

EVERYDAY COSMOPOLITANISM in the EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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ABSTRACT There is a rich body of literature on the functioning of the European Commission and the profile of its officials in the 1990s and early 2000s. Yet, the empirical evidence on the new generation Commission officials operating in the post-reform Commission bureaucracy is scarce. What kind of individuals end up working for the Commission? How do they think and behave on a daily basis? This article provides an insight into a crucial aspect of the everyday behavior of Commission officials, whether national identity and categorizations play a role in the Commission. The analysis of the functions and meanings of nationality in a multinational context and the ways in which officials deal with nationality provides evidence of cosmopolitan dispositions and practices. In contrast to what has been previously argued in the literature, the empirical findings point to the effect of self-selection, selection, and organizational socialization in establishing cosmopolitanism in the Commission.

KEYWORDS cosmopolitanism, European Commission, nationality, selection, socialization

INTRODUCTION

Textbook introductions to the European Union (EU) begin by referring to the ills of World War II and define one *raison d'être* of the EU as overcoming nationalism within a common cooperation regime. EU governance on the whole and the European Commission as an institution in particular are considered to be the most post-national and supranational of all international regimes. Whereas the member-states may legitimately push for their national interests within the structures of the European

Council, the Commissioners and Commission officials are to represent and defend the interests of all Europe.

Whilst the Commission has to operate independent of national interests, EU member-states still attach a high value to having their nationals represented in the Commission at all levels. They not only want the diversity of Europe to be mirrored throughout the Commission but also want to ensure that “national mentalities, reflexes and interests are represented” (Spence and Stevens 2006: 149) through *their* Commission officials. Member-states thus feel that they are physically and symbolically represented through their Commissioners and officials “who bring ... a baggage of preconceived ideas, outlooks and prejudices, many of them of a specific national nature” (Cockfield 1994: 109). Despite the non-nationalistic vision of its founders, the persistence of these rather subtle effects of nationality in the multinational administration of the Commission have been acknowledged by scholars and practitioners alike (Cini 1996: 125).

Whereas nationality is assumed to have a long-lasting effect on individuals through their national identity, the existing evidence in the literature with respect to socialization in the Commission is ambivalent. Despite the fact that the Commission is seen as a most likely site for socialization due to the intense and long-term exposure of officials to its norms, the socialization capacity of the Commission has been proven to be limited (Hooghe 1999, 2001, 2005): The length of time spent within the Commission does not correlate significantly with changed allegiances, and the effects of international socialization tend to be often weak and secondary to dynamics at the national level.

The predominance of national socialization rests on the assumption that all individuals go through similar life paths and respond in the same way to socialization processes. Yet, the same research on top Commission officials has suggested that most of them are ‘**cosmopolitan**’ – a sizeable minority have studied or worked abroad, were born

into a multinational family or started one (Hooghe 2001). This indicates that at least some Commission officials might have been re-socialized through their exposure to norms other than those of their country of origin.

Social constructivist analyses, for example, have concluded that supranational socialization transforms EU officials (Hermann, Risse and Brewer 2004). This strand of interactionist work on socialization in EU institutions has argued that it is not just the duration or quantity of contact that matters in a causal sense, “equally (or more?) important is the quality of the contact” (Checkel 2001: 8). The constructivist argument rests on the premise that intense exposure to supranational norms leads to the *internalization* of these norms, whereby individuals accept, incorporate, and adopt the values and behavior of the institution out of genuine conviction (as opposed to temporary instrumental reasons).

The ambiguity of the results suggests that whether and how nationality sticks to individuals in a particular context needs to be empirically tested instead of theoretically assumed. Yet empirical evidence as to how cosmopolitan identities are reflected in daily behavior is scarce despite the growing theoretical and normative literature on cosmopolitanism (Turner 2006: 609). This article aims to fill this gap. By studying cosmopolitanism within the context of an international organization, this article offers an account of how cosmopolitans function on a daily basis in the Commission. The analysis results from interview and participant observation data gathered at the Commission in 2005-2006. Whilst offering an insight into everyday cosmopolitanism of EU elites, this article challenges and extends the arguments on selection and socialization processes in the Commission.

