

## BRINGING ABOUT CHANGE IN THE EUROPEAN UNION: THE LEADERSHIP ROLE OF THE COMMISSION

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### Introduction

The European Commission exists within the framework of a unique system of governance. It is unique both by comparison with the systems of governance which exist at the level of nation states and at the level of other international organisations.

One of the key distinguishing characteristics of the EU's system of governance is its considerable dispersal of political power and its associated lack of direct accountability between the governing and the governed. In the Member States of the EU there is an identifiable, usually reasonably coherent, and democratically elected source of authority - a government supported by a majority in parliament being the basic pattern. This source of authority has political and policy orientations which draw on ideological perspectives and these orientations and perspectives guide the general shape and direction of public decision-making. So, for example, a national election in Germany or in Spain is likely to result in a Centre-Right or Centre-Left party or coalition of parties with a majority in parliament and this majority is then likely to pursue policies which, though affected by the evolution of circumstances and events, reflect manifesto and programmatic commitments and beliefs. To put this another way, in the Member States there is an institutional structure which is capable of being used by political movements and actors to provide a basis for political power and authority. This, in turn, can be used to provide political leadership.

In the EU there is no such comparable focus of power and authority. The governing structure, as set out in a series of treaties - most notably the Founding Treaties of the 1950s, the Single European Act (SEA) of 1986, and the Treaty on European Union (TEU) of 1992 - and as clarified by political practice, results in political power and authority being divided between, and shared between, several institutions. Of these institutions, the Commission, along with the Court of Justice, might be thought of as the most inappropriate and unsuited institution to provide leadership and drive for the EU: it is, after all, an appointed body with no popular base or mandate. The European Council and the Council of Ministers, by contrast, bring together senior political representatives of the governments of the Member States, whilst the European Parliament (EP) brings together the directly elected representatives of the people. In practice, however, these three institutions with some claim to democratic legitimacy are constrained in what they can do by way of providing leadership and impetus for the EU. The European Council and the Council of Ministers are constrained by, amongst other factors, internal national and ideological divisions and their very structural nature as rolling series of international negotiations, whilst the EP is constrained both by the size and heterogeneity of its membership and by its lack of constitutional powers.

There is then, if not a complete lack of democratically based political leadership in the EU, at least a shortfall in that there are no direct counterparts to those national political structures which provide (to varying degrees) political direction that is located within a political party shaped framework and set of priorities. This has presented, as the Founding Fathers intended, considerable opportunities for the Commission to exercise not just the advisory and administrative responsibilities which are the normal

business of national civil servants and international secretariats, but also to exercise considerable leadership responsibilities.

In practice, there have been, and are, four broad aspects to the leadership responsibilities the Commission has sought to exercise. These are:

- (1) shaping the political and policy agendas;
- (2) bringing forward specific policy proposals;
- (3) mobilising support behind initiatives;
- (4) guiding and mediating policy and legislative proposals through the maze of EU decision-making processes from draft proposal to final decision-making stage.

Numerous factors determine and shape the extent to which, and the ways in which, the Commission exercises these leadership roles. The concerns of this paper are : a) to examine the nature of these factors as they effect the Commission's potential leadership capacity; b) to show that whilst some of the factors have remained relatively constant over time others have changed in significant ways; and c) to demonstrate - especially as regards agenda setting and policy proposing - the sorts of relationships which exist between the factors and the leadership exercised by the Commission. It is, of course, not possible in a relatively short paper to examine these three concerns in any great depth. Nonetheless, it is hoped that in the account which now follows, whatever may be lost in the way of detail and fine tuning will be more than compensated for by information and observations which throw at least some general light on this extremely important aspect of the functioning of the EU.

The factors which influence the Commission's leadership capacity can be grouped into two broad categories: the resources of the Commission and the operating context of the Commission.

#### Resources of the Commission

Of the many resources which the Commission has at its disposal to enable it to attempt to exercise effective leadership, the following are the most important.

