency, and during office time. Under such circumstances, the setting does not provide unambiguous cues for evoking additional identities. Identities that have *recently* been evoked are likely to be evoked again. This leads to 'intertemporal' and 'intersituational' stability in the sense that certain identities and role orientations may be carried over into other roles (March 1994:70).

THEORETICAL EXPECTATIONS IN A EUROPEAN UNION SETTING

The potential for loyalty shifts

From these more general theoretical ideas about the impact of organizational and institutional contexts on individuals' role and identity perceptions, we now turn to discuss how these ideas apply to the EU committee systems. There are three main categories of collegial structures involving national officials: expert committees under the European Commission ('preparatory committees'), the working groups/parties under the Council of Ministers, and, finally, the comitology committees established to monitor the delegated legislative power of the Commission ('implementation committees') (Schaefer 1996). Van Schendelen (1996) found the expert committees to be very influential when the Commission formulates its proposals to the Council. Hayes-Renshaw and Wallace (1997:78) claim that about 85 per cent of all issues on Council agendas will have been essentially agreed on in advance of ministerial sessions: 70 per cent in working groups and 10-15 per cent in COREPER I and II. That issues sometimes have to be dealt with at higher levels before a solution can be found, ultimately by voting, does not imply that the proceedings in the working parties have been unnecessary. Deliberative processes preceding a vote may impact on the formulation of alternatives, the outcome and the legitimacy of the decision (cf. Eriksen and Weigård 1997). However, when it comes to comitology committees, their independent role in the policy process has been seriously questioned. The Commission is indeed very rarely overruled by a committee: in 99 per cent of the cases it gets its own way regardless of the decision procedure applied (van der Knaap 1996:103-104).

It follows from our theoretical discussion that national officials can *not* be expected to shift their loyalties profoundly from a national to a supranational level as claimed by neo-functionalists. Most obligations, expectations, information networks, incentives and sanctions are connected to the institutions that employ them nationally. Most of

the time their attention and energy are devoted to these organizations. By the same token, only officials affiliated with the Commission services, or the secretariats of the Council, the Court or the European Parliament, can be assumed to develop primarily supranational identities (cf. Egeberg 1996; Hooghe 1999).

Although national identities are supposed to dominate the minds of national officials, we do expect supranational orientations to *complement* national horizons as an effect of participation at the European level. Compared with most committees involving officials at the national level, activities in EU level groups are separated in time and space in an unambiguous way from other activities, thus providing circumstances under which additional identities are more easily evoked. Most officials have to travel, and meetings are convened in EU buildings in which seating arrangements, physical symbols like the blue flag with the golden stars and a multi-linguistic setting remind visitors of their roles as EU participants. In DG VII (Beaulieu) the EU flag is present in the reception and outside the door of the director general. In the Commission's conference centre (Centre Broscette), in which most expert committees convene, the blue flag with the golden stars is on display in the reception area and in the areas on each floor where participants gather during coffee breaks, as well as in the meeting rooms. In the Council building this flag is only present at the entrance. 1)

The extent to which identity formation takes place may also depend on officials' degree of participation and their seniority on committees. One could also ask whether *institutional* experience matters: officials from countries that have been members of the EU for a long time could have developed stronger supranational attitudes than those coming from newer member states, independent of their personal involvement. The extent to which experiences are assessed as positive or negative may be crucial: is EU level policy-making considered to contribute to problem-solving within one's issue area? Finally, one could ask if their *personal* attitudes towards Europe and European integration may penetrate their job-related orientations.

