

Journal of Contemporary European Research

Volume 12, Issue 3 (2016)

Research Article

From National Enclaves to Supporting Offices: an Analysis of the 1999 Reform of European Commissioners' Cabinets

Renke Deckarm, *Oldenburg University*

Citation

Deckarm, R. (2016). 'From National Enclaves to Supporting Offices: an Analysis of the 1999 Reform of European Commissioners' Cabinets', *Journal of Contemporary European Research*. 12 (3), 735 - 752.

First published at: www.jcer.net

Abstract

This article analyses the transformation of European commissioners' private offices (cabinets) from national enclaves to supporting offices. Structural changes were caused by a reform by then-Commission President Prodi in 1999. To analyse this reform, a typology based on management literature is developed. The reform is characterised as 'big bang': it was strategically planned by a leader, transformational and affected the entire cabinet system. The most important measures were that at least three nationalities and three Commission officials were required in cabinets. These and other measures anticipated changing demands towards cabinets caused by the 2004/7 enlargement and the Kinnock reforms. This article closes a gap in research on the Commission, in which cabinets are seldom analysed in their own right. It complements earlier evidence on change in cabinets by explaining why and how structural changes evoked a functional transformation. This contributes to the broader research agenda on change in the functioning of the Commission. Content analysis of primary sources (Prodi's speeches and publications, expert interviews and a biographic database) and recent academic publications contribute to the analysis.

Keywords

European Commission; Organisational Change; Reform; Cabinets; Kinnock Reforms; Enlargement

This article analyses European commissioners' influential private offices (cabinets). It explores change in cabinets, specifically how these former national enclaves were transformed into supporting offices. The changes resulted from then-Commission President Romano Prodi's reform in 1999. Prodi took office after his predecessor Jacques Santer and his entire Commission resigned over allegations of mismanagement and fraud (Committee of Independent Experts 1999), at this time, the Commission faced a major institutional crisis. At the same time, the EU was about to be enlarged from 15 to 25 members, which presented additional challenges to its institutions. Cabinets are in a pivotal position in the EU's political system. Their 1999 reform resulted from the consensus on the need for reform and can be seen as a first instance of a series of adaptations which were to happen.

The article's first and central aim is to analyse the cabinet reform, which until now has only been mentioned in passing by scholars. It extends existing evidence of structural changes (Egeberg and Heskestad 2010) and provides a detailed account of the functional adaptation (Kassim et al. 2013). The 1999 reform needs to be understood in the context of other transformations in the Commission. Consequently, the second aim is to explore the context of the reform. It does so by inductively analysing the cabinet reform's interaction with the Kinnock reforms and the Eastern enlargement.

Considering the lack of an appropriate toolkit to analyse such a reform, this article thirdly aims at presenting a typology of reforms. This is done along the lines of two types of organisational change: 'big bang' and 'small steps'. Four dimensions of organisational change borrowed from management studies are considered: how it occurred, its magnitude, focus and level (Hodges and Gill 2014). In its analysis of the process and outcome of the reform, the article relies both on primary sources (interviews, data on cabinet composition, speeches and publications by Prodi) and recent academic publications.

There has been research on commissioners (Egeberg 1996, 2012) and the services (Hooghe 2001; Suvarierol 2008; Ban 2013; Kassim et al. 2013; Wille 2013). Nationality has been found to have a minor and declining impact on political behaviour in the Commission. This is related to the Eastern enlargement, the Commission's presidentialisation and a professionalisation of the Commission after the Kinnock reforms (Dimitrakopoulos 2004; Bauer 2008; Kassim et al. 2013; Wille 2013).¹ This article contributes to this literature by adding an analysis of the functioning and the development of the organisational layer between commissioners and the services.

UNDERSTANDING CHANGE IN ORGANISATIONS

This section presents an analytical framework for the analysis of the cabinet reform – which political science currently lacks. Much literature on Commission reforms deals with the extent to which the Kinnock reforms complied with standards of the new public management approach; most business literature on change aims at discovering the ideal way of managing change, contributions being manuals rather than analyses. Here, a change shall be analysed *ex post* to understand both the process and the outcomes.

The analysis is based on the typology of change in organisations suggested by Hodges and Gill (2014). The different extremes on four dimensions – how change happened (D1), magnitude (D2), focus (D3), level (D4) – will be summarised in the types 'big bang' and 'small step'. This will allow conclusions on the relevance of the cabinet reform. Table 1 summarises the Hodges-Gill typology and adds the types.

Table 1: Typology of change

| | Type 'big bang' | Type 'small step' |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| D1: How? | Change was planned, momentary and leader-driven. | Change was emergent, continuous and leader-managed. |
| D2: Magnitude? | Change was transformational. | Change was incremental. |
| D3: Focus? | Change was strategic and far-reaching. | Change was operational and adjusted only details. |
| D4: Level? | The entire organisation was affected by change. | Change affected only individuals. |

Source: Hodges and Gill (2014), except for summary in types

D1 concerns how change happened, whether it was planned or emergent in character. Planned change is strategic, mostly leader-driven and addresses organisational aspects with a clear aim (Tenkasi and Chesmore 2003). Emergent change breaks with the understanding of change as a linear and planned process. Burnes defines emergent change as a 'continuous, open-ended, cumulative and unpredictable process of aligning and re-aligning an organization to its changing environment' (Burnes 2009, 372). This does not mean that this kind of change is leader-less, but the leader discreetly manages change instead of imposing it.

D2 concerns the reform's magnitude, in which transformational and incremental reforms are the most extreme instances. Weick and Quinn (1999) distinguish between episodic and continuous change, which Hodges and Gill (2014) describe as transformational versus incremental change. Transformational change is a major redefinition of an organisation. It transforms its identity and strategy and can also be understood as revolutionary change. Incremental change by contrast is characterised as continuous and adaptive change in small steps. The punctuated equilibrium theory posits that the two types of change follow each other: transformational changes are followed by periods of incremental change (Gersick 1991; Hayes 2014).

