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**Bridging the Gap:
Political and Administrative Leadership
in a Reinvented European Commission**

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ABSTRACT

Over the past years the European Commission has undergone its most significant changes since its inception. The resignation of the Santer-Commission in 1999 pushed reform to the top of the political agenda of the Commission. A range of internal reform measures transformed the functioning and administration of the Commission and its executive responsibilities. Moreover a long series of treaty revision—Maastricht, Amsterdam, Nice—since the early 1990s, changed the legal and political framework governing the appointment and tasks and accountability of the Commission. This all contributed to the transformation of the political and administrative leadership in the European Commission. This paper explores how new rules, recruiting patterns, a change in role interpretations and a transformation in the relationships between political and administrative leaders in the European Commission have emerged.

Introduction

'Commission bureaucrats are getting too powerful' stated European Commission vice-president Guenter Verheugen in an interview with the daily *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* October 2006.ⁱ The German commissioner in charge of the industry portfolio voiced unprecedented criticism of high-ranking commission bureaucrats for their hunger for power in the EU executive resulting in a "*permanent power struggle between commissioners and high ranking bureaucrats. Some of them think: the commissioner is gone after five years and so is just a squatter, but I'm sticking around.*" Verheugen adds: *'the whole development in the last ten years has brought the civil servants such power that in the meantime the most important political task of the 25 commissioners is controlling this apparatus.'* Verheugen's comments created commotion in the Commission. The Commission's top permanent civil servant and Secretary-General, Catherine Day, even took the trouble to make statement in the media that *'the civil service understands that we are not the bosses. It is the Commissioners that are the bosses'*.ⁱⁱ

In the dramaturgy of European politics, bureaucrats are generally perceived as powerful. The negative stereotype of top-civil servants in the Commission bureaucracy commonly emphasizes the promotion of its status and power. As always, there may be an element of truth in such a caricature. In any event, Gunter Verheugen and Catherine Day's statements in the media can also be read as a sign of another trend that is slowly emerging at the top of the European Commission: that of a serious leadership gap between its political and administrative levels. Over the past years the European Commission has undergone its most significant changes since its inception. The resignation of the Santer-Commission in 1999 pushed reform to the top of the political agenda of the Commission. A range of internal reform measures transformed the functioning and administration of the Commission and its executive responsibilities. Moreover a long series of treaty revision—Maastricht, Amsterdam, Nice—since the early 1990s, changed the legal and political framework governing the appointment and tasks and accountability of the Commission. The point of departure in this paper is that changes arising from the processes of treaty reforms, administrative reforms and EU enlargement have put new political pressures and demands on the working of the Commission in terms of its political executive function and its bureaucracy.

The tension about the boundaries of the roles of politicians and civil servants is a persistent dilemma in modern democratic systems. Even though there is a general idea that '*this frontier*' is an important battle zone, there appears, apart from anecdotic, little systematic empirical evidence as to what is taking place *along these borderlines*. In this paper I want to examine 'the frontier' between politics and administration at the helm of the European Commission. There the *collaboration* between the political and the administrative levels consists of a *ménage à trois*, a delicate threesome of commissioners, heads of cabinet and the directors-general. The reforms have reviewed and revised the workings of the political and bureaucratic levels in the Commission. The principal question to answer in this paper is: how have these reforms changed the roles and relationships of the political and bureaucratic leaders at the top of the European Commission?

Studying the changing nature of the *relationship* between politicians and top-level bureaucrats in the European Commission is not an easy job. I will use three indicators as an indicator or yardstick for gauging such a qualitative alteration. These are: a) changing recruiting patterns; b) changing role conceptions; c) altered patterns of interaction between senior bureaucrats and the policy making elite. By studying developments in these three areas I hope to paint a picture of the changing nature of the relation between politicians and bureaucrats in the European Commission. Drawing on interviews held with political executives and top officials in the Commission as well as on documentary and other evidence of politics during the Prodi and Barosso years, I try to describe how reforms in the Commission affected the composition and the operation of the political-bureaucratic interface in the Commission.

Models of political-administrative roles and relations

One of the most complicated relationships within many governance systems is that between politicians and professional civil servants. While each have their share in running the public sector, it is often assumed that both have their own goals, interests, resources and commitments. Consequently, the relationship between politics and administration has been an important topic in the literature since the writings of Wilson and Weber. The dominating perspective was that there was, or at least should be, a clear distinction between the sphere of politics and the sphere of administrations (Svara 2001; Overeem 2005). In the traditional understanding of the relationship

between bureaucrats and politicians—the literature goes back to Weber’s early 20th century model of bureaucracy and to Woodrow Wilson in the American context—there is a clear distinction and hierarchy of labour between politicians and bureaucrats. The politician functions as a sovereign representative of political values and interests. The bureaucrat is the subordinate expert advisor and policy executor, concerned about efficiency and not acting from biased, personal or partisan orientations.

This classical dichotomy has long been challenged. Several authors have argued that a clear division is impossible, and a number of empirical studies show varying intermeshing of the two spheres (Aberbach et al. 1981; Svava and Mouritzen 2002). These studies suggested that the interaction between politicians and administrators is more complex and differentiated (Putnam, 1975). Aberbach et al. (1981) pointed to a growing involvement of civil servants in what had traditionally been described as ‘political’ roles. Of their famous four images to describe the relationship between politicians and administrators, image IV (the complete blurring of roles) seemed to become the face of the future when they conducted their interviews in the eighties. The four images of the relationship between bureaucrats and politicians reflected a steady progression of bureaucratic influence in policymaking from Image I, with its emphasis on politicians making decisions and bureaucrats implementing them, to the ‘pure hybrids’ of Image IV where the line between policy making and administration essentially vanishes, producing a seamless partnership between politicians and bureaucrats (Aberbach & Rockman 2006).

Peters (1987) deduced five ideal-typical modes of interaction on a continuum of strict, formal, Weberian separation and hierarchy, in which political leaders prevail over neutral bureaucrats, to the administrative-state model, in which technical expertise, bureaucratic activism and command of information allows bureaucratic professionals to dominate the policy process. In between both ends of the continuum there are the intermediate categories of ‘village life’, ‘functional village life’ and of ‘adversarial politics’. The notion of ‘adversarial politics’ refers to a strongly politicised relationship in which politicians and bureaucrats compete for control over public policy. Most governmental organizations reflect a village life type of model, where backgrounds and behaviour lead to more convergence than divergence between politicians and bureaucrats.

