

NETWORKS AND ATTITUDES

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Researching the Eurocrats

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Introduction: Integration Theory and the Dynamics of Europeanisation

It is 9 October 2001 and one of the authors, Thedvall, has been working for a month as a *stagiaire*/researcher at the Directorate General (DG) of Employment and Social Affairs (DG EMPL). It is morning, and she is taking part in an induction course at the DG EMPL to become familiarised with the European Commission, the DG, and their ways of working. Induction courses are frequently held at the DG and the European Commission in general. There is a constant influx of people starting to work as *fonctionnaires* with permanent positions or arriving as detached national experts (DNEs) or *stagiaires* staying for a few months or a few years. The influx is matched only by the constant stream of farewell parties and goodbye drinks. People move in and out of the city all the time. Brussels is a city where friends constantly leave. The room, a typical meeting room in the DG with grey/blueish chairs, tables, floors and walls, is filled with a mix of people of different nationalities, positions and levels, from directors to trainees/*stagiaires*. The day starts out with the Director General welcoming us and talking about the European Union (EU) project. As Director General of DG EMPL, he is particularly pleased that the EU project has expanded to include social issues, moving the EU closer towards a federation. He is convinced that, within this decade or the next, the EU will become a proper federal union with working political processes and a European Parliament as important as its member states' parliaments.

Today, his prediction might seem naïve, but at that time, when Thedvall was doing fieldwork in the European Commission, the EU was about to put into circulation its new euro banknotes and coins, and enlargement of the EU from fifteen to twenty-four countries was scheduled to happen within a few years. For European federalists there were reasons to be optimistic.

The current Director General is probably not as hopeful,¹ but for someone working as a *fonctionnaire* in the European Commission the ‘European idea’ needs to be on the agenda. For EU policy elites, the notion of a united Europe demands commitment and attention. This is also something that distinguishes the EU from national governments and intergovernmental organisations. There is always a tension in terms of loyalty and identity between the national and the supranational, or in this case, the European. This chapter is about the ‘Eurocrats’ – those officials and professional Europeans who work in, and for, the EU and its institutions – and how they navigate those tensions.

Dissolving the boundaries between the EU and its member states has often been described as an essential step towards ‘Europeanisation’. By this term we do not mean just political and economic adaptation to the EU or the influence of its policies on nation states.² Rather, we define Europeanisation in a wider anthropological sense as the processes by which European citizens are exposed to – and enculturated by – the norms and values of the EU, particularly within its institutional habitus.³ Writing over six decades ago Ernst B. Haas, the German-American political scientist and inventor of the ‘neo-functionalist’ theory of integration, defined European integration as the process whereby ‘political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties and activities towards a new centre, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over the pre-existing national states’.⁴ According to Haas and his supporters, the integration of national

- 1 D. Chalmers, M. Jachtenfuchs and C. Joerges, *The End of the Eurocrats’ Dream: Adjusting to European Diversity* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018).
- 2 U. Sedelmeier, ‘Europeanization’, in E. Jones and A. Menon (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the European Union* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 825–39.
- 3 M. Abélès, ‘Political Anthropology of the Trans-national Institution: The European Parliament’, *French Politics & Society* 11 (1993): 1–19; R. Harmsen and T. M. Wilson, ‘Introduction: Approaches to Europeanization’, in R. Harmsen and T. M. Wilson (eds.), *Europeanization: Institutions, Identities and Citizenship* (Leiden, Brill, 2000), pp. 13–26; C. Shore, ‘La socialisation de l’administration de l’Union européenne: Une approche anthropologique des phénomènes d’européanisation et de supranationalisme’, in H. Michel and C. Robert (eds.), *La fabrique des ‘Européens’: Processus de socialisation et construction européenne* (Strasbourg, Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 2010), pp. 169–96; I. Bellier, ‘A Europeanized Elite? An Anthropology of European Commission Officials’, in R. Harmsen and T. M. Wilson (eds.), *Europeanization: Institutions, Identities and Citizenship* (Leiden, Brill, 2000), pp. 135–56; M. Kuus, *Geopolitics and Expertise: Knowledge and Authority in European Diplomacy* (Hoboken, NJ, John Wiley & Sons, 2013).
- 4 E. B. Haas, *The Uniting of Europe: Political, Social, and Economical Forces, 1950–1957* (London, Stevens, 1958).

elites would flow naturally from a steady process of ‘political spillover’.⁵ Like Haas, many scholars portray Europeanisation as the processes whereby member states’ national policies, identities, beliefs, norms and institutional structures are increasingly influenced or ‘domesticated’ by their involvement with the EU’s laws and institutions.⁶ States become more Europeanised when the European dimension penetrates their national arenas of politics, policy and bureaucracy.⁷ The idea of ‘enhancing the European dimension’ is often used by the EU institutions as a way to increase their power by redefining national ideas of peoplehood, territory and citizenship in terms of the EU and its federalist project.⁸

Europeanisation occurs at multiple levels, including both among member state nationals and among EU elites in Brussels. Within political science and EU studies, there is an extensive body of research that has sought to explain how officials working for the EU become ‘socialised to Europe’ or, in Jeffrey Checkel’s words,⁹ ‘go native’ within the EU’s institutions. Much of this work draws on the neo-institutionalist methodologies that seek to understand how institutional rules, norms and ‘cultures’ shape the actions and orientation of individuals when they are part of a political institution. These approaches typically draw on organisational theories, political science models and psychological perspectives to measure cognitive shifts and loyalty transfer among European elites with the aim of identifying the ‘scope conditions’ that produce Europeanisation.¹⁰ A key assumption that informs this work is that the habit of working together within the EU’s institutions and continued exposure to the EU’s norms and values has a transformative effect

5 S. George, *Politics and Policy in the European Community* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1985);

P. Taylor, *The Limits of European Integration* (London, Croom Helm, 1983).

6 B. Jacobsson and U. Mörth, ‘Europeisering och den svenska staten’, in G. Ahne

(ed.), *Stater som organisationer* (Stockholm, Santérus Förlag, 1998), pp. 179–202;

M. G. Cowles, J. Caporaso and T. Risse (eds.), *Transforming Europe: Europeanisation*

and Domestic Change (London, Cornell University Press, 2001); K. Featherstone and

C. M. Radaelli (eds.), *The Politics of Europeanisation* (Oxford, Oxford University Press,

2003); B. Jacobsson, P. Lægred and O. K. Pedersen, *Europeanisation and Transnational*

States: Comparing Nordic Central Governments (London, Routledge, 2004).