CHOOSING AND CHANGING COMMISSION OFFICIALS

While employees arrive at an organization with their “cultural and social baggage obtained from interactions in other social contexts” (Scott 2003: 23), this does not mean that the organization has no control over their values and behavior. Organizations use recruitment policy to filter individuals based on their backgrounds. Most organizations tend to recruit in their own image (Shore 2000: 132).¹ Two factors play a role here (Hooghe 2005: 869):

- *Self-selection*: individuals choose to join an organization they are already supportive of;
- *Selection*: the organization screens recruits for their views.

In the early years of the Commission, the main qualification for becoming an official was to be “pro-European” (Coombes 1970: 142), i.e. to be supportive of the European integration project. Whereas being pro-European is no longer a prerequisite, the Commission still looks for individuals with an international outlook. The Commission describes the desired profile as follows:

- on its personnel selection website: “we are looking for people who have something more than just knowledge and professional skills: the drive to deliver results and the ability to work effectively as part of a multi-cultural team.”²
- on an information brochure: “Adaptability and the taste for working in a multicultural and multilingual environment are key attributes. So is the willingness to become an expatriate for a long period.”³

Even though it is not explicitly stated as a requirement, these descriptions implicitly call for individuals who have experience abroad that proves their capability of functioning in different cultural contexts.

Implicitly then, working for the Commission presumes a certain degree of *cosmopolitanism*, which I take here as “a cultural disposition involving an intellectual and aesthetic stance of ‘openness’ towards peoples, places and experiences from different cultures, especially those from different ‘nations’” (Urry 2000: 7). Instead of antagonism towards the ‘stranger’, cosmopolitanism embraces “the search for, and delight in, the contrasts between societies rather than longing for superiority or for uniformity” (idem). As such, cosmopolitanism refers to an orientation or capacity in individuals (Calhoun 2009: 210). This cosmopolitan expectation is likely to be reflected in the kind of individuals the Commission attracts and selects.

As an organization, the Commission has the power to select as well as to form cosmopolitan officials. Whereas the Commission is dependent on the prior socialization of individuals (i.e. self-selection) for the selection of cosmopolitan officials, once officials are recruited, it has control over the organizational context within which cosmopolitanism can grow on officials and flourish throughout the organization. Nationality may thus lose its salience in a multinational environment if the institutional set up downplays territorial interests and organizes work along the lines of policy areas as in the Commission (Egeberg 2004, 2006a, 2006b; Suvarierol 2007, 2008).⁴ In terms of its formal structures, the Commission applies the norm of multinationality throughout. National diversity is reflected in the overall distribution of officials and across the organizational hierarchy of the Commission (Hooghe 2001, Egeberg 2004). Officials thus get to learn about other nationalities by working together on common policy projects. As a result of this *organizational socialization* process, their perception of nationality acquired through their primary socialization might change, and they might cease thinking in national categories.

Yet, one might also argue that constant exposure to other nationalities might actually reinforce the identification of others as 'nationals'. Demographic attributes like nationality are difficult to deny and easier to assess in comparison to personality and abilities (Pratt 2001: 25). As such, national culture serves as a sort of optical or perceptual illusion which becomes activated by difference (Avruch 1998: 58). The core issue here is not that officials have different cultural backgrounds, which is a given, but that the differences are perceived to influence the behavior of officials from different nationalities (Abélès, Bellier and McDonald 1993: 42, McDonald 2000: 66). As cultural difference is experienced as a daily reality, multinational organizations are ripe grounds for national stereotyping. Neither international organizations like the UN (McLaren 1997) nor European organizations like the ESTEC (European Space and Technology Center) (Zabusky 2000) and the Commission are free from stereotyping (Michelmann 1978, Abélès et. al. 1993, Page 1997, McDonald 2000, De Gruyter 2006). These observations have led scholars to conclude that the convergence that results from a common professional experience reduces national identification to a certain extent and brings distance to relations with the native state (Bellier 1995: 60), but that individuals are still conscious of their differences and sensitivities (Abélès and Bellier 1996: 435).