Peters and Pierre (2001) argue that public sector reform and administrative reorganization have had a profound effect on the relationship between politicians and administrators. Agencification and the changing recruitment and career patterns of officials tend to undermine both the classical dichotomy and the more cooperative 'village life' in which jointly socialised politicians and top officials blend smoothly. Moreover the NPM-driven emphasis on performance and measurable outcomes rather than procedural correctness and hierarchical compliance may, paradoxically, have lessened the capacity of politicians to control bureaucrats and created more conflict between them.

Svara (2001, 2006) argues that the extensive sharing and interaction along with important differences and areas of separation indicate the need for a dynamic view of the political-administrative relationship. The most current interactions among officials resemble a win-win situation of *complementarity* (see also Mouritzen & Svara 2002). This key notion of complementarity is based on the presumption that politicians and administrators are highly dependent upon each other for getting their respective jobs done. In a model of complementarity administrators accept the control of elected officials and elected officials respect what administrators do and how they do it. At the same time there is interdependency and reciprocal influence between commissioners and dg's who fill distinct but overlapping roles in policy and administration. Complementarity is based on the conditions for maintaining the distinction between politics and administration, while at the same time describing how the two are intermixed and prescribing values for preserving this complex relationship.

Does the European Commission fit into any of these political-administrative models? Although not a conventional government, the Commission is a body with features familiar to the larger comparative politics and public administration community. The Commission is an international institution that has more in common with a national government than with any other international organization; it consists of a group of politicians at the top and an administrative apparatus beneath; and the tasks assigned to it, displays many of the same qualities as national governments (Egeberg 2004). The conceptual models of political-bureaucratic relationships have provided and can provide a framework for the analysis of political-bureaucratic relationship in the European Commission.

Looking back: Political and Bureaucratic Leadership in the Commission

Within the European Commission the organization of the political-bureaucratic interface is rather complex. The bureaucrats in the Commission consists of a staff of several thousand full-time European career officials, responsible for public administration with on top the directors-general, the administrative heads of the Commission services. Above them floats the commissioner, who although appointed, is generally a politician by background. Together with his or her colleagues they form the college of commissioners. This college function much like a government (ministerial cabinet) in that each commissioner is responsible for a particular policy area and for overseeing one or more directorates-general (DGs), which in turn are the functional equivalent of national government departments. However, beyond the commissioners lies another powerful body of executive politicians, the Council of Ministers from the member states (the EU has what in terms of most nation states would be regarded as an 'extra' political layer). To make it more complicated, each commissioner has a cabinet of personal appointed officials who offer policy advice, who function as the gate-keepers to the commissioner's desk, and who perform a crucial role in the political-bureaucratic divide. The result of this all is a very complex set of relations between political and bureaucratic officials within the European Commission.

This political-bureaucratic complexity was intentional from the start. Jean Monnet's design for the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) , today's European Commission, gave a High Authority of appointed experts administrators responsibility for both determining and implementing the policies of the ECSC (Stevens 2001: 220). The Commission was designed as a technocratic body to propose solutions to policy problems, to broker deals, to provide the impetus for integration ('motor of integration') and to be the guardian of the common European interest. Decisions on the way in which that interest was to be practically specified and pursued, ought not to be subject to some kind of democratic majoritarian mechanism. The integration and mediating function should be guided by the judgement of a technocratic elite rather by political judgement. The reason is that politicians are bound to be short-sighted and self-seeking, as they are subject to electoral mechanisms. It makes for better governance to take the impartial, the overall and long term view of the technocrat. The Commission's role as a guardian of the European interest would depend on its expertise and its credibility as an impartial

mediator between political views, conflicting national interests and interest group pressures.

The Commission image at this point may often have become synonymous with the concept of ‘*depoliticised*’ technocratic body, the Commission’s civil service on the other hand is often depicted as a politicized bureaucracy. Although formally a textbook case of a Weberian organization, in reality consociational practices are often superimposed on hierarchical relationships in the Commission (Hooghe 2001: 200). What makes the Commission less bureaucratic than other bureaux—is the nature of continuous bargaining in the Union. In the EU systems, policies are not only subject to the extensive deliberations in the legislative phase, but are also bound to be renegotiated when it comes to their implementation in different national contexts. Christiansen (1997: 77) argues: ‘having to manage the resultant clash between pervasive political interests and the rigidities of the *acquis communautaire* is what makes the Commission such a special type of public administration’.

The fact that the Commission is a multinational bureaucracy has had a fundamental impact on its cohesion, demographic character and the form of political control. The educational, professional and cultural background of top-officials is extra-ordinarily diverse and far more heterogeneous than that of top-officials in any national bureaucracy. Those that entered the Commission with a genuinely European educational formation were long time a minority. Studies in the mid 90s showed that national identifications in the Commission were important for network-building (Egeberg 1996) and sometimes became institutionalized in units, divisions and even whole DGs (Christiansen 1997: 83). For a long time, promotions at the top depended on one’s nationality and support from one’s national government—not on merit or loyalty to the Commission hierarchy. National quotas and temporary contracts ‘politicized’ the Commission bureaucracy. The upshot of this all was that the line between politics and technocracy was far from clear in the Commission and was constantly blurred by the behaviour of many officials (Fouilleux a.o 2005). In the words of Hooghe (2001: 7): ‘in the complex setting of the European Union, Commission officials often find it impossible to resolve the tension between politics and expertise and impartiality’.

In short a decade ago, two images of political-administrative models were often implicitly present in discussions on the political-bureaucratic relationship in the European Commission. The first is Peters’ ‘*administrative state*’ model; in this model

the Commission is perceived as a bloated Brussels bureaucratic fiefdom that cannot be held accountable. This model fits the standard popular perception that bureaucracies are ‘unresponsive, self-interested, and out of control’ (see Svava’s 2006b: 7). A less extreme interpretation of the relationship between commissioners and their top-officials in that period is to understand it as a form of the pure hybrid of Aberbach’s *et al.* (1981) Image IV in which a fusion of decision-making and administration has taken place.

Crisis & Change: Reinventing the Commission

In the past decade the Commission has changed and three crises were needed to bring this change in motion. The first concerns a crisis in the Commission’s *political credentials*; the second involves the manifestation of the Commission ‘*plumbing problems*’ (Peterson 2006); and the final crisis involves the Commission’s *credibility*. Together, these three problems created a climate in and outside the Commission that reforms of the Commission’s operation were seriously needed.

