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Working Paper

The Composition of the College of Commissioners: Patterns of Delegation

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Patterns of Delegation

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Abstract

Recent theoretical studies question the view that the European Commission is a preference outlier. This paper addresses this question by discussing the composition of the European College of Commissioners and by focusing on the appointment process. The analysis is based on a dataset that contains biographical information for all commissioners since 1958. The analysis highlights the importance of commissioners' party affiliation and their former political positions. Multivariate regression analysis shows that smaller member states have tended to send more high-ranking politicians to the College of Commissioners than larger member states. However, party affiliation has not become more important as an appointment criterion. What has changed with time has not been the party link but the caliber of positions held by commissioners before they are appointed to the College.

Zusammenfassung

Neuere theoretische Ansätze bezweifeln, dass die Interessen der Europäischen Kommission stark von den Interessen anderer Institutionen der Europäischen Union abweichen. Im vorliegenden Papier wird diese Frage mittels einer Analyse der Zusammensetzung des Kollegiums der Kommissare empirisch untersucht. Als Basis für die Untersuchung wird ein Datensatz verwendet, der biografische Daten aller Kommissare seit 1958 umfasst. Die Analyse vergleicht die Parteizugehörigkeit und die früheren politischen Ämter der Kommissare. Unter Verwendung multivariater statistischer Verfahren wird gezeigt, dass sich das Delegationsverhalten kleiner und großer EU-Mitgliedstaaten unterscheidet. Entgegen einer oftmals geäußerten Annahme ist die Parteizugehörigkeit kein wichtigeres Kriterium bei der Auswahl der Kommissare geworden. Vielmehr deutet eine Veränderung der früheren Positionen der Kommissare auf eine zunehmende politische Rolle des Kollegiums der Kommissare. Waren Kommissare zunächst hauptsächlich Ministerialbeamte, so sind es jetzt fast ausschließlich Berufspolitiker.

Contents

Introduction	5
European Commission	6
The Commission's position in the political system of the EU	6
Dimensions of conflict in European politics	8
Delegation to appointed agents	8
Determinants of selection	9
Empirical studies of Commission preferences	9
Delegation to the Commission	10
Empirical analysis	12
Data	12
Descriptive analysis	14
Multivariate analysis	16
Conclusion	21
References	22

Introduction

The European Commission is a central political actor in the political system of the European Union. It holds the monopoly to initiate legislation and can bring charges against member states before the European Court of Justice. As the bureaucracy in charge of initiating legislation, it often enjoys informational advantages vis-à-vis the member states. For a long time, the Commission has been seen as a major driving force behind further integration. However, given that member states appoint the members of the Commission, its degree of autonomy has remained controversial. How strong is bureaucratic drift in the EU? Is the European Commission a preference outlier?

Many studies contend that it is. In quite a few scholarly accounts, the Commission is pictured as being much more in favor of further integration and more liberal economically than the member states. Contrary to these arguments, Hug (2003) and Crombez (1997) have doubted that substantial differences can persist between the political preferences of the Commission and the member states. By using the mechanisms of appointment and by determining the extent of delegation, member states can keep the Commission effectively under control (see also Pollack 2003).

Attempts to test these contending claims empirically have been rare. Hooghe (2001) analyzed the factors that influence the preferences of high Commission officials. MacMullen (1997) provided biographical information of all commissioners. Wonka (2004) was the first to link the biographical information about commissioners' former careers to theoretical questions, as raised in the principal-agent literature. He questioned the extent to which member states use the appointment of commissioners as a control device and contended that member states can control the College of Commissioners quite effectively via the appointment of loyal party members.

As valuable as these empirical studies are, several questions have remained unanswered concerning the relationship between the political preferences of EU member states and those of the commissioners. One way to shed more light on the preferences of commissioners is to determine the party linkage of member states and the College of Commissioners. In this respect, two questions are of particular theoretical importance: First, to what extent does the party affiliation of commissioners match the party composition of the appointing government? Second, to what extent is the increase of the Commission's political importance reflected in the patterns of appointment to the College of Commissioners? The following empirical analysis will answer both questions.

My study contributes to the existing literature in several respects. Unlike previous studies, I account for the differences between large and small member states regarding del-

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egation to the College of Commissioners. Moreover, drawing on a new indicator that captures the relative political importance of a prior political position – from state secretary to prime minister – I am able to observe changes in the relative political importance of appointed commissioners. With this indicator I can analyze whether member states have sent more high-ranking politicians to the College of Commissioners in Brussels over time.

My analysis shows that, counter-intuitively, party affiliation has not grown in importance as an appointment criterion. Instead, a stronger party-political alignment between member-state governments and the College of Commissioners is the by-product of a reduction in the number of commissioners that larger member states can send to Brussels. However, member states have increasingly appointed more important high-ranking politicians as commissioners, as is shown by the political position previously held by each. In addition, my analysis shows that large and small member states differ substantially in their appointment patterns.