#### Constitutional Powers

The Commission's constitutional powers are potentially considerable. Article 155 of the EC Treaty is the key article in regard to the Commission seeking to provide general leadership:

'In order to ensure the proper functioning and development of the common market, the Commission shall:

1. ensure that the provisions of this Treaty and the measures taken by the institutions pursuant thereto are applied;
2. formulate recommendations or deliver opinions on matters dealt with in this Treaty, if it expressly so provides or if the Commission considers it necessary;
3. have its own power of decision and participate in the shaping of measures taken by the Council and by the European Parliament in the manner provided for in this Treaty;
4. exercise the powers conferred on it by the Council for the implementation of the rules laid down by the latter'.

Article 155EC gives to the Commission a considerable potential for launching new initiatives and shaping the terms of the ongoing debate about EU policies and structures. It does so by virtue of the vagueness of some of its provisions as to what the Commission should be doing, and by virtue of its references to the need to ensure that 'this Treaty' is properly applied and developed - the significance of the latter being that there are few policy areas, other than those which are covered by the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) pillars of the TEU, which are completely excluded from the EC Treaty's remit. Article 155 thus permits the Commission to move on a broad front if it so wishes - by, for example, issuing position or discussion papers which are designed to set or shape the agenda. If the ideas expressed in such papers are then endorsed by other institutions - especially by the European Council and/or the Council of Ministers - or if they lead to requests for the Commission to develop its thinking further - perhaps in the form of a White Paper - they can then

become a source of legitimacy and a framework in which more specific proposals are advanced. Such, for example, has been the pattern in the sphere of the social dimension, where the Commission's 1989 Community Charter of Fundamental Social Right for Workers (the so-called Social Charter), which was endorsed by the December 1989 Strasbourg European Council meeting, has served as a reference point and a legitimiser for a stream of specific legislative proposals.

Where leadership is concerned not so much with the broad sweep and direction of policy and institutional development but rather with the more modest task of advancing specific proposals, the Commission is also strongly placed constitutionally. It is so in two particular ways. First, the EC Treaty is less than precise in many respects. This has created opportunities for the Commission to take action and to advance proposals where it has felt it to be necessary and appropriate to do so. For example, it has taken advantage of the Treaty articles on competition policy (Articles 85-94) to be highly pro-active in seeking to ensure that restrictive and protectionist practices in the internal market are minimised. Article 235 of the Treaty has also been useful for the Commission because it allows it to make a proposal if 'action by the community should prove necessary to attain, in the cause of the operation of the common market, one of the objectives of the Community and this Treaty has not provided the necessary powers...' Illustration of the use of Article 235 is seen in the way it was frequently invoked prior to the SEA to enable the Commission to begin to develop a Community environmental policy. Significantly, and this can be seen in other policy areas too, once environmental policy began to become established as a legitimate Community goal, it was incorporated into the Treaty - via the SEA in its case and in the case of several other policy areas, via the TEU in other cases. Incorporation of a policy area into the Treaty has had the effect of further increasing the Commission's powers because the appropriateness of the EU being involved in the area is established. Second, the Commission enjoys a considerable control over proposals as they make their way through the legislative process. The Commission can, it should be said, be requested by the Council and the EP to submit appropriate proposals and its functions in a context wherein it is subject to a constant barrage of representations from all sorts of outside interests on the need for EU law. These requests and representations, coupled with the constant dialogue in which the Commission is engaged with third parties, result in no more than about ten per cent of EU legislation originating 'spontaneously' within the Commission. (Fitzmaurice, 1994, p186). Nonetheless, it is the Commission alone which decides just how and when to proceed - albeit sometimes under pressure - and no other institution or outside interest is in a position to issue instructions to the Commission concerning the substantive context or timetable of its proposals.

