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A NEW MODEL PRESIDENCY: JOSÉ MANUEL BARROSO'S LEADERSHIP OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Hussein Kassim[1]

For decades a fragmented institution, where authority was diffuse and leadership precarious, the European Commission has experienced nearly a decade of strong presidentialism over the past decade. Since 2004 José Manuel Barroso has not only centralized power in the Commission Presidency, but has adopted a style of presidential leadership that contrasts sharply with his eleven predecessors, including the two most illustrious: Walter Hallstein (the first) and Jacques Delors (the eighth). The impact on the Commission and on the EU more broadly has been important and significant. The Commission has demonstrated a greater capacity for coherent action, which in turn has made inter-institutional cooperation easier to achieve.

The new model of presidential leadership developed over the past decade cannot be explained as the culmination of a long process of institutionalization as in the case of the US Presidency (Ragsdale and Theis 1997; Lewis 2002; McGuire 2004), the outcome of a more general trend towards presidentialization (Poguntke and Webb 2001), or a deliberate attempt by national governments to create a powerful presidential office through constitution maing. Rather it came about, albeit under somewhat propitious circumstances, largely through entrepreneurial efforts on the part of the President himself. Reasoning that in an era marked by wariness about further integration and in an enlarged Union where the College had expanded to twenty-five members (Bellier 2000) and would shortly become twenty-seven strong) the Commission could only be effective if steered by a strong Commission President, Barroso mobilized old resources and developed new ones.

Evidence for these arguments is drawn from survey data and from a programme of structured interviews with Commissioners, cabinet members and managers in the Commission in 2009, conducted as part of 'The European Commission in Question' project ('EUCIQ').[2] The combination of methods allowed views to be solicited from all levels of the Commission and across all services. The EUCIQ data is supplemented by further interviews carried out by the author between 2010 and 2012.

The discussion below is organized into four sections. The first reviews the powers of the Commission President. Comparison with heads of government at the national level brings out its weakness. The second examines how Commission

[1] This paper draws on data collected as part of 'The European Commission in Question' (EUCIQ), funded by the ESRC (RES - 062 - 23 – 1188), EU Consent and two private donors. I should like to thank the members of the research team – Michael W. Bauer, Sara Connolly, Renaud Dehousse, Liesbet Hooghe, Andrew Thompson and especially John Peterson -- on that project for their useful insights on the topics covered by the paper, the officials who completed the online survey or who agreed to be interviewed during the course of the research on which this paper is based, and participants of workshops and conference panels, who offered helpful comments on earlier drafts, especially Morten Egeberg, Miriam Hartlapp, Jarle Trondal, Gary Marks, Will Sleath and Ulf Sverdrup.

[2] The project created original date from two sources: responses to an online survey administered to a structured sample of Commission staff in autumn 2008 (n=4621; the achieved sample of 1901 fell to 1820 after iterative proportional sampling); and a structured programme of interviews conducted with Commissioners (n=5), *cabinet* members (n=28) and senior and middle managers (n=119) in the first half of 2009. For further details, see http://www.uea.ac.uk/politics-international-media/european-commission-in-question.

Presidents before Barroso approached the office. It shows that his predecessors adopted one of five strategies, each defined by the type of resources mobilized. The third section focuses on the Barroso Presidency. It highlights the strength of Barroso's leadership and discusses what distinguishes the Barroso Presidency from previous presidencies. It then considers how the new style of leadership came about. The fourth section compares the advantages and disadvantages of a strong presidential leadership of the Commission, investigates the impact of the Barroso Presidency on the Commission, and considers whether the model is likely to endure. The conclusion summarizes the main arguments, reflects on the significance of the emergence of the new model, and suggests lines for future research.

Two points of contextualization are necessary at the outset. The first is that paper is narrowly concerned with leadership of the Commission only -- essentially the Commission President's relationship vis-à-vis the College and the Commission services – and that it investigates changes in the Commission Presidency as a political office, the leadership strategy and style of Commission Presidents, and the resources mobilized by its various incumbents. While it makes reference to studies that have examined leadership in a broader sense, such as Endo (1999), Grant (1994) and Ross (1995), the paper does not make wider claims about, for example, the Commission President in the context of leadership of the EU or Europe -- or about the policy achievements of any particular Commission President (see, e.g., Tömmel 2013). The second point is that the analysis presented below falls within the interactionist school of leadership.[3] It recognizes that leadership is the outcome of a combination of the incumbent's characteristics and the environment in which he or she operates. It also acknowledges that the mobilization of resources by an individual outside the organization may have implications for his or her standing inside it. In the case of the Commission President, the ability to perform effectively in the European Council or in the European Parliament is likely to have an impact on his or her authority within the Commission.

THE COMMISSION PRESIDENCY: LEADERSHIP WITHOUT POWER?

Whereas most international organizations were created to provide a permanent forum for cooperation and exchange between governments, the European Communities bound member states to a system of collective governance in which governments share powers not only with each other but with common institutions designed to assist them in the pursuit of their agreed goals. In contrast to its counterparts in these international organizations, which serve principally as international secretariats, the European Commission was given a broader mission. Its specific functions include: a near-monopoly over policy initiation; executive and management roles; and responsibility for enforcement of primary and secondary legislation.

As the head of this unique body, the Commission President quickly assumed a visibility and prominence unrivalled by any other officeholder among EU bodies. Although the office became 'fundamental to the operation of the Commission and to the coherence of the EU *per se*' (Spence 2006: 27), it remained largely undefined. The EEC Treaty failed to outline any distinctive role or responsibilities, or even to differentiate

[3] For discussion, see Elgie (1995).

the Commission President from other members of the College (Cini 2008).[4] It is only recently that the formal powers of the office have come to approach its profile and importance.

In the absence of a blueprint for the office, the Commission Presidency developed through a process of improvisation. It took shape largely in response to managerial requirements arising from the functions entrusted to the Commission under the treaties and the need for the Commission to be represented in its interaction with other institutions. It was also strongly influenced by Walter Hallstein, the first Commission President, who had a clear image of the kind of organization the Commission needed if it were to be able to exercise the authority and independence presupposed by its responsibilities under the treaties (Hallstein 1965; Noël 1992; Loth et al. 1998). Many of the principles and procedures setting out how the Commission was to operate as an organization, including the role and responsibilities of the Commission President, were subsequently codified in an internal Commission text, the Rules of Procedure.

Historically, and certainly until the 1990s, the Commission Presidency has been weak compared to most heads of government. The strength of prime ministers is often measured in respect of three resources (see, e.g., Elgie 1995): *procedural*, which give influence over where, when, and how decisions are taken within a collective decision-making context; *political*, which concern powers, formal and informal, that attach to the office and the personal legitimacy of the incumbent; and *administrative*, which relate to the size of the personal office, powers of appointment within the administration, and wider prerogatives concerning the administration as a whole.

The Commission Presidency did not score highly with respect to any one of the three. Neither custom nor the Rules of Procedure gave the office a 'monopoly over procedural weapons' (Spence 2006: 28). The Commission President has one vote – the same as his peers -- when formal decisions are taken by simple majority. The Commission President convenes and chairs meetings of the College, establishes its agenda, and approves its minutes. However, other members of the College may ask for items to be added to the agenda or for postponement of discussion of a particular dossier, and College minutes must be countersigned by the Secretary-General.

Although the President has the power to establish subcommittees, he cannot use this prerogative to circumvent discussion or push through policy options he favours.[5] The College is the Commission's supreme decision-making body,[6] and its authority

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[4] Like other Commissioners, the President was appointed by common accord of the member governments. Unlike them, however, the President's term of office expired mid-way through the life of the College and he had to be re-appointed by common accord if he was to continue.