Do cosmopolitan backgrounds and daily exposure to national diversity make nationality more or less salient and how? What kind of functions and meanings does nationality acquire in a multinational context? These are questions this article addresses by opening the black boxes of cosmopolitanism, nationality, and socialization in the Commission.

MEASURING AND OBSERVING SOCIALIZATION

This study combines 'thin and thick methods'. To begin with, I use quantitative and qualitative data derived from interviewing 82 AD (Administrator)-level Commission officials in April-June 2005 who were working for the 'Social Regulation DGs', Employment, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities; Environment; Health and Consumer Protection; and Justice, Freedom, and Security. As the Commission is organized in terms of policy areas, limiting the population to one policy type controls a part of the variation. Since the EU is considered to be a "regulatory polity" (Majone 1996), 'Social Regulation DGs' are a theoretically relevant choice. Strictly speaking, the quantitative data only offers valid results for these DGs. However, the organizational structure is the same throughout the Commission. Furthermore, the Commission employs a common pool of officials recruited through the central examination (*concours*) and inter-DG mobility is high (Hooghe 2005, Suvarierol 2007). As such, the differences between officials working in different DGs or policy areas in terms of backgrounds and attitudes are minimal.

Methodologically, reducing the respondents' burden is a crucial factor that influences the response rate (Lohr 1999: 261). At the time of sampling, these DGs employed 1100 AD-level officials, more or less equally distributed between the DGs which allowed me to spread respondent burden. The overall response rate was 69%, which is considered to be a very good response rate (Babbie 1992: 267). The item non-response of the questionnaire was very low: Only one official responded only to half of the questions.

The questionnaire began with closed questions concerning the backgrounds of the officials, such as their education, (multinational) family background, past work experience, and length of service in the Commission. The closed questions were

succeeded by open questions which addressed the role of nationality in the Commission. The quantitative data made it possible to discover the overall patterns across the whole group. The open-ended questions generated a rich deposit of native explanations and the reasoning underlying these arguments. I use this material either by referring to repetitive answers or by directly citing officials who used a specific expression that was representative of a particular pattern.

The third method used in this study was participant observation. Whereas interview data provide a snapshot in a given point in time, observation brings a researcher full-time over a lengthy period of time into the places and interactions of the subjects being studied. I gathered participant observation data at the Commission between October 2005-February 2006, during an internship in the Commission at DG Health and Consumer Protection. As an intern, I could experience the Commission on a first-hand basis. This meant that I could carry out tasks comparable to beginning AD-level officials and go through an organizational socialization process as a beginner.

I attended meetings of the Commission, Council working groups, and Parliamentary committees. Within the Commission, I observed meetings of various types involving officials from all hierarchical ranks. Besides the more 'formal' work settings, I observed Commission officials during the coffee breaks and lunches where they were sharing office gossip or talking about mundane subjects unrelated to work. I took note of all instances where nationality and socialization were/were not at play. I present the results in the form of a descriptive narrative in the style of "realist tales" where the focus is on the regular and often-observed activities (See Van Maanen 1988: 45-72).

To pin down everyday cosmopolitanism, I borrow the operationalization of cosmopolitanism offered by Urry (2000: 7-8, emphases in original) that includes cosmopolitan dispositions and practices, which I classify separately as follows:

- cosmopolitan dispositions:

- a *curiosity* about many places, peoples and cultures and at least a rudimentary ability to locate such places and cultures historically, geographically and anthropologically
- *semiotic* skill to be able to interpret images of various others, to see what they are meant to represent, and to know when they are ironic

- cosmopolitan practices:

- an *openness* to other peoples and cultures and a willingness/ability to appreciate some elements of the language/culture of the 'other'
- extensive *mobility* in which people have the right to 'travel' corporeally, imaginatively and virtually and for significant numbers they also have the means to travel
- capacity to *consume* many places and environments en route
- a willingness to take *risks* by virtue of encountering the 'other'
- an ability to '*map*' one's own society and its culture in terms of a historical and geographical knowledge, to have some ability to reflect upon and judge aesthetically between different natures, places and societies.