### The Background and Standing of Commissioners

A weakness of the Commission is that its most prominent members, Commissioners, are not chosen first and foremost on the basis of what would be best for the Commission. Practices vary between the Member States regarding what their governments have in mind when they nominate their Commissioner(s), but invariably at least some attention is given to the likely willingness and capability of the nominee(s) to keep an eye on the national (as defined by the dominant party[ies]) interests. Another, and related, weakness is that Commissioners are appointed rather than elected, so legitimacy can be a problem if they seek to be too bold. This weakness has been partially offset by the practice which developed under Delors, and which was made into a constitutional requirement by the TEU, that incoming Commissioners must obtain a vote of confidence in the EP before formally taking up office. Important, however, though this confirmation process is in enhancing the credibility and legitimacy of the College, it still leaves the Commissioners a long way short of being able to claim that they have a popular endorsement, let alone a popular mandate.

Nonetheless, at College level the Commission is composed almost exclusively of former politicians, most of whom have held ministerial, and some of whom have held senior ministerial, office in their own countries (see Macmullen, 1995). Commissioners are, thus, mostly people who enjoy a considerable measure of political prestige, who possess a range of political skills and resources, and who are used to exercising power and influence. Usually, moreover, they come to Brussels with the idea of wishing to continue to exercise power and influence - both in respect of the portfolio they are assigned and of the Commission as a whole.

### Commission Expertise

The Commission bureaucracy is the main source of technical expertise and the main repository of information about the content and impact of EU policies. With expertise and information being key power resources - little that is sensible or workable can be done in many policy areas without an understanding of highly complex issues and without access to a mass of what are often almost impenetrable facts and figures - the Commission is thus advantageously placed to make itself indispensable to many initiatives and developments.

So as to manage its expertise and its knowledge in an efficient manner, Commission staff are organised into sectoral Directorates General (DGs), in much the same way as national civil servants are organised into ministries. Within the DGs, officials have and develop ideas, understandings and knowledge as to what should and can be done in their respective policy spheres. When the necessary expertise is not to be found amongst the Commission's permanent staff, as is often the case - especially in new and developing policy areas - given that there are only 3,000 or so officials at policy-making levels, outside help is frequently called in by the relevant DG. Usually by contracting consultants of some kind or by making use of the extensive advisory committee system which is clustered around the Commission.

### Commission Neutrality

At both College and administrative levels, Commission employees have, in theory at least, a quality which is absent from the European Council, the Council of Ministers and the EP: neutrality and independence vis a vis national and other interests. Since the Commission is staffed by nationals of the Member States, there are naturally sometimes suspicions that a particular Commissioner or official has used his/her position to look sympathetically at a matter concerning his/her country. Moreover, it is clear that at College level the governments of Member States do sometimes look to their Commissioner(s) to press a particular matter or to adopt a certain position on an issue that is deemed to be important to the national interest. For the most part, however, the impartiality which all Commission employees are expected to display in the exercise of their duties is respected, and is generally seen to be so. This impartiality means that when the Commission launches initiatives, be they of a general directional or of a specific policy kind, or when it tries to promote a consensus on a contentious issue, it tends to be viewed with less suspicion than other institutions and actors when they seek to do something similar. This is not, of course, to say that Commission initiatives and actions are necessarily liked or accepted, or even that they are not viewed by some as evidence that the Commission has an agenda of its own, but generally speaking the Commission is seen to be seeking to act in the interests of the EU as a whole. For many, it is, and must be - because it is the only body with the potential to so be - the conscience of the Union.

### The 'Duty' of the Commission to Promote Integration

Closely related to the perceived neutrality and independence of the Commission is a widely held view, which is shared both by most Commission staff and by many influential outsiders, that the Commission has a duty, a mission almost, to be fostering the integration process. If the Commission does not assume such a pioneering role and act as the motor force of integration then who, it is argued, will? Other EU institutions are seen as being able to make important contributions in this regard, but their heterogeneous memberships, their organisational structures, and in some respects their powers, makes it difficult for them to initiate and press ahead with integrative developments on a sustainable basis.

The origins of this view that the Commission has special responsibilities in promoting integration go back to the way in which the European Community was founded in the 1950s, and more particularly to the vision of one of its main architects, Jean Monnet. It is perhaps not a complete coincidence that the Commission has been at its most adventurous, its most ambitious, and its most forward looking during the period of the Delors' Presidencies, for Delors had long been inspired by thinking and ideas which were in many respects similar to those of Monnet. Moreover, Delors spent several years in the 1960s as a prominent figure in the French Planning Commission - which Monnet founded and headed in the early post-war years and where he became convinced of the merits of

economic planning by enlightened officials and also of the need for much of such planning to be undertaken at a European rather than at a national level.