7 C. M. Radaelli, ‘The Europeanisation of Public Policy’, in K. Featherstone and

C. M. Radaelli (eds.), *The Politics of Europeanization* (Oxford, Oxford University Press,

2003), pp. 27–56.

8 J. Borneman and N. Fowler, ‘Europeanisation’, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1997): 487–514.

9 J. Checkel, ‘“Going Native” in Europe?: Theorizing Social Interaction in European Institutions’, *Comparative Political Studies* 36 (2003): 209–231.

10 J. Beyers, ‘Multiple Embeddedness and Socialization in Europe: The Case of Council Officials’, *International Organization* 59 (2005): 899–936; L. Hooghe, ‘Several Roads Lead to International Norms, but Few via International Socialization: A Case Study of the European Commission’, *International Organization* 59 (2005): 861–98.

on national and European civil servants; that over time this exposure generates supranational solidarities, European identity and a palpable sense of ‘we-ness’ among European officials. According to Jahl Trondal,¹¹ the EU’s institutions are powerful agents in the re-socialisation of national civil servants and prime sites for incubating ‘Europeanness’, or what we might more accurately term ‘EU-ropeanisation’. Even though it is increasingly recognised that Europeanisation is not as easily accomplished as some political scientists and integration theorists imagined, it is still assumed that Eurocrats take on a European identity and supranational solidarities accordingly.¹² But is this necessarily the case? As we argue below, the Europeanising/socialising effects of the EU’s bureaucracy are not as straightforward or as predictable as these theorists assume.

These attempts to promote EU-ropeanisation, planned or unplanned, and how they are played out, responded to and navigated in relation to ‘Eurocrats’ are the focus of this chapter. By ‘Eurocrats’ we mean the senior officials (or *fonctionnaires*) with permanent positions in the European Commission, Parliament and Council, DNEs or trainees (*stagiaires*), who stay for a limited time working in the EU institutions; and representatives of member states in the EU’s committees and working groups moving in and out of Brussels for a day or two every other month or so. These different positionings and responsibilities shape the way they act and how they are integrated within the institutions.¹³ Eurocrats are typically viewed as the driving force of European integration and the embodiment of European identity.¹⁴ Anthropologists have highlighted the active role that Eurocrats and national civil servants play in EU policy-making processes.¹⁵ They have also shown how the EU civil service’s supranational ethos and ideology influence the subjectivities of those who work for it.¹⁶ Indeed, officials in

11 J. Trondal, ‘Re-socializing Civil Servants: The Transformative Powers of EU Institutions’, *Acta Politica* 39 (2004): 4–30.

12 Chalmers et al., *The End of the Eurocrats’ Dream*.

13 A. Spinelli, *The Eurocrats: Conflict and Crisis in the European Community* (Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966).

14 Trondal, ‘Re-socializing Civil Servants’.

15 R. Thedvall, *Eurocrats at Work: Negotiating Transparency in Post-national Employment Policy* (Stockholm, Almqvist and Wiksell International, 2006); R. Thedvall, ‘The EU’s Nomads. National Eurocrats and European Policy-Making’, in R. A. W. Rhodes, P. ‘t Hart and M. Noordegraaf (eds.), *Observing Government Elites: Up Close and Personal* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 160–79; K. Geuijen, P. ‘t Hart, S. Princen and K. Yesilkagit, *The New Eurocrats: National Civil Servants in EU Policy-Making* (Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2008).

16 M. McDonald, ‘Identities in the European Commission’, in N. Nugent (ed.), *At the Heart of the Union: Studies of the European Commission* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1997), pp. 49–70; C. Shore, *Building Europe: The Cultural Politics of European Integration* (London, Routledge, 2000).

Brussels even had their own idiom for describing this process, which was often referred to as *'engrenage'*, a French term evoking the idea of 'enmeshing' or being caught in the cogs of a wheel.¹⁷

Ethnographic studies show that the everyday working life of Eurocrats involves not just a balancing act between the political and the technocratic, but also a complicated web of supranational and national ideals and practices where national identities are expressed through language, bureaucratic traditions and a tendency to interpret action through national stereotypes.¹⁸ Georgakakis and Rowell¹⁹ focus on the power relations and access to capital within what they describe as a Bourdieusian bureaucratic field of Eurocracy involving Eurocrats in all sorts of organisations involved in EU policy-making, including expert groups, the European Trade Union Confederation and European business leaders. They are concerned with the institutional and social construction of authority. We ask, what did 'Europeanisation' look like to the Eurocrats themselves and how did they navigate the national-supranational tensions between the interests of member states and those of the EU? In answering these questions, we will also illustrate why this issue remains relevant for understanding the challenges of administering the EU today.

Outline and Method: Returning to Field Notes

Our argument is set out in five parts. In the first we describe our method. The second describes the background and explains the types of Eurocrat dealt with in the chapter. In the third, we draw on empirical and ethnographic examples to examine more closely what the integration or socialisation of Eurocrats entails in practice. In the fourth, we elaborate on the deliberate attempts, planned or unplanned, to 'EU-ropeanise' Eurocrats and how they are played out, responded to and navigated in relation to the national and the European. Finally, the fifth section draws out some wider conclusions about the nature of socialisation or *engrenage* among EU elites.

Our aim is to provide an anthropological analysis of the EU on the basis of ethnographic research conducted within its institutional heartlands in

¹⁷ Shore, *Building Europe*, pp. 147–53.

¹⁸ M. Abélès, I. Bellier and M. McDonald, 'An Anthropological Approach to the European Commission', Report for the European Commission (1993), <http://aei.pitt.edu/41765/1/A5783.pdf>; McDonald, 'Identities in the European Commission'; Bellier, 'A Europeanized Elite?'; P. M. Lewicki, *EU-Space and the Euroclass: Modernity, Nationality, and Lifestyle among Eurocrats in Brussels* (Bielefeld, Transcript, 2017).