Regarding D3, the focus of a reform, the literature distinguishes strategic from operational types (de Wit and Meyer 2010). Strategic changes are fundamental to structure and processes, while operational changes are smaller adaptations. Often, operational changes stabilise or sustain the functioning of the system in its current form, whereas strategic changes aim at a renewal and are more radical. While the remaining dimensions are quite distinct, this dimension is inter-related to magnitude (D2). Strategic change can be transformational or incremental, or a combination of both. There are strategies of change which foresee a long-term series of incremental steps. By contrast, operational change can hardly have a transformational focus. It can only involve small-scale incremental changes, but a transformational change is necessarily a major redefinition of the organisation. Thus, strategic change can be transformational and incremental, but operational change can be incremental in its magnitude only.

D4 concerns the level of the reform. Hodges and Gill distinguish between individual, group, team and organisation levels. Change on higher levels affects lower levels as well. Hodges and Gill call this the 'waterfall' effect, change imposed on higher levels trickles down to lower levels. The process of change needs to be adapted according to the level which is to be changed.

For the purpose of the analysis and possible applications to other contexts, the four dimensions of the typology will be summarised in two types of change, the 'big bang' and the 'small steps'. Burnes's (2009) summary of the literature on emergent change allows the conclusion that, generally, it is a process of small and detailed steps, followed by power-play in organisations. This is summarised in the 'small steps' type. Complementary, planned change is transformational, strategic and aims at the whole organisation, resulting in the 'big bang' type.

This typology put forward here is a means for a systematic analysis and classification of a reform in the public sector, which political science literature so far has not offered. Future research could apply the typology and adapt and refine it to serve broader purposes. The dimensions are not associated with weights and there are no predefined boundaries by which a certain reform could be classified as one type or the other. As it stands, the typology supports a systematic analysis of a reform in order to understand a case, which is the core aim of this article.

ANALYSING CHANGE IN THE CABINET SYSTEM

Cabinets are commissioners' private offices and link the political (college of commissioners) and bureaucratic layers (Commission services) of the Commission. Each commissioner is entitled to six cabinet members (and administrative personnel), the vice-presidents can employ more staff. Cabinet members are hand-picked by commissioners.

Cabinets are crucial in the Commission's policy-making. Vertically, they co-ordinate the work of commissioners and the services attached to them. The services, organised in directorates-general, draft policies and fulfil the Commission's administrative tasks. Cabinets follow policy proposals and

transmit the political directions by the commissioner. Horizontally, the existence of cabinets ensures the principle of collegiality in the Commission: each commissioner is responsible for every policy. A major part of cabinets' work therefore concerns the monitoring of other commissioners' portfolios. There are regular meetings of cabinet members, the most important one being the 'Hebdo', the meeting of the heads of cabinet. In this meeting, the meetings of commissioners are prepared and conflicts over policies are often resolved at this stage. Additionally, cabinet members occasionally represent the commissioner and keep in constant contact with other EU institutions and outside stakeholders.

Cabinets occupy a pivotal position in the Commission and are of paramount importance in its internal organisation. Their reputation used to be bad, they were known as 'national enclaves' (Michelmann 1978, 482ff.). The baseline of the decade-long criticism is provided in 1979: cabinets had bad relations with the services and questioned their authority and they represented national interests in appointment procedures (Spierenburg 1979, 19). There were accusations of bringing intergovernmentalism into the Commission, one official claiming cabinets to be 'mini-Councils' (Peterson 1999, 56).

Today, cabinets are perceived differently. There has been a structural (Egeberg and Heskestad 2010) and functional denationalisation (Kassim et al. 2013, 199). In their survey, Kassim et al. do not find support for the persistence of cabinets' characterisation as 'national enclaves'. Wille comes to a similar conclusion on (heads of) cabinets who developed 'From National Agents to Professional Advisers' (Wille 2013, 115).

The remainder of this section displays and analyses the changes in the cabinet system in the past twenty years, building on four kinds of sources. First, I conducted five interviews with top Commission officials who worked in cabinets before and after 1999. The interviewees occupied senior positions both in cabinets and in the services, one was a member of Prodi's transition team. This allowed a better understanding of the functioning of cabinets before and after the reform and of the relevant aspects of the reform itself. Second, speeches and other publications (Prodi 2000, 2008) by Commission President Prodi are utilised to analyse the intentions of the reform. Third, structural changes are analysed based on a database with biographical information of 1,343 members of 149 commissioners' cabinets, broadening the results presented by Egeberg and Heskestad. This information was collected from the official Commission website as well as other webpages (news pages, conference pages, professional networks). In addition, an online form was sent to current and former cabinet members in 2015, resulting in 94 responses with detailed biographical information. Fourth, the analysis benefits from results published in excellent monographs on the Commission (Ban 2013; Kassim et al. 2013; Wille 2013).

DENATIONALISATION AND BEYOND: DEVELOPMENTS IN CABINETS, 1995-2015

Incoming President Prodi had a clear mandate to reform the Commission. He announced major institutional reforms which were to be implemented by Vice-President Neil Kinnock. In the same spirit, Prodi announced a concrete set of measures concerning commissioners' cabinets, which the college had to implement right at the term's beginning.

Table 2 provides a detailed overview of the measures taken and those not taken by Prodi. It assesses the measures with regard to their theoretical significance, and describes the situation before 1999, the measures taken, their effects and the post-1999 developments. The table also includes evidence from the collected data and refers to other sources. The following analysis of the typology's four dimensions will build on Table 2.

The most important measures were Prodi's decision to require at least three Commission civil servantsⁱⁱ and three nationalities per cabinet, as well as limiting their size. Figure 1 complements Table 2 and summarises the most important developments in the composition of cabinets in the past two decades. It displays the share of commissioners' compatriots, people who have no Commission experience and people who had worked with their commissioner before; as well as the cabinet members' average experience in the Commission.