The potential for sustaining functional loyalties

As stated in the introduction, the role conceptions of national officials as regards the expert-government representative dimension are supposed to be conditional upon both the institutional affiliation of the EU committee(s) on which they participate and their position in the national bureaucracy. It is assumed that the purpose- (sector) and function-based structure of the Commission tends to sustain functional orientations among officials. As already argued, this particular role perception can be further underpinned if the official originates from a relatively independent governmental agency. Based on a common understanding of scientific principles and reasoning, or professional knowledge, 'epistemic communities' for deliberative, collective problem-solving tend to evolve across national boundaries (Haas 1992; Joerges and Neyer 1997). However, a functional point of reference may be weakened if the official is employed by a cabinet level department, since such an affiliation also reminds him or her of the government representative role that is to be fulfilled. In addition, the use of name plates on the table with (usually) the *country* names on them rather than the names of institutions or persons may contribute to evoking national identities even at Commission committee meetings. Also, the formal role expectations are indeed rather ambiguous. National officials are sometimes selected directly by the Commission, implying that they are supposed to attend in their capacity as experts. However, on

other occasions, the Commission asks national administrations to appoint their representatives on expert committees, thus suggesting that they should express the views of their governments. 2) Also, during an expert committee meeting, officials may come to experience that their roles are expected to shift rather quickly: when the Commission official makes a 'tour de table' at the end of a meeting in order to anticipate Council reactions, a typical expert may suddenly find himself/herself turned into a government representative. 3)

The Council groups, on the other hand, are supposed to induce orientations reflecting the government representative role of officials. This pattern may be linked to the territorial principle of organization underlying the Council structure, even if this principle is challenged by the purpose (sector) logic embedded in the working party system and the specialized Councils (Egeberg and Trondal 1998). National experts coming from specialized agencies, and who also participate on committees under the Commission, may carry their functional identity over to their roles in the Council groups. In a similar way, of course, national identities evoked in the Council working parties may be transferred to the Commission committees by officials participating in both arenas. On the other hand, since expert committees and working parties are not only parts of different institutions but are also located in separate buildings, role separation may become easier. Interestingly, and different from the Commission's conference centre, the flags of the *member states* are all present in the Council building's hall, together with the EU flag. No flags, however, are on display in the meeting rooms of this building. 4)

Comitology committees are organized between the Commission and the Council. They represent a continuation of the formal decision-making process taking place in the Council in the sense that details, often highly technical ones, are worked out regarding how Council policies are to be practised. This aspect of comitology is reflected by the fact that participants attend formally in their capacity as government representatives. However, since it is the responsibility of the Commission to implement Council decisions, or to monitor national administrations in doing so, the meetings are chaired by Commission officials and convened in the locations of the Commission. The often highly technical character of comitology work is reflected in the fact that expert committees may change into comitology meetings during the same day, the only difference being that interest group representatives are excluded from participation and that voting may take place. In that case, identities that have been evoked so recently are likely to be evoked again. In sum, the rather ambiguous nature of comitology work makes it pretty hard to predict the role perceptions that might emerge. Therefore, in the following we will concentrate on expert committees and Council working parties.

DATA AND METHOD

This study is primarily based on personal interviews with 47 national officials involved in EU level policy-making. The interviews were conducted during winter and spring 1998. The interviewees do not make up a representative sample of all national officials engaged in EU affairs. *First*, the respondents are all drawn from a particular policy sector, namely the transport field. Although transport policy from the outset was looked upon as pivotal to European integration, little progress was made until the 1980s. However, the single market programme begun in 1985 provided a

ready-made vehicle for encouraging common action in transport (Aspinwall 1998). Within transport I have focused on those working in the road and rail sectors. They are involved in policy-making on road and rail infrastructure and transport on these infrastructures, also including market liberalization. As regards road traffic they are also involved in social regulation (e.g. driving hours, resting time), vehicle safety and emission control. Most of the interviewees are affiliated with transport ministries or their equivalents, but some were also found in the Department of the Environment and Local Government (Ireland). Due to financial and time constraints, the number of interviews that could be made had to be limited. Under these circumstances, I decided to try to cover the two modes of transport in each country instead of selecting officials from several issue areas. The problem with this solution is of course that generalization of findings across policy fields becomes difficult. However such generalizing would hardly have been possible in any case with so few respondents from each policy sector. On the other hand, concentrating on this particular area makes it possible to utilize the data in a policy study on a later occasion. This limitation of the study was also justified by the fact that the author already had invested considerable time and energy in penetrating the road and rail policy fields in connection with another project. It was considered to be a clear advantage to have as much substantive policy knowledge as possible even when the interviews to a great extent dealt with general role conceptions.