As we shall see in the analysis of the empirical data, the boundaries between cosmopolitan dispositions and practices are often not that clear-cut. For the sake of clarity, I separate the two discussions in this article. I take *cosmopolitan dispositions* as the characteristics of individuals that are visible or known to the Commission as an employer, such as language skills and experience with other countries and cultures. I treat cosmopolitan dispositions as evidence for self-selection and selection. I take *cosmopolitan practices* as the translation of cosmopolitanism into behavior, whereby living and working with other countries and cultures become a way of life.

COSMOPOLITAN DISPOSITIONS of COMMISSION OFFICIALS

In what follows, I rely predominantly on the quantitative interview data to look for evidence of cosmopolitan dispositions. Where relevant, I supplement it with qualitative interview data. For evidence of cosmopolitan practices, I draw on qualitative interview and participant observation data. Especially observation data offers valuable insights into these practices since it gives actual examples of cosmopolitan behavior.

Multilingualism in the Commission

The Commission presents a microcosm of Europe in terms of the diversity of cultural backgrounds, values, attitudes, and languages. Whereas the UN has 192 member states and six official languages, the EU has 27 member states and 23 official languages. Paradoxically, as the EU has become larger and more official languages have been added, the number of languages actually being used has decreased (Official #82). Globalization has made English the *lingua franca* as a result of which the new generations increasingly learn and speak English as their primary foreign language. This is also reflected in the languages the interviewed officials speak. Table 1 displays the total number of officials that fluently speak the Commission's three official working languages, English, French, and German.

TABLE1: *Popularity of the Official Working Languages (N=82)*

Language	Frequency	Percentage
English	81	98.8%
French	75	91.5%
German	37	45.1%

When we look at these figures, we see that although English is the most popular language (all but one of the interviewed officials speak it), French is still by far the second language. Despite the predominance of English, it is difficult to imagine how a Commission official “could do an effective job without a working knowledge of French” (Hooghe 2001: 170). The language of meetings and conversations constantly shifts from English to French. There is an unwritten convention in the Commission that officials may choose one of these two languages when they take the floor. It may be because they feel more comfortable in English or French, or that they simply continue in the language of the speaker before them.

Constantly shifting languages is rather the norm than the exception in the Commission (See also Abélès et al. 1993: 33-35). In terms of language use, the working environment of the Commission differs noticeably from the Council and Parliament. Unless it is a conference or meeting involving external actors, translation and interpretation is not available in Commission meetings. “Since language tends to go together with national identity, a similar reduction to the use of only a very few languages is more difficult to foresee in the Council.” (Egeberg 2006c: 196-197) For Commission officials, however, language is not a major issue. They are well aware that working for the Commission demands being multilingual. Consequently, language training is offered to officials, varying from crash French courses for new recruits to courses in other European and foreign languages (depending usually on personal and professional needs).

The incentive to learn languages has become even stronger since the personnel reform. Whilst AD-level officials were already required to speak two languages to be recruited, the new Staff Regulation has made the ability to work in a third language a pre-condition for their first promotion.⁵ Indeed, Commission officials are champions of

speaking foreign languages as Table 2 demonstrates. The interviewed officials speak in average 3.63 languages, and the maximum is six languages.

TABLE 2: *Number of Languages (N= 82)*

Number of Languages	Frequency	Percentage
2	9	11%
3	32	39%
4	25	30.5%
5	12	14.6%
6	4	4.9%
Mean= 3.63	Median= 3.5	Mode= 3

This multilingualism makes the study of how EU officials deal with this complexity of a multilingual bureaucracy a worthwhile endeavor (Loos 2000: 145), not the least because the multiplicity of languages has been identified as a factor that creates “distinctive linguistic barriers to communication within EU organizations” (Page 1997: 41). Indeed, officials told anecdotes on misunderstandings due to language (Officials #46, #95) and emphasized the extent to which it is important to make oneself understood in such a multilingual environment (Official #97). To deal with misunderstandings in a language other than their mother tongue, Commission officials adopt a flexible and relaxed approach to language (Abélès et al. 1993: 33).