Table 2: Measures of the 1999 Cabinet Reform

| | Structure | Structure/Employment Status | Size | Selection |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Influence | The organisation could be divided along national or portfolio lines (Gulick 1937). | The organisation could be the primary structure for its members (such as the EP now) or the secondary structure (such as the EP made up of national MPs) (Egeberg 2006). Future career prospects influence loyalty. | The bigger the cabinet, the more powerful it is. | The selection of staff matters for an organisation. It could be highly formalised (like the usual Commission personnel selection procedures) or very flexible, in the individual commissioner's responsibility |
| Status quo before 1999 | Officially, the commissioners and their cabinets have always represented portfolios, not countries. | The Commission has been the primary structure for most cabinet members, except for those seconded from member states. | The initial number of cabinet members was two, but grew to up to eight (Coombes 1970, 255; Donnelly and Ritchie 1994, 42f.) | Despite some formal requirements, staff selection has always been the sole responsibility of the commissioner and her/his head of cabinet (Nugent 2001, 119). Some cabinet staff were 'parachuted' into the services, circumventing the concours (Balint, Bauer and Knill 2007, 58f.) |
| Measures in 1999 | The portfolio division was further strengthened (see nationality). | No outside secondments into cabinets are allowed anymore (European Commission 1999, 13). | The usual number of cabinet members was limited to six (European Commission 1999, 12; Prodi 1999c) | While the cabinet selection procedures were not altered, the practice of 'parachuting' was stopped. |
| Results | Nationality is a less significant division line in the Commission, cabinets work less in the national interest (Kassim et al. 2013, 198ff.) | The loyalty of all cabinet staff belongs to the Commission, since it is the clear primary structure. Cooperation with the services is better since cabinet members might work there in the future (interview 2). | Each cabinet member faced an increasing workload, which limited cabinets' capacity. This cut the power of cabinets. | It is seen as a good thing that commissioners have the sole responsibility for selecting their staff. Stopping the practice of 'parachutage' silenced criticism and improved relations to the services. |
| Measures after 1999 | None. | None. | Some minor changes were introduced, which did not significantly affect the size of standard cabinets. | None. |

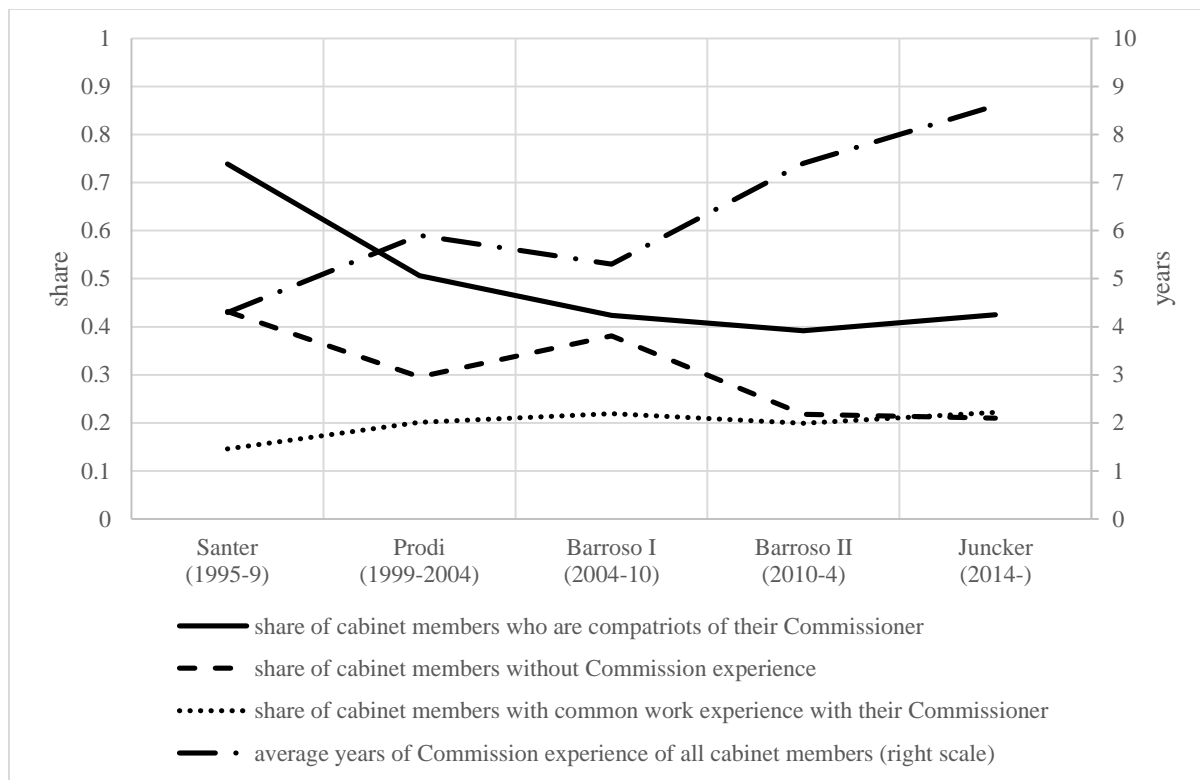
(Table 2 continued)

| | Tasks & Routines | Location | Gender | Age |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Influence | Cabinets are access points to their commissioners and hence fulfil important tasks – which gives them power as well. | The physical location matters because it constructs identities and affects interactions (Egeberg 1996, 725; 2004, 204) | Members of small, distinct groups are seen as representatives of this group. Increasing the share of women tackles this and leads to better results (Pfeffer 1997). | Older staff are more experienced, whereas younger staff might be more capable and willing to cope with an extraordinary workload. |
| Status quo before 1999 | Cabinets have always been criticised for being too powerful and interfering in the work of the services (Nugent 2001, 126). There were no formalised rules on cabinets' tasks and working routines. There were regular meetings of the heads of cabinets and of the relevant staff to prepare decisions. | The commissioners and their cabinets were traditionally housed together in the Berlaymont (or the Breydel) building (Wille 2013). | There were no rules on the share of women in cabinets. | Cabinets have traditionally been staffed with young people (Nugent 2001, 121), who often understand this as preparation for other tasks (Coombes 1970, 256; Wille 2013, 107). |
| Measures in 1999 | A Code of Conduct was introduced, which detailed tasks and routines of cabinets (European Commission 1999). Internal organisation was not affected by the rules. | After 1999, the cabinets were decentrally located with their respective services, aiming at improved relations (Prodi 1999c, 2008). | Prodi emphasised his will of achieving a gender balance. However, this did not result in formalised rules. | The 1999 reform did not address the age of cabinet members. |
| Results | The relations between cabinets and services improved because of a clearer division of labour (Kassim et al. 2013) | The relocation was criticised, the interviewees were very divided. There was more contact with the services, which is not necessarily a good thing. The coordination between cabinets suffered. | The share of women in cabinets slightly increased from 32 to 36 per cent, it remained at 13 per cent in senior positions. | The average age of cabinet members increased slightly from 38 to 39. Interviewees were indifferent regarding the changes. |
| Measures after 1999 | Barroso adopted the same rules, Juncker's system of more powerful vice-presidents changes tasks and routines. | Barroso reversed Prodi's decision and the college moved back into the Berlaymont in 2004. | The share continuously increased and is now at 45 per cent (41 in senior positions). | The ageing trend continues. The average age increased to 43 years in the current Commission. |