Second, the officials included in the study all come from small member states, namely Denmark (10 interviewees), Finland (8), Ireland (10), Portugal (10) and Sweden (9). Given that the amount of interviews had to be limited, hard choices had to be made once more. The notion that small countries had not been subject to research to the same degree as the larger countries, and in accordance with this, 'the small state profile' of the ARENA programme, became decisive for this choice. One bias that may accompany this selection is that those originating from smaller member states have been shown to express somewhat more supranational attitudes than their colleagues from larger countries (Beyers 1998).

Third, the respondents are all affiliated with cabinet level departments. Thus, as discussed in the theoretical part of this paper, this probably implies an over-representation of people identifying with the government representative role at the expense of more functional role orientations often associated with agency personnel.

The intention was to approach the phenomenon called 'identity' by asking whom ('of the following institutions') they feel an allegiance to (identify with or feel responsible to). In order to measure the extent to which the officials identify themselves with various institutions, they were asked to locate themselves along a five-point ordinal scale, one scale for each institution. The rest of the interview guide is also, for the most part, very standardized in order to get quantifiable measures. Due to the small N and the level of measurement, there are, however, limitations as to what kinds of statistical analyses that can be made. The results are presented in uni-variate and bi-variate forms (gammas), and, if necessary, controlled for a third variable. Gamma's level of significance is presented, as if we deal with a representative sample, in order to indicate the robustness of a relationship. However, since we are not dealing with a representative sample, gammas might probably indicate correctly the direction of relationships, but their strength should be considered with care.

EMPIRICAL RESULTS ON LOYALTY SHIFTS

One could argue that a precondition for individual shifts of loyalty from a national to a supranational level is that European level institutions are perceived to have acquired a certain level of autonomy and integrity. Table 1 shows that a strong majority of the national officials find the EU institutions they deal with regularly to be independent to a great extent.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

It is understandable that the proportion is somewhat smaller as far as the Presidency is concerned (63 per cent). The Presidency of the Council is after all made up of a national government, and, to fulfil its policy development role, it has to draw heavily on administrative resources in its home country (source: interview).

Table 2 reveals the national officials' feeling of allegiance to national and supranational institutions respectively.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

As hypothesized, the supranational level is clearly a *secondary* point of reference for national officials. However, the cumulative percentages show that a clear majority feel an allegiance to, or identify with, EU level entities to some extent (value 3) or more. 6) Several committees are ad hoc groups, and this may explain why the proportions are somewhat higher as regards the EU as a whole. We will come back to the huge difference concerning government identification across committees.

In tables 3, 4 and 5 the purpose is to uncover whether some of the supranational loyalty variance may be related to the factors discussed in the theoretical part of this paper. This statistical analysis will be confined to participation under the Commission from the simple reason that it is here that we have the largest N. We start with committee allegiance.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

There is only one factor that is strongly and significantly related to committee allegiance: the more participation on a committee, the more loyalty seems to be created to the same committee. People may come to know each other personally, and a feeling of mutual responsibility for the outcome of the work seems to emerge. More general experiences that an official has from EU work do not seem to affect his or her feeling of belonging as regards the committees. We also observe, somewhat surprisingly, that officials from the new member states express this feeling of collective responsibility more often than those from older member countries, even if the relationship is not a strong one. However, to be able to rule out the possibility that the relationship between committee participation and committee allegiance is a spurious one, a control will be made for country seniority in EU.

TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

Table 4 shows that the nationality of officials, and whether their countries have been members of the community for a long or a short time, does not dismiss the original relationship between participation and allegiance. The level of significance for Portugal and Finland/Sweden is obviously due to the small N.

In table 5 we go on to look at the extent to which the independent variables that appeared in table 3 are related to the national officials' feeling of allegiance to the EU as a whole.

- TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

The amount of individual or collective participation in the EU does not seem to impact significantly on the national officials' feeling of allegiance to the Union when participating on expert committees. Neither do personal attitudes towards European integration or Europe make a difference. Although not significant, the only factor that could have some weight is how beneficial one finds EU co-operation as far as one's own policy sector is concerned.

Table 2 showed clearly that supranational allegiance among national officials is indeed secondary. This does not mean that such loyalty is of minor importance however: One expression for this may be that most officials do report that positions should be modified or altered during or subsequent to meetings. 45 % of those on Commission committees and 43% on Council groups report that this situation occurs *often*. Thus, a considerable portion of collective responsibility for reaching decisions seems to exist. Table 6 reveals that national officials are indeed attentive to arguments advanced by supranational actors in this respect. For example, 80 per cent of those on Commission committees and 63 per cent on Council groups would give *much* consideration to proposals, statements and arguments from the Commission. Certainly then, the Commission and the Presidency of the Council are not only the hub of the *communication* network in and around Council working parties (Beyers and Dierickx 1998:313), they are also interlocutors that are really *listened* to.

TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE

EMPIRICAL RESULTS ON FUNCTIONAL VERSUS GOVERNMENT LOYALTIES

In order to shed light on the effects that the institutional affiliation of committees might have on how national officials conceive of themselves, we have asked about their feeling of belonging in relation to various contexts in which they are embedded. They were also invited to characterize the role behaviour of their colleagues from other member states.

TABLE 7 ABOUT HERE

The most salient difference between the Commission setting and the Council setting concerns the amount of allegiance to one's own government. As hypothesized, almost all on Council working parties conceive of themselves as government representatives (cf. also table 2). This pattern is also quite striking in table 8. While those on Council

groups almost unanimously portray their colleagues from other member states as government representatives, the picture is considerably more complex under the Commission. Of those on expert committees, 37 per cent describe their colleagues as mainly government representatives. Also, in expert committees, professional affiliation and educational background play a more important role. It is symptomatic that as many as 88 per cent would give much consideration to proposals from colleagues from other countries who have demonstrated considerable expertise on the subject matter, while this holds for 57 per cent of those on Council groups. On the other hand, the size of a member state is assigned much more weight in the Council setting (cf. table 6, and Beyers and Dierickx 1998). The fact that 87 per cent of those on Council groups report that they *often* have an instruction about the position they should take, while this holds for only 32% on Commission committees, also reflects the more intergovernmental character of the Council structure. According to many interviewees, however, the participants themselves play a vital role in formulating the instructions.

TABLE 8 ABOUT HERE

We have previously discussed several reasons why a clear-cut picture could not be expected to emerge from the data. Council working parties are for example specialized according to a purpose or sectoral principle, and this fact obviously brings in a logic which is challenging the overall territorial, or nation-based, logic of the institution. This is reflected in the considerable weight assigned to own policy sector as a point of reference (cf. also Kerremans 1996). Similarly, the basic sectoral and functional logic of the Commission faces competing principles most of the time (Christiansen 1997). For example, people from the ministries, like the respondents in this study, are probably more likely to conceive of themselves as government representatives than those originating from highly specialized agencies. Name plates on the table with country names on them continuously remind them of their nationality, and, last, but not least, identities that have been evoked recently are likely to be evoked again. In table 9, we therefore compare the government allegiance of those only participating under the Commission with those also participating under the Council in order to detect indications of identity transfers across institutional spheres.

TABLE 9 ABOUT HERE

Since those who participate in *both* arenas more often seem to identify with their own government when attending meetings under the Commission, some intersituational and intertemporal stability is obviously present. However, since the number of units are limited, interpretation should be made with care. In principle, a parallel comparison could be made as regards participation under the Council in order to reveal the extent to which functional loyalties might be carried over from expert committees to working parties. Since, however, not more than three officials have experiences only from the Council, this comparison can not be made.