A first problem concerns the gradual erosion of the perceived legitimacy of the EU and the Commission in particular. Today the process of European integration is being called into question by many people. In 2005, citizens of two founding members of the European Union – France and the Netherlands – rejected the EU constitution, a document that would have led to further European integration. Surveys continued to show a lack of enthusiasm. This process of legitimacy loss started already in the context of the discussion that preceded the Maastricht Treaty of 1992. Questions relating to the legitimacy of the EU integration process, its governance and its institutions were seriously raised (Tsakatika 2005: 200-204). The legitimacy of the way in which European integration was taking place came under fire. Europe was charged with a ‘democratic deficit’ which weighed heavily on its legitimate *governance*. Severe criticism emerged on the fact that an independent and unaccountable technocratic elite in the Commission was allowed to play a role that was so important.

For some the real problem with European *governance* was not the Commission’s traditionally weak democratic credentials (input legitimacy) but its diminishing problem solving efficiency (output legitimacy). The Commission’s organization came under increasing attack in the mid 1990s for handling of its executive responsibilities. The organization had, as Peterson (2006) calls it,

‘plumbing problems’: it tended to leak money and work inefficiently. Over the 1990s, as the pace of the European integration picked up, the size of the Union increased and its range of policies expanded, the Commission suffered the consequences of success. Though it became larger, at the same time it was assigned an ever-increasing range of tasks and responsibilities (Christiansen 2001: 758). Majone (2002: 389) argues that the expansion of competences should, however, not be mistaken for a sign of growing strength: ‘new and often ill-defined powers have tended to dilute the Commission’s core commitments’

The result has not only been a weakening of the organization but also a loss of its trust. *The third development affecting the operations of the Commission was hence a crisis in its credibility.* The Commission lost much of its authority it enjoyed under Delors. Weak leadership and ineffective management have eroded its standing vis-à-vis other EU institutions. Dissatisfaction of the way the Commission functioned, especially among the largest and more powerful EU member governments, made that no member governments of any large EU state was prepared to spend any real political capital defending the Commission (Peterson 2004: 15). Lack of support in large state national capitals contributed to a political marginalisation of the Commission. In fact, the larger states, led alternately by France, the UK and Germany have frequently been keen to clip the Commissioner’s wings (Spence 2006: 26); and many national leaders were less enthusiastic about entrusting it with new powers, preferring to co-operate among themselves on issues they consider to be at the core of national sovereignty.

Fraud allegations and corruption scandals have finally tarnished its reputation. The resignation of the Santer Commission in March 1999 following accusations of mismanagement, irregularities and fraud, pushed the legitimacy of the European Commission to the forefront of the public debate. Faced, at the end of the 1990s, with a decline in the Commission’s power, legitimacy and credibility political leaders of the institutions of the EU and the member States have been engaged to put their ‘House’ in order (Cram 2002: 310). New structures and rules with a range of ex ante constraints and ex post incentives combine to provide a system for more control in and over the Commission that may ‘repair the Commission’ (Peterson 2006). The prospect of the arrival of the EU’s largest and most complex enlargement in May 2004--the European Union was to include 10+2 new member states—was a further impetus for reform.

Reinventing the Commission

A first dimension of the Commission's problem that needed to be fixed was the general conception of the 'democratic deficit'. Coping with the legitimacy problem of the European project has become a central focus. Since the rise of the deficit narrative at the beginning of the 1990s all EU institutions sought remedies to the 'democratic deficit' and the EU has been in a process of continuous constitution building in which the Treaties have been revised every few years by member states in intergovernmental conferences (IGCs). This constant stream of Treaty Reforms was intended to improve the channels of democratic accountability. The idea was that European institutions, which adopt binding rules and spend public money, should be answerable to citizens through elected bodies; and if a decision is taken at European level, especially if majority voting is involved, then there has to be an elected European body capable of directly channelling citizens' concerns and exercising political control on their behalf. This has been the main functional logic behind the successive increase in the powers of the European Parliament. With every treaty change in the past years the EP has successfully managed to extend its powers and also the accountability of the Commission to the Parliament; and through this empowerment of Parliament the Commission attempted to earn its own legitimacy (Peterson 2006)

The crisis and the resignation of the Santer Commission in March 1999 functioned as a catalyst to address ongoing criticism of the inefficient administrative practices and organisational weaknesses in the Commission. Problems at both political and administrative levels could no longer be ignored. Prodi, Santer's successor as Commission President, was accordingly appointed very much on the basis of a mandate to reform the Commission (Nugent 2001: 4). The Prodi Commission issued a *White Paper on European Governance*, which announced an ambitious agenda that would transform the functioning and administration of the Commission and would improve its executive responsibilities. The modernization of the Commission had to be seen in terms of 'principles of good governance'. In March 2000 new commissioner of Administrative Reforms Neil Kinnock announced a set of specific proposals in a *Reform Strategy White Paper* for what he called a 'root, branch, trunk and trees' reform of the institution (Nugent 2001; Kassim 2004; Christiansen & Gray 2004). Amongst these proclaimed reforms were the introduction of personnel policy, managerial skills, awarding talented staff; the introduction of more efficient and performance-oriented working methods; and the creation of a new

system of financial management and control (Nugent 2001: 57). The main objective of this reform strategy was to ensure that '*efficiency, accountability, transparency, responsibility and service*' were applied as working conventions in the Commission administration (Commission 2000: iii). The Kinnock reforms are generally perceived as the most radical and comprehensive programme of modernization in the Commission's 50-year history (Stevens & Stevens 2006: 478; Kassim 2004: 58) which are likely to turn the Commission into a high performance, policy focused and one of the world's most well-managed international administrations (Peterson 2007).

The question that rises now is: what are the repercussions of these shifts in the reinvented Commission for the political-bureaucratic relationship at its helm? To what extent have these changes created new selection patterns and a redefinition of the roles of commissioners and their senior-officials? And how have these changes affected the nature of the relationships between the political and administrative leaders in the European Commission? Did it produce an increased cooperation or a greater antagonism? I will examine these questions in the remainder of the paper.

Changing recruiting patterns

At the national level politicians often differ from bureaucrats in their backgrounds, their training, careers and the way they are recruited for the office. This pattern is also evident in the European Commission. *Commissioners* reach office by a completely different route than their top-officials, the *directors general*. Whereas the latter typically take a long climb up the Commission ladder, *commissioners* usually come from outside. Whereas directors-general have spend all or most of their careers in the Commission (civil service 'lifers') before they reached the pinnacle of the service, *commissioners* in contrast are merely passing through the Commission, serving usually for relatively short periods and often set their sight on further advancement, for instance in other political positions. These differences in careers may influence their vision on leading the Commission. Incoming commissioners can bring new ideas, different experiences, and fresh approaches. Brought in from the outside they may, however, not fully understand the Commissions culture or values. Directors-general, being most of the time *home-grown* leaders, have spend a great deal of their careers inside the organization and may not recognize the need for change or have the necessary skills to pursue it effectively.