The paper is divided into three sections. In the first part, I discuss different theoretical perspectives on the Commission and derive empirical implications from this literature. Second, I present my empirical analysis of the composition of the College of Commissioners and discuss the results. I conclude by discussing my findings against the background of the theoretical debate on delegation in the European Union.

European Commission

The Commission's position in the political system of the EU

Rational-choice institutionalists have always claimed that the Commission plays an important role in EU policy-making (Steunenberg 1994; Crombez 1996). Contributions have focused on the ability of the Commission to influence legislation through agenda-setting. Three periods are usually distinguished to highlight the power of the Commission in the political system of the EU. In the first period after the Treaty of Rome, the Commission's power was limited. With the Single European Act (SEA), the Commission's agenda-setting power gained in importance, but it was somehow reduced by the Treaties of Maastricht and Amsterdam which introduced the co-decision procedure (see Tsebelis/Garrett 2001: 359). Given that the Commission has the right to initiate legislation, it can use this power to shape the legislative agenda.

However, the empirical studies on European lawmaking have focused instead on the conditional agenda-setting power of the European Parliament in the wake of George Tsebelis' prominent article (1994). It was his provocative claim that shaped the agenda for empirical research. Therefore, more quantitative research has focused on the EP's

ability to act as an agenda-setter than on the Commission's role in the legislative process (see e.g. Tsebelis et al. 2001). It seems as if the Commission's important role in the legislative process has been taken for granted as being rather uncontroversial.

Surprisingly little is known about the systematic differences in the interests of the Commission and the member states over longer periods of time. Most studies simply assume that the Commission and the EP have a much more pro-European agenda than the member states in the Council. This assumption would appear even more relevant given that critics have pointed out the possibility of the Commission being even more powerful than the agenda-setting models stipulate (see Schmidt 2000). For instance, Schmidt argues that the Commission may not only be able to choose the policy it prefers among the positions of the member states but might also be able to change the preferences of a member state by threatening to charge it with a treaty violation that would burden it with costly penalties. In addition, information asymmetries provide the Commission with more bargaining leverage, as it can put pressure upon member states in its role as the guardian of the treaties.

The emphasis on information asymmetries comes close to neofunctionalist accounts. From this perspective, high levels of uncertainty provide an advantage for the Commission in EU legislation. Furthermore, in neofunctionalist accounts the European Commission has more than formal agenda-setting power. Here the Commission forms alliances with interest groups to support policies that bolster further integration (Burley/Mattli 1993: 54). It is the central role of the Commission and its detailed knowledge of the treaties that places it in a more advantageous position vis-à-vis the member states.

To sum up, the various theoretical approaches to European integration agree that the European Commission plays a critical role in the political system of the EU, even though they differ on explaining how and why this is so. For example, rational-choice models of EU legislation emphasize the formal agenda-setting power of the Commission after the SEA. According to this view, the Commission's role had been rather limited before this act. However, scholars in the neofunctionalist tradition emphasize the central role of the Commission as a motor of integration. Both approaches agree that the political importance of the Commission has substantially increased over time.

This increase in importance should also be mirrored in the assignment of the commissioners, but how? Is it reflected in the higher status of the politicians appointed to the College of Commissioners or in a closer party alignment between commissioners and the appointing governments? Before I address these questions, I will briefly discuss the relevant dimensions of conflict in the political system of the European Union.

Dimensions of conflict in European politics

What are the issue dimensions relevant for EU politics? There is a consensus concerning the basic dimensions of political conflict in European politics. The literature usually distinguishes between the left/right and the integration/sovereignty dimensions. These two dimensions have been shown to be relevant both for political parties in Europe and for the party groups in the European Parliament (see Ray 1999; Gabel/Hix 2002).

The extent to which the left/right divide determines decision-making in the European Union has been analyzed in a new wave of research. Mattila (2004) provides evidence for the salience of the left/right divide in the Council. Hix et al. (2005) show that left/right is a main explanatory variable for party group coalitions in the European Parliament. The goal of one recent research project was to discover whether the ideological divide between the institutional actors of the EU can explain decision-making in the EU (see Thomson et al. 2004). The authors, however, could not confirm that the left/right dimension had been decisive for the directives they studied (Thomson et al. 2004: 254).

Little is known about the degree to which these dimensions of conflict are reflected within the European Commission. Is the political location of a member-state government mirrored in the Commission as well? In other words, are commissioners chosen on the basis of their political affiliation? We would expect that party affiliation should be an important selection criterion for commissioners. Yet, as we know, cooptation of the (major) opposition party by granting it one of the two commissioners has been a strategy often used to broaden support for EU policies and to remove the EU issue from domestic politics in the larger member states. The empirical question therefore asks whether the average political position of the Commission is closer to the centre of gravity of the position taken by the member-state parliaments or by member-state governments.