(Table 2 continued)

| | Nationality | Shared Work Experience | Commission Experience | Education |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Influence | Nationality in the Commission generally has little influence, it matters when the group is representing something (Egeberg 2006, 4). | Shared experience of the commissioner and his/her staff increases familiarity and trust. Also, national or partisan positions are known. | Working in any environment socialises and transcends norms and perceptions (Egeberg 1996). Thus, a person who has worked for the Commission before has a different view than an outsider. | There is no clear evidence on effects of the type of educational background on an organisation. |
| Status quo before 1999 | Cabinets were considered 'national enclaves' and were named by their commissioners' nationality rather than the name or portfolio (Michelmann 1978, 482; Prodi 2008). Cabinets had at least two nationalities. | Commissioners traditionally employed people they had worked with before (Donnelly and Ritchie 1994, 43). | Many cabinet members were not Commission staff. This contributed to criticisms directed at cabinets: they were interfering in the services' work and had no knowledge of procedures and people in the Commission. | Cabinet members are usually well educated and have higher education degrees in various subjects. |
| Measures in 1999 | Prodi required three nationalities per cabinet, the head or deputy head of cabinet had to be of a nationality different than that of the commissioner. | Setting limits to compatriots and requesting three service members (see next column) limits the number of staff with shared work experience. | Prodi requested at least three members of a cabinet to be officials from the Commission services (Prodi 1999c; European Commission 1999). | There were no rules on the education of cabinet members. |
| Results | Commissioners over-fulfilled Prodi's rules (Egeberg and Heskestad 2010). The share of commissioners' compatriots in cabinets fell from 74 per cent (80 in senior positions) to 51 (44). Cabinets are no longer seen as national enclaves, mixing nationalities is seen as a good thing. | The share of staff who have shared prior work experience with the commissioner increased from 15 to 20 per cent. Commissioners seem to select staff more carefully Interviewees emphasise the importance of trust more than contacts to national parties and government. | The share of cabinet members without Commission experience dropped from 43 to 30 per cent, the average tenure in the Commission rose from four to six years. Interviewees emphasise the importance of a mix and say that the measure improved relations with the services. This is in line with other evidence on this (Wille 2013, 107; Kassim et al. 2013, 203f.). | Most cabinet members are lawyers, followed by economists and social scientists. In Prodi's Commission, the share of economists was slightly higher, which cannot be related to any reform measures. |
| Measures after 1999 | Although the formal requirements were not changed, the share of compatriots decreased further to around 42 per cent in the Barroso and Juncker Commissions. | No further measures were taken, the numbers are stable. The share of senior cabinet members with shared work experience increased from 12 per cent under Prodi to 31 per cent under Juncker. | Both trends continued after Prodi, without being strengthened by further measures. Under Juncker, the share of Commission outsiders is 21 per cent and the average tenure is nine years. | Educational background continues to vary slightly without being externally influenced. |

Figure 1: Developments in cabinets, 1995-2015



Source: own data collection

A 'BIG BANG'? ANALYSING THE REFORM'S IMPACT

This section analyses the 1999 reform along the lines of the typology presented above and evaluates the nature of the reform as a 'big bang' or a 'small step'.

D1: How did the reform occur?

The dimension on how the reform occurred (D1) distinguishes planned from emergent change. The changes in the functioning of cabinets are a result of planned change by Prodi as leader. The resignation of the Santer Commission led to the opportunity for the first major Commission reform. President Prodi had a clear reform mandate and announced a reform of commissioners' cabinets, which is seen as part of a bigger change agenda encompassing also the major Kinnock reforms (Dimitrakopoulos 2004, 5).

In his speech before the EP in April 1999, Prodi made clear that his aim was also to reform organisational aspects of the Commission (Prodi 1999a). Less than a month later, cabinets are mentioned:

In my view, one of the reasons for the development of grey areas between technical and political spheres lies in the role assumed by the Cabinets. The Cabinets need to acquire a more markedly supranational structure and must simply serve as an instrument supporting the policies developed by the President and the Commissioners. The task of implementation must be left to the departments (...) (Prodi 1999b).

In the same debate, Prodi identified blurred responsibilities as one cause for the Commission's crisis and offers a solution: 'This is a problem of fundamental importance, which I wished to tackle head-on by defining the function of the Cabinets – one of the difficulties which has led in the past to tension and misunderstanding' (Prodi 1999b).

Later, Prodi reflected that he had feared that the national influence of cabinets would turn the entire Commission into an international body with commissioners representing their governments (Prodi 2008, 125), which explains the relevance Prodi gave to cabinets. In his speech before the June European Council in Cologne, Prodi announced the measures. He underlined his will to clarify the roles of cabinets and of the services, aiming at 'a genuine shift in the balance of power from the Cabinets towards the Commission's services. The role of Cabinets should be to support their Commissioners in the development of policy' (Prodi 1999c).

These statements show that Prodi followed a plan. He developed a strategy (see section on focus (D4)) with measures aimed at achieving the purpose of reforming cabinets. This was embedded in a broader reform agenda (Prodi 2008, 123f.). This is a clear sign of a planned and top-down change process. The planned process did achieve its aims, as the cabinet members interviewed confirm. The member involved in the reform process emphasises that Prodi had a clear vision and the above-quoted speech at the Cologne European Council was meant as an introduction to his comprehensive reform programme.