[5] Subcommittees have typically been used as a mechanism to affirm collegiality, and to improve the work of the College, rather than as an instrument to advance the Commission President's agenda (Coombes 1970: 124).

[6] The principle of collective responsibility, which Cassese and della Cananea (1992: 80) contend is 'implicitly required by Article 163 of the Treaty', was 'later specified by Article 1 of the internal rules of procedures, adopted on 9 January 1963' (see Coombes 1970: 181–5). The organizational implications are well described by Michelmann (1978: 16): 'Even relatively trivial matters, which would be routinely decided by senior civil servants at the national level, are at least formally decided by the commission. Decisions within the commission are made by majority vote, although every attempt is made to attain unanimity, at least on important matters, and any commissioner can stall action on a decision. The upward funnelling of all matters, and collective decision-making, are devices to assure that few, if any, decisions can escape the attention of any Commissioner or his political advisers, and that consequently any action

cannot be delegated to its inner bodies or formations. Since the organization's earliest days, decisions have been taken by the entire body of Commissioners, meeting weekly, on a day devoted to that purpose. A procedural channel through which the President can influence the policy agenda is the weekly meeting of 'special chefs' that precedes the Monday meeting of the chefs de cabinet and that prepares the weekly Wednesday meeting of the College, since the 'special chefs' is chaired by a member of the President's cabinet (the Secretary-General presides over the hebdo.)

The political resources historically available to the Commission President have often been even sparser. Appointed by common accord of the member governments, he had neither the legitimacy that a popular mandate bestows nor, since he was neither a party leader nor the head of a coalition, any of the resources—electoral mandate, party discipline, or formal coalition agreement— that prime ministers can mobilize in order to hold sway over their ministerial colleagues. Nor, since other members of the College felt no sense of personal obligation, did the Commission command significant patronage powers.

More broadly, some Commission Presidents have been able to derive authority from external sources. Where the climate has been positive, governments have looked to the Commission for major policy initiatives, or where he has been a respected performer in the European Council, the Commission President has developed a standing that has increased his authority vis-à-vis his colleagues in the College and the Commission administration. The same is true when the Commission President has enjoyed the backing of major national capitals, most notably, Bonn or Paris. However, such capital has often proved to be elusive or disappears as quickly as it was accumulated.

The political resources available to the Commission President have, however, increased from this relatively low basis since the early 1990s. The first step was the 1992 Treaty on European Union, which gave the nominee for President a voice in the nomination of other members. Five years later, the Amsterdam Treaty gave explicit recognition to the Commission President's pre-eminence in the organization, declaring that: 'The Commission shall work under the political guidance of its President' (Art. 219 TEC). The 2001 Nice Treaty added the power to allocate portfolio responsibilities and, with the prior approval of the College, to appoint Vice-Presidents from within the College or to require that a Commissioner resign. The Lisbon Treaty retained these provisions and extended them in respect of the appointment of the High Representative.

Over the same period, the method by which the Commission President is appointed has changed in ways that confer a stronger personal mandate to the incumbent. Again the process began with the Treaty of European Union, which granted Parliament the right of approval over the member governments' nominee for Commission President (Westlake 1998). More recently, the Treaty of Lisbon stipulated that the European Council must take account of the results of the preceding elections to the European Parliament in selecting their Presidential nominee, a move intended to align the choice of the heads of state and government with the expressed will of European citizens. Combined with recognition of the President's pre-eminence and the appointment powers granted to the office, the effect has been explicitly to acknowledge the leadership role of the Commission President and to give the incumbent genuine patronage powers for the first time. Importantly, as discussed below, Barroso was the

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that may be interpreted as being rashly unfair or biased can be attacked by other nationalities.' See also Dimitrakopoulos (2008).

first beneficiary of these changes.

The administrative resources of the office have also been limited in comparison with most heads of government. The Commission President is not able to determine the number of portfolio positions in the College. Nor, until the Treaty of Nice provided that the Commission President 'shall decide on [the Commission's] internal organisation in order to ensure that it acts consistently, efficiently and on the basis of collegiality', did he have much say about how the administration should be structured – although its size and the number of officials appointed at each level remain within the preserve of the EU's budgetary authority -- the Council and the European Parliament acting jointly.[7] Meanwhile, his powers of patronage over senior appointments in the administration have been constrained by the national shares system, which was monitored and enforced by the *cabinets*, backed by permanent representations and national capitals.[8] Though larger than the private offices of other Commissioners, the President's *cabinet* is small relative to the range of his responsibilities.

In addition, while the UK prime minister has been able to rely on the Cabinet Office, the chancellor the Kanzleramt, and the French prime minister the Secrétariat général du gouvernement to communicate their views and to monitor, oversee and coordinate the work of government, the equivalent body in the Commission – the Secretariat General – has traditionally been a guardian of collegiality, serving and supporting the College, rather than acting as a personal office of the Commission President (Kassim 2006). Although the relationship between the President's cabinet and the Secretariat-General has been central to the functioning of the Commission, the two bodies have been distinct and separate. Indeed, one of the Secretariat-General's main functions has been to represent the administration to the Commission President.

In short, for most of the Commission's history, the resources at the Commission President's disposal were considerably out of step with the responsibilities of the office. The incumbent has typically been little more than a primus inter pares within the College (see Coombes 1970; Ross 1995; Kassim 2012). The challenge has been to balance 'effective chairing of College, collegiate consensus, and leadership of policy orientation', without being able to exercise 'managerial control' or to 'impose policy positions on his peers' (Spence 2006: 27–8). The verdict of a biographer of one former President captures the weakness of the position and the challenges faced by incumbents: it was 'an impossible job. Indeed, . . . hardly . . . a job at all' (Campbell 1983: 181). Key powers over the organization lay in the hands of external stakeholders, while the procedural, political and administrative resources available to the Commission Presidency were meagre.

The challenge of leadership in a fragmented organization

The lack of resources available to the office limited the ability of Commission Presidents to exercise strong leadership with a small number of exceptions (discussed below). It also had an important impact on the capacity of the Commission to carry out its responsibilities effectively, which in turn had an effect on the EU as a political

[7] The first is set out by the Treaty and decided by member governments as contracting parties; the second is decided by the EU's budgetary authority – the Council and the European Parliament acting jointly.

[8] See, for example, the comment made by Delors to Directors-General, recorded by Ross (1995: 121) and cited by Spence (2006: 138)—'If I could hire and fire here, I'd go after at least five or six of you . . . In a government, I'd be able to remove people. But here you are all barons, it is hard to shake you up . . . But I'll get you nonetheless'.

system more broadly. The absence of centralized political authority that makes coherent government possible in national political systems (Peters 1998; Hayward 2004) rendered coordination -- a perennial challenge in any executive – an even more formidable task in the case of the Commission (Kassim 2006; Kassim and Peters 2008). Strong centrifugal pressures were difficult to counter and the Commission became a fragmented organization where leadership has been problematic. As a result, the Commission has been characterized as a 'multiorganization' (Cram 1994), where Directorates-General (DGs) are feuding 'baronies', 'silos', or 'fiefdoms', quasi-autonomous and introspective institutions that pursue their own agendas and are fiercely protective of their turf, *cabinets* are in perpetual conflict with each other, and the services are permanently at odds with the cabinets (Coombes 1970; Spierenburg 1979; Ross 1995; Stevens and Stevens 2001; Spence with Edwards 2006).