You have to use a standard language and accept a standard answer and [not] be too sensitive to politeness rules or protocol rules. (Official #46)

Sometimes we receive an e-mail which can [sound] a little bit rude or too direct. In fact you should always reflect if this is his or her mother tongue ... writing in another language is not ... so easy like writing in your ... mother tongue... (Official #95)

Such an approach takes account of the fact that the other person might not have meant to be rude and is helpful in avoiding relationship problems resulting from miscommunication.

Miscommunications do occur, however, and nationality or culture is sometimes used to explain incomprehensible behavior, especially when the behavior tends to be negative. The mistake is then dismissed or excused, thinking it might be due to cultural differences. North and South are also terms that are often used to differentiate people in such occasions, as illustrated by the following incident:

(Trying to make sense of an event involving direct criticism) 'You were too direct. This is normal for a North European but not for a South European. She was offended by your criticism, but she would not confront you with it because she is from a Southern culture.'

This example demonstrates how cultural differences come to be accepted as a cause of misunderstandings or miscommunications. It appears that at times of crises, Commission officials fall back on nationality as a relevant category to make sense out of the insensible. As such, the "cultural clashes" that occur from time to time are transformed from negative to neutral or positive experiences, mainly by not being offended by the other's behavior.

Cosmopolitan backgrounds

The foregoing analysis provides evidence of the semiotic skills of Commission officials. To find out the extent to which Commission officials are a cosmopolitan crowd, I

gathered a variety of other personal background details: whether officials had studied, lived, or worked abroad, whether they had been raised in a multinational family, whether they had a partner of a different nationality, etc.⁶ I summarize the responses to these questions below in Table 3.

TABLE 3: *Multinational Experience*

Type Experience	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Family</i>		
Raised in a multinational family (N=82)	7	8.5%
Partner of a different nationality (N=81)	31	38.3%
Partner working at the Commission (N=81)	12	14.8%
<i>Experience Abroad Prior to Joining the Commission</i>		
Lived abroad (N=81)	56	69.1%
Studied abroad (N=82)	38	46.3%
<i>Brussels/EU-related Experience Prior to Joining the Commission</i>		
Studied at the College of Europe (N=82)	7	8.5%
Traineeship at an EU institution (N=82)	22	26.8%
Worked in Brussels (N=82)	14	17.1%

69.1% of the interviewed officials have lived abroad before coming to work for the Commission, on an average of 2.3 years. For 46.3% of them, this experience abroad involved also their studies, e.g. through the Erasmus exchange program. Furthermore, 38.3% have partners with another nationality, and 8.5% have grown up in a multinational family. Having a multinational relationship reinforces the phenomenon of “multiple

loyalties” and “cosmopolitan identities” (Cailliez 2004: 57-59) as it implies having a close affinity with another culture. Officials are thus not only used to *working* in a multinational environment but also to *living* in a multinational environment.

All the above indicators point strongly to a cosmopolitan elite.⁷ Commission officials are not an average crowd. They are individuals who usually have previous experience with various cultures. This affects how they relate to other cultures. As one of the officials expressed, “Commission officials have a multicultural background. They have more experience in languages and a capability to approach other cultures in a better way and to understand different cultural backgrounds” (Official #118). Commission officials are thus in many ways “very atypical of their cultures of origin.... Often you have mixed couples, you have people who have traveled all over the world and end up all together in the funny Brussels place.” (Official #64)

The empirical data hence lead me to conclude that self-selection and selection play a strong and mutually reinforcing role in the Commission: Cosmopolitans want to work for the Commission, and the Commission chooses amongst the cosmopolitans who apply to work for it. Indeed, getting a job at the Commission has increasingly become a matter of pursuing a pre-socialization path in order to build up an “international CV”. Studying at the College of Europe (8.5%) and/or doing a traineeship at the EU institutions (26.8%) are the main pillars of this pre-socialization track. During their studies or traineeships, prospective EU officials get a taste of functioning in a multicultural environment. In that sense, the Commission benefits from the socialization effects of other initial international experiences.