Delors' Presidencies may in time come to be seen as the high point of Commission activism and drive. They should not, however, be seen as aberrations in terms of the Commission wanting to assert itself. The desire 'to be doing something useful and important' is an ongoing characteristic of the Commission which penetrates deeply into the Commission bureaucracy. Whilst the idealistic, almost pioneering, vision of many of the early employees of the Commission has necessarily been replaced by more pragmatic attitudes as the institutions has become more rational and bureaucratized, the notion that it is the duty of the Commission to be pushing ahead with integration is still widely held. As Ludlow has commented, 'the function of animateur permeates the whole structure and ethos of the institution' (1991, p97).

### The Role of the President

Under the various articles of the TEU which refer to the Commission, the President is barely differentiated in his powers from the College of Commissioners. In theory he is, therefore, little more than *primus inter pares*. In practice, however, the position of President has assumed increased visibility and status over the years: so much so that the incumbent, if he so chooses and if he has the ability, can loom much larger than his fellow Commissioners. Several factors account for this enhanced standing of the President, of which the most prominent are: the increased significance of the EU itself; the development of the practice of Presidents assuming key portfolio responsibilities; the building up of the personal office (cabinet) of the President and of more direct lines into the Commission Services; the presence of the President at important and media-swamped international gatherings - most notably European Council meetings and the annual Western Economic Summits; the need of the media to focus on an individual - if only to provide pictures; and the drive which Delors - and in less favourable circumstances Jenkins - brought to the post.

The potentiality of the office of President was seen in the way that Delors exercised a range of leadership roles in respect of most of the major initiatives and developments which occurred during his ten year period of office. It is not possible to examine Delors' leadership record here, but let it be noted that there is an abundance of evidence attesting to the vigorous leadership he provided in such key areas as the Single European Market (SEM), Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), the social dimension, enlargement to the states of the European Free Trade Association (the EFTAs), and the initiative on growth, competitiveness and employment. (Grant [1994] and Ross [1995] provide very useful insights into the role of the Commission Presidency under Delors).

In short, it is clear that a forceful and activist President can do much to enhance the Commission's general standing and leadership capacities.

### The (Relative) Cohesion of the Commission

The Commission is potentially more capable of acting as a cohesive institution than the European Council, the Council of Ministers, or the EP. Four main factors explain this. First, its members, at both College and administrative levels, are not supposed to be politically or nationally partisan in the performance of their duties. Personal preferences and loyalties do, of course, sometimes creep into the work of the Commission, especially at College level, but they tend not to be so sustained or indeed as deeply felt as the preferences that are articulated and the loyalties that are apparent in the more openly political and partisan European Council, Council of Ministers, and EP. Second, its leading figures - the Commissioners - occupy their posts in a full-time capacity, whereas their counterparts in the European Council and Council of Ministers are primarily concerned with managing affairs in their own countries. This tends to result in Commissioners becoming attached to the success of the Commission in a manner in which Heads of Government and national ministers do not do so in regard to the European Council and the Council of Ministers. It also means that Commissioners have more time and opportunity to develop consensual positions on important issues. Third, Commissioners hold office for much longer periods than either Heads of Government or national ministers, which can further develop their attachment to the success of the institution and enable them to build up a formidable subject expertise. Unless they die or choose to resign (and these are rare occurrences) Commissioners now (subsequent to the one year increase in the term of office which was stipulated in the TEU) hold office