The need for coordination within the Commission as with any organization arises from the task specialization that is a feature of all modern bureaucracies. Since decisions cannot be taken, implemented, or enforced by a single individual or administrative unit alone, it is unlikely that, in the absence of specific coordinating efforts, policy or action will be consistent or coherent, or that problems of 'duplication, overlapping, and redundancy' (Wildavsky 1979: 132) will be avoided. The Commission's responsibilities for policy coordination, management and executive, and implementation and enforcement all require internal coordination if its interaction with external actors is to be effective and efficient.

Moreover, the principle of collegiality, fundamental to the operation of the Commission, requires cooperation between Commissioners, their cabinets and the services. Although 'each sector is the responsibility of a different member of the Commission' (Commission 2004), the administration is 'one and indivisible' (Spence 2006: 148), its unity affirmed by Article 21 of the Rules of Procedure (Cassese and della Cananea 1992: 83). Collegiality is not only an operational principle in the Commission, embodied by the supremacy of the College, but has symbolic status as a legitimizing myth, representing the claim of the organization to act on behalf of the common interest of Community and thereby to rise above the particularistic national backgrounds of the member states and of individual Commissioners (Dimitrakopoulos 2008).

At every level, however, centrifugal pressures in the organization have been powerful, while countervailing forces have been weak (Coombes 1970; Michelmann 1978). At its top, the College has historically been a 'government of strangers', whose members have often not met each other before they assemble in Brussels (Coombes 1970: 252). Unelected on a manifesto or programme, 'Commissioners are not' as Page (1997: 119) puts it, 'commissioned by anyone to do anything in particular'. With no shared background, ideology, or common fate to bind together its members, often at different points in their career and usually entertaining quite different career ambitions, it is perhaps not surprising that Commissioners have found it difficult to muster a 'unified political purpose by which administrative action can be oriented and guided' (Stevens and Stevens 2001: 224) or that 'Colleges rarely become as cohesive as other parts of the EU's institutional arrangements' (Smith 2003: 142). Large and unwieldy, it is hard to resist Coombes's judgment that the College has not been up to the task of defining 'the mission of the institution [or creating] an organization that is adequate to fulfil it' (1970: 247).

Although originally established to support Commissioners in their collegial responsibilities, the *cabinets* became over time national enclaves, motivated primary by

a concern to promote the interests of their Commissioner's home state. In constant competition with each other, they were typically also at odds with the services. Not only were *cabinets* impelled by a political rather than a technical logic, but their members were set on different career trajectories from permanent officials. The relationship was one of perennial tension and frequent friction.

The Commission was also prey to interdepartmentalism. Powerful, introspective, and resistant to cooperation, each with its own mission, networks, and culture (Cini 1996; Smith 2004: 4), the DGs were interested in protecting their own responsibilities, and in defending and extending their turf (Stevens and Stevens 2001: 196–205). After gaining significant organizational freedom early in the Commission's history, the independence of the services has been strengthened by the concentration of policy expertise and experience in each department, low levels of staff mobility between services, and the absence of an overarching loyalty to the administration as a whole (Abélès et al. 1993).

At the same time, the mechanisms that typically facilitate coordination in national administrations are absent or weak in the Commission. In national political settings, for example, the Finance Ministry can be an important centralizing or coordinating force. However, budgetary authority of the sort that is exercised by the Treasury in the UK simply did not exist within the Commission. Nor has the DG responsible for personnel and administration within the Commission ever developed authority over the allocation of human resources.

More generally, although responsible for coordination and despite the reputation that it enjoyed as a result of the contribution made by Emile Noël, its head for thirty years first as Executive Secretary to the EEC Commission then Secretary General to the merged Commission, to the development of the Commission as an institution, the Secretariat-General was unable to rival the authority of similar bodies at national level (Kassim 2006, 2010a, 2010b). For most of its life, the Secretariat General focused on process: it ensured compliance with internal procedures; was keeper of the institutional memory; oversaw the legislative process, including the Commission's interactions with the Council, the Parliament and other outside actors; and acted as guardian of collegiality, assuring that the department responsible for drafting a policy proposal consulted other interested DGs.[9] It operated a somewhat limited concept of coordination, rarely intervening in the substance of policy, except in the few areas – for example, devising the Commissions' response to the BSE crisis -- where it was given direct responsibility. Although charged with coordinating the Commission's work programme, it did little more than bring about 'an annual opening of filing cabinets' (Ross 1995: 267–8, note 22). For their part DGs resisted what they considered to be interference by the Secretariat-General on the grounds that the doctrine of collegiality implied a principle of departmental equality that applied as much to the Secretariat General as it did to the line DGs.[10] Hence, when one Commission veteran, Carlo

[9] Over time, it has accumulated additional functions, such as direct responsibility for competencies that are new to the Union or for dossiers that are complex, sensitive, or controversial, as well as coordination of the Commission's input into treaty negotiations.

[10] It was largely on the grounds of collegiality that senior officials opposed Carlo Trojan's greater assertiveness. Trojan's successor, David O'Sullivan, projected instead a conception of the Secretariat-General as 'a service at the service of the other services', which provided the rubric for a strengthening of the Secretariat-General as a coordination hub. As part of the reform, the Secretariat-General became the home for an enhanced, centralized capacity— Strategic Planning and Programming (SPP)—to govern

Trojan, became Secretary General in 1997 and attempted to adopt a more pro-active, interventionist approach, he encountered serious opposition and was forced to abandon the experiment (Kassim 2006).

MODELS OF PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP: FROM HALLSTEIN TO SANTER

How, given the weakness of the office, did the first ten Commission Presidents approach it? How can their leadership styles be distinguished and summarized? Political leadership has proved an elusive concept, but a consensus on an 'interactionist' approach, combining insights from agent-centred and structuralist perspectives (see Elgie 1995, Helms 2005), has emerged. According to this syncretic view, leadership is contingent on interaction between the personal attributes of the leader and the environment in which they operate (Elgie 1995: 7) — a view that has much in common with studies of the Commission Presidency that highlight the importance of internal and external resources and constraints (see, for example, Endo 1999; Spence 2006).

'Personal attributes' include ambitions and style, which can vary significantly. Some leaders have a small number of specific goals, others a long list of general aims. The ambitions of some are far-reaching, radical, and transformative. Other leaders are concerned simply to keep the ship of state on an even keel or to implement modest changes. The level and scope of a leader's ambitions influence priority setting, which has implications for the mobilization and investment of resources, including personal political capital. Leaders also differ in terms of style. They can be dogmatic or pragmatic, assertive or responsive, active or passive. Leaders learn on the job, adjusting and altering their aims and leadership style over time.

'Environment' encompasses three elements: 'institutional structures, historical forces and societal demands' (Elgie 1995: 13, 192). As for the first, the structure of the College, the resources of the Commission Presidency, and relations with other actors at different levels of government are the key elements. The second—historical forces—highlights the extent to which the choices available to the Commission today are shaped by its previous actions. The appointments member governments make and their preparedness to develop policy at the EU level are also influenced by inferences based on the Commission's past performance. In terms of societal demands, as an executive body in an international organization, the Commission is relatively remote and has little direct contact with EU citizens. Instead, the views of domestic publics tend to be channeled via national governments, the European Parliament, and interest groups. These elements constitute the environment within which the Commission works. They can operate as either resources or constraints.