¹⁹ D. Georgakakis and J. Rowell (eds.), *The Field of Eurocracy: Mapping EU Actors and Professionals* (Berlin, Springer, 2013).

Brussels. This includes transcripts of interviews with Eurocrats, analysis of policy documents and grey literature, and field notes from participant observation carried out by both authors on the evolving administrative culture and internal dynamics of the European Commission during the 1990s and 2000s. There are reasons to believe that the administrative culture and internal dynamics today are similar to what they were then, but for an ethnographic study this is historical material and has to be treated as such. Except for our vignettes, we have therefore decided to use the past tense in the ethnographic material even though it is not unusual in ethnographic writings to use the 'ethnographic present'.

Shore carried out two periods of fieldwork in the Brussels headquarters of the European Commission (1993 and 1995–7) exploring the various ways in which the EU was seeking to expand its reach into the area of 'culture' (a previously national competence) and pursue its agenda for creating a 'people's Europe' and promoting European consciousness.²⁰ This entailed, among other things, following the activities of DG X, the DG responsible for culture, media, heritage, youth and sport. However, the research later shifted towards a study of DG 9 (Administration) and the administrative culture of the European Commission itself to explore whether EU civil servants embodied the supranational European identity that the EU claimed to be nurturing among European citizens. The focus on DG 9 was also prompted by advice from EU insiders that this was the place to look if one wanted to understand how the Commission works – and 'where the bodies are buried'.

Thedvall followed the Swedish as well as European Commission Eurocrats doing participant observation (2001 and 2002). First, she held a trainee position, a *stagiaire*, in DG EMPL in the European Commission during the autumn of 2001. Throughout 2002, she became an 'observer-member' of the Swedish delegation to the EU Employment Committee. She attended its preparatory meetings at the Swedish Ministry of Industry, Employment and Communication, went on its trips to Brussels and sat in on the Employment Committee meetings in Brussels.²¹ The EU Employment Committee is the 'first' committee, in a hierarchy of committees, working groups and council meetings, where the member states and the Commission discuss and negotiate on EU employment issues which Thedvall was

20 C. Shore, 'Inventing the "People's Europe": Critical Perspectives on European Community Cultural Policy', *Man* 28 (1993): 779–800; Shore, *Building Europe*, pp. 26–32.

21 R. Thedvall, *Eurocrats at Work*; Thedvall, 'The EU's Nomads'; R. Thedvall, 'Negotiating Impartial Indicators: To Put Transparency into Practice in the EU', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 18 (2012): 311–29.

studying. The EU Employment Committee was where most of the negotiations took place and, in practice, most decisions were made before the formal decision was taken in the Council of the EU. The European Commission has many of these committees and working groups preparing decisions.

We also briefly analyse what it is like to return to field notes from 20–25 years ago. Field notes are not just about what is going on. They are personal, and it has been a personal experience to return to them. Shore recalled the atmosphere of optimism and élan that still permeated the Commission following Jacques Delors' presidency and the huge strides that had been made towards widening and deepening the EU. The ideal of 'ever-closer union' proclaimed in the EU's founding treaties seemed to be coming to fruition. The Treaty on European Union, or Maastricht Treaty, which entered into force on 1 November 1993, represented a massive leap forward for the EU's project to construct a new European political order. The Maastricht Treaty established the EU, granted EU citizenship to every person who was a citizen of a member state and provided for the introduction of a central banking system and common currency (the euro). It also committed members to implementing common foreign and security policies and an 'area of freedom, justice and security'. EU officials and politicians were now speaking openly of the Commission as a future 'government of Europe' and the EU becoming a federal polity to rival the United States.²² Yet, in contrast to this image of cohesion, dynamism and efficiency, Shore increasingly found evidence of a dysfunctional administration wracked by cleavages and contradictions. Far from being a streamlined, integrated and fully Europeanised civil service, the EU administration seemed to be an organisation riddled with factionalism, clientelism and networks, many of which were based on interest groups or nationality. As one insider commented, 'mafias' were everywhere in the EU. It had a thriving 'informal' system of administration that in many ways was more important and effective than its formal system.²³ Shore recalled the awkwardness of this situation and the dilemmas it posed for him, as an ethnographer trying to write about the EU's organisational culture.

22 C. Shore, "'Government without Statehood?": Anthropological Perspectives on Governance and Sovereignty in the European Union', *European Law Journal* 12 (2006): 709–24.

23 C. Shore, 'Culture and Corruption in the EU: Reflections on Fraud, Nepotism, and Cronyism in the European Commission', in D. Haller and C. Shore (eds.), *Corruption: Anthropological Perspectives* (London, Pluto, 2005), pp. 131–55; D. Spence and A. Stevens, 'Staff and Personnel Policy in the Commission', in D. Spence and G. Edwards (eds.), *The European Commission* (London, John Harper, 2006), pp. 173–208.

However, 2 years later, in March 1999, an independent committee produced a devastating report on fraud and mismanagement in the Commission which led to the resignation of the entire Santer Commission, paving the way for a major reform of the organisation.

Thedvall was reminded of her 30-year-old self in her field notes: her fast, not-thought-through, observations of the EU and its bureaucracy that had not yet benefited from her analysis in a PhD thesis; remembering friends she made, but with whom she had now lost contact; and remembering that her return ticket to Stockholm was with the airline Sabena, which went bankrupt (on 7 November 2001) during her fieldwork. She was also reminded that on her second day as a *stagiaire* terrorists flew hijacked airplanes into the World Trade Center towers in New York, and European Commission staff were told that they were allowed to go home if they felt unsafe. No one knew whether the EU might be under threat. Most of the people working in her building were not very worried. If the EU were to come under attack, which was highly unlikely, they thought it would be the European Parliament, or the buildings around Rond point Schuman: the Berlaymont housing the European Commission's headquarters or the Council of the EU. This might seem naïve today, as we have become more used to attacks of this type in Europe, but that was not the case in 2001. Still, it would continue to be a subject of discussion during the autumn, especially with the US-led wars against Afghanistan and Iraq that followed. It was also evident from field notes how life just went on. There was some more security when entering the Commission buildings for a few days, but then it was back to normal.