Subsequently, there were also instances of emergent change, for example the unintended consequence that commissioners employ more persons they had worked with before. Their share has continuously increased (see Figure 1). The rules led to limited access to people who could provide the link to the own government or party and this resulted in more careful selection. This, however, does not undermine the original reform, and interviewees do not evaluate this negatively. First, the commissioners need to be informed about what is happening in their home countries. Second, establishing a link does not necessarily result in national position-taking. Third, the single most important selection criterion explaining this trend is trust, as all interviewees unanimously emphasise:

You want people you can trust. (...) You want somebody that reminds you of home and especially somebody you can really trust. Why? Well, because you spent years working with somebody and you know exactly that the guy will never betray you, he will never lie to you (interview 1).

Of course the overall, perhaps the ultimately (...), the most decisive quality is that of trust. Such people trust these people, normally. The ones which they bring from their capitals. And it's a huge asset (interview 5).

In summary, the cabinet reform can be identified as planned change with major relevance. It was followed by emergent changes, which did not counteract the original reform.

D2: The reform's magnitude

The typology's dimension on magnitude (D2) distinguishes between transformational and incremental change. Prodi's cabinet reform can be considered transformational since there has been a major re-definition of cabinet's purposes. They are no longer national enclaves but, again, their role 'should be to support their Commissioners in the development of policy' (Prodi 1999c). This is the case now (see 'Tasks & Routines', 'Nationality' and 'Commission Experience' in Table 2, among

others). All interviewees considered the 1999 reform important, but most point to the importance of the Kinnock reforms and the enlargement on the functioning of the cabinets as well, as the following section will reveal in more detail.

Of course, not only the function was transformed, but also the form. The analysis has shown clear changes in the composition of cabinets. They are more diverse, less national and consist of more Commission civil servants, as Figure 1 and Table 2 (see especially 'Nationality' and 'Commission Experience') have demonstrated.

The transformation from national enclaves to supporting offices was caused by a variety of factors, but there are some crucial ones. The changes with regard to employment status are seen as very important by the interviewees. Three changes need to be considered in this respect: Prodi introduced a minimum of three Commission civil servants per cabinet, and stopped the practices of secondments of Commission-outsiders and 'parachuting' of cabinet members into the Commission (see 'Structure/Employment Status', 'Selection' and 'Commission Experience' in Table 2). Figure 1 displayed both an increasing Commission experience of cabinet members and a decreasing share of Commission outsiders. The development which had started under Prodi was reversed in the first Barroso Commission (because of the influx of staff from the new member states who of course had not worked in the Commission), but continued in his second term (also because of reappointed commissioners and their cabinets) and in the Juncker Commission.

Interviewees emphasised the importance of having Commission insiders because of the Commission's complex nature. An interviewee who was involved in selecting cabinet members himself stated:

I always relied quite heavily on people from the services. Because it is not an easy organisation to understand and to have a high yield, high production, to be familiar with the system helps a lot. And therefore, it is useful to have a minimum number of Commission officials among the ranks. That said, the subject matter may well require some fresh blood; actually, always requires a certain degree of fresh blood. So that is the incentive also to have people from outside (interview 5).

The relations with the services improved: 'people who came from the services would be less inclined to start bullying around the services because they knew what it was like, they would have more respect for the services' (interview 3).

Other observers also note better cooperation between services and cabinets due to knowledge of each other's work (Wille 2013, 107; Kassim et al. 2013, 203f.). Increasing the number of civil servants and stopping outside secondments also increases loyalty, as one interviewee points out:

Because unless you are particularly foolish, you know that the director general of the directorate which you are passing instructions will become again your boss. Very soon. So you don't want to make an enemy and therefore, you are careful. While if you are a national official (...) you can start being a little bit rude, sometimes, a bit more aggressive. And that creates tension (interview 2).

Stopping the practice of 'parachuting' also improved relations with the services since cabinet members were no longer able to avoid the difficult entry and promotion procedures. These three measures increased loyalty and, together with a clearer division of labour, enhanced cooperation between the services and the cabinets.

These measures were combined with a reduction of cabinets' size (see 'Size' in Table 2), a normal commissioner's cabinet was limited to six persons. This weakened cabinets, which is the exact consequence intended by Prodi and which cabinet members did acknowledge:

Then you cut the numbers so that they would have to work like, you know, like slaves. Until three o'clock in the morning so they would not have time to plot a plot on their own. (...) We had a lot, lot of work. Lot, lot... (interview 1).

Unsurprisingly, cabinet members did not share the criticism of cabinets excessively interfering in the services' work, which is illustrated by the sarcastic talk of plots in the quote above. But the interviewees knew that the measure was intended as a cut in their power and agree on its success in this regard.

Finally, further limiting the number of compatriots in cabinets (see 'Nationality' in Table 2) clearly contributed to the transformation away from national enclaves. De facto, Prodi only increased the minimum number of required non-nationals from one to two. Nevertheless, Figure 1 has shown that this measure had a clear and lasting effect. This structural denationalisation has been shown (Egeberg and Heskestad 2010), as well as the functional consequences thereof (Kassim et al. 2013, 199ff.), although initial evaluations were less clear regarding the functional consequences (Kassim and Menon 2004, 99; Peterson 2004, 25).

There have been incremental changes as well: the rules concerning cabinet composition are slightly adapted by each president, as is the Code of Conduct. Table 2 has shown further minor changes within the past twenty years. These changes supported the overall transformation by Prodi's measures and did not have independent effects on cabinets. This supports the notion of the punctuated equilibrium, which states that major changes and phases of small adaptations alternate. But comparably to the conclusion on planned change (D1), the conclusion on the magnitude is that the 1999 reform had a transformational character.

D3: The reform's focus

D3 distinguishes between strategic and operational changes. Prodi's speeches clearly revealed his intentions and the Cologne speech detailed the measures he was going to take (Prodi 1999c). Prodi had clear aims and a strategy to achieve the transformation of cabinets. The section above demonstrated the transformation of cabinets, which was strategically steered by Prodi. Through Prodi's reform, the structure of cabinets was substantially altered and processes were defined. This was part of Prodi's broader reform agenda to adapt the Commission to oncoming challenges, such as the enlargement (Prodi 2008, 123).