The ten incumbents came come to the office with very different ambitions and confronted quite different challenges arising from prevailing institutional, historical and social conditions. [11] Only thumbnail portraits are possible here, but it is possible to draw

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priority setting and implementation across the organization

[11] In fact, Barroso has eleven predecessors as follows: Walter Hallstein (1 January 1958 – 30 June 1967); Jean Rey Franco 2 July 1967 – 1 July 1970; Maria Malfatti 2 July 1970 – 1 March 1972; Sicco Mansholt 22 March 1972 – 5 January 1973; François-Xavier Ortoli 6 January 1973 – 5 January 1977; Roy Jenkins 6 January 1977 – 19 January 1981; Gaston Thorn 20 January 1981 – 6 January 1985; Jacques Delors 7 January 1985 – 24 January 1995; Jacques Santer 25 January 1995 – 15 March 1999; *Manuel Marín* 15 March 1999 – 17 September 1999; Romano Prodi 17 September 1999 – 22 November 2004; José Manuel Barroso 22 November 2004 – *present (term expires 31 October 2014).* However, since he occupied the position on an interim basis and in highly exceptional circumstances, Marín is not discussed here.

meaningful distinctions between individuals according to their level of ambition, style, conception of the President's role, attitudes towards policy initiation, and the resources – internal and external –they were able to mobilize.

Based on these five variables, it is possible to construct four ideal types of presidential style: active presidential, steered presidential, primus inter pares, and passive chair. The first two encompass Commission Presidents who came into office with high levels of ambition, intervene selectively in other portfolio areas and allow other Commissioners autonomy in their policy domains. However, whereas active presidents lead policy on specific dossiers, steered presidents take general charge of key areas. A further salient difference is that active presidents utilize the Secretariat General, while steered presidents orchestrate their management of the organization through personal networks centred on the Commission President's *cabinet*. The primus inter pares President has more modest or incremental ambitions, but is prepared to take the initiative in some areas of policy. The passive chair, by contrast, has limited ambitions and is content simply to transact business without launching major initiatives.

This schema makes it possible to distinguish between the strategies adopted by individuals to occupying the position and is more suitable for the purpose of comparing organizational leadership than classifications that are essentially output focused. For example, Tömmel's distinction between 'transactional' leaders, who essentially manage whatever items come on the policy agenda, and 'transforming leaders', who matter 'as forceful promoters of the European project' (2013:789), is helpful for comparing the achievements of Commission Presidents, but not for investigating differences between the strategies that they pursue or the different resources that they mobilise.

Table 1. Models of the Commission Presidency, 1958-2004

Type	*Passive chair*	*Primus inter pares*	*Steered presidential*	*Active presidential*
Ambition: level and scope	Limited: introspective	Modest: general	Heroic: general	High: general
Style	Passive	Active: presidential lead on some areas	Active: Strong presidential lead on major policies.	Active: President launches major policy proposals; may intervene in portfolio areas
Autonomy extended to colleagues	Collegial	Allows colleagues to launch major initiatives	Allows other Commissioners to develop and promote initiatives	Allows other Commissioners to develop and promote initiatives
Resources mobilised	President's cabinet is passive. Loose working relationship with Secretariat General Passive in Council/European Council	*Internal* Loose working relationship with Secretariat General *External* Active in Council/European Council	*Internal* Presidential cabinet plays steering role Secretariat General bypassed by personal networks of President and President's cabinet *External* Active use of power of persuasion in European Council	*Internal* Close working relationship between presidential cabinet and Secretariat General. *External* Active use of power of persuasion in Council/European Council
Examples	Malfatti, Ortoli, Thorn, Prodi Santer	Rey, Mansholt	Delors	Hallstein, Jenkins

Source: Compiled by the author

In terms of the schema set out above and presented in Table 1, five of the ten Presidents who occupied the office before Barroso were passive in their approach to the Presidency and in their style, showed limited ambition, took a collegial approach to the College, and mobilized few resources. Two were primus inter pares, but were responsible for launching occasional specific policy initiatives. A further two were highly ambitious, strongly interventionist, and actively mobilized resources. Only one came to office with heroic ambitions, adopted a strongly presidential style, and aggressively mobilized resources.

The Hallstein Commission was 'an intimate and cohesive team' (Coombes 1970: 253) that brought together several veterans of post-war integration. Walter Hallstein was an ambitious President, who sought to establish the Commission as equivalent to national administrations. Although he was personally involved in the main areas of policy, he permitted other Commissioners to take the lead in key domains, most notably, agriculture (Sicco Mansholt) and competition (Hans von der Groeben). Inside the Commission, Hallstein had a good working relationship with Emile Nöel, the Commission's first Secretary-General, who is credited with 'the Commission's rise to institutional maturity' (Lemaignen 1964: 69–70). Externally, Hallstein was an impressive performer (Noël 1998; von der Groeben 1998), but encountered fierce resistance from the French President, Charles de Gaulle, and resigned following the 'empty chair' crisis persuade and convince his fellow members of the European Council. However, 'three propitious contextual variables: national receptivity to European solutions, international changes (especially German unification), and a favourable business cycle from 1985 to 1990' (Ross 1995: 234–7) were critical to his success.

Jacques Santer's more modest ambitions were captured by his promise to 'do less, but to do it better'. Although several important successes were achieved during his tenure and he was personally involved in initiatives to reform internal procedures and processes within the Commission, his Presidency illustrated the extent to which historical factors and societal demands can operate as constraints. He had been appointed to the office precisely because member governments had begun to be concerned about Commission- led expansionism under his predecessor.

Romano Prodi also recorded a number of notable achievements, but came ultimately to be viewed as a weak President. Although he was the first Commission President to benefit from the strengthening of the office under the Treaty of Amsterdam, and on entering office had spoken of the Commission as a 'European government', Prodi did not offer strong leadership to a College that included several imposing figures. Nor was he effective in the European Council, despite inside experience as a former Italian prime minister. Illustrating how the rating of a Commission President outside the institution can affect morale inside, the lack of support for the Commission in major national capitals led to reports that 'the Commission as a whole is losing heart' (Peterson 2006: 97).

Operationalizing the factors identified by Elgie (1995) and distinguishing between past Commission Presidents according to personal attributes and environmental conditions, it is possible to identify four models of Commission Presidency: active presidential, steered presidential, primus inter pares, and passive chair. Of the first ten Commission Presidents, five have been passive chairs with limited ambitions, passive styles, collegial in the College, and modest in mobilizing resources. Two have been primus inter pares, with occasionally presidential styles on specific initiatives. Another

two have been active presidential, with high ambitions, an interventionist style, and active in mobilizing resources. And only one—Jacques Delors—deserves association with the steered presidential model, defined by its heroic ambitions, a strongly presidential style, and very active—even aggressive—resource mobilization. The typology and categorization are shown in Table 1 (below).

THE BARROSO COMMISSION: A NEW MODEL PRESIDENCY

Barroso's tenure has been significant not only because he has been a strong Commission President, who followed in the wake of two relatively weak figures, but because he has centralized power in the office and asserted a form of personal leadership through the mobilization of both long-standing and new resources. His deployment of the latter largely defines the new model presidency. They include new powers created by amendments to the treaty. Importantly, Barroso was the first incumbent to whom they were available.

They also include resources that Barroso to a large extent has himself engineered. Foremost among them is the Secretariat General, which metamorphosed at Barroso's instigation from a service of the College into a presidential service, thereby giving Commission Presidency a capacity for control over the policy process lacked by even the most powerful of his predecessors. Barroso was further able to strengthen the Presidency in the transition from Barroso I to Barroso II.