Whereas being ‘pro-European’ has been taken as an indicator of selective recruitment in previous research (Hooghe 2005), I claim that for the new generation of Commission officials it might be the willingness to work and live in a cosmopolitan

environment that serves as a more important attraction and selection factor. Accordingly, nowadays cosmopolitanism in the shape of a taste for and affinity with international values and norms may potentially weigh more heavily than the criterion of being pro-European. This is not to say that the new generation of Commission officials is not pro-European, but that it may no longer be the primary motivation factor.⁸ Whereas pro-European officials are likely to be cosmopolitans at the same time, a cosmopolitan orientation does not necessarily mean that an official wants more European integration at all costs and all the time. Rather than participating in a 'political construction', the new generation also tends to be more motivated by the material conditions offered by the Commission, namely the high salary, stable employment, and the opportunities for valuable and fascinating administrative work (Spence and Stevens 2006: 184).⁹

COSMOPOLITAN PRACTICES of COMMISSION OFFICIALS

Even for those who do not possess strong cosmopolitan dispositions or international CVs, the Commission offers an organizational context in which the significance of nationality is gradually transformed.¹⁰ In this section, I rely on my observations in the Commission to explain the socialization processes through which nationality *becomes* less relevant for Commission officials in their daily working environment. This allows me to describe how Commission officials deal with nationality and the meaning nationality takes in their multinational context.

Nationality for cosmopolitans

Even though nationality formally plays no role in the Commission, it has been argued that informally, nationality is widely discussed and accepted as an important factor (Spence and Stevens 2006: 173). That is why it is important not only to rely on interview

accounts on nationality, but to observe its role as a part of daily reality in the Commission. When and how is nationality an issue if at all? How do cosmopolitans deal with nationality on a daily basis? What is the place of nationality in the cosmopolitan talk and life?

To begin with, five-months of observation has led me to conclude that talking *about* nationality was rather an exception than a rule since I could count the times that nationality or culture were mentioned at all in the context of work. Therefore, I looked into these exceptional cases and identified two functions of nationality in the daily cosmopolitan scene:

- *Nationality as small talk:*

Nationality becomes visible during the breaks within working hours when Commission officials socialize with their unit colleagues and/or compatriots. Whilst having coffee with colleagues from the unit, the subject often revolves around different national traditions. Anthropologist Stacia E. Zabusky observed the same phenomenon at the European agency ESTEC, where talking about national and cultural differences was part of an effort to make connections:

People, in exchanging information about national and cultural differences, came to share the same general, if superficial, knowledge about each other, incorporating it into their own expertise, as it were, on 'nationalities'.... In a sense, it was not so much the contrasts which emerged as significant, but instead the experience of talking together about the same things which was the pre-eminent experience of such conversations 'about' nationality. Furthermore, people were acutely aware that these kinds of conversations never happened 'at home', where everyone was 'the same' (Zabusky 2000: 194).

As such, speaking of different countries and cultures forms a bond between the officials as part of a cosmopolitan small talk.

At informal occasions, I also encountered other instances of Commission small talk, such as sharing travel information about different countries.¹¹ Officials typically gave each other tips and shared their travelling experiences. Travelling and cultural exchanges and form a crucial part of the cosmopolitan life styles of Commission officials, who frequently go for short weekend trips. Anyone who has experienced Brussels on a Friday afternoon or Monday morning will notice officials with trolleys heading towards or coming back from their destination. This is the cosmopolitanist motto 'Been there, done that' (cited in Calhoun 2009: 217) in action.

- Nationality as a joke:

Commission officials "play with stereotypes" (Abélès et al. 1993: 49). During meetings, jokes on nationalities are popular joke material. Especially the British and the French tend to tease each other using stereotypes. Such nationality jokes help to ease the atmosphere and to laugh together. Within the unit, nationality jokes are made or forwarded in mails which are not related to work.

(Referring to the fact that a Brit was organizing the unit Christmas lunch) 'The Christmas lunch should be ok since he is just organizing and not cooking it.'

Coffee breaks with colleagues are equally occasions for sharing some stereotypes in each country about other countries or making fun of each other based on nationality.

(Speaking about nicknames given to other nationalities in different countries)

The British – roast beef

The French – froggies

The Germans – Krauts

'Isn't it funny that they're all about food?'