and a particular portfolio for at least one fixed five year term. Moreover, about half of the Commissioners in new Colleges are returning for a second, or even a third, term of office: so, for example, eight of the seventeen Commissioners in the Delors II Commission were returning, as were ten of the seventeen in the (interim two year) Delors III Commission, and eight of the seventeen (excluding the three newcomers from the acceding states) in the Santer Commission (Macmullen, 1995, p19). By contrast, the representatives of national governments change frequently - normally as a result of some shifts in political fortunes. So, for example, as Donnelly and Ritchie have shown, during the Delors II Commission (1989-92) there were elections in all Member States except France and Denmark, and only three Heads of Government - Kohl, Mitterrand, and Gonzales - retained their positions throughout (1994, p35). Fourth, the Commission has, in its President, an office which has considerably greater potential for forging cohesion than is the case with the six-monthly rotating Council Presidencies and the weakly empowered EP President. Delors showed, especially in the first half of his Presidency, how a strong willed figure supported by a well organised supporting team, can use the office to promote a reasonable degree of direction on Commission objectives and actions.

The case regarding the coherence of the Commission should not, however, be overstated, for it is a relative coherence rather than an absolute one. In many respects the Commission is highly pluralistic, with a divergence of preferences, styles, and working processes and cultures at both College and administrative levels. With Commissioners and DGs enjoying a potentially considerable degree of independence in the exercise of their duties, this diversity can make political and policy dynamism, and overall coherence, difficult to achieve at times. So, for example, the effectiveness of the Delors II and III Commissions were unquestionably damaged by several disputes between Commissioners which became public knowledge - such as the dispute in the Delors II Commission between External Relations Commissioner, Frans Andriessen, and Agriculture Commissioner, Ray MacSharry, over who was the 'lead' Commissioner on the agricultural aspects of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) negotiations, and the dispute in the first few months of the Delors III Commission between External Political Relations Commissioner, Hans van Den Broek, and External Economic Relations Commissioner, Sir Leon Brittan, over the remits of their respective portfolios. As for difficulties with coherence at administrative levels, differences on important issues sometimes arise between DGs, especially where policy responsibilities overlap and the DGs concerned have developed different views as to what should be done. There have, for example, been several clashes in recent years between DGIV (Competition), which inclines to a liberal and non-interventionist perspective on how the internal market should function, and several DGs - including DGIII (Internal Market and Industrial Affairs), DGVII (Transport), and DGXIII (Telecommunications, Information Technologies and Industries) - which have supported selective intervention.

#### The Operating Context of the Commission

Three aspects of the operating contexts of the Commission are especially important in terms of the Commission's potential capacity to use the resources which it has at its disposal to exercise leadership in an effective manner.

#### Perceptions of the Need for, and Desirability of, Policy Activity at EU Level

Clearly, the Commission's prospects of advancing the policy agenda at EU level and bringing forward policy proposals which have reasonable prospects of being favourably received are considerably enhanced when those who make the final decisions - which means particularly the representatives of the Member States - are convinced of the need for, and the desirability of, policy activity at EU level.

That this is so, is no more clearly seen than in the background to the launching of the SEM programme in 1985. The many studies which have been undertaken on the reasons for the launching of that programme have focused on several claimed causal factors - from pressure by European business groupings to background work by the Commission - but virtually all have agreed that little progress could have been made had not a consensus emerged between the Member States on the need to integrate the still fractured internal market.

The dependence of the Commission on the perceptions of Member States regarding acting at EU level was further illustrated at several points during the Delors Presidency, most notably after the

Danish and French referenda on the TEU when it became clear that a considerable gap existed between political elite opinion and much of public opinion on the desirability of continuing with rapid integration. The political leaders themselves scarcely changed their views, but they felt obliged to be seen to become more cautious and circumspect about the integration process and signalled quite clearly to the Commission that brakes needed to be applied.

### Perceptions of the Role of the Commission in the Integration Process

Whilst increased perceptions by the Member States that there should be policy activity at EU level normally enhances the Commission's leadership capacities, this is not always so. There are circumstances in which Member States may have doubts about, and may even be opposed to, allowing further integration to automatically result in a greater leadership role for the Commission. Usually such doubts and opposition are part of a broader concern about the increasingly supranational tilt of the EU. This was, for example, certainly the case in the context of the 1991 IGC negotiations on the institutional implications of expanding the EU's policy remit, when the decision to establish the CFSP and JHA pillars outside the EC Treaty was motivated by concerns not just to keep the Commission's powers at bay but also by a more general concern to retain the pre-eminence of national governmental power in these spheres.