But there were operational changes in cabinets as well. The rule regarding nationality in cabinets was over-fulfilled, also in subsequent Commissions, as Figure 1 and Table 2 have shown. One simple reason can be a misunderstanding, since many people still refer to the rules thinking they required three non-nationals instead of three nationalities. But also, commissioners had realised the different function of cabinets and therefore adapted the selection – and nationality simply lost relevance.

Also, Barroso taking back the decision to house the cabinets with the services is an instance of operational change (see 'Location' in Table 2), which does not fundamentally change an organisation, but ensures its functioning. Prodi's relocation of cabinets from a central building to their respective services was controversial. It should have enhanced relations between cabinets and services, but interviewees were divided regarding the success. There was certainly more contact, but:

Either they [the relations between services and cabinets] got better or they realised that they hated each other. So, if there were tensions between a commissioner and a director general or the cabinets and the DG and you are in the same building that became more difficult to manage (interview 4).

And the coordination between cabinets was more difficult. The interviewee who was involved in the reforms noticed that relocating cabinets made it more difficult to ‘just spend all the time having coffee together and hatching deals, you know, you look at the German state aid case and I'll look at that French infringement and we will all be fantastic’ (interview 4).

But this positive view is a minority one, since most people value the coordination between cabinets higher than the immediate contact with the services. Prodi's decision was revised by Barroso due to its negative effects on collegiality and horizontal coordination between cabinets (Christiansen 2001, 753; Wille 2013, 171). This is an operational change, which was not implemented to achieve a strategic aim but to fix a shortcoming.

D4: The reform's level

The level of the reform (D4) was the entire cabinet system – it can hence be considered a mid-range reform. Prodi did not address the college of commissioners (as Juncker did in 2014), neither did he address the Commission's civil service with these measures (as the Kinnock reforms did). Addressing the cabinet system had effects on lower units, namely each cabinet and ultimately every individual member of cabinet; which confirms the theoretical ‘waterfall effect’.

Having considered all four dimensions allows the conclusion that Prodi's cabinet reform was ‘big bang’. It was a planned and strategic change of a transformational nature which addressed the whole cabinet system. My interviewees acknowledge the importance and the success of Prodi's reform in changing cabinets. But they also emphasise that it is important to understand the transformation of cabinets in the context of the changes to follow. How did these changes – the Kinnock reforms and the 2004/07 enlargement – affect cabinets?

THE CABINET REFORM IN ITS BROADER CONTEXT

The previous sections presented a detailed analysis of the cabinet reform. This section embeds the ‘big bang’ cabinet reform in the context of other change processes in the Commission. It does so by inductively relating the cabinet reform to two other substantial changes in the Commission. It first displays how the Eastern enlargement's effects on the college of commissioners changed commissioners' demands towards cabinets. Second, it displays how the Kinnock reforms of the Commission's services altered the relationship between cabinets and services. It then embeds the ‘big bang’ reform into these broader processes, as Prodi also did (Prodi 2000, 8; 2008, 123). The section's main point is that the cabinet reform was effective in anticipation of and in combination with the enlargement and the Kinnock reforms.

The Eastern enlargement of 2004 and 2007, saw twelve, mostly Eastern European countries, joining the EU. Staff from new member states had to be recruited on all Commission levels. The enlargement had the most decisive impact on the top level of the Commission, the college of commissioners. Analyses have identified three main developments.

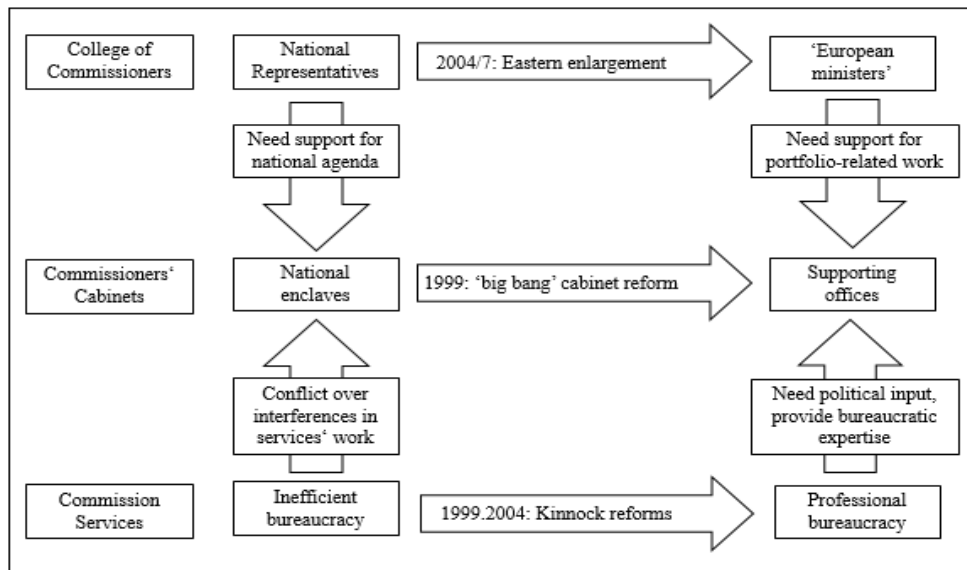
First, the college grew. New member states were also entitled to commissioners. To avoid a college of more than thirty commissioners, big member states no longer sent two commissioners. This led to an apparently intergovernmental design with one commissioner per member state. The growing number of commissioners had to be given portfolios on their own which led to more specialised portfolios. This in turn also lowered the feasibility of horizontal coordination, since six people can hardly follow dozens of commissioners' specialised portfolios (Kassim et al. 2013, 200f.; Wille 2013, 65). Second, my interviewees pointed to the fact that it was more difficult to voice national interests in an enlarged college; strong positions outside the own specialised portfolio become suspicious when they happen to concern the own member state. Third, the potential intergovernmental character was offset by a much stronger role for the Commission President. He gave less liberty to his commissioners and controlled the overall processes in the college, despite the ongoing principle of collegiality (Peterson 2015).