Background: The Eurocrats of the EU

The popular view of EU officials typically sees them as the epitome of what Herzfeld²⁴ identifies as the stereotypical bureaucrat: a rigid, inflexible, boring person working for his bureau rather than its clients or society at large. Eurocrats are frequently associated with forming useless, interventionist and regulatory policies, such as prescribing the size of a strawberry or banning curves in cucumbers and bananas. Moreover, like its national counterparts, the EU bureaucracy is held to be a hierarchical system akin to that envisaged by Max Weber²⁵ with its emphasis on rules, uniformity and compliance.

24 M. Herzfeld, *The Social Production of Indifference: Exploring the Symbolic Roots of Western Bureaucracy* (Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press, 1992).

25 See H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1958 [1946]).

The bureaucratic stereotype only goes so far in describing the real world of EU policy-making processes. As one is drawn into that world, it becomes clear that the bureaucrats who populate it are complex, three-dimensional individuals; people of flesh and blood with different personalities and driven by different goals. Some of them are motivated by the urge to make the world a better place; some are just trying to do their job and perhaps climb the career ladder; some see themselves mainly as experts living up to the standards of their profession. Few of them match the stereotype of the bureaucrat strictly following the rules. Overwhelmingly, bureaucratic players in EU policy processes are, of necessity, flexible people.²⁶ They don't just apply rules. They take part in complex policy-making and organisational games. Broadly speaking, they are highly educated people with degrees in law, the social sciences and economics. They are not street-level bureaucrats²⁷ trying to implement policies. They are policy designers. As in classical bureaucratic theory, they offer advice to politicians, and their advice is based on technical, politically neutral expertise. In reality, the implied difference between 'politics' and 'administration' becomes blurred.²⁸ The notion of expertise becomes especially problematic in the context of the EU, because these Eurocrats have to act in the name of the EU or their member state when presenting 'EU' or 'national' positions and argue in the EU's or their member states' political interest.

Thus, the skills needed to do well in these games vary markedly from the classic role description of the bureaucrat, at least if you hold one of the higher grades, as a *fonctionnaire*, in the European Commission, or if you are one of those Eurocrats who have a position in the member state, but move in and out of EU meetings in Brussels representing your member state. Both these categories have to learn how to work in the EU context, but their processes of becoming integrated within the EU are different.

The ideal European Commission Eurocrats were the *fonctionnaires*. This is still the case, but as our knowledge about administrative levels, grades, taxes and 'Blue Books' (see below) is from our respective fieldworks, we will stick to the past tense. Most *fonctionnaires* enjoyed life-long employment in the Commission. Becoming a *fonctionnaire* started with a *concours*, or test. If

26 M. Albrow, *Do Organizations Have Feelings?* (London, Routledge, 1997).

27 M. Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services* (New York, NY, Russel Sage Foundation, 1980).

28 G. Weiss and R. Wodak, 'Debating Europe: Globalization Rhetoric and European Union Unemployment Policies', in I. Bellier and T. M. Wilson (eds.), *An Anthropology of the European Union: Building, Imagining and Experiencing the New Europe* (Oxford, Berg, 2000), pp. 75–92.

one passed the test, one was called to an interview. The test differed depending on level and subject. There was a generalist *concours*, an economy *concours* and a lawyer's *concours*. The generalist *concours* might be directed to different areas like 'trade and development'. If one was accepted after the interview, it normally took 1–2 years (or longer) to get a position at the Commission, but once you had a job it was for life. As a *fonctionnaire*, you were one of the privileged at the Commission and in Brussels. You only paid a small tax to the Commission to cover your future pension and insurance, and the first year you did not have to pay any value-added tax.

There were A-, B-, C- and D-level *fonctionnaires*. A-level *fonctionnaires* were classified as 'conceptual' employees and had at a minimum a university degree, but many also had MAs and doctorates. B-level *fonctionnaires* had at a minimum a high-school diploma. A-level *fonctionnaires* were the people who handled their own areas and represented the Commission in meetings. These were the *fonctionnaires* who worked as policy designers. To become a Head of Unit or climb the Commission hierarchy, you had to be an A-level *fonctionnaire*. B-level *fonctionnaires* were generally assistants to A-level *fonctionnaires*. C-level *fonctionnaires* were mostly secretaries; and D-level *fonctionnaires* were security staff, porters and so on. If you had taken the B-level *concours* you could never be promoted to A-level: that required an A-level *concours*. Every level was divided into different wage and responsibility grades. Level A was divided into nine grades, starting at 9 and moving up the ladder. Every 2 years you were evaluated and then you also had the opportunity to move up a wage level. The first promotions were almost automatic, depending on how long you had worked in the Commission. However, few A-level *fonctionnaires* ever progressed automatically beyond A4 grade, as these senior positions were usually regarded as political appointments. To move up in the hierarchy, you had to become Head of Unit, Director, Deputy General Director or General Director, and that usually required intervention from national governments (typically, staff would comment that certain key senior posts had a 'national flag' over them). This effectively meant that the EU's civil service was only truly 'supra-national' or independent up to the A4 level. Beyond that, you needed the political support of 'your' member state.

If you were not working as a *fonctionnaire* in the European Commission, you were either a DNE or a *stagiaire*. As the titles imply, you were only working temporarily in the European Commission. DNEs are national experts seconded by member state governments. They were supposed to learn how the Commission worked and take this knowledge back to their

ministries. But this was also part of the Europeanisation process as the returning staff would, in theory, become emissaries for Europeanising the member states. DNEs were also an intermediate link between the Commission and the member states. DNEs usually stayed 2–3 years. They were paid both by the Commission and by their member state, and earned far higher salaries than the rate for an equivalent position in their home countries. DNEs had an interesting role. They might be high-ranking civil servants in their member state used to having major responsibilities, but when they arrived at the Commission they entered a very hierarchical system. DNEs complained that they did the job of A-level *fonctionnaires*, but they were not allowed to represent the Commission and were not always respected by lower-level *fonctionnaires*. DNEs from member states that have less hierarchical administrative systems than that of the Commission found it harder to adjust. The Commission hierarchy was built on the French civil servant model, and DNEs from, for example, the Nordic countries or the Netherlands and United Kingdom were used to a different style of organising.