The selection and recruiting patterns of commissioners and their senior officials have changed in the past decade in such a way that the differences between the two groups appear to have become even more distinct. To start with *the selection of Commissioners*, the growing ministerial background of commissioners, a significant trend which manifested itself since the first Commission (Macmullen 2000: 46), indicates a move away from the more narrowly technical based roles characteristic towards a broader and more political approach. Wonka (2004) argues that an analysis of Commissioners' prior jobs in the political arena shows that member states rely extensively on candidates which have a high political visibility. Over time the share of Commissioners who previously served as ministers in their member states and who therefore are experienced in exercising political leadership over a large executive bureaucracy increased from 45% for the first eight Commissions to 70% for the 9th (Delors) to the 12th Commission (Prodi) (Wonka 2004: 17). Increasingly the Commission also includes commissioners who have held a senior ministerial office (prime minister, foreign minister, finance minister, interior minister) or led a mainstream political grouping. This had the effect of making the College less technocratic and more political.

Not only their backgrounds, also the procedures of appointing commissioners seem to have become more 'political'. In a 1999 resolution the EP advocated a strong link between the preferences expressed by Union citizens in EP elections and the nomination of the College of Commissioners and its programme for the parliamentary term. Consequentially, the term of office of Colleges has been extended from four to five years so as to bring them into close alignment with the term of the EP elections. The EP has gradually gained more weight in the appointment procedure; the EP shall not only be consulted on the choice of the President, but also been assigned the right to approve his/her appointment. Steps have been taken to render the College directly accountable to the EP as illustrated by the EP committees' examination of nominated Commissioners, its vote of confidence, and its right to dismiss the entire College. Moreover, the new investiture procedures by the EP may contribute to a new form of 'credit' that commissioners can build up for their internal and external leadership during their mandate; commissioners can claim to represent a legitimacy which is not simply based upon bureaucratic hierarchical rank but reflects the facts that their appointment is a political one—supported by the EP-procedure.

As the selection of commissioners has become more 'political', the appointment of top-officials is designed to become less 'politicized'. In the past, time-serving and the right political and national connections were often more valuable for promotion prospects than a good performance record. The Santer as well as the Prodi Commission both claimed that more weight should be assigned to merit and internal recruitment and less to nationality and 'parachuting'. The new staff regulations that entered into force in May 2004, intended to change the Commission's personnel management practices. While the services should maintain a broad geographical balance, nationality would no longer be allowed to be the main determinant in appointing a new person to a particular post. Moreover, in addition to the proportionality concern, it is now required in the new system that the immediate subordinate and superior of top-officials (A14-16) should be of another nationality than himself/herself. A mix of nationalities in a Directorate General and within individual units has become the norm. A director general should not share the same nationality as the commissioner responsible for their service (Peterson 2004: 26). Directors general, in turn, should be of different nationalities from their deputy-directors general and their directors. The purpose is to ensure a wide spread of nationalities in senior positions and the avoidance of nationality clusters (Spence 2006: 143).

Moreover, a new procedure for appointments to posts at A15/16 (former A1 and A2) was established (Spence/Stevens 2006: 201) by introduction of a system of compulsory mobility at senior. Prodi directed, in the first few months of his Commission, that directors-general should be rotated to new posts periodically to ensure that permanent officials do not become too powerful in their relationship with commissioners. The incumbency in any post of director or director-general should be limited to five years with seven years as a maximum. The objective of this reform was to remove 'national flags' from the posts and to diminish the impact of informal networks.

Recruiting patterns have altered for both commissioners and top-officials in such a way that we can observe the growth of a political-administrative gap. Yet there are also some mechanisms in the selection of commissioners and their top-officials that can build some common ground. From the literature we learn that the training and background which political executives bring with them to office will tend to influence the manner in which they interact with the permanent civil service staff that they find

when they come to the office (Peters 1988: 171). Usually, the more generalist orientation of political executives is usually contrasted with the more specialized background of executives. Generalists will be less able to contest issues on substantive grounds than political executives with more specialized training. Generalist political executives may be more expected to be associated with what Peters (1988) calls *the administrative state* model. Specialist career patterns of political executives may be more related to an *adversarial relationship* or to the *functional* model of interaction.

In case of the current European Commission we observe at the top however a lesser amount of specialist career patterns on both the political and the bureaucratic side. Most commissioner of Barroso's College had general and not specialist backgrounds and if we look at the top of the administration we see also a tendency towards the development of generalist career patterns among top-officials. In the mobility policy for top-officials managerial competencies being increasingly preferred over professionalism based on a specific knowledge about, and the handling of policy fields. With the development towards generalist career patterns among commissioners and their senior-officials and with generalist patterns of training—law and economics is the most common study among both commissioners and their top-officials—it is not unlikely that these backgrounds can create something of a shared understanding to work on a collaborative relationship between the two distinct groups.

A mechanism, sometimes visible at the level of nation states, and that reinforces a elite integration is the presence of personnel overlap between political and administrative spheres (see Peters 2001, 85-133). A 'float' of persons between spheres, in which administrators engage in political careers or vice versa, can increase the amount of both informal and formal interaction between them (Jacobsen 2006: 307). Persons with experience from the other sphere have a broader contact network with it, simply because they have knowledge about the administrative machine or politics or through personal acquaintances. A career movement between politics and administration is not noticeable at the level of commissioners and their top-officials. It is, however, clearly present at the level of cabinet staff and the Commission's services. Cabinet heads are appointed by and directly responsible to their commissioner and retain their post at his/her personal discretion. Most *head of cabinets* come, however, from the Commission's administration (seconded to the cabinet for a five year term). When the commissioner leaves the Commission, this

part of the cabinet staff is usually transferred back into the services. This is well established practice, because commissioners need staff who have a good understanding of how the Commission works (Nugent 2001: 122) For commission officials a passage through a commissioner's cabinet is an undoubted key to a successful career in the commission (Spence 2006: 65). A high proportion of senior officials in the service has served in one cabinet or another. This flow between central positions in the bureaucracy to central cabinet positions and vice versa, may help to bridge the increasing gap between the political and administrative spheres (Aberbach et al. 1981; Putnam 1977).