Delegation to appointed agents

Pollack (2003: 103–107) argues that the Commission serves functions that enhance the interest of EU member states. Treaty-based delegation has been created to increase the credibility of the member-state commitment to their EU obligations. Especially the substantial competence of the Commission to bring infringement proceedings against noncompliant member states highlights the Commission's role as a guardian of the treaties. In addition to asking why certain functions are delegated to the Commission, Pollack also answers the question about the way in which the Commission is monitored by the member states. In this context, comitology is perceived as a police patrol mechanism, with which the member states monitor the Commission's activities (see also Franchino 2000).

Besides comitology, Pollack (2003: 111–114) claims that member states also monitor the Commission via appointments to it, particularly that of the Commission president. He claims that the appointment process is one of the major mechanisms through which member states can influence the decision-making of the Commission. He emphasizes that the member states are in full control of the nomination and re-nomination of their commissioners. Only lately has the European Parliament been given the right to conduct official hearings of candidates. Pollack highlights the fact that commissioners are reappointed by their home countries or pursue a career in the domestic politics of their homelands after having served on the Commission.

There have been attempts to clarify the relationship between the Council and the Commission with the help of formal models. Crombez (1997: 7) predicts that the policy preferences of a commissioner should be similar to the preferences of his domestic government. The main insight provided by his model is that member states will only appoint those commissioners who are likely to initiate legislation that will find support in the Council.

Often the Commission is seen as a preference outlier who is much more in favor of European integration than the member states in the Council. Drawing on Crombez, Hug (2003: 51) has taken issue with this common assumption in the EU literature. He argues that it is rather dubious in the light of principal-agent theory whether a major divide exists between the Council and the Commission. Two arguments suggest that the Commission should have preferences similar or close to those of the member states. First, since a principal – here the member states – appoints an agent – the College of Commissioners – the preferences of the two should be related. Second, if there were a major divergence between a principal and his agent, the principal should be hesitant to delegate to the agent. Therefore, we should expect that the Commission has preferences similar to those of the Council due to two mechanisms of control: first, through the appointment process, and second, through the design of delegation. This paper focuses on the first mechanism, especially on party membership as a criterion for commissioners' appointment. I will show the extent to which member states use the appointment of commissioners to delegate officials with similar profiles to the domestic government.

Determinants of selection

Empirical studies of Commission preferences

Liesbet Hooghe's work (2001) has substantially enhanced our understanding of the European Commission. In her detailed qualitative and quantitative analysis of the preferences of top Commission officials, Hooghe shows which kind of factors shape the preferences. In her view, the Commission officials are influenced by the length of their

former national administrative experience, the length of their work in the Commission, their party affiliation, and the position of their home country in the EU. As Hooghe argues, the experience in the home country crucially shapes an official's views.

Other studies have explicitly focused on the composition of the College of Commissioners. MacMullen (1997) was – to the best of my knowledge – the first to collect information on all commissioners. In his study, he focuses on biographical aspects of the commissioners such as age, gender, and education. The relation between Commission and Council preferences was not of particular interest for this study. Magnette (2005: 80) demonstrates that the College of Commissioners has become more political over time. Although he offers no information about the absolute number, he shows an increase in the number of commissioners who held high political positions before their promotion to the Commission within the last ten to fifteen years.

A quantitative analysis of the College of Commissioners focusing on theoretical questions has been provided by Wonka (2004). He is the first to have studied the patterns on which the selection of European commissioners is based. Wonka is particularly interested to know how relevant party membership is for the assignment of new commissioners. In addition, he tries to assess how much more frequently the commissioners have been politicians rather than bureaucrats. Wonka, like Hix (2005: 44–46), shows that over time most of the commissioners have held political positions rather than strictly administrative ones before they entered the Commission. In his view, the appointment process of the EU member states is a successful mechanism with which states can control the Commission.

Wonka's paper has been an important contribution to an understudied aspect of the European Commission. My paper goes beyond his analysis in several respects. First, my dataset contains information on the importance of the former positions of European commissioners. Second, using multivariate statistics, I can better determine how much the importance of party membership has increased and whether member states apply different appointment strategies. In particular, controlling for incumbency, I can better assess whether party affiliation has really become a more important appointment criterion over time. Before I start my empirical analysis, I will shortly summarize the hypothesis to be tested later.

Delegation to the Commission

The Left/Right dimension in the appointment of commissioners

If the relation between member states and Commission is perceived to be a principal-agent game, we should expect that the principals – the member states – appoint agents – the commissioners – with similar preferences. Given that party affiliation is a good

indicator for the ideological position of a future commissioner, it should be a relevant factor in the appointment process of commissioners. In other words, governments who want to ensure that their interests are represented in the Commission should be more likely to nominate their own party members as commissioners.