There were also possibilities to become a *stagiaire*, or intern, in the European Commission. There were two main types of *stagiaire*; formal and informal. Formal *stagiaires* applied to have their name put in the ‘Blue Book’. To become a Blue Book *stagiaire* you had to be of the right age (no older than twenty-seven) and have the right education. A degree in law, economics or political science and an MA in European Studies from the Collège d’Europe in Bruges or Johns Hopkins University in Bologna gave you a particular advantage. You then needed to be chosen from this book to become a *stagiaire*. Some Blue Book *stagiaires* were paid by the Commission, whereas others were not. Paid *stagiaires* were higher in ranking. If you wanted a *stagiaire* post you had to contact the place where you wanted to work and convince them to take you on. It was unlikely you would be picked from the book without making personal connections. Informal *stagiaires* were paid by their national government, university or some other organisation. They might be looking for a DNE post or they might not want to stay for as long as 2 years, which was the minimum for a DNE post. Candidate countries or countries outside the EU, such as Norway, would also send government *stagiaires*. When Thedvall enrolled in the induction course chronicled above, there was one *stagiaire* from Norway and two from Poland, which at the time of her fieldwork was still an accession state. Thedvall was a university *stagiaire*. There were usually several *stagiaires* doing research on the Commission itself, paid for by their universities or

research centres. The standard duration of a *stage* is 6 months, but some do 3 months and others do a year.

A fourth type of Eurocrat was those working as member state representatives in the EU committees and working groups, travelling to Brussels for 1 or 2 days every other month. They were the ‘occasional’ Eurocrats, who often also had other areas of responsibility in their ministries in the member state in addition to the work connected to the EU arena. Finally, there was a fifth type of Eurocrat: those working for Commissioners as members of their cabinets. These were often individually hand-picked and trusted by Commissioners, but also included talented EU civil servants with expertise in a particular policy area.

The World(s) of Eurocrats

As anthropologists interested in culture and identity-formation within the European Commission, a key question for us was ‘What does European integration look like at the heart of the EU?’ The world of the Eurocrats in Brussels was surprisingly small and enclosed, and often characterised by considerable professional and social intimacy. Most of the EU buildings and offices were located within a small 2-kilometre square known as the ‘European Quarter’. The Breydel building (where the Commission Presidency was located), the European Parliament and the Justus Lipsius building (the Council’s headquarters) formed an even tighter triangle. Within this bounded area, EU *fonctionnaires*, seconded national experts, journalists, diplomats, lobbyists and politicians would mingle and interact on a daily basis. Local cafés and restaurants buzzed with ‘Eurospeak’, a curious blend of European languages often punctuated by foreign loan words and EU acronyms intelligible only to the initiated. Most EU staff, particularly those with children, tended to be concentrated in a handful of suburbs, typically the more affluent residential neighbourhoods such as Etterbeek, Ixelles/Elsene, Uccle and Woluwé Saint Lambert. Despite the oft-repeated claims about its multinational and multicultural character, what was striking about the Commission was its lack of ethnic diversity and the absence of women from senior posts. Indeed, despite conscious attempts to promote more gender equality, by 2002 the number of women ‘A-grade’ *fonctionnaires* was still only 22 per cent.²⁹ This enclosed geographical environment combined with the relative segregation of EU officials from the local *Bruxelloise* population created an extraordinary intensity of interaction among EU officials and

29 Spence and Stevens, ‘Staff and Personnel Policy in the Commission’.

political actors. This was also something that Olivier Baisnée³⁰ noted in his study of the EU press corps in Brussels. Baisnée recounts the shock experienced by a journalist when first encountering this EU microcosm and the rules that govern it. This journalist speaks of

a technocratic world that was obeying incomprehensible rules for the outsider; a conventional world; a world where I would say journalists, civil servants and diplomats were sleeping together. There was no distance at all, no objectivity. A European militant's world of people persuaded that they are working for the good of humanity. In short, I couldn't distinguish between who was a journalist, who was a civil servant and who was a diplomat. It's a bit strange, isn't it?³¹

Like the EU press corps, officials and lobbyists seemed to experience a real sense of community in the rituals of daily interaction, while the regular circuit of meetings and diplomatic engagements often gives the appearance of a 'traveling cocktail' party.³² Shore recalls a dinner that seemed to capture many of the prevailing concerns shared by Eurocrats in this EU Brussels microcosm:

It is March 1996, the 'European Year of Lifelong Learning' in the EU calendar, and three months into the Italian presidency of the Union. My partner and I have been invited to dinner by Geoff and Ingrid who live in Ixelles. Geoff is a British official who has worked for the European Parliament for two decades; his wife Ingrid is an interpreter at the Commission. The six guests are of mixed nationality (Philip is Spanish, Justine is French; others are Greek, German or South African). Over canapés and a glass of chilled Sancerre ('Santer's favourite', someone quips) we talk about how we know Geoff and Ingrid; everyone is connected with the EU: one is a lobbyist, another works for the Commission; the others are a journalist, translator and independent consultant, respectively. But apart from being expatriates, the key point of connection is that everyone has children at the European School. Over dinner the conversation moves quickly from a discussion of Britain's BSE beef crisis (everyone agrees that John Major is 'awful'), to the 'European Voice' newspaper that has just started a free distribution to all the EU offices, to Geoff's awful journey on the 'Eurostar' last week. I notice that direct references to people's nationality is studiously avoided (except when the conversation includes the topic of

30 O. Baisnée, 'Can Political Journalism Exist at the EU Level?', paper presented to the workshop on 'Political Journalism: New Challenges, New Practices', ECPR joint session, Copenhagen (2000).