A new model Presidency

Support for the argument that the Barroso Commission has been presidential in style comes from a number of sources. It is a view that was expressed publicly by highly placed individuals within the Commission early in Barroso I. Danuta Hübner, Commissioner for Regional Policy between 2005 and 2010, for example, testified to the presidential character of the Commission in February 2007.[12] Barroso himself signaled repeatedly before taking office and in the early stages of his first term that he saw strong presidential leadership as the only way for the Commission to remain an effective actor within the Union, given the expansion of the College to 25 Commissioners in 2004 and to 27 in 2007 following enlargement, the assertiveness of the European Parliament, and the wariness of member governments in the face of action at the EU level.[13]

Further evidence comes from data collected as part of the EUCIQ project. Respondents were asked in an online survey administered in autumn 2008 to a stratified sample of Commission officials to assess the performance of the four Commission Presidents from Delors to Barroso in regard to setting a policy agenda, effectively managing the house, delivering on policy priorities, and defending the Commission. [14]

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[12] 'EU commission sees civil servants' power grow', EU Observer, 22 02 2007, http://euobserver.com/political/23553

[13] As one Commissioner, interviewed as part of the EUCIQ project in 2009, recalled: 'I've discussed it with him [Barroso]. I said, "You have to establish a presidential system here", and he said, "This is the only way our Commission of 27 can be organized. Otherwise, decision-making would be impossible"' (interview 85).

[14] The first points to the Commission President's effectiveness in articulating policy priorities, the second to the management of the Commission as an organization, the third to securing the passage of key policy initiatives, and the fourth to protecting the Commission's prerogatives and policy proposals, in the EU system. Collectively the four dimensions embody an interactionist approach, combining the expression of personal attributes with sensitivity to the environment in which the leader operates.

Two findings are noteworthy. The first is that the ranking of Commission Presidents by Commission insiders largely coincides with assessments in the academic literature. While Delors emerges as the strongest, Barroso is related second, Prodi third and Santer fourth. Second, the same individuals received different scores across the found dimensions. Delors received close to a 100 per cent rating for setting a policy agenda, delivering policy priorities, and defending the Commission, but only 44 per cent of respondents regarded his management of the house as fairly or very strong. Barroso, meanwhile, was regarded as strong by up to a third of officials. He is viewed by senior managers and members of cabinets as strong in managing the house, delivering on policy priorities and defending the Commission.

A similar message was communicated in face-to-face interviewees – also part of the EUCIQ project. The testimony of these respondents is especially important as they work closely with the Commission President and his staff on a daily basis. Three of the five the Commissioners interviewed had no hesitation in qualifying the Barroso Commission as presidential. According to one: 'We have clearly a presidential system now, and a very strong one' (interview 85). A second reflected that: 'I've been in the [name of a member state] government . . . [and I disagreed with the Prime Minister] but he allowed me to pursue my policy. With Barroso it's not the case . . .' (interview 115).

Both *cabinet* members and senior managers commented on the extent to which decision making has become personalized under Barroso. One senior manager noted, for example, that Barroso liked to put his own signature on policy proposals agreed by the College, such as the services directive and the REACH directive. Barroso has also taken personal responsibility for certain key dossiers, such as energy and the negotiation of the successor to the Draft Constitutional Treaty, and championed a number of pet projects, including the European School of Technology.

What is arguably at least as significant is the kind of Commission Presidency that Barroso has brought about as defined by the resources that he has mobilized in its service. Unsurprisingly, he has drawn on some of the long-standing resources available to the Commission President. Thus, he has used the procedural resources available to the Commission President to select which issues reach the College table and those that do not. One Commissioner reflected that: [i]n this Commission, we normally do not have controversial points, or contentions . . . The President simply doesn't want that. Yeah? And he doesn't put it on the agenda, as long as there are still different views. (interview 85). Pointing specifically to the Commission President's preference to minimizing debate within the College and ensuring that decisions had effectively been made before they reached the full body of Commissioners, he continued:

> In this [Barroso] Commission there was never a vote. . . . Well, normally, a vote is not needed. . . . It does not happen. But here, the consensus in this Commission is achieved before the college meets. Before. The Prodi Commission, that was still normal, but at least two or three agenda points—yeah?—were on the agenda, where consensus was achieved during the meeting, and not before. . . . I mean, the reality, because in the majority of cases the Commissioner or the President are never involved, yeah? This is the matter and this then is solved at the level of cabinet members of the President, officials in Sec-Gen, and your cabinet members. I think that is the normal way—it is normally the exception if a Commissioner is involved. . . .' (interview 85).

Other interviewees pointed to additional ways by which the Barroso has been able to control the policy agenda. One *cabinet* member, interviewed alongside his Commissioner, compared the role played by the Commission President's *cabinet* under Barroso with the Prodi Commission:

> I always felt that when we were dealing with the members of Prodi's cabinet their job was to make sure that what the portfolio Commissioner was wanting to do, fitted into the overall picture of what the Commission was doing. At the moment it's slightly bizarre. You have the impression that the member of Mr Barroso's cabinet that is following the work of a given Commissioner, is almost a kind of second Commissioner wanting to drive forward that interest. . . (interview 85).

Other interviewees highlighted how in meetings of 'special chefs', the President's *chef de cabinet* would delayed or sideline policy proposals, thus effectively preventing further discussion.

Barroso's strengthening of the Commission Presidency has, however, depended to a significant degree on new resources. When the Treaty of Nice, agreed in 2001, came into effect in 2003, Barroso was the first incumbent to benefit from the expanded powers extended to the Commission President. Not only was he given an important voice in the appointment of members of the College, subject to approval by the European Council and the European Parliament, but he was able to allocate portfolios to his preferred candidates for particular jobs. Moreover, he was the first Commission President to have the power to request the resignation of individual Commissioners. These new powers, although not without their own problems, underlined the pre-eminence of the Commission President vis-à-vis other members of the College. This status was further reinforced by the selection of the Commission President by member governments and approved by the European Parliament both in the wake of the European elections, which was intended to grant the Commission at least a mediated and personal mandate, and prior to the appointment of other Commissioners. The result was significantly to enhance the formal authority of the office. The effect was felt even more strongly with Barroso II, where the Commission President's previous experience of incumbency further strengthened his status in regard to the other Commissioners.

While these new resources strengthened the Commission President vis-à-vis the College, Barroso extended the grip of the office over the Commission more generally through his redefinition of the role of the Secretariat General. Though formally accountable to the Commission President, the Secretariat Generally had traditionally served the College and acted as a custodian of collegiality. Barroso turned it into a service of the Commission Presidency.[15] He thereby not only also turned the Secretariat General into a political body,[16] granting it licence to intervene in the name of the

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15 When asked in the online survey for their view on the proposition that the Secretariat-General is a 'neutral arbiter between the services in policy coordination', a plurality (37 per cent) of respondents disagreed. Fifty-nine per cent, however, agreed that: 'The Secretariat General is becoming more political and more influential in the life of the Commission'. Interviews with senior and middle managers provided further and more specific evidence. In response to the question 'Some respondents thought that the Secretariat-General is becoming too political in the life of the Commission. What is your view?' 47 per cent either agreed or strongly agreed.33 When pressed, many confirmed that they viewed 'more political' to mean 'serving the Commission President'.

16 According to one senior official the Secretariat-General is `becoming more political no doubt . . . [and]

Commission President in the substance of policy to an extent that had not previously been possible, but also considerably extended his own influence throughout the Commission.

For the first time, the Commission President could call upon a body that was equivalent to a prime minister's office. As well as providing procedural expertise, the Secretariat General has been the Commission's institutional memory (Kassim 2004, 2006). It is the only body to know what is going on in every Commission service and at level of the organization, as well as monitoring the progress of legislation through the Council and the European Parliament, and managing the Commission's interactions with other EU institutions and outside actors. Moreover, the Secretary General herself chairs key meetings, including the weekly meeting of the *chefs de cabinets* that acts as a clearing-house prior to the meeting of the College.