Observable implication 1: Commissioners are most likely to be members of parties that form the domestic government. As discussed above, the practical and political importance of EU policies has sharply risen over time. Most of the literature on legislation in the EU has focused on the period after the SEA in 1987. This treaty gave the Commission substantial agenda-setting power. This power was reduced by the Treaties of Maastricht and Amsterdam, but since the 1950s the Commission's role in the legislative process of the EU has become more important overall. This leads to two further implications:

Observable implication 2a: The congruence between the party affiliation of appointed commissioners and the party composition of the national governments should have become stronger over time.

Observable implication 2b: Countries have increasingly sent high-ranking politicians to Brussels, or: the political importance of commissioners' prior position has increased over time.

Small states in the College of Commissioners

The literature suggests that the interests of small member states differ from those of large member states (cf. Pollack 2001: 224). Small states rely on international institutions for a "voice," and international institutions are a more efficient means for small states to express their interest than for large states. Differences of interest evolve either from different positions in the world economy or from the more limited state capacities of smaller states. For the European Union, Thorhallsson (2000: 114) has argued explicitly that small states relate differently to the Commission than large states: "[D]ue to the limited capacity of the administration of the smaller states, they rely more upon the Commission to get their proposals through the Council." For the Commission, the following observable implications can be derived from this argument. Commissioners from smaller states are more likely to be affiliated with the governing party and to have held higher positions earlier in their career.

There is an institutional explanation that generates similar predictions. Until the Nice Treaty, bigger member states were allotted two commissioners to the College of Commissioners. Starting with the Barroso Commission, only one commissioner now represents every member state. This institutional feature may have generated different delegation patterns between small and large member states. Since small member states used to have only one seat in the College, the same implications apply as those outlined previously.

Observable implication 3a: Small EU member states are more likely to send commissioners with an affiliation to the parties in government.

Observable implication 3b: Commissioners from smaller member states have held higher political offices at home than have commissioners from larger member states.

I test these hypotheses with a dataset that contains information on the former positions of all commissioners and their party affiliation. In the subsequent paragraphs I discuss the data, introduce the methods I have chosen, and present my empirical results.

Empirical analysis

Data

My dataset contains information on all members of the College of Commissioners since 1958. Each commissioner in every Commission is coded as one observation ($N = 218$). For five commissioners biographical information was not available and for a few commissioners information about their party affiliation was lacking. My criterion for differentiating between small and large member states is how many commissioners the respective country is allowed to send to the Commission. Small states are the ones with only one commissioner. The other member states with two seats in the Commission – France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom – are considered to be large member states.¹ Time is measured in years from 1958, when the first Hallstein Commission came into office. I also include a variable that indicates whether a commissioner is an incumbent and therefore has been a member of the previous Commission.

I use three different variables to measure the dimensions of change in the composition of the Commission. First I use an indicator that provides information about the political importance of the highest position a commissioner held before he or she was appointed (cf. Druckman/Warwick 2005). Second, I use a variable that simply codes whether a commissioner held a political position before he or she entered the College of Commissioners. Positions like MP, MEP, junior ministers, ministers, and important positions within a party are coded as being political ones. Third, I include party affiliation as an additional variable. Let me describe these variables in some more detail, starting with this last one.

1 In the current Barroso Commission all member states are only allowed to send one commissioner. Neither the exclusion nor the inclusion of the Barroso Commission into the quantitative analysis affects my results.

Party affiliation

The party affiliation could be easily determined for most of the commissioners. Some commissioners were not formal party members but had strong connections to one party in their former career. Other commissioners pursued their political career rather independently. These were usually diplomats, administrators, or policy experts. In the context of this paper, it is of interest which party was in government at the time the Commission was assigned. I distinguish three scenarios. First, a commissioner has a strong party connection and is affiliated with a party in government at the time he or she takes office in the College of Commissioners. Second, a commissioner has an affiliation with a national party then in the opposition. Third, the commissioner has no direct party affiliation.

Importance of former appointments

It is more difficult to account for the political importance of the position which a given commissioner held before he or she got nominated. Indexes that have developed within comparative politics can help assess the importance of political positions. For example, researchers have been interested in the way different ministries are divided among coalition partners. One way to assess the political importance of government offices has been through the use of expert surveys. Two approaches figure prominently in the literature. Laver and Hunt (1992: 105) use a ranking based on the importance of different ministries. Experts were asked to rank portfolios according to their importance, but without an underlying scale. The results from this survey show that in almost all countries “finance” and “foreign affairs” are considered the two most important portfolios. Recently, Druckman and Warwick (2005) also conducted an expert survey to evaluate the importance of portfolios for Western European countries. Yet, unlike Laver and Hunt, they asked country experts to base their evaluation on a scale provided in the survey. The logic of the scale is described by the authors in the following way:

In order to obtain interval-level ratings of these posts, we provided our respondents with an anchor by asking them to apply a score of 1 to all posts whose importance they believed equalled the “average” or “normal” portfolio. They were then instructed that any post that is above average should receive a score above 1 that would reflect just how much more important it is than an average portfolio (e.g., a score of 1.5 would indicate that the post is 50 per cent above average). Likewise, any below-average post would receive a proportional score of less than 1.
(Druckman/Warwick 2005: 23)

I use the dataset provided by Druckman and Warwick to compare the former positions of commissioners across countries and time. I took the highest position that a person had reached in his career before he entered the Commission and assigned to it the score for that position in Druckman and Warwick’s scale. Unfortunately, the Druckman and Warwick dataset provides neither information for all member states nor for all positions relevant to my context. Where values were unavailable, I assigned values

Table 1 Party affiliation of commissioners

Affiliation	Large states	Small states	Total
	Total incumbents	Total incumbents	
Government	69 (33)	85 (22)	154
Opposition	31 (10)	7 (6)	38
None	8 (4)	8 (4)	16

to positions. One might have additional reservations concerning the use of the Druckman and Warwick data. The survey, conducted from 2000 to 2002, reports only one score for a ministry's importance, even though the relevance of some ministries might have changed significantly over time. In addition, cross-sectional comparability might be limited since experts may apply different definitions of an average position. Still, it's the best source available, and since information about the importance of commissioners' former positions is crucial for a better understanding of delegation within the EU, I make use of the Druckman and Warwick data in my subsequent analysis.

Descriptive analysis

Party affiliation

Let me start with some descriptive statistics. Table 1 provides information about the party affiliation of commissioners. Immediately we observe a strong difference between commissioners from small and large member states. Although we find commissioners who belong to parties both in office and in opposition, some patterns emerge. First of all, small states have a significantly higher percentage of commissioners from governing parties than from opposition parties. If we control for the incumbent status of a commissioner, we realize that almost all commissioners from small member states who belong to a domestic opposition party have been incumbents. In fact, only one nonincumbent commissioner from a small state was identified as belonging to an opposition party – the first Finish commissioner, Erkki Antero Liikanen.

However, several small states have sent commissioners with no party affiliation. For example, Luxembourg and Denmark have always sent either members of the governing parties or persons with no party connection. Greece and Portugal have only sent commissioners with an affiliation to the governing party. In general it seems as if the pattern has changed over time. In the latest Commissions, almost no commissioner of a small state had an affiliation with an opposition party. This finding supports the expectation that small states in particular will want to secure the preference alignment between the domestic principal and the European agents in the Commission.

The picture looks different when we analyze large member states. Here, no general pattern emerges, although some trends and tendencies can be depicted. Britain and Spain, for example, have always filled their two Commission seats with one commissioner from the two main parties, Conservative Party/Labour Party and Partido Popular/Partido Socialista Obrero Español, respectively. Germany has usually sent commissioners who were affiliated with one of the governing parties, but never a commissioner without any party affiliation. For France and Italy, no patterns can be found by simple data inspection. All in all, the difference between small – one commissioner – and large member states is striking. Larger members sent opposition members much more often. For the smaller members, almost all of the commissioners with an affiliation to an opposition party had been incumbents (see below for the multivariate confirmation of this finding).

Former positions

To assess the relative political importance of the former position of an EU commissioner, I make use of a new dataset that provides us with a continuous measure for portfolio importance (see Druckman/Warwick 2005). I use the Commission presidents to demonstrate how positions are translated into ‘importance scores’ and thereby help explain better the measure applied here. Table 2 shows the highest former position held by each Commission president. In addition, it shows the score that is assigned to these positions and the average position score of the Commission headed by the president. Keeping in mind that this scale of portfolio importance might provide us with only a rough and basic measure, we still can use this scale to depict trends and tendencies.

Table 2 suggests that there has been a substantial increase in the importance of the former political positions held by Commission presidents. Whereas the first had formally been a junior minister, subsequent presidents held a ministerial portfolio, often later for the most important national ministries. Lately, Commission presidents have been former prime ministers.

This observation is in line with the expectation that the heightened importance of the Commission should be reflected in the importance of commissioners’ former positions. The box plot in Figure 1 provides additional support for this hypothesis. It shows that the importance of the former positions of commissioners has increased over time. Both the median of the position scores and the highest position held by a commissioner have risen. In addition, we see that the frequency of commissioners in the lowest quartile has dropped. Commissioners with no former political experience are given a score of 0.2, and the figure shows that this group provided a significant number of commissioners in the early years. However, the Barroso Commission has no one from this group.