31 *Ibid.*, p. 5. 32 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

Brussels or Belgian society: people feel safe to criticize the Belgians). As we progress through the main course an animated conversation ensues about the use of English in the EU. Ingrid insists that it is not simply that English is fast replacing French as the lingua franca of the EU, but 'the English language itself is being Europeanized'. English spoken inside the institutions is 'quite different' and 'unique'. Everyone agrees. But as we move to dessert, the main topic of conversation reverts back to the European School and gossip about particular teachers and the head of school. I ask the Greek and German couple what language their children speak at home: the answer is Greek with their mother and German with their father – and French or English at school and in the playground, depending on the company. Ingrid remarks on how cosmopolitan their children are – and how sad it must be 'to grow up as a monoglot'. I remember thinking: 'that's the first time I've ever heard that expression. Is this an example of the new Europeanized English I wonder?

(C. Shore, field notes 1996)

This combination of Brussels talk and awkwardness around national differences seemed typical of the way social groups interacted inside the EU's institutional milieu. More importantly, it was notable how much Eurocrats tended to mix and socialise with other EU-connected individuals in these expat enclaves within the Belgian capital.

In the Corridors of the Commission and EU Meeting Rooms

The professional world(s) of the Eurocrats we focus on here are played out in the corridors of the Commission and the EU meeting rooms. In what follows, we offer glimpses of the workings of these places.

While the Commissioner of a Directorate General makes the final decision in day-to-day policy-making, the decision-making process involved both permanent and temporary staff as well as national civil servants from the member states. Thedvall recalls the life of Eurocrats in the Directorate General of Employment and Social Affairs in the European Commission.

Shifting deadlines was a recurrent issue in the Commission. In this sense it was a rather whimsical organisation as those at the top were eager to have their hands on everything, which meant that issues were constantly moving up and down. An example of this was when Abigail and Thedvall were working on the articles for the member states' press releases that were to accompany the launch of the new Employment package. This included guidelines, national reports and comparisons between member states and recommendations to member states. The articles included some of those recommendations for the member states. Thedvall [Swedish] had been tasked to do Sweden and Finland and Abigail [British] was given the UK

and Ireland. Bernard had left them with a model article that he had written about Italy. It was Friday and Bernard said it was okay if they were ready on Monday. However, after lunch Catherine, the Head of Unit, said that the Director and Director General required them that evening. By Monday, the articles had been run through the system and Abigail and Thedvall were asked to help with the changes. The Director General also wanted some changes in the general text. The Director's secretary called to make sure some changes were made in the Deputy Directors General's speech that Abigail and Bernard had been working on for a week.

(R. Thedvall, field notes 2001)

The hierarchical system of the Commission had its own workings, but as Commission Eurocrats they also had to handle the politics of the national.

Thom, a Detached National Expert [DNE] from the Netherlands, came into Abigail's [and Thedvall's] office to discuss a table that was in the document that compared the member states' labour markets. The document had been released a few days earlier and now complaints from the member states were starting to come to the Commission. As usual, Thom, speaking with a dry tone, said some of the member states didn't agree on the numbers. 'Everybody wants good numbers.' Abigail smiled and said ironically that we should have put the table in the supporting document, then they might not have seen it.

(R. Thedvall, field notes 2001)

The national civil servants were attentive to the way their member state was portrayed in the Commission document. Thom and Abigail, both seconded national civil servants, understood where this emphasis came from, but, as they were working for the European Commission, they had their Commission hat on and therefore privileged the EU perspective.

An important part of being a senior Eurocrat was taking part in various EU committees and working groups, especially on policy issues like employment and social protection which, with the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam, had become a shared responsibility of the Commission and member states, along with jurisdiction over working conditions. There was a certain way of working in these committees that had to be mastered if members wanted to shape the arguments and influence the policy process. The members had to know when to speak, what to say and how to say it. As Schwartzman points out, a formal meeting needs, apart from rules about who starts and ends meetings, who has the right to call speakers and so forth, 'a series of rules and conventions for ordering and regulating talk'.³³ These rules included who

33 H. Schwartzman, *The Meeting: Gathering in Organizations and Communities* (New York, NY, Springer, 1989).

could be a member, voting systems and so forth. Other rules were not explicitly expressed or written down but had to be learnt by the members either through learning-by-doing or by someone explaining them. These were the rules that members had to know in order to put forward their positions in the group, such as asking for the floor by putting the member state sign on its end or having to speak into the microphone when presenting, so that the interpreter could translate. They also had to know what to present and how to present it. As a Commission representative in the meeting, they had to act and argue in the interest of the Commissioner. As a member state representative, they had to act and argue as their government expected. What this was had to be learnt.

On the morning of a Committee meeting day, Anders, a senior Swedish representative, but also the President of the working group today, gave last-minute coaching to Annika and Marie, two new Swedish representatives in the Committee, on what they should say at the meeting. The expert on the issue of, in this case, 'gender equality' had not had time to prepare a Swedish position on the 'childcare' indicators beforehand, and now Anders informed Annika and Marie that this was an important question for Sweden, with high priority for the Swedish government. For this reason they must not only state the Swedish position but also emphasise its importance in the meeting. (R. Thedvall, field notes 2002)

Most decisions were made in the various working group and committee meetings among Eurocrats, even though the formal decision was taken by the Commissioners and Ministers in the Council of the European Union. It was therefore important to make allies if a certain issue was important.

Catherine, the Head of Unit, Bernard, the Deputy Head of Unit, and Thedvall were walking out of the Council of the European Union building. We had taken part in one of the Council's working groups discussing the employment package as representatives of the Commission. We had been there for about an hour. Catherine and Bernard discussed strategy. Catherine said that if the Deputy Director General wanted to get through the issue of gender pay gap then the Commission needed to align themselves with some of the member states. We have to think about how we should play this, she said. A few weeks later when the issue was discussed in the COREPER [Council of Representatives to the European Union], the Commission asked for a cover note that they reserve themselves regarding the gender pay gap. The Commission had not been able to have a decision on this, because most of the member states were against it. (R. Thedvall, field notes 2001)

Thedvall recalled another time when making allies entailed one DG making friends with member states against another DG:

The Swedish delegates to the Committee were in the lobby. It was evening and we were about to go to dinner. It had been the first day of two of the Committee meeting. One of the delegates had held a meeting with Svante, a Swede working in the Commission as a *fonctionnaire* in the Directorate General of Employment and Social Affairs. Svante wanted Sweden to support the proposal to introduce the Employment package in November. The Directorate General of Economy and Finance [DG ECFIN] wanted to present the package in February along with the EU's broad economic guidelines instead, but DG EMPL did not want this because it would mean that they would lose some of the agenda-setting power. It had moved all the way to the two Commissioners and they were set to meet with the President of the European Commission. (R. Thedvall, field notes 2002)

Negotiation, making allies and persuading others was a key part of committee and working group meeting life. Even if there was a possibility to decide by voting, the goal was to reach a consensus decision. Thedvall was following the policy process of developing indicators for measuring the quality of working life in national labour markets. The member states and the Commission had met several times already to discuss the indicators in the Employment Committee, made up of senior Eurocrats from the member states and the Commission. This was the last committee meeting before the issue would go to the Council of the EU and the committee had to make a decision.