These changes altered the commissioners' role, which is now more comparable to that of ministers than it used to be. Consequently, this affected commissioners' demands towards cabinets. After enlargement, they needed less support for a national agenda, and more expertise to cope with a specialised portfolio.

The Kinnock reforms present the second decisive change in the Commission after 1999. Kinnock was appointed to administer a broad reform of the Commission's bureaucracy between 1999 and 2004. These reforms modernised administrative procedures, personnel administration, financial control and other aspects. In short, the Commission became a more modern and effective bureaucracy (Kassim et al. 2013, 205; Wille 2013, 116). This also affected the relationship between cabinets and services. Before, cabinet members were accused of interfering in the work of the services. After the reforms, the roles were much clearer: cabinets were responsible for the politics, whereas the services were responsible for the bureaucratic work and were subject to the political guidance of commissioners and their cabinets. Having clarified the roles and professionalised the services, the cooperation is much better now. The analysis above demonstrates that this was also caused by the inclusion of more civil servants in cabinets, which continued after 1999. Wille summarises: 'The changes in the political and bureaucratic accountability arrangements had a "spillover" effect on the operation of the cabinets' (Wille 2013, 149).

Figure 2 summarises the interactions between the different change processes in the Commission. At the top, Figure 2 displays how commissioners generally do not pursue a national agenda and do not need support in such a national role by their cabinets. They became 'European ministers', they needed more portfolio-centred expertise and a good relationship with their respective directorate(s) general. The cabinet reform had transformed the cabinets according to these changing demands: cabinets were less national and more diverse, comprising more Commission officials. At the bottom, Figure 2 shows that the services had a clearer bureaucratic profile which they fulfilled more professionally. The cabinet reform had changed cabinets so that they would be able to better cooperate with the services and would not unduly interfere anymore in their work.

Figure 2: Interaction between simultaneous change processes in the Commission



The 'big bang' cabinet reform thus was a highly strategic anticipation of the cabinets' future role. It transformed cabinets from national enclaves to commissioners' supporting offices, a profile which is complemented by a changing context as well.

In addition, this embedding explains those ongoing emergent and operational changes in the cabinet system which were found earlier. Commissioners still have considerable leeway in the composition of their cabinets. A still growing Commission expertise in cabinets and the hitherto puzzling over-fulfilment of rules (Egeberg and Heskestad 2010) underline their realisation of changing demands towards cabinets. The pattern of a decreasing role for nationality exemplifies Prodi's anticipation of changing demands towards cabinets: while the biggest drop in the share of commissioners' compatriots in cabinets happened in 1999 (from 74 to 51 per cent), the decreasing trend continues as commissioners realise the decreasing importance of having compatriots in cabinets.

In conclusion, the cabinet reform of 1999 anticipated broader changes at other Commission levels. The demands towards cabinets and their interaction with the other Commission levels changed. The developments in the Commission hence underlined the necessity of the changes introduced in 1999 and sustained their effects by changing the roles of cabinets. The changed Commission needs the multinational, diverse and less powerful cabinets Prodi envisioned.

CONCLUSION

The 1999 reform was found to be a 'big bang' reform of the cabinet system. By referring to several data sources, this article could analyse the relevance of the cabinet system, its functioning and the impact of the 1999 reform. Here, it was shown which organisational factors were addressed and what the consequences were. Prodi's cabinet reform was an instance of planned, transformational and strategic change aiming at the entire cabinet system. Due to this reform, cabinets became denationalised and professionalised entities serving their important function in the Commission. The analysis of the 1999 reform adds to our understanding of the functioning of cabinets, a hitherto under-researched topic.

The more explorative second empirical part aimed to contextualise the cabinet reform in the light of other changes in the Commission. It considered the Eastern enlargement and the Kinnock reforms which affected other Commission levels. At the top, the Eastern enlargement led to a specialisation of commissioners and an increasingly strong role for the President. This changed commissioners' demands towards cabinets, more portfolio-related work is needed rather than the service of 'national enclaves'. The Kinnock reforms of the services also had a substantial indirect impact on the work of cabinets. The services now work more professionally and the distinction between their work and that of cabinets is clearer. This in turn leads to clearer demands towards cabinets to steer politically the administrative work of the services. The 1999 reform of cabinets consequently anticipated and complemented changes in the political and the bureaucratic levels of the Commission. By analysing the level in between, this article contributes to a more encompassing understanding of change in the Commission.

The third aim was to propose a typology of change for the analysis of public sector reforms, connected with the call for further refinements and applications to other reforms. This typology has been useful to disentangle the numerous organisational aspects of the 1999 reform. In the Commission context, President Juncker's recent reforms of the college's structure or of the spokesperson service could be considered using this typology. This would ultimately also lead to a broader picture of determinants of occurrences and success of reforms in the Commission. Explanatory factors such as external pressures, the interaction with other institutions and the personality of the President could add to our understanding of reforms. Here, the rich literature on the Kinnock reforms could be synthesised.

Substantially, this article provided more evidence to scholarship finding a decreasing role for nationality in the Commission. It showed how President Prodi's 'big bang' reform actively addressed this issue and transformed the influential cabinets from national enclaves to supporting offices.

CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESS

Renke Deckarm, Department of Social Science, Oldenburg University, Ammerlaender Heerstrasse 114-118, 26129 Oldenburg, Germany [renke.deckarm@uni-oldenburg.de].

REFERENCES

- Balint, T., Bauer, M.W., and Knill, C. (2007) 'Bureaucratic Change in the European Administrative Space - The Case of the European Commission', in M. Egeberg (ed.), *Institutional Dynamics and the Transformation of Executive Politics in Europe. Connex Report Series Nr. 03*. Mannheim: Mannheim Centre for European Social Research: 43-81.
- Ban, C. (2013) *Management and Culture in an Enlarged European Commission: From Diversity to Unity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bauer, M.W. (2008) 'Introduction: Organizational change, management reform and EU policy-making'. *Journal of European Public Policy* 15(5):627-47.