The Evolution of Political and Administrative Leadership Roles

Recruiting patterns for the top of the European Commission may have changed. To what extent does this also have brought changes in the roles of commissioners, heads of cabinets and directors general? Numerous studies explored the differences between the roles politicians and bureaucrats play at a national level. For the European Commission this dimension has been, however a rather unexplored one. There has always been a differentiation between the roles of commissioners and their directors-general. The political top is expected to provide the Commission's political direction and take its major decisions; the administrative top is directing the executive and administrative tasks (Nugent 2001) Yet, the hybrid nature of the Commission, being partly political and partly administrative in nature, may also have contributed to the blurring of political -administrative roles in the Commission. Yet, the changes in organizational designs in the last decade give not only effect to the recruiting patterns but also to the 'psychology' of roles and the behaviour of the political executives and the officials at the top of the Commission. How different are Commissioners and top-officials in their roles? And how has this altered in the past decade?

I deal with the commissioner's role first. There is little doubt that changes in the political context have made the Commission's job more awkward and demanding in the last decade. The reforms in the Commission and the emphasis on its improved public management are assumed to be best achieved when the political level in the Commission makes its *objectives* sufficiently explicit and transparent. Since the introduction of the Commission's reform strategy the organisation of work in the European Commission has been regulated by a Strategic Planning and Programming (SPP) system. *Box 1* gives an overview of the steps in SPP. Central in this system is a

management cycle concentrating on the setting of political priorities and the appropriate allocation of resources

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According to the reform model, the role held for commissioners is as strategists and opinion-leaders. From the interviews it appeared that commissioners need to clarify and communicate visions and values, choose appropriate strategies, and try to identify, allocate and commit resources at the macro-level. The managing operations will then be done by their directors-general, whose performance will subsequently be appraised against clear objectives and targets. The SPP-system seems likely to encourage commissioners to adopt these 'political' roles more and more. Their political success (not their survival) depends upon their skills and creativity in putting together coalitions of support to steer through particular programmes. Most commissioners, have been trained for such a role as senior politicians in the member states.

Not only has the policy role of Commissioners evolved, also the value commissioners attach to public responsiveness has become more significant in the past years. Since the seismic political shock in 2005 (after the French and Dutch referenda), EU leaders have been trying to do more than just pay lip-service to getting citizens on board the "European project". The European Commission has launched a whole series of citizen-friendly initiatives and commissioners have gradually been obliged to give more attention to the needs and demands of the European public.

The interviews showed that the role of commissioners with regard to parliamentary politics has also grown. In their *relation with the European Parliament* many Commissioners are obliged (as a result of the introduction of co-decision brought about by the Maastricht treaty) to include MEPs in their negotiating strategies. MEPs are taken more seriously by commissioners as policy experts and negotiators, and commissioners depend increasingly on the EP for support. The actual practice of securing accountability through a host of means have evolved and affected the roles of commissioners. Egeberg (2006a) argues that if the Commission's relationship to the European parliament continues to grow, both as regards to the appointment of Commissioners and their daily policy-making, it is reason to believe that more emphasis would be put on their 'political' role (party affiliation) in future colleges.

The revised Code of Conduct for allows commissioners to ‘be active members of political parties or trade unions.’ If they are to play an ‘active’ role in an election campaign they have to ‘withdraw from the work of the commission for the duration of the campaign.’ In previous years, the commission and its commissioners - often ex-politicians themselves - tended to keep a distance between Brussels and national politics, hovering somewhat above the domestic fray. Yet under the Prodi and Barroso leadership commissioners appear to cultivate a more explicit political role. Louis Michel, the EU's commissioner for development, took on unpaid leave because he is taking part in Belgium's federal elections. Margot Wallstrom, the EU communications commissioner, has made an all-out plug for French socialist president candidate Segolene Royal in her blog. Dutch commissioner Neelie Kroes openly supported Angela Merkel to become chancellor just days before the German elections. During the last commission Italian prime minister Romano Prodi actively campaigned in the general elections in Italy while still head of the Brussels executive and Greek commissioner Anna Diamantopoulou also took a leave of absence for domestic elections and then resigned after winning a seat.

These developments reflect the increasing trend towards politicisation of the European Commission (Wille 2007). The treaty itself says that commissioners should be impartial and work for the European cause, stipulating they must be ‘completely independent in the performance of their duties’ in the general interest of the European community. But as the European Union has evolved, the political level of the Commission has sought to rebrand itself as more of a political entity.

Reforms in the Commission have not only influenced the roles of the commissioners but of their directors-general too. As with the political executives, the roles adopted by top-civil servants manifest an important psychological element. The interviews revealed that the creation of management systems that secure performance according to commission targets and standards has emphasized increasingly the *accountability* of senior officials. The extent to which PI and target regimes are employed in the Commission in order to set explicit goals, to apply performance measures, and to impose more demanding and transparent reporting and accountability regimes (see box 1) and the extraordinary growth of central auditing, inspecting, and monitoring moment has not been simple for top-officials in the services. This may account for the somewhat ambiguous responses from directors general—they have experienced

greater freedom to deploy their inputs but at the same time they have felt themselves under closer scrutiny than ever before as far as their results are concerned

As a result of the internal reforms, top-officials in the Commission are taking up a new role as 'managerialist' leader. *Policy oriented professionalism* is being replaced by managerial skills, performance measurement and financial control. The focus for most senior officials is shifted from professional policy advisory role with a clear focus on content to a role of 'process management' as 'getting thing done through people'. This tendency may fit Ezra Suleiman's (2003) description of the gradual de-professionalisation of the upper echelons of public bureaucracies in terms of public policy orientation.

As the policy role of senior officials is diminished, the political responsiveness dimension is increased. Directors general have become more disposable in the new rotation-system; once it is perceived that a director general has gone over the line, his (or her) usefulness is at an end and the notion of continuity and experience of the civil service is evaporating. Whether or not the '*speaking truth to power*' qualities suffer from this change is unknown presently, but it seems logical to assume that as the criteria for success become more arbitrary or capricious, top-officials will begin to behave more like the *political appointees* whose job depend on personal loyalty to commissioners. One way or another short term contracts, in combination with performance goals and objectives created by the college of commissioners obviously increases the responsiveness of senior officials to political direction.

The Commission reform has thus had important implications for the job of senior officials: a reconfigured policy role, new performance demands and skill requirements, and new accountability expectations and mechanisms; and increasing demands for political responsiveness.

While witnessing substantial shifts in the conception of the roles that commissioners and top-officials held in the Commission, on base of the conducted interviews it is uncertain at this moment, if and how the role of *cabinets-chefs* has altered in the last decade. In principle the aim of *heads of cabinets* ought to be the same as that of *directors-general*: 'enhancing simultaneously the effectiveness of the Directorate General and the commissioner's profile by providing informal guidance on the commissioner's wishes' (Spence 2006: 73). Why is it then that commissioners rely often more on what heads of cabinets as close advisors say, than on the experts in the

services and DG's? After all are the latter are the policy experts, while the former are generalists. The answer is simple: the services may have greater expertise, but their loyalty to the commissioner is smaller.