During a lunch break in one of the committee meeting, Thedvall went to lunch with one of her Commission colleagues, Manfred (20 November 2001). They took the lift to the top-floor restaurant. As they arrive they noticed that they were almost the only ones there from the Committee. Mark, one of the Secretaries in the Committee, once said that when the different delegations eat somewhere other than in the conference centre, he thought it was an indication that a difficult question was considered and that they had to discuss, in private, how to put their position across. This was certainly the case today because the discussions had been quite tough and members have encountered difficulties in agreeing on the indicators.

(R. Thedvall, field notes 2001)

What these vignettes illustrate, besides the need to understand the invisible rules and unspoken norms of the Commission and master its meeting etiquette, is that a key part of the work of a Eurocrat entails learning how to reach consensus. These skills are essential features of what becoming a good Eurocrat means in practice.

*The Presence of the National and the European
in the World of Eurocrats*

In the world of Eurocrats, the national and the European are always present and in tension with each other, not just in the daily interaction or in the policy process, but also in the make up of the Commission. As Abélès et al. observed long ago,³⁴ the national is even encouraged by Commission leaders through its appointment of Director Generals, its *cabinet* system, the continuous secondment of DNEs, and the fast-track promotion of national appointees to top positions in the administration through what officials call *parachutage* ('parachuting'), although others denounce this as cronyism.³⁵ Interaction within the EU thus encourages member states to think according to the national. As Jacobsson and Mörth argue,³⁶ EU membership has, paradoxically, forced member states to adopt a 'national' position in areas where until now they did not feel the need for one.

At the same time the idea of a supranational civil service pioneering European integration is strong and, on taking up their post, each new Commission *fonctionnaire* is required to recite a 'solemn declaration' before the justices of the European court. A similar declaration is contained in the staff statutes which govern all EU officials. This is effectively an 'oath of allegiance' by which EU officials solemnly swear to carry out their duties independently of member states and refrain from taking instructions from any government, institution, body, office or entity.³⁷

There are also more informal mechanisms that promote European solidarity and identity, including a certain kind of shared language. This 'Eurospeak', as officials sometimes called it, was made up of an abundance of acronyms, a lingua franca through French or English, or rather a pidginised French and English because most of the users did not have either language as their mother tongue. The French and English used was also often made up of a mix of both languages, spoken of as 'Franglais' or 'Frenghish', as the earlier dinner party vignette suggests. For Eurocrats living and working in Brussels, being conversant with the EU acronyms, local (i.e., institutional) gossip and jargon that pepper Eurospeak conversations is essential to operate effectively

34 Abélès, Bellier and McDonald, 'An Anthropological Approach to the European Commission'.

35 Shore, 'Culture and Corruption in the EU'.

36 Jacobsson and Mörth, 'Europeisering och den svenska staten', pp. 199–200.

37 European Commission, *Regulations of the Rules Applicable to Officials and Other Servants of the European Commission* (Luxembourg, Office of Official Publications of the European Commission, 1993).

within this bureaucratic milieu, as is the ability to move between languages mid-sentence.

Commission *fonctionnaires* were expected to master both French and English. The Commission was, however, made up of temporary staff in the form of DNEs and *stagiaires*, many of whom were more comfortable with English than French. Still, it was not unusual for French speakers to insist on speaking French during Commission meetings even though it meant that some staff did not completely understand, as Thedvall experienced many times. As a Eurocrat proper you should be fluent in French and English³⁸ and in the EU's plethora of acronyms. This shared Eurospeak was an important aspect of the EU's distinctiveness and identity. Even outside these formal office settings, it was an important marker of belonging to the EU. But the Eurocrat environment was also multilingual. Most formal meetings between member states and the Commission had interpreters present. Documents were translated into the member states' languages when a decision was made on a policy issue. Commission staff sometimes socialised among friends sharing the same language. The Director General of DG EMPL sent regular official invitations to fellow national staff members within the Commission to drinks. The *stagiaire* system even had clubs based on nationality and parties that involved showing off some peculiarity of their member state. The presence of the national was not only evident in the documents and the organisation of the DG with the national desks. It was also present through the presidency. The presidency moved between member states and changed every 6 months. The member state holding the presidency usually had an agenda it wanted to bring to a conclusion by the end of its presidency. During Thedvall's period doing fieldwork, this was in the area of employment issues and qualitative indicators on the member states' labour markets. This work had already started during the Portuguese presidency 18 months earlier, and had continued during France and Sweden's presidencies. The order of presidencies created (unexpected) alliances where the Portuguese, French, Swedes and Belgians were working together on this very issue.

The mix of the national and the European was particularly present in the negotiations in the EU's committee and working group meetings where member states and Eurocrats thrashed out the details ministers later ratified. This was evident when there were sensitive issues on the agenda, such as the 'quality in work' indicator noted earlier. The member states anticipated how

38 Abélès, Bellier and McDonald, 'An Anthropological Approach to the European Commission', pp. 32–8.

the indicators would play out when used and they wanted to make sure that they looked good in statistical tables, an important issue as the experience of Thom and Abigail showed. The committee working on these issues was asked, through its president, to make a statement in the Council of the EU on the progress on the indicators. It was a verbal report, but they anticipated that the Belgian presidency would request a written text, and written texts leave traces and affect policy. So, even if it was only a few paragraphs, the committee worked for 3 hours to write this statement together. As the president of the committee (from the UK) said at one point: 'Well, what fun this is. I meant what I said about not leaving the room until this is finished' (5 October 2001). The member states and the Commission had to negotiate their positions and formulate a common decision that was a mix of the Commission's European position and the national positions. This is how EU policy was made.