The Secretariat General is also the locus of the Commission's planning capacity. Historically, its role in this regard was limited and its powers weak (Kassim 2006). However, as part of the administrative reforms implemented under the Prodi Commission, a new machinery for Strategic Planning and Programming (SPP) had been created and placed in the Secretariat General with the aim of enabling the Commission to set political objectives, detail tasks to be carried out at various levels of the organization, and allocate human and other resources (Kassim 2004a, 2004b; Schön-Quinliven 2011). The SPP capacity has developed progressively since the early 2000s. Similarly, as a result of the same reforms the Secretariat General is able to manage its responsibilities for overseeing coordination more effectively. Historically, its powers to ensure that the lead DGs consulted other interested departments in timely fashion were weak. However, its capacities were strengthened by the Kinnock-Prodi reforms. In particular, it has used information technology to compel the services to comply with their obligations to consult.

As a result of the changes introduced by Barroso's predecessor, the Secretariat General achieved greater eminence among the departments of the Commission, but it still remained a primus inter pares. Although the Secretariat General was significantly upgraded, there was no fundamental change in its vocation. Indeed, David O'Sullivan, Secretary General from 2000 to 2005 and a key player in the reforms, conceived of it as a 'service at the service of other services'. Rather, the transformation of its role began in November 2005, when Catherine Day, an official of considerable experience,[17] was appointed to head it. The new Secretary General was considered to share not only Barroso's liberal economic values, but also his view that the Secretariat General should be more interventionist and play a more political role in the organization.

As a result of the new relationship between the Commission Presidency and the Secretariat General, Barroso was not only able to access the latter's experience, intelligence and knowledge, but also to expand his own ability to direct and drive the organization as a whole. The introduction in 2010 of the Commission President's State of the Union speech to initiate the Commission's planning cycle is an excellent example of the new relationship. Its construction was a quite deliberate strategy on his part. As two senior officeholders recalled:

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clearly transforming itself into the President's services . . . they are no longer the Commission's Secretariat-General (interview 150).

[17] Day joined the Commission as an administrator in 1979. She served in the cabinets of Richard Burke, Peter Sutherland and Leon Brittan, then in DGs Enlargement, External Relations and, as Director General, Environment.

> When Catherine arrived, she got a very clear mandate from the President, who as a former prime minister, like his predecessor but maybe more, and a different generation of prime minister, said, well, Catherine, I would like the Sec-Gen to be my service, and if I want to be a political president of the Commission, I need the Sec-Gen to be also a political part of this system (interview 159).

Crucially, therefore, presidentialism under Barroso has been defined by this new relationship. As Danuta Hübner observed: 'The presidential system doesn't mean the president is making all the decisions; it means that there is a strong role of the Commission Secretariat'. It is the relationship with the Secretariat General and especially the assistance provided by the Secretariat General in devising, rolling out and defending the Commission President's programme in negotiations with other institutions that marks out the Barroso Presidency as a new model presidency (see Table 2).[18]

Moreover, the relationship with the Commission President gave the Secretariat General a new standing. As well as providing political backing that it had previously lacked, the Secretariat General drew on its new authority to take a more interventionist approach to policy coordination and to develop functions beyond its traditional tasks. In the words of one interviewee, the Secretariat-General 'used to be a coordinating body focusing pretty largely on procedures. It is beginning to become more a prime minister's office, a large prime minister's office, trying to focus on policy' (interview 144).

This in turn has further extended the influence of the Commission President. Barroso's new relationship with the Secretariat General increased his powers through the addition of its existing capacities, but as a result of the political authority it has gained, the Secretariat General has been able to expand its functions and responsibilities, which has further broadened the reach of the Commission President.

Under Barroso, a model of presidential leadership has emerged that is quite different from its predecessors. Barroso is a pre-eminent President, but his Presidency draws on resources and a conception of the office that departs from his predecessors. Whereas Hallstein and Delors relied on personal standing and authority, and in the case of the latter a powerful cabinet and personal networks throughout the Commission, Barroso's power has been rooted in the constitutional strengthening of the office, the appeal to centralized authority in an expanded College, and in the transformation of the Secretary General the annexation of a key organizational resource. The new model is 'presidential-organizational', where the Presidency is not primus inter pares, but pre-eminent. Barroso exercises close control over the College agenda and takes personal ownership of key policy initiatives. To an extent previously unseen, he runs the Commission through a close partnership with the Secretariat-General.

In terms of the types of Commission Presidency outlined above, the Barroso Presidency can be represented as shown in Table 2.

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[18] According to one middle manager: 'The President . . . sees the Secretary-General as his office, his department, therefore— and he is a very political person. I mean, whether it's Barroso or not, it is a political role, but he sees it as such, and sees this as his department geared to drive forward the programme, which he has presented to the Parliament, and to the Council, and that the Commission as a whole subsequently has presented' (interview 53).

Table 2: A model of the Barroso Presidency

	Ambition: level and scope	*Style*	*Autonomy extended to colleagues*	*Resources mobilised*
Presidential-organisational	Modest and limited	Passive	Close control over College agenda, with active use of delay and veto. Personal ownership of policy initiatives	Partnership between presidential cabinet and Secretariat General. Active use of power of persuasion in Council/European Council

Source: Constructed by the author

EXPLAINING THE NEW MODEL PRESIDENCY

How did the new model presidency arise? The political science literature suggests several ways in which a political office in general or the executive more specifically can be redefined. The first is as the intended result of deliberate 'constitutional engineering' (Sartori 1994) by the framers of the constitution. A second is presidentialization, where it is contended that changes in political campaigning and an increased focus on individuals has led to the personalization of power across liberal democracies (see for example Poguntke and Webb 2005). A third is as the result of a process of institutionalization (Ragsdale and Theis 1997; Lewis 2002; McGuire 2004). The fourth is through entrepreneurship, whereby an incumbent is able to redefine and expand a political office by mobilizing new and existing resources. The argument in this paper is that the last best explains the strengthening of the Commission Presidency that has taken place since 2004, not least because it remains unclear as to whether the change to the office represents a genuine transformation – in other words that it will be permanent (see below).

The change in the Commission Presidency cannot be satisfactorily explained by 'constitutional engineering'. Although the formal powers of the office were extended through a succession of treaty reforms from 1992 in a way that differentiated the Commission President from other members of the College, the aim of the contracting parties (i.e. member governments) was not to create a strong presidency. Indeed, this outcome was one that, in the post-Maastricht ratification era and in the wake of Delors, they wanted to avoid.

Rather the reforms that they introduced were intended as a response to calls to address particular problems. By linking the selection of the Commission President to European elections, for example, the member governments sought to respond to pressures to remedy the democratic deficit (Majone 2002; Rittberger 2005) and specifically to connect the appointment of the College to the expressed will of European citizens, while by recognizing the pre-eminence of the Commission President and by allowing him to request the resignation of individual Commissioners they hoped to create the capacity within the Commission to avoid a repeat of the crisis that had ultimately provoked the resignation of the College en masse in March 1999 when the government of the home state of the Commissioner against whom allegations had been leveled refused to support her removal. In short, the new formal powers granted to the Commission Presidency were significant, but they were motivated by pragmatic

conditions and were incremental in character. They were not informed by a desire to engineer a radical reconfiguration of power.

A second possibility is that the strengthening of the Commission Presidency under Barroso should be read as an instance of a more general process of presidentialization that has been taking place across liberal democracies in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. In their influential volume, Poguntke and Webb (2005) contend that in parliamentary systems power has become increasingly concentrated in the hands of the prime minister, distancing him or her from his or her colleagues in government. They find that presidentialization is the result of greater leadership resources and autonomy within political parties and the executive, and to the rise of leadership-centred electoral processes.