Cabinet heads occupy extremely important positions in the Commission's organisational system. They are in charge of a personally loyal group of advisors to be placed outside the mainstream bureaucracy.ⁱⁱⁱ These cabinets perform a crucial role at the political-bureaucratic interface in the Commission. They are the gate-keepers to the commissioner's desk (Christiansen 1997: 81); they provide an additional source of policy advice; co-ordinate policy development, control the work of the administrative services attached to their commissioner; and they are responsible for monitoring, on behalf of the commissioner the activity of the other departments in the Commission. Phrases such as 'the eyes and ears of the Commissioner' (Nugent 2001: 123) or 'the heart and soul of Commission politics' (Hooghe 2001: 27) are commonly used to describe the role of a commissioner's cabinet.

The role of the *Cabinets Heads* is a rather neglected one. Data from the interviews indicated that their main intention is to serve the commissioners and to be responsive upward to the incumbent Commissioner. The role and success of commissioners is closely connected to that of their cabinets or personal teams. Cabinets can counterbalance a commissioner's shortcomings and they are used by commissioners to strengthen their own performance in areas where they might otherwise be weak. Moreover, difficulties commissioners have with working in a multinational bureaucracy and with officials from various administrative backgrounds are attenuated by cabinets acting as interlocutors and buffers between the commissioners and the services (see also Spence 2006: 68). For commissioners it means that they are advised from at least two sources: the director general who's primarily responsible for policy development; and the cabinet heads who's responsible for the operations at the political-administrative interface. Under this design the former never monopolizes the provision of advice and this of course diminishes the likelihood of commissioners captured by their services. In this advice *directors general* are more likely to be advocates for their DG, whereas *heads of cabinets* are more likely to represent the 'Berlaymont view'.

It seems sensible to think that with a shift in the roles of the commissioner, the roles of their heads of cabinets have changed too, but the data from the interviews are still a moot on this point. It is clear though that the detachment of leading servants

from the DGs to serve in the cabinets implied that the cabinets gradually has acquired a major influence over the day-to day running of the Commission. The cabinets appear increasingly to be drawn into the details of policy making and monitoring. As a result, the heads of cabinets (can) have an important role in setting priorities and dealing with problems of governance. How far they have actually been drawn into the *day-to-day* management of the DGs is hard to say. It seems to vary from cabinet to cabinet and has been a function of the approach of individual commissioners and their heads of cabinets. Yet with the increasing role of policy making there is the danger of a parallel bureaucracy. This makes the relations between cabinet heads and top-officials from the DG are inevitably delicate (see also Spence 2006).

Distinct worlds, Distinct Perspectives, but Overlapping Roles

Generally speaking, the interview data revealed/showed persistent and sharp differences in the perspectives of commissioners and directors-general. Their core values, functions and working methods, their ways of thinking about public policy were all largely distinctive across roles. On the whole, I found that commissioners (as politicians) acted more and more as ‘*energizers*’ in the European Commission and director-generals (as top-bureaucrats) as ‘*equilibrators*’. These images of Aberbach and Rockman (2006) are a good empirical approximation of their leadership. These differences very much reflected the different demands of each role. Table 1 summarizes the essentials of the three roles. It is possible to conclude that bureaucrats and politicians in the European Commission did live in distinctive worlds.

-Table 1 about here-

Apart from the substantial *differences* between commissioners and their top-officials, there are also significant *similarities*. Both groups report a genuine concern for the general public European interest. Moreover, both realized that they worked in a political environment and that this affected their work. Though both groups were aware of the political world they operated in, the main difference is the kind of politics they were involved in. Commissioners dealt with broad ideas; parliamentary politics; member states and the politics of parties. Directors general dealt with the politics of bureaucracies, advising commissioners, and so on. For all leaders in the Commission--commissioners, heads of cabinets and directors general alike--‘doing

politics successfully' means increasingly that they need to share a defined set of executive core qualities and skills: have the ability to build coalitions and to communicate and to manage interpersonal relations. These critical leading capacities may provide a common ground for political and administrative executives to cooperate.

Partnerships in Flux

Commissioners and their top-officials have very different backgrounds, aims, jobs, and styles of work. As Peterson (2007) notes the political side of the Commission – the College and *cabinets* – has, over time, become a considerably different world from that of permanent officials in the DG. This distance also got a physical side. Under Santer (as under Delors) commissioners resided collectively in the Berlaymont, and later the Breydel while services and DG's have been scattered across a multitude of different locations across Brussels. This added—practically as well as symbolically—to the perceived distance between political and administrative spheres of the Commission. Prodi's Commission decided to house commissioner in the DG's for which they were responsible. Commissioners had to 'move in' with their services to bridge the vertical divide between the political and the administrative levels. Barroso, however, decided to reverse the decision taken by Prodi and to bring his commissioners and their advisers (the cabinets) back to one location in Brussels.^{iv}

The reuniting of all commissioners and their cabinets in the newly reopened Berlaymont, close to the office of the Commission President, can be perceived as a sign of a 'new' division between the services and the College. Peterson (2007:xx) even goes that far to conclude that '*the two halves of the hybrid had drifted apart*'. Signalling this disconnect between political and administrative leadership in the European Commission, the differences in their recruiting patterns and roles, the question arises what will this mean for the collaborative relationship between commissioners and their top-officials? The implications of this development for the political-administrative relationships remained unclear so far. Yet, the interviews conducted with top-officials in the Commission brought more light to this question. Four critical observations appear of relevance.

First, one would expect, from the persistent and sharp differences in the perspectives of bureaucrats and politicians, that the relationship between the two categories is to be hampered by role conflict. What however became clear from the

interview data was that political executives and top officials have the *ability to turn conflict into cooperation*. Distinct roles and differences between commissioners, heads of cabinets and directors general are recognized, but that they usually are not considered as problematical for the work situation. On the contrary, most interviewees perceive ‘conflicting opinions’ as a positive and healthy thing, an unstructured system of check and balances. Both politicians and administrators reported a rather low level of conflict with each other. In case of *differences of opinion* a gradual accommodation usually takes place that smoothes the differences away. In such situations, several elements of an individual behaviour nature are considered as important—and for the most part constitute common sense—for example ‘show respect to the other side’, ‘keep communication lines open’ etc. These observations confirm the findings in a recent study of Jacobsen (2005) on political-administrative interactions at the local level; and echo the classic study of Heclo & Wildavsky (1974) on the relationship between ministers and bureaucrats. Heclo & Wildavsky's main point was that, even if ministers and bureaucrats had different personal opinions, interdependencies between the two spheres, structural arrangements and general values and norms to some extent disciplined both parts. They adjusted themselves to each other.