It is not only general perceptions and political orientations which influence the attitudes of Member States regarding the leadership the Commission ought to be offering. Other factors play a role too, of which perhaps the most important is whether or not the Commission is seen to be doing a good job. At the level of the individual Member States, what is deemed to constitute 'doing a good job' varies considerably according to national interests and priorities - Italy, for example, which is generally supportive of Commission leadership, has strongly resisted such leadership in the context of the Commission's proposals for restricting the EU steel industry because they are judged to be too damaging to Italian interests. At the overall EU level, what is deemed to constitute 'doing a good job' is more difficult to say because it involves general notions of competence, efficiency, fairness etc. Certainly, however, there can be little doubt that one of the reasons why the Commission's leadership was not as effective in the closing period of Delors' Presidency was that the Commission as a whole was just not seen as doing as good a job as it had done previously: the open conflicts between some Commissioners were seen as being damaging and the Commission was blamed for having contributed to the climate of opinion which brought about the June 1992 Danish referendum result by having been too integrationist in its rhetoric in the weeks preceding the vote.

### The Institutional Context

The institutional context in which the Commission finds itself naturally has many direct implications for the leadership the Commission is expected and is able to provide. This context is in almost constant evolution in response to political and constitutional changes, with consequences which are sometimes helpful and which are sometimes unhelpful from the viewpoint of the Commission's leadership potential.

Of the many changes in the institutional context which have occurred over the years, three have been perhaps especially important in regard to the Commission's agenda setting and policy proposing roles:

- The European Council has become established as the place where major political decisions concerning the direction of the EU - be they concerned with enlargement, with institutional reform, with budgetary development, or with policy guidelines - are taken. It might be thought that this involvement of the European Council in the 'grand issues' would undermine the Commission's agenda setting and policy proposing roles, and indeed in limited respects it does do so insofar as the Heads of Government attempt and frequently succeed in agreeing on deals which provide a reference framework for future action. However, much of the discussion at summits is on the basis of papers which have been drawn up by the Commission - either on its own initiative, or at the request of the European Council, or on the basis of ideas which have been originally floated by the Commission and on which the European Council has then requested further information or a more detailed report. So, for example, the Commission has provided extensive briefing material on the issue of EU enlargement for recent summits - and is currently in the process of doing so again, with the December 1994 Essen Summit

having requested the Commission to present a White Paper at its next meeting on 'preparation of the associated states for integration into the internal market of the Union' and also requesting the Commission 'to submit as quickly as possible the detailed analysis desired by the Council of the effects of the enlargement in the context of the Union's current policies and their future development'. (European Council, 1994).

- The greater use of qualified majority voting (qmv) in the Council of Ministers since the mid-1980s, and the expansion via the SEA and the TEU of the policy areas in which qmv is constitutionally permissible, has meant that the Commission has been able to be bolder with many of its policy proposals. Where qmv applies, the Commission need not be unduly inhibited in bringing a proposal forward if there is opposition in just one or two states, and need not necessarily water down its preferences in the hope that potential minority opposition will be withdrawn or removed.

- The TEU Social Protocol has had, in those spheres of social policy where unanimity is still required in the Council, a not dissimilar effect to the greater use of qmv in other policy spheres. It has done so by making it less necessary for the Commission to be concerning itself, when bringing forward policy proposals in the social sphere, to be concerning itself with a particular dissenting view - in this case, of course, a particular dissenting view, namely that of the UK Government. An illustration of the usefulness for the Commission of the Social Protocol was seen in September 1994 when the Council 'as eleven' adopted its first directive on the basis of the Social Protocol: the Labour and Social Affairs Council adopted, with Portugal abstaining, the long discussed and much delayed European Works Council Directive. The second usage of the Social Protocol seems likely to be a directive guaranteeing unpaid paternity leave, following the blocking of such a directive in the Council of Ministers by the UK Government in December 1994. Significantly, the Social Affairs Commissioner, Pdraig Quinn, quickly made it clear after the December Council meeting that he would attempt to make the directive of 'the fourteen' (as it would be following enlargement) more comprehensive than the original proposal.