Although the presidentialization thesis is a plausible reading of developments in national political systems, it has considerably less purchase in the case of the EU, where the same agencies and the same dynamics are not present. Most significantly perhaps the Commission President is not a party leader, nor is the Commission an elected body. Indeed, the EU is not a parliamentary system. Rather, the EU combines elements of both mixed government (Majone 2005) and the separation of powers (Hix 2005). To paraphrase Neustadt (1991: 29) in regard to the latter, parties in the Union have not combined what the treaties have kept separate—or at least they have not done so yet.

The institutionalization of the executive is a third hypothesis (Ragsdale and Theis 1997; Lewis 2002; McGuire 2004). Although they emphasize different dimensions, scholars who have applied the concept to the executive (usually the US Presidency) use institutionalization to refer to a long-term process as a result of which the office is able to exercise institutional autonomy among other attributes. It is debatable, however, whether the concept is appropriate for understanding the development of the Commission Presidency. First, the office is far smaller in terms of the administrative resources that it commands than heads of government in national systems. Second, it is debatable whether the centralization that has taken place even under Barroso will provide to be enduring. Third, the Commission Presidency is most similar to the top post in international administrations. These positions are almost always weakly institutionized. International organizations themselves tend to be less well-entrenched or stable, because in institutional terms they are relatively new (or adolescent) and are multiply dependent on outside actors – mainly national governments -- for their powers and resources.

The most convincing explanation for the rise of the new model presidency lies in entrepreneurialism on the part of Barroso. Barroso was able to mobilise existing and new resources in the service of a conception of the office that fitted the post-enlargement environment. As with prime ministers in a national setting, relations within the 'core executive' are recast to a degree by a new appointment to the top office. On becoming Commission President, Barroso has insisted on the need for the Commission to adopt 'presidential-style' leadership if it was to remain effective. In order for the College to avoid what he termed 'fragmentation' or 'Balkanisation' now that following enlargement it had expanded to twenty-five members and would shortly thereafter grow to twenty-seven, he argued that needed 'a President that is seen by members of the Commission as a last resort and authority'. Similarly, assuming office in a climate that was wary of further integration, Barroso took the view that the Commission would need to cooperate closely with member governments and the European Parliament. He reasoned that strong leadership of the Commission, including tight control over the flow

and quality of policy initiatives from the organization would therefore be essential. Importantly, both arguments were accepted within the Commission.[19] Moreover, it followed from both that the Secretariat General should not only become the Commission President's service, but that it should have a wider remit, be more interventionist, and become more extensively involved in policy.[20]

Based on this understanding, which he expressed publicly, Barroso sought to strengthen the Commission Presidency and especially to expand its control over policy formation within the Commission. The beneficiary of recent treaty reforms that underlined his pre-eminence vis-à-vis other members of the Commission, Barroso engineered a new relationship with the Secretariat-General, which provided him with a powerful new organizational resource that extended his reach into the services and thereby expanded his influence throughout the administration.

ASSESSING THE NEW MODEL PRESIDENCY

The centralization of power within the Commission since 2005 is a significant and important development. It has implications for the Commission—not least because it responds to long-standing criticisms of weak leadership, fragmentation (see for example Spierenburg 1979), and a lack of control over decision-making and resource allocation—but also for the Union more broadly. Although there is much about the changes that is positive, there are also costs and risks.

On the benefit side, a strong Presidency enables the organization to speak clearly with a single voice, diminishing the risk of sending out contradictory signals that may be politically damaging. It also makes it easier to attune the political initiatives of the Commission to the prevailing climate, since presidential control makes it easier to dilute or delay initiatives, or to overrule colleagues who want to bring forward unpopular or badly-timed proposals. In addition, it clarifies issues of accountability, and significantly enhances the coordination capacity within the organization.

It has also enabled the Commission to remedy long-term problems that have beset the organization in developing and presenting a coherent policy programme and in coordinating action between the Commission's departments. Backed by the political authority of the Commission President, and following the Commission President's lead role in setting policy priorities, the Secretariat General has been able to orchestrate action across the organization with unprecedented effectiveness.[21] Evidence from the EUCIQ project points to enhanced capacity in producing and implementing a coherent Commission project. One interviewee expressed a widely held view as follows:

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[19] Several interviewees speculated that the President's concern to maintain a tight grip over policy derived from concerns about what was necessary to make a 27-member College workable. One manager, commented for example: 'There's been a heavy centralization of what we do, but I think to myself that that's inevitable, given the size of the College' (interview 134).

[20] According to two senior officeholders: 'After a request, a clear request from the President . . . [Catherine Day] said, 'well, our work vis-à-vis the Council and the Parliament, in particular, should not just be a role of note-taker of the meetings we attend there. We should influence their work. We should listen to the political discussion out there, to the change of the composition of the Council'. The move from fifteen to twenty-seven member states was seen by the President and by Catherine as a major opportunity for us, for the Commission, to be a stronger player '(interview 159).

[21] EUCIQ report on coordination; and attribution to Secretariat General

> Under Catherine Day . . . and indeed, prior to her under David O'Sullivan as well, . . . there's been a big effort of coordination of legislative programming, which has been very effective, because in the old days, when I joined the Commission first, twenty years ago, every DG worked as a little kingdom of its own, and there was no coordination of policy; there was . . . a yearly legislative work programme, but it was sort of bits and pieces . . . Now, that has changed, and . . . this has been driven by [the] need to have good policy coordination (interview 162).

Evidence from the EUCIQ survey shows not only that coordination is no longer as problematic as it was in the past – 55 per cent of respondents regard it either as effective or are neutral -- but attributes its improvement to changes in the roles of the President and the Secretariat General or to mechanisms for which they are responsible:

> [T]here is [an]other [kind of] coordination, which is centrally initiated by the Secretariat-General, and . . . I perceive that it is increasing. . . . [P]erhaps one of the more significant changes in the more recent past is that they work on substance. So they do not only formally coordinate . . . but they are trying to strongly influence the substance, the outcome of the coordination. This is relatively new (interview 52).

> There are two different layers that develop independently. . . . [T]he procedural layer has become more and more heavy. . . . But the Secretariat General, especially the present head . . . focuses on policy a lot . . . So [for] the internal market, the new document is written by the Secretariat-General (interview 158).

> I think [the role of the Secretariat-General] has significantly changed. . . . I think there are more and more people aware . . . of the fact that on quite [a lot] of the key policy and legislative files over the last few years that Sec Gen has played a leading role: guiding, coordinating, whatever you want to call it . . . which is stronger than what we might have seen in the past (interview 127).

On the cost side, while personalizing authority may make decision-making more efficient, it carries the danger that the Commission's actions will be too ambitious or, more likely in an era of member state re-assertion, that they will not be ambitious enough. Barroso I, for example, was marked by caution and what some considered an excessive sensitivity to the preferences of Berlin and Paris. Although perhaps understandable given Barroso's wish for reappointment in order to serve a second term, such perceived timidity caused some frustration and loss of morale among Commissioners, cabinet members, and senior officials. Individual Commissioners and their services felt inhibited and discouraged from proposing major initiatives. There is also a normative dimension. An important claim to legitimacy on the Commission's part is that it represents the general interest of the European Union. Collective or collegial decision-making is key to this claim, which may be weakened if excessive power is concentrated in the office of Commission Presidency.