The rising levels of ambiguity and turbulence at the level of European governance are demanding a more paradoxical approach to the management of the political administrative interface—one that embraces the simultaneous need for *conflict* and *collaboration*. The complexities of political issues at the European level are clear; and there is clear and straightforward awareness at the top of the Commission that public problems cannot be tackled by any one organization alone (neither the college nor the services or the Commission). This requires and stimulates an approach that is more critically about developing understandings and practices that accept accommodate and even encourage tensions. The inevitability of the complexity of the work at this level of the European Commission makes that top-officials will not only need to be able to manage conflict and collaboration simultaneously, but also become more sophisticated in the competencies needed to work across organizational boundaries. From the interviews it appeared that commissioners and their services can be very effective when working together to advance the Commission’s agenda. But the advice was: to avoid confrontational strategies and instead encourage trustful relations between commissioners, heads of cabinet and directors-general. In addition, the College should try to forge a consensus on what is in the public interest. Such a

consensus will help try to minimize bureaucratic conflict and ensure that the political and administrative levels are pursuing the same goal.

A second major finding, appearing from the interviews, concerns the nature of the political-bureaucratic relationship. It became clear that Commissioners and top-officials talked about one another as quite different breeds, as representatives of different worlds coming to the European Commission via different routes and bringing completely different outlooks to it. I found little trace of Peters' (1987) 'village life' in that respect. That does not mean that interviewees perceived their relationship as adversarial. On the contrary, they stressed the virtues of *complementarity* and *teamwork* along the lines of Svvara's (2001) model. Empirically the interactions of commissioners and top-officials shared similar characteristics that Svvara (2006a: 133) has observed in his studies of politicians and administrators. It was clear that commissioners and directors general *maintain distinct perspectives* based on their unique values and the differences in their formal position. Commissioners and their directors general have *partially overlapping functions*; and there is *interdependency and reciprocal influence* between the two groups. Complementarity does not equal 'blurring' (Image IV) of roles. Once the College of commissioners did set a course, the details were more likely to be worked out by bureaucrats. At the end of the day, the relationship between commissioners and their director-generals is superior to subordinate. But, in the day-to-day practices they perceive each other as equals. Each set of actors, taken as an aggregate, brought unique assets and shortcomings to the process of government. Given these interdependencies, they realize that their relationship must be collaborative, not adversarial.

From the interviews it appeared that the establishment of strategic frameworks that structure the work in the Commission and of work agreements has helped to promote efficient and effective governance and administration. It introduced a new *contractual* element in the relationships between commissioners, their cabinets and their directors-general. Directions from the political level and controls for performance have taken on a new dimension where such '*contracts*' have become the principal mechanism for linking policy and operations. The contractual type of arrangements in the SPP-system (see box 1) clarified and constrained the roles and responsibilities of Commissioners and their top-officials in the policy-making process. The adoption of these new systems highlighted the decoupling of responsibilities;

commissioners are not to intervene in the management of operations in services; and directors-general are not their subordinates in the same way as most officials in the departmental model at the national level are. The contractual mode of the relationship emphasized the principal-agent like character of the liaison between commissioner and their directors general.

The new *Codes of Conduct*, introduced as measures of Prodi's program of Commission reform, specified the distinct the politico-bureaucratic roles and responsibilities and intended to improve the working relationship between commissioners, their cabinets, and the top of the services. As soon as a commissioner takes office he or she has to lay down, in the first month of the Commission's term, together with the director-general and Head of Cabinet a *working arrangement* that describes and has to ensure an effective collaboration.

Despite the use of these contracts and working arrangements, the interviews showed that in terms of the day-to-day practices, the relationships between Commissioners, heads of cabinets and directors general vary a great deal according to a number of factors. Relationships between individual commissioners and their director-generals and their heads of cabinets depended, among others, on their respective competencies, personalities, interests and leadership styles. Some commissioners have direct close and regular contacts with senior DG officials, whilst others Commissioners keep a distance between themselves and 'their' top-officials and rely heavily on the their cabinets to channel day-to-day contacts and communications (see also Nugent 2001). As in any 'arranged marriage', some relationships between commissioners and director generals are close and convivial, other more distant and formal, if not tense and uneasy. In most cases, relationships grow and mature over time. Thus when a new commissioner comes in, or a new director general is appointed, there is usually a period of learning; as confidence and trust are built up, the relationship evolves; and in some cases this evolution may not happen.

The final main finding coming out of the interviews is hence that *the relationship between the political and administrative spheres in the Commission should be perceived and treated as a variable*, rather than a steady, invariable form of interaction (see also Jacobsen 2006 for a similar observation) There are considerable variations in the relations between cabinets and services from harmonious and productive to full of tensions and resentment. Labelling the relationship as either a

harmonic or as a conflict situation seems too simplistic. What I found was a rather a heterogeneous political and bureaucratic sphere. The relationship between Commissioners and the departmental top should therefore be regarded as a division of labour and different contingencies—environments, resources, size—will favour different forms of division of labour (Jacobsen 2006: 304). Usually there are overlaps in responsibility between a commissioner and the top of the DG's. These '*zones of discretion*' or '*zones of indifference*', in which top-officials can operate in the shadow of their political executives and make autonomous decisions, are in flux. If directors-general go beyond that zone, commissioners and their cabinets might interfere and strengthen their control (Christensen & Laegreid 2006: 26). But sometimes the zone is considerable and directors-general fill the void. This means that the relationship needs to be expressed more in terms of ebb and flow than as a fixed format of less or more control. Following Svava (2006b: 12) the relationship between commissioners, heads of cabinets and directors-general should therefore be conceptualized as 'mixed and interactive, fluid and integrative, not dichotomous or hierarchical'

Conclusion

I have discussed in this paper how reforms in the European Commission have changed the recruiting patterns, the roles and relationships of its political and administrative leaders. The Commission appears to be in the process of evolving into a core executive. The college of commissioners has clearly become a genuinely political rather than technocratic body, something which is also reflected in its composition. The top of the services, on the other hand, have been increasingly filled by '*managers*' recruited on a merit basis. The changes in organizational designs give not only effect to the recruiting patterns but also to the behaviour and interactions at the top.