Table 2 Former positions of commission presidents

	President	Highest former position	Score ^a	Average ^b
1958	Walter Hallstein (D)	Junior minister (Foreign affairs)	0.84	0.55
1962	Hallstein II		–	0.62
1967	Jean Rey (B)	Minister of economic affairs	1.02	0.53
1970	Franco Maria Malfatti (I)	Minister of state participation in industry	1.18	0.52
1972	Sicco Mansholt (NL)	Minister of agriculture	0.74	–
1973	Francis-Xavier Ortoli (F)	Minister of economy and finance	1.92	0.68
1977	Roy Jenkins (UK)	Chancellor of the exchequer	1.64	0.84
1981	Gaston Thorn (L)	Prime minister	2.17	0.95
1985	Jacques Delors (F)	Minister of economy and defense	1.92	0.80
1989	Delors II		–	1.00
1993	Delors III		–	1.01
1995	Jacques Santer (L)	Prime minister	2.75	1.07
2000	Romani Prodi (I)	Prime minister	2.48	0.94
2004	Jose Manuel Barroso (P)	Prime minister	2.20	1.23

Source: Munzinger archive and Druckman/Warwick (2005).

a Position score for Commission's president's highest former position.

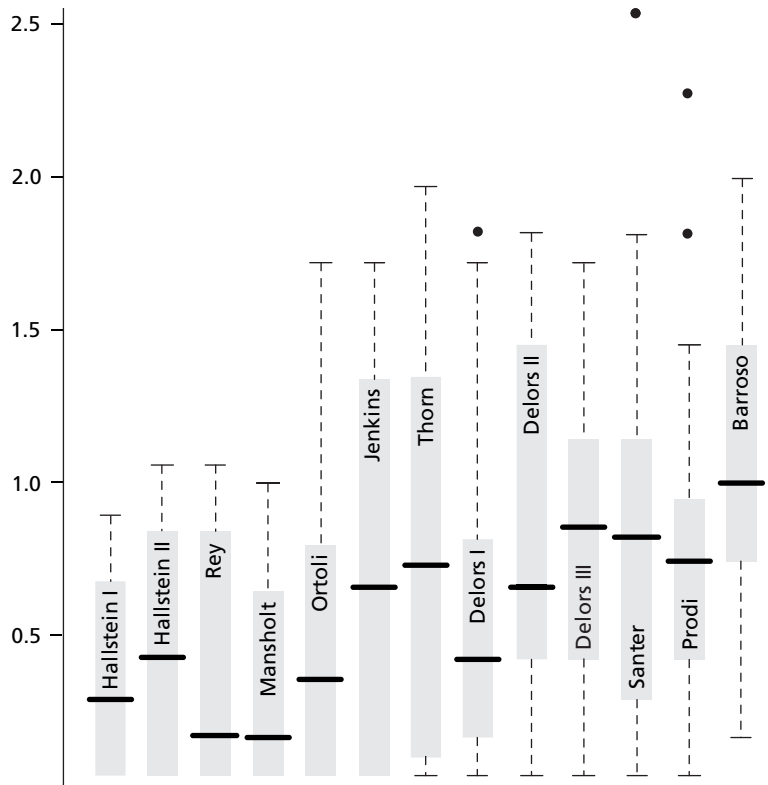
b Average position score of all commissioners in Commission.

The data clearly confirm the expectation that the increasing importance of the Commission is reflected in an increase of powerful political actors delegated to the College of Commissioners. I continue with a multivariate analysis that enables me to control for additional factors like incumbency and national background.

Multivariate analysis

In studying the changing composition of the Commission, I use three different indicators: first, the highest position formally held by a commissioner – in other words, the position score; second, whether he or she had been in a political position before; and third, the person's party affiliation at the time he or she was appointed to the Commission. Methodologically, these three variables are of different types and require different multivariate models. Party affiliation is coded as a categorical variable and has to be analyzed with a multinomial logit model. Whether a commissioner has held a political position before is coded through a dummy variable and analyzed with a logit model. An OLS model is used to analyze the position scores of the commissioners. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 3. I present a more in-depth discussion of these models in the following sections.

Figure 1 Box plot of former positions (scores) of commissioners



Party affiliation

To find out how the factors that I have discussed – incumbency and country size – are interrelated with other factors, I present the results of a multivariate analysis. Based on the three categories for party affiliation – member of government party, opposition member, no party affiliation – I conducted a multinomial logit regression to analyze these categorical data in which each category is compared with a reference group.

Model 1 (see Table 3) presents the results of this analysis. It indicates that there is in fact a strong difference between EU members with only one representative in the College of Commissioners and large member states with two Commission members. Commissioners with an affiliation to a domestic party in the opposition are less likely to be from smaller states. The results show also that, contrary to the theoretical expectations, commissioners are not more likely to be members of governing parties over time. There is some evidence that the number of commissioners with no party affiliations has decreased.