Conclusion: Eurocrats, Europeanisation and the EU Project

We began this chapter by asking what the 'EU-ropeanisation' of senior EU civil servants entails in practice; how they adapt to, or become socialised within, the EU's institutional habitus; and how they navigate the contradictions between the national and the supranational and the political and the technical. As we have argued, these tensions operate throughout the EU's administrative apparatus, and officials have learned to balance them in subtle ways. While the ideal of European cosmopolitanism is considered morally superior to nationalism or the selfish pursuit of national interests, the EU's project for European integration nevertheless requires that 'national perspectives' are recognised and accommodated in its policy process. EU *fonctionnaires* are, of course, 'professional Europeans' who have sworn an oath of allegiance to serve Europe and the European interest, but they also owe their livelihood, job security and careers to their position as EU employees. In one sense, these are arguably the most important 'scope conditions' for socialisation to Europe; that is, officials have a strong personal investment in the continuing success of the EU and its project. If the EU-ropeanisation of elites is measured by loyalty transfer and the extent to which officials come to identify with the EU's goals and acquire strong feelings of belonging to its institutions and values, then it stands to reason that Eurocrats both epitomise and embody European identity and consciousness in its most developed form. However, the vision entertained by Monnet, Halstein and other EU

founding fathers, of an independent and autonomous European civil service acting as a 'higher' authority that stands beyond the influence of nation states and the logic of nationalism, is far from what exists in practice. If Eurocrats are the driving force of European integration and pioneers of European identity, as some claim,³⁹ this merely serves to highlight the composite, contingent and contradictory nature of the European Commission and the ways in which its core principles of independence and meritocracy have had to adapt to political realities and the interests and influence of its member states. This is another reason why learning to compromise is so important in the education and training of EU officials.

Our ethnographic studies also highlighted the performative dimensions of being a Eurocrat. Learning to become a competent EU official Eurocrat involved mastering a complex set of social, linguistic and bureaucratic skills and adapting to the often invisible and unspoken institutional rules of the game. Multilingualism, meeting etiquette, attention to hierarchy and protocol and the ability to shift register were all key elements in the socialisation of EU officials. These were defining features of what, to echo Bourdieu,⁴⁰ we might term the Eurocrat 'habitus'; that enduring set of structured dispositions through which the administrative culture of the EU is created and reproduced.

Anthropological research also revealed just how small, self-contained and insular the 'world' of EU officials in Brussels is. Beyond the exclusiveness of its institutional practices, this is partly a consequence of the residential locations, working patterns and affluent lifestyles that EU officials share; further 'scope conditions' for socialisation to Europe. This 'worlding' phenomenon is reinforced by the elite European School system, which is one of the perks of being a Eurocrat. Whether this was intentional or not, the rarefied expat lifestyle tends to insulate Eurocrats from contact with the harsher and more mundane realities of Belgian society. It also places Eurocrats in a world very different from that of other inhabitants of Brussels. In this respect, the EU-ropeanisation of Eurocrats does not provide a model or template for the EU's wider project for the Europeanisation of member state nationals. The integration of elites at the core is unlikely to spill over into shifting the loyalties of the European masses or forge a wider sense of 'We-ness' among the would-be European demos. This in turn raises the question about the depth and permanency of this sense of European identity

³⁹ Trondal, 'Re-socializing Civil Servants'.

⁴⁰ P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977).

among Eurocrats. Put simply, is the EU-ropeanisation of Eurocrats more about 'fitting in' to the EU's institutional rules and ways of acting than any permanent shift in loyalty or changes to what, echoing Raymond Williams, we might call the 'structures of feeling'?⁴¹

As we have sought to illustrate, there are different ways of being a Eurocrat and different degrees to which EU employees become EU-ropeanised. European identity is situational, and the tensions between the European and the national play out differently for the various categories of Eurocrat. Europeanisation is both contingent and performative. From the perspective of the *fonctionnaires* themselves, it is also about belonging and having a sense of mission or purpose. The EU's narrative about itself is attractive and appealing as it places Eurocrats as pioneers at the vanguard of history; policy entrepreneurs working to promote the 'European idea' and serving the peoples of Europe. What the 'European interest' means in this narrative is typically undefined. Beyond a sense of being part of an elite project, the other appeals of being a Eurocrat include high status, excellent job security, high salaries and a comfortable lifestyle. The development of a distinct *esprit de corps* among staff working in the EU is therefore to be expected. However, as we discovered through our fieldwork, socialisation to Europe took different forms. While some officials were committed Eurocrats serving the European interest, others were politically networked and closely connected to their national government. That closeness to national government also related to the difference between the constant Eurocrats (*fonctionnaires*), who were supposed to be totally committed to the European project, and the occasional Eurocrats (DNEs, *stagiaires*, national representatives working in the EU) understood as somewhere in between. There were variations in how *fonctionnaires* understood their role and their relation to their national governments. We also met disillusioned time-serving Eurocrats caught in the EU's 'gilded cage' (i.e., unable to leave because the pay and conditions were too good to give up) and self-serving, entrepreneurial Eurocrats creatively building their own networks and bureaucratic empires.⁴²

Playing the Brussels game, as some officials described it, is a useful metaphor for describing how EU-ropeanisation is understood by some officials. As an experiment in institution building, the European Commission now stands at a crossroads. The rise of populist nationalism across Europe has

41 R. Williams, *The Long Revolution* (New York, NY, Columbia University Press, 1961).

42 Shore, 'Culture and Corruption in the EU'.

once again drawn attention to the EU's so-called 'democratic deficit', prompting accusations that the EU is run by a ruling elite that is increasingly out of touch with the people it claims to serve. In this respect, and in a climate of growing Euroscepticism, the factors that produced successful integration among EU elites could also be the source of its greatest problem if the result is increasing distance between elites in Brussels and citizens in the rest of Europe.

Recommended Reading

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