CONCLUSION

Focusing on the role and identity perceptions of national officials in EU policy-making, intergovernmentalism may be transcended in two different ways. First, as

asserted by neo-functionalists, national elites may shift their loyalty from a national to a supranational level owing to the effect of EU institutions. Second, as could perhaps be interpreted as the argument of the functionalists, functional identities acquired in sectoral ministries and specialized agencies at the national level may be sustained in the cross-border interactions of national officials. As asserted in the introduction, both views are highly contested in the literature. Based on organizational and institutional theory, the argument in this paper is that, concerning supranationalism, loyalty shifts may take place, but only *marginally*. This is confirmed in the empirical part. Being embedded in EU level structures and separated in time and space from their primary institutional affiliations back home, officials tend to develop a sense of allegiance to the supranational level. However, the identity evoked in EU level settings does not replace identities evoked in national institutions; it is rather complementary and secondary. When interpreting this finding, we should keep in mind the bias that may be present in our material due to our small state profile. The analysis indicates further that the amount of individual committee participation may be crucial for the extent to which participants develop a sense of responsibility for the group as such and its outcome. Neither individual nor collective EU experience seems to be related to the amount of individual allegiance to the EU as a whole. 9)

Though modest, the amount of supranational loyalty among national officials should not be ignored however. A considerable degree of collective responsibility may be reflected in the overall willingness of participants to move and reformulate their positions during and subsequent to meetings. It may also be worth noticing that supranational institutions like the Commission and the Presidency of the Council are the interlocutors most listened to in this respect.

Concerning functionalism, it was hypothesized that the extent to which officials might sustain nationally acquired functional identities at the European level depends mainly on their institutional affiliation, both at the national and the EU level. Basic principles of organizational specialization, vertically as well as horizontally, are seen as decisive in this respect. Thus, agency personnel and participants in expert committees under the Commission are probably more likely to maintain functional orientations than cabinet level personnel and Council group members. This pattern is partly confirmed by the data, showing that expert committees and Council working parties are indeed different arenas, inducing different reference points among decision-makers. The amount of functional identities evoked or sustained at the European level may even be underestimated in the analysis due to the cabinet level profile of our officials. As argued, within each institutional setting the basic organizational principle is not unchallenged though. For example, the sectoral specialization characterizing the Council at the level of the working parties is reflected in the importance attached to own policy sector as one's point of reference. Similarly, highly ambiguous 'cues' and formal role expectations may help to explain the mixed identities unveiled in expert committees. And, finally, the data indicate, as assumed, that identities that have recently been evoked are likely to be evoked again: those participating not only on expert committees under the Commission but also on Council groups are more likely to conceive of themselves as representatives of their government when participating under the Commission than those only attending Commission meetings.

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NOTES

1 Observations made by the author in Brussels on November 18, 1998.

2 Source: Ass. Director General J.E. Paquet, DG VII.

3 Source: Senior Advisor Ø. Opdahl, Norwegian Permanent Representation in Brussels.

4 cf. note 1.

5 'a great extent': Values 1 and 2 on a five-point scale combined.

6 The national officials were also asked to what extent they feel that their identity is associated with various territorial units. They were asked to locate themselves along a five-point scale, one scale for each unit. 94% identified themselves to *a great extent* (values 1 and 2 combined) with a particular country, 57% with Europe, 30% with a particular local community, and 22% with a particular sub-national region.

7 'much': Values 1 and 2 on a five-point scale combined.

8 cf. note 5.

9 The 'experience variable' could have been richer as regards information had founding member-states been represented in the data. This could have made a difference (Beyers 1998).

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Table 1

Proportion of the national officials who feel that the representatives of the Commission, the Presidency and the Council secretariat behave independently from particular national interests *to a great extent*. 5) Percentages.

| | in expert committees | in Council groups |
|---------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Commission | 81 | 93 |
| Presidency | | 63 |
| Council secretariat | | 87 |
| N | (41) | (30) |

Table 2

Proportion of the national officials who feel an allegiance to or identify with the following entities when participating on EU committees. Cumulative percentages.