Table 3 Determinants of party affiliation and former positions of commissioners

GLM-Model Dependent variable	Model 1		Model 2	Model 3
	Multinomial logit ^a		Logit ^b	OLS
	Opposition party ^c	No party	Political position	Position score ^d
Years since 1958	0.012 (0.78)	-0.039 (1.95)*	0.065 (4.25)***	0.011 (3.72)***
Incumbent Commissioner	-0.655 (1.44)	0.151 (0.20)	-0.361 (0.93)	-0.091 (-1.18)
Country with one seat	-3.711 (3.52)***	-0.211 (0.28)	1.181 (2.65)***	0.332 (4.20)***
One seat and incumbent	3.527 (2.94)***	0.786 (0.73)	- -	- -
Constant	-0.829 (1.77)*	-1.430 (2.27)**	-0.276 (0.69)	0.471 (5.21)***
N	208		213	213
Likelihood ratio χ^2	36.41		37.01	-
Pseudo-R ² (McFadden)	0.12		0.18	-
R ²	-		-	0.19

Sources: Munzinger archive and LexisNexis for biographical information of commissioners.

Software: Stata 8.2 and R 2.1.

Absolute value of z-statistics (logit models) and t-statistics (OLS) in parentheses.

*** significant at 1% ** significant at 5% * significant at 10%

a Reference category: commissioners that were affiliated with a party in government.

b Reference category: commissioners that held a political position before.

c Government status of commissioners party from Woldendorp et al. (2000).

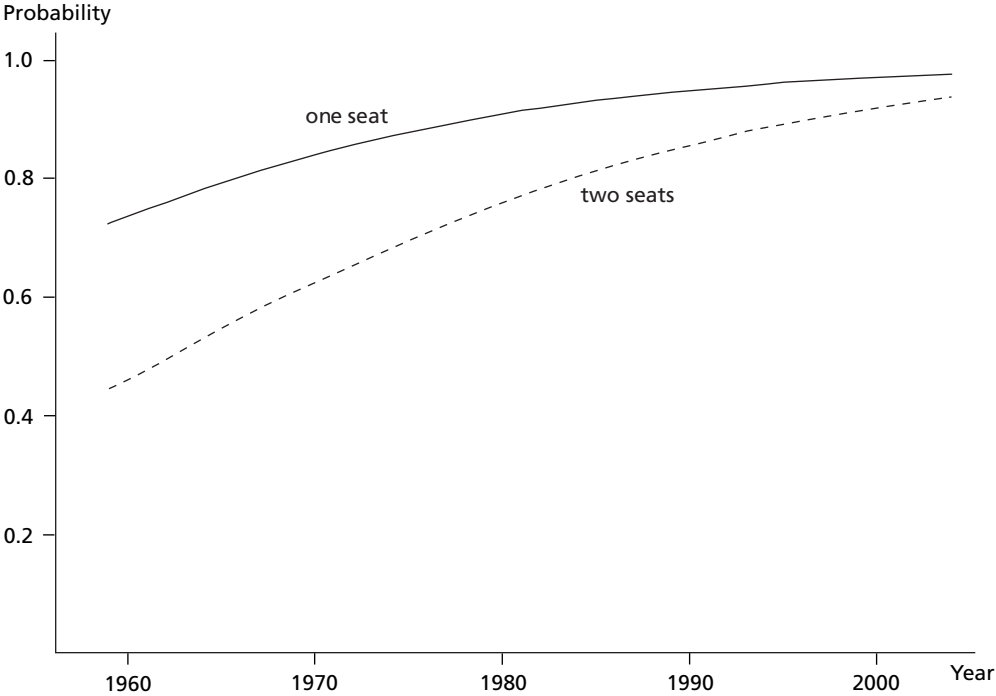
d Source: Druckman and Warwick (2005).

To shed more light on the political dimension of a commissioner's former career, I conducted a further analysis. I divided all commissioners into two groups – politicians and commissioners who had held no previous political positions. This variable separates politicians from commissioners who previously had neither parliamentary nor ministerial positions and therefore no politically relevant positions. Model 2 (see Table 3) displays the results of the logit analysis. It can be seen that commissioners have been less likely to be in nonpolitical positions over time. To illustrate the result of the logit analysis I have calculated the predicted values over time.² Figure 2 shows the results of this analysis. The figure illustrates that the probability that a commissioner was in a political position before he or she took office in Brussels has increased sharply over time. In addition, the model predicts that almost half of the early commissioners had never before held a political position. The graph also reveals a significant difference, decreasing over time, between small and large member states.

For small member states, the results confirm insights gained from the descriptive data analysis. First, if a commissioner is a member of a domestic opposition party, he or she is most likely to have once been a member of the Commission. Second, the number of commissioners with no party affiliation has decreased over time. The multivariate

2 For the calculation, the incumbent status is set to zero. Therefore the predicted values on which the graph is based gives probabilities for new commissioners.