## Conclusion

The Commission does not, of course, exercise anything like a monopoly of leadership in the EU. Other institutions and actors are also very much involved. To take agenda setting by way of example, sectional and party interests, Member States and groups of Member States, the European Council, the Council of Ministers, and the EP are all part of ongoing, interconnected and overlapping discussions and negotiations about what the EU should be doing. In seeking to determine in particular instances which institution(s) or actor(s) played the key role in bringing an issue onto the agenda it is frequently virtually impossible to disentangle contributions and determine who did what. For example, the key role in regard to the prominence given to the SEM from the mid-1980s is still very much the subject of political debate amongst commentators, with the Commission, the European Council, the UK Government, and the Court of Justice (via the Cassis de Dijon ruling) all finding advocates and supporters.

The precise leadership role of the Commission in respect of particular initiatives is not, therefore, always easy, or indeed even possible, to determine. What is clear, however, is that every major new development and every major change with which the EC/EU has been associated in recent years has seen the Commission at the heart of decision-making processes: by, for example, Commissioners making speeches on the subject and advocating courses of action - such as the urging by Delors in a series of speeches in 1988-89 that movement towards EMU should be paralleled by movement towards greater political union; by the issuing of position and policy papers - such as the report and proposals produced by the Commission in 1992 on the future expenditure and financing of the EC; and by urging the other EU institutions and actors to act, and facilitating wherever possible their ability to do so - such as with the very active and high profile role played by the Commission in 1992 and 1993 in cajoling and enabling the Member States to accept the trade deals negotiated within the context of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) Uruguay Round.

That the Commission provides leadership in the EU is thus clear. This paper has sought to outline the main factors which determine the Commission's potential leadership capacity. The factors have been divided into two broad categories - resources and operating contexts - and it has been shown that whilst two of the factors - the resources of perceived neutrality and of the integrating 'duty' - have remained relatively constant over time, most factors have changed considerably over the years.

The overall effect of the changes has been to increase the Commission's potential leadership capacity. However, this has not occurred in any consistent manner, for some changes have been helpful to the Commission, some have been unhelpful, whilst some have been, in different respects, both helpful and unhelpful.

For the most part, the changes in the resources of the Commission have served to strengthen the potential leadership capacity with, for example, the increasingly high profile background of Commissioners and the enhanced role of the Presidency combining to give the College a greater political standing and confidence. At the same time, however, there have been some weakening effects of resource changes with, for example, internal cohesion seemingly becoming an increasing problem - not least at College level where the greater political standing of Commissioners has tended to go hand in hand with greater political skills and self-confidence, which in turn has not been altogether helpful for collegiality.

The changes in the operational contexts have also contained pluses and minuses from the Commission's viewpoint, with the balance again seemingly tilted in the Commission's favour. As regards, for example, perceptions of the need for initiatives to be launched and policies to be determined at EU level, the climate which emerged in the mid-1980s was very favourable to the Commission in opening the way for a major expansion of the EC's policy remit, but the atmosphere which followed upon the first Danish referendum on the TEU was much less helpful - although it did not, it should be stressed, put the integration clock back too far. As regards the institutional context, an example of a change which has benefited the Commission is the greater use of qualified majority voting in the Council of Ministers, whilst an example of a change which has not been helpful is the TEU-created provision enabling the EP to call on the Commission to submit a policy proposal. (The EP exercised this right for the first time in April 1994 when it passed a resolution requesting the Commission to prepare a directive on civil liability in respect of future damage to the environment).

Clearly, the Commission cannot exercise leadership by force of will alone. Acting within a framework of institutional constraints and rapidly changing circumstances it must, if it is to maximise its leadership potential effectively, mobilise the resources at its disposal and take advantage of the opportunities that are presented within its operational contexts. In general, the Commission has been quite successful in so mobilising and taking advantage. However, precisely how it has done this - and, more particularly, what have been its strategies and tactics - is the subject matter for another paper.

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