- Burnes, B. (2009) 'Reflections: Ethics and Organizational Change – Time for a Return to Lewinian Values'. *Journal of Change Management* 9(4):359-81. doi: 10.1080/14697010903360558.
- Christiansen, T. (2001) 'Intra-institutional politics and inter-institutional relations in the EU: toward coherent governance?'. *Journal of European Public Policy* 8(5):747-69.
- Committee of Independent Experts (1999) 'First Report on Allegations regarding Fraud, Mismanagement and Nepotism in the European Commission', Brussels: European Parliament, available online: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/experts/pdf/reporten.pdf>. [last accessed 15 June 2016]
- Coombes, D. (1970) *Politics and Bureaucracy in the European Community. A Portrait of the Commission of the E.E.C.* London: George Allen and Unwin.
- de Wit, B. and Meyer, R. (2010) *Strategy: Process, Content, Context*. Andover: Cengage Learning.
- Dimitrakopoulos, D.G. (2004) *The Changing European Commission*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Donnelly, M. and Ritchie, E. (1994) 'The College of Commissioners and their Cabinets', in G. Edwards and D. Spence (eds), *The European Commission*. London: Cartermill Publishing: 31-61.
- Egeberg, M. (1996) 'Organization and Nationality in the European Commission Services'. *Public Administration* 74:721-35.
- Egeberg, M. (2004) 'An organisational approach to European integration: Outline of a complementary perspective'. *European journal of political research* 43(2):199-219.
- Egeberg, M. (2006) 'Executive Politics as usual: Role Behaviour and Conflict Dimensions in the College of European Commissioners'. *Journal of European Public Policy* 13(1):1-15.
- Egeberg, M. (2012) 'Experiments in Supranational Institution-Building: the European Commission as a Laboratory'. *Journal of European Public Policy* 19(6):939-50.
- Egeberg, M. and Heskestad, A. (2010) 'The Denationalization of Cabinets in the European Commission'. *Journal of Common Market Studies* 48(4):775-86.
- European Commission (1999) 'SEC(1999)1479 Code of Conduct for Commissioners'. Available from the European Commission on request at <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/index.cfm?fuseaction=fmb&&CFID=56029878&CFTOKEN=9927158c8bccfe96-A6EEAF51-C40A-E982-FF03514ACCE724F0&language=en> [last accessed 18 June 2016].
- Gersick, C.J.G. (1991) 'Revolutionary Change Theories: A Multilevel Exploration of the Punctuated Equilibrium Paradigm'. *The Academy of Management Review* 16(1):10-36.
- Gulick, L. (1937) 'Notes on the Theory of Organization. With Special Reference to Government in the United States', in L. Gulick and L. Urwick (eds), *Papers on the Science of Administration*. New York: Insitutue of Public Administration, Columbia University: 1-45.
- Hayes, J. (2014) *The Theory and Practice of Change Management*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hodges, J. and Gill, R. (2014) *Sustaining Change in Organizations*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Hooghe, L. (2001) *The European Commission and the Integration of Europe. Images of Governance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kassim, H. and Menon, A. (2004) 'EU member states and the Prodi Commission', in D.G. Dimitrakopoulos (ed.), *The changing European Commission*. Manchester: Manchester University Press: 89-104.
- Kassim, H.; Peterson, J.; Bauer, M.W.; Connolly, S.; Dehousse, R.; Hooghe, L.; Thompson, A. (2013) *The European Commission of the Twenty-First Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Michelmann, H.J. (1978) 'Multinational Staffing and Organizational Functioning in the Commission of the European Communities'. *International Organization* 32(2):477-96.
- Nugent, N. (2001) *The European Commission*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Peterson, J. (1999) 'The Santer Era: the European Commission in Normative, Historical and Theoretical Perspective'. *Journal of European Public Policy* 6(1):46-65.

Peterson, J. (2004) 'The Prodi Commission: fresh start or free fall', in D.G. Dimitrakopoulos (ed.), *The changing European Commission*. Manchester: Manchester University Press: 15-32.

Peterson, J. (2015) 'The Commission and the New Intergovernmentalism', in C.J. Bickerton, D. Hodson and U. Puetter (eds), *The New Intergovernmentalism: States and Supranational Actors in the Post-Maastricht Era*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 185-207.

Pfeffer, J. (1997) *New Directions for Organization Theory. Problems and Prospects*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Prodi, R. (1999a) 'Statement by Mr Prodi, nominee for President of the Commission. European Parliament Debate 13 April 1999', Strasbourg: European Parliament.

Prodi, R. (1999b) 'Statement by Mr Prodi, nominee for President of the Commission. European Parliament Debate 4 May 1999', Strasbourg: European Parliament.

Prodi, R. (1999c) 'Intervention of Romano Prodi - Cologne European Council, 3rd June 1999', available online: <http://ftp.infoeuropa.euroid.pt/files/database/000025001-000026000/000025367.pdf>. [last accessed 16 June 2016].

Prodi, R. (2000) *Europe as I see it*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Prodi, R. (2008) *La mia visione dei fatti. Cinque anni di governo in Europa*. Bologna: il Mulino.

Spiereburg, D. (1979) 'Proposals for Reform of the Commission of the European Communities and its Services. Report made at the request of the Commission by an Independent Review Body under the chairmanship of Mr Dirk Spiereburg', Brussels: Commission of the European Communities.

Suvarierol, S. (2008) 'Beyond the Myth of Nationality: Analysing Networks Within the European Commission'. *West European Politics* 31(4):701-24.

Tenkasi, R.V. and Chesmore, M.C. (2003) 'Social Networks and Planned Organizational Change: The Impact of Strong Network Ties on Effective Change Implementation and Use'. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 39(3): 281-300. doi: 10.1177/0021886303258338.

Weick, K.E. and Quinn, R.E. (1999) 'Organizational Change and Development'. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 50(1):361-86.

Wille, A. (2013) *The Normalization of the European Commission: Politics and Bureaucracy in the EU Executive*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

INTERVIEWS

Interview 1: former cabinet member, telephone

Interview 2: former cabinet member

Interview 3: former cabinet member

Interview 4: former head and member of cabinet

Interview 5: current head of cabinet