Figure 2 Predicted probability of having a political position



analysis also shows almost no changes in the party affiliation of commissioners over time with respect to the government/opposition status. Contrary to an often held view in the literature, commissioners are not more likely to be government party members over time. This latter finding contradicts some of the expectations I raised in the first part of the paper.

The effect of the finding changed through the institutional reform of the College of Commissioners in the Nice Treaty. Now every member state has one seat in the College of Commissioners. Given that countries with only one seat in the College delegate politicians from the governing parties as commissioners, we find a closer similarity among the parties in the Council and those in the College of Commissioners.

Former positions

The advantage to measuring the significance of former positions as I have discussed above is that it provides a continuous scale with which to compare different positions held by commissioners before they entered the Commission. I apply an OLS regression

to determine the influence of time and the size of a nation on its delegation behavior to the European Commission.³ I expect that the increased importance of the Commission is reflected by the fact that persons with higher political positions take office over time. In addition, I expect that especially small states have a strong interest in the European Commission. Therefore, they should send persons who have held higher political positions than those previously held by commissioners from larger member states.

The results of the analysis are presented in Model 3 (see Table 3). Generally, they confirm the implications drawn from the delegation literature. Some further discussion helps clarify the implication of these results and the general performance of the model. To understand the results, we should keep in mind that the scale measuring the importance of former positions can be divided into four categories. The highest category consists of former prime ministers and the most important national portfolios, the second category of average ministers, the third category of junior ministers and less important ministries, and the last category of almost all other, primarily nongovernmental positions (MPs, diplomats, policy experts, etc.). Given that each of these categories consists of a range of about 0.4, we can infer from the regression results that the commissioners' former positions have shifted from those of former junior ministers and nongovernmental positions – especially diplomats – to those of governmental experience in average ministries.

Looking at the results of the regression analysis, we are surprised to see how significantly more high-profile politicians have been assigned as commissioners by smaller member states. It is not so much the finding as such but the strength of the finding that catches our attention. Again considering the data in categorical terms, we note that, on average, smaller member states have delegated commissioners one category above larger member states. More precisely the data show us that larger member states were still sending their junior ministers and MPs at a time when smaller member states were already sending their former ministers to the Commission.

To sum up, the finding that the importance of delegates to the College of Commissioners has increased over time reflects the more important role of the Commission. More surprising is the fact that small states seem to delegate persons with a significantly higher profile than the larger member states. It is not necessarily surprising that this is statistically significant, but it is more surprising with respect to the scope of this influence.

3 To evaluate the robustness of my analysis, I analyzed my regression results also through the use of a multinomial logit model. For this analysis I divide all former positions into four groups and analyzed how the composition changed over time. This analysis leads to the same results as the normal regression. Since the latter is easier to interpret, I present only these results here.

Conclusion

Commissioners are usually members of governing parties, and the increased importance of the Commission over time is reflected in the former positions of EU commissioners. Contrary to the arguments discussed in the theoretical section of this paper, it cannot be statistically shown that the importance of a commissioner's party affiliation has increased over time. It has been a constant pattern that most of the commissioners are members of parties in domestic governments. As long as bigger member states delegated two commissioners, one of them was often an opposition member. Only the number of commissioners with no party affiliation has decreased. The increased political role of the Commission is represented in the former positions of the commissioners rather than in their party affiliation.

This study has outlined some striking differences between smaller and larger member states. It was shown that the number of commissioners who had neither parliamentary nor ministerial positions decreased over time. Small member states have sent more significant political figures to the Commission than have larger member states. The observation that more politicians than bureaucrats became members of the Commission over time corresponds to the arguments in the literature. Because the Commission's role has become more important, the position of a commissioner has become a quasigovernmental one occupied by politicians rather than bureaucrats. Placed in a principal-agent terminology, this mechanism allows member states to "screen" commissioners more carefully before they take office. Through this more extensive "screening," the subsequent loyalty of the commissioner may be better anticipated.

I have shown how the composition of the College of Commissioners has changed over time. This analysis of the composition has shed more light on the factors that may influence commissioners' preferences. Some interesting questions are still open to further research. To what degree does the party affiliation of a commissioner determine his or her policy agenda in Brussels? How strong is a commissioner's party linkage once he or she is in office? To understand the choices commissioners make, their decisions have to be analyzed. Since voting records in the College of the Commissioners are confidential, it may be difficult to study these choices. It would be interesting to discover whether different stances on the major lines of party conflict in EU politics – left/right and integration/independence – are reflected in the votes of the College of Commissioners as well. In addition to studying decision-making in the College, it would be interesting to analyze the portfolio allocation there as well. In my study, I have used a measure of the portfolio salience in Western democracies. For future research it should be interesting to show how the portfolios of the Commission are divided among member states. In addition, we would benefit from learning how the allocation of portfolios has changed over time and which factors determine portfolio allocation in the Commission.

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