Role research reflects changing governmental systems and, thus, changing role expectations (Aberbach and Rockman 2006). The conception of the Commission as 'pure hybrid' in which commissioners and bureaucrats act as in Aberbach and Rockman's (1981) Image IV is gradually disappeared. The general tendency of the political changes examined here has been toward *controlling* the influence that the Commission exerts over the design and execution of policy making process. The new governmental arrangements assume actors ('agents') that need to be controlled, given proper incentives, and held accountable through contracts. It is safe to describe the

intent of the changes as improved responsiveness to elected (EP) and appointed officials (college of commissioners). The Commission's services were perceived as too powerful, and too unresponsive to political directions, and unable to ensure efficient performance ('plumbing' problems). There was a desire to improve hierarchical political direction of the services, which has led to a significant redefinition of the role of commissioners and of higher officials. The nature of bureaucratic entrepreneurship is increasingly seen in managerial rather than in substantive policy terms.

This all has resulted in a clearer demarcation of the political and the administrative parts. Relations between bureaucratic and political leaders in the Commission is more closer to Aberbach and Rockman's Image II -- "Facts/Interests," with directors general bringing facts and knowledge (by management) to the policy process as their distinctive contribution and commissioners defining values and representing interests of the European public. The changing roles of political executives and senior officials have created a '*leadership gap*' of substantial proportions. At the same time the need for joint activity, cooperation and a collaborative relationship is recognized. Several mechanisms in the working relationship are used to bridge this gap.

The increased gap may also explain the complaints of commissioner Verheugen at the start of this paper. All of Verheugen's remarks reflect larger issues about the nature of control and the nature of public sector responsibilities. In many countries the introduction of public reform practices has had a pronounced impact on the relationship between politics and administration. Management reform has been a vehicle by which executive politicians have gained a tighter grip on their officials (see Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004: 144). In the Commission too the last few years have showed attempts by the College to reassert authority through bringing the work of the services within the ambit of the political level. There was and is a desire to improve hierarchical political direction of the services and increasingly the Commission has been using *targets* as mechanisms of control. The Commission has been caught by a modern reform dilemma: on the one hand they have sought greater control over the services and its programmes; but on the other they have sought the advantages in decentralizing responsibility and trying to sit 'above' the dangerous cauldron of day-to-day operational failures and achievements (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004: 146). The purport of this latter aspect is that it limits commissioners to 'indirect steering' (Svara 2006b: 6) and that the influence of the permanent bureaucracy remains substantial.

Perhaps it was the day-to day practice of this conundrum that led Verheugen to make his observation.

Tables & Figures

Table 1 Distinctive Elements in the Roles of Commissioners, Top-Officials and Cabinet Heads (adapted from Svava (2006a))			
	<i>Commissioners orientation</i>	<i>Top-officials orientation</i>	<i>Cabinets Heads orientation</i>
Selection (of counterpart officials)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - By member states & - Investiture procedure EP 	Use merit as basis for selection and nationality balance. Interference by the political level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Patronage - Float between cabinets and services
Functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Initiate policies - Sell Policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Initiate and develop policies - Policy Advice - Management - Deliver Policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Policy Control - Intervention - Coordination - Oversight
Means	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building coalitions, consensus, find political support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exchange of information
Core values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Desire to advance Commission Workprogram - Oversight - Responsibility - Responsiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Desire to Deliver - Professionalism - Independence - Expertise - Accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coordination
Orientation to counterpart	Respect of the advice and information provided by the staff	Accept political supremacy	Loyalty to commissioner & Respect for advice dg

Box 1 Setting objectives and priorities in the European Commission

In 2000, the Commission acknowledged the need for management focused more closely on results and decided to develop a conceptual framework for *activity-based management*. To that end, the Commission divided up its work into a set of politically meaningful "activities".

This box explains how the Commission's overall strategy is developed, and its objectives defined as part of its annual policy cycle, developing a coherent and organised work programme, and how its *activity-based management* works at the operational level. In practical terms, the Commission's work is planned and reported on in *the following steps of the annual strategic planning and programming, and reporting cycle*.

- Upon entering into office the Commission establishes **its five-year strategic objectives** which would mark its political project over the duration of its term of office.

- The orientation debate held amongst the College of Commissioners initiates the **strategic planning and programming cycle (SPP)** and defines priorities and strategic objectives of the Commission for the following year. The Secretary-General informs the services of the conclusions of the College and services make proposals to convert College orientations into specific operations.

- Based on the orientation debate and the subsequent proposals of the services, the Commission decides upon its **annual policy strategy** which sets out the political priorities for the year to come and orientations for the allocation of human and financial resources. The annual strategy provides the framework for the preliminary draft budget and for the Commission's annual work programme.

- The President of the Commission presents the annual policy strategy to the European Parliament and the Council. The three institutions then engage in a structured dialogue and each Commissioner has a discussion with the relevant Parliamentary committee. The result of this dialogue is a stock taking document which is used to prepare the **Commission work programme** for the following year. The Commission work programme translates policy strategy into a concrete action plan and a set of deliverables.

- Each Commission department (directorate-general) then develops its **annual management plan**. These describe how departments plan their activities and how they contribute to the priorities set by the Commission, including the allocation of human and financial resources to the activities. Since the introduction of activity-based management, these plans have to set clear, specific, measurable and verifiable objectives for each activity as well as indicators for the monitoring and reporting on the progress made and the impact of the activities to the EU citizens.

- At an operational, day-to-day level, the Commission has also introduced an '**agenda planning' system** in order to provide reliable programming of initiatives foreseen for adoption. A forward programming document is updated every month and sent to other EU institutions in order to help them organise their own activities. The rolling programme is accompanied by an execution report.

- A new procedure to assess the impact of a given initiative in the economic, environmental and social area was adopted in 2002. The Commission services prepare an **impact assessment** of all major work programme initiatives. Impact assessment is an aid to political decision, not a substitute for it. It informs decision-makers of the likely impacts of proposals, but it leaves it up to them to take the decisions.

- Once the budgetary year is ending, all directorates-general have to report on the degree of achievement of the objectives that were set in their annual management plans. They establish an **annual activity report**. The Commission collects the main conclusions of the different annual activities reports in a synthesis report which is presented to the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers.

Source: http://ec.europa.eu/atwork/strategy/index_en.htm

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Notes

ⁱ Quoted in EuObserver, 10 October 2006.

ⁱⁱ Quoted in *European Voice*, 19-25 October 2006, p.12.

ⁱⁱⁱ A staff of personally appointed officials--hired and fired by the commissioner, consisting of five to seven advisers, plus a number of clerical staff, which is organizationally separate from the administrative services.

^{iv} The Prodi Commission faced heavy criticism for its lack of coordination and collegiality. Housing commissioners and their cabinets alongside their Services, made communication among commissioners and among cabinets significantly more difficult and was considered as one of the factors contributing to the lack of collegiality in the Prodi Commission (Peterson 2004).