A. When participating under the Commission:

| | my own government | the committee(s) on which I participate | EU |
|---------------------------|-------------------|---|--------|
| 1. to a very great extent | 37 | 2 | 8 |
| 2. | 66 | 24 | 31 |
| 3. | 90 | 68 | 74 |
| 4. | 95 | 93 | 97 |
| 5. to a very small extent | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | (N=41) | (N=41) | (N=41) |

B. When participating under the Council:

| | my own government | the group(s) on which I participate | EU |
|---------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|--------|
| 1. to a very great extent | 63 | 7 | 7 |
| 2. | 93 | 13 | 28 |
| 3. | 97 | 50 | 66 |
| 4. | - | 83 | 100 |
| 5. to a very small extent | 100 | 100 | - |
| | (N=30) | (N=30) | (N=30) |

Table 3

Bi-variate correlations between the national officials' allegiance to, or identification with, expert committees on which they have participated and the other variables listed beneath. Trichotomized variables. Gamma. (N=41).

| | committee allegiance/ identification |
|--|---|
| Frequency of attended expert committee meetings | .49 (sign.=.02) |
| Number of years engaged in EU related work | .11 (sign.=.57) |
| Country seniority in EU | -.29 (sign.=.17) |
| EU advantageous/disadvantageous own policy sector | .10 (sign.=.65) |
| Identification with Europe | .14 (sign.=.14) |
| Positive/negative on European integration when involved in EU work for the first time | -.01 (sign.=.98) |

Table 4

The relationship between expert committee allegiance and committee participation, controlling for country seniority in EU. Gamma.

| | Denmark/Ireland com. participation | Portugal com. participation | Finland/Sweden com. participation |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| committee allegiance | .69 (sign.=.02) (N=18) | .45 (sign.=.45) (N=9) | .40 (sign.=.26) (N=14) |

Table 5

Bi-variate correlations between the national officials' allegiance to, or identification with, the European Union when participating on expert committees and the other variables listed beneath. Trichotomized variables. Gamma. (N=41).

| | EU allegiance/ identification |
|--|----------------------------------|
| Frequency of attended expert committee meetings | .18 (sign.=.43) |
| Number of years engaged in EU related work | -.05 (sign.=.78) |
| Country seniority in EU | .02 (sign.=.94) |
| EU advantageous/disadvantageous own policy sector | .31 (sign.=.19) |
| Identification with Europe | -.09 (sign.=.70) |
| Positive/negative on European integration when involved in EU work for the first time | -.11 (sign.=.59) |

Table 6

Proportion of the national officials who will give *much* 7) consideration to proposals, statements and arguments from the actors listed beneath when participating on EU committees and groups. Percentages.

| Actors: | Commission expert committee | Council working group |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| the Presidency | | 69 |
| Commission | 80 | 63 |
| Colleagues from other countries who have demonstrated considerable expertise on the subject matter | 88 | 57 |
| Colleagues from large member states | 27 | 47 |
| Colleagues from member states from my own region | 63 | 47 |
| N | (41) | (30) |

Table 7

Proportion of the national officials who *to a great extent* 8) feel an allegiance to or identify with the following entities when participating on EU committees and groups. Percentages.

| Entities | Commission expert committee | Council working group |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| own government | 66 | 93 |
| own ministry | 85 | 93 |
| own profession | 35 | 17 |
| own policy sector | 55 | 73 |
| N | (41) | (30) |

Table 8

The extent to which the national officials feel that their colleagues from other countries behave like 'experts' or 'government representatives' when participating on EU committees and groups. Percentages.

| Behave like: | Commission expert committee | Council working group |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| mainly experts | 32 | 3 |
| mixed roles | 32 | - |
| mainly gov. repr. | 37 | 97 |
| | 100 | 100 |
| N | (41) | (30) |

Table 9

The national officials' allegiance to or identification with their own government when participating on expert committees under the Commission. Cum. percentages.

| | Those on expert committees only | Those on both expert com. and Council groups |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| 1. to a very great extent | 29 | 38 |
| 2. | 50 | 73 |
| 3. | 93 | 88 |
| 4. | 100 | 92 |
| 5. to a very small extent | - | 100 |
| N | (14) | (26) |