Face-to-face interviews with Commission officials, cabinet members, and senior managers revealed an ambivalence about the strengthening of the Commission Presidency under Barroso. Although increasing presidential control was acknowledged, interviewees were divided on whether this centralization of authority was good or bad. Some respondents highlighted the benefits of a strong presidency. Some understood the

necessity, but were concerned about the implications. Others, on various grounds, voiced disapproval. For example, the Director-General of a large and powerful DG issued the following warning:

> I would say that the main risk I see now is a too big centralization in terms of policy shaping and that . . . the Directorate-General will not be asked enough their opinion on the policy content' (interview 133).

A similar concern was voiced by another experienced Director-General: 'We are in the process of centralization. A bit too much. We were too much decentralized before. I hope we will find the right balance' (interview 15). Of course, these more negative opinions may reflect frustration on the part of Commissioners or senior managers who found their pet projects blocked. Nevertheless, a clear ambivalence was expressed within the organization.

A similar ambivalence was evident in respect of the Secretariat General's new role, status and functions. Strong support was expressed for the new relationship between the Commission President and the Secretariat General. Many regarded this closeness as normal:

> [The Secretariat-General is] serving the institution and it is the President who leads the institution so that's completely normal (interview 160).

> [I]f the Secretariat-General identifies with the President, it's normal. He's their line manager. Why wouldn't [they] identify with the President? (interview 142)

> [The Secretariat-General is] working for the Commission's President, are they not? I think it would be absurd to think of the Secretariat-General that was in some way independent and autonomous of the President of the Commission; absurd! (interview 139).

Some approved, because it promised to strengthen the Commission:

> Given that criticism of the Commission—the last two Commissions were too weak in political terms, . . . every effort and every contribution to counterbalance or to cultivate this aspect is positive (interview 116).

One interviewee felt that a close relationship was necessary for the Commission President to operate effectively within the European Council:

> In my view it [the Secretariat-General] would never be too political. It should be extremely active in the political sphere, because the . . . main interest of this institution is that the President is fully supported in its role as member of the European Council. That's the main interest . . . If our President is weak, all the rest will be weak. We need to ensure that everything works in order to give him the brightest ideas, the best products, and the top quality that we can deliver. In order to get there you inevitably need some political steer from the top, and the Secretariat-General can give that steer. . . . But of course this is the Commission so it will never become a Cabinet Office (interview 72).

Others were supportive because they had longed for the Commission to present a more coherent policy programme. In the words of one senior manager: 'I think I can only subscribe [to] the idea and the attempts to strengthen upstream coordination, and feel this is absolutely necessary' (interview 116). One Director-General offered the following view:

> I think that the Secretariat-General's role should be to look for policy coherence, so that what is done is coherent with what has been done before, has been done elsewhere in a related field. . . . Their role is also to observe that policies are in line with the President's and the house's overall priorities (interview 52).

Indeed, some wanted the Secretariat-General to move even further away from its traditional role:

> [P]ersonally I feel that in coordinating the role of the Secretariat-General could be improved, because [it has become] very bureaucratic. It became a very heavy machine. They could do more coordination on policy, on the same issues, in order to create the common drivers for action other than coordinating the bureaucratic issues (interview 14)

A head of unit in the Secretariat General explained:

> [W]hen you compare the Commission to ten or fifteen years ago, . . . [the] resources that are devoted to any particular area . . . has increased dramatically.
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> And of course, one of the key issues is having twenty-seven Commissioners, because if you have a Commissioner in a policy area, by definition you have a need for activity, for visibility, for whatever. . . . [S]o in a body which is coordinating the actions of twenty-seven people I think you need a centre which is possibly stronger than it would have been when we had—you know, when the Commissioner for competition policy [who] also did personnel policy, budget, and consumer policy, which I think Karel Van Miert had at one stage. Inevitably, the amount of attention he could give to consumer policy was slightly less than the single Commissioner for consumer policy can give today. So, strong need for coordination, and I think that has to be the Secretariat-General (interview 107).

At the same time, some expressed cautionary views. Although its orchestrating role at the centre of the Commission is indispensable many officials think that the Secretariat-General should leave the policy lead to Directorates-General. According to one middle manager in a large DG, with previous experience of working in the Secretariat-General:

> The Secretariat-General is the DG of the President, so I think it would be no news that there are some guidelines coming from there, but it's true that it shouldn't interfere too much in daily life, but rather [set out] the general guidelines. . . . [W]hen the Secretariat-General actually consulted the DGs, I found that positive (interview 56).

> Regret was expressed by a few who lamented that the Secretariat-General had forsaken its historic role and was far too closely identified with the President. The views of one experienced senior manager were representative: 'I think the Secretary-General is losing its identity. The Secretary-General should be the guardian of the house. They decentralize too much. They do too little and I am afraid . . . [that a] private Secretariat is developing' (interview 49).

Others, however, argued that, although there was a role for the Secretariat-General in policy, the Directorates-General should retain their lead:

> I would hope that the Sec-Gen will not develop into an institution that . . . is in the driving seat and dictates to us what kind of environmental policy we have to propose. That is not good. Coordination, fine. But the European Commission is what its DGs are doing and what kind of ideas they have. If they don't have any, I really don't think the Sec Gen would have better ones (interview 90).

> [I]t's not something that I approve of. I think it's creating yet another layer. We started speaking about coordination. I would rather coordinate with a colleague that is in charge of agriculture or energy or whatever, than having to sit with someone who is in charge of nothing but coordination (interview 144).

> [I]ts not their job to focus on policy content . . . it's the DGs', who are charged with policy . . . [it's their job] to make sure we don't go too far off the general strategy of the Commission (interview 125).

> I wonder whether they should really focus on policy content, frankly. They should focus on policy harmonization and harmonization of the DGs' work. And that they're doing. I don't [think] they should get too much involved into the actual content of the policy (interview 43).

CONCLUSION

The Commission Presidency historically has been an important, but weak, office. However, findings from the EUCIQ project suggest not only that Barroso has strengthened the office but that he has fashioned a quite different model of the Commission Presidency as compared to his predecessors. Although the change was made possible by a series of treaty reforms and enlargement, which occurred before he assumed the Presidency, Barroso seized the opportunity that they presented. His reconfiguration of the Presidency has had an important impact not only on the working of the College but on the Commission more generally, even if the response to the changes on the part of staff has been ambivalent.

It is unclear whether the change is likely to prove enduring. First, whoever succeeds Barroso may have a different conception of the Presidency. The changes that he has introduced may not have been so deeply institutionalized or accepted by the time that his term expires that they are irreversible. Second, much has depended on the willingness of other members of the Commission to buy into Barroso's view that leadership of a large College must be presidential. Future colleagues may not be as compliant. Third, the relationship between the Presidency and the Secretariat-General has worked effectively due partly to the personal relationship between José Manual Barroso and Catherine Day. Such a close partnership may not be possible in the future.
Fourth, the EU as a political system is characterized by fluidity and improvisation. In the words of one senior manager:

> Power [in the Commission] is never with somebody for a very long time. It shifts all the time, and as soon as you see that it is somewhere visible too long, it's rebalanced somewhere else. So the automatic inner life of this organization is to ensure that there is always a fair balance between different interests, and that's basically the European idea. That's how we have always envisaged it, and here it works (interview 72).

There may be grounds, on the other hand, for thinking that the centralization of power within the Commission Presidency may prove to be enduring. With a College of twenty-seven or more members, each with an interest in each other's portfolios, strong 'brokerage' may be a functional necessity. In addition, the more the Commission is under siege, the more do officials appreciate central authority. Finally, when looking back at the Barroso Commission partner actors and institutions may appreciate the new effectiveness that it has brought to the organization and to the EU system more broadly

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