As the examples above illustrate, nationality jokes form a part in the Commission's sense of humor. Just like talking about different nationalities during the breaks, what makes joking with nationality noteworthy in the context of the Commission is that these are moments to share and exchange nationality-based humor with each other. As such, nationality jokes form a social bond between Commission officials. Whereas a monocultural context allows for multiple types or subjects of humor, a multicultural context limits the options available since some types of humor are not always translatable. Joking about nationalities is thus a kind of humor officials can relate to the most due to their daily experience with national diversity.

Becoming cosmopolitans

The foregoing paragraphs show how nationality is present as a part of daily reality in a multinational workplace. These representations of nationality offer a view of the visible role of nationality. As such, they constitute the daily cosmopolitan scene. Yet cosmopolitanism goes deeper. To explore the internalization of cosmopolitan values, we need to look into organizational socialization processes through which the way officials perceive and act upon nationality have been transformed.

The Commission facilitates organizational socialization through intercultural training and language courses (Official #92). Yet, learning to work with diversity happens effectively at the work floor. The officials admit that it takes some time to learn to take stereotypical remarks as a joke and not to be offended easily by the behavior of others since this behavior might be normal in another cultural context. The learning process begins with learning about other cultures beyond the stereotypes.

In the end, it doesn't depend on nationality. I have found outspoken Nordics and distant Italians. As you know each other better, you realize that ... very little distinct things remain. (Official #62)

Am I stereotypically Irish? Are the Italians typically Italians? I find not.... I have a number of German colleagues. They're all individuals. If they stood in front of you and they spoke with an Italian accent and if you didn't know what their names were, I wouldn't think they're Germans because they don't match with my stereotypes of what a German person is. (Official #90)

When you start to get to know and understand the differences, you can take the differences into account in your relationships and contacts (Officials #20, #35, #47, #54, #78, #97). Taking the differences into account often means adapting yourself to the other, for instance, by adjusting your speed or style of speaking (Officials #54, #97).

In fact, this process of learning and changing by working in a multinational environment is seen as one of the best aspects of working in the Commission: "when you come to the Commission, you have to adapt to other cultures. You do change. That's one of the best things about being a European official" (Official #3). This process of socialization (or "assimilation" as Official #72 called it) changes Commission officials: "The Commission integrates people so that people will never be the same after five years.... You just enjoy and have fun with the differences. Once you learn the rules, you can enjoy it. The Commission gives you the opportunity to develop this skill. You feel comfortable in a different environment" (Official #22). As a result, not only do officials begin to view their own cultures from another perspective, but they also become less representative of their national cultures (Officials #17, #83).

People are not typical of their nationalities because once you are here and you meet all the nationalities, you realize that you are not the center of the world in the end. I

think it is typical ... if you stay in your country, that you think you are the best, you are the prettiest. You come to Brussels; you have the chance to meet all these nationalities, to change, to see that each one of them brings in something So in the end it is a mix and I believe that after some time ... you cannot say that you are typically French or typically British or typically Spanish because you blend.... It is enriching to be here, very enriching because you learn from each nationality. I think that this is the reason why we stay here.... If you stay in your region or in your ministry, you don't have this possibility to enrich yourself with all these contacts. And that's fabulous.... You become perhaps more humble... The French still have a mentality, ... we always say that we are the best and the prettiest, but well, when you are in Brussels, no: We are not the best. We are not the prettiest. [Author's translation from French] (Official #17)

As this excerpt manifests, the daily experience of working in a multinational organization has a deep effect on the perceptions and behavior of Commission officials. Their conceptions of the Self and the Other undergo a transformation process which Gerard Delanty calls the "cosmopolitan imagination" (Delanty 2006: 37). Having undergone this transformation, embracing the core supranational ideals behind the European integration project is not a big leap. By practicing everyday cosmopolitanism, officials can easily internalize the EU motto of 'unity in diversity'.

After the initial period of socialization at the Commission, even the multinational environment becomes a banality. Working day in, day out at the Commission means that it becomes an organization as any other where officials stop thinking of their colleagues as Germans or French but just see them as colleagues (Abélès et al. 1993: 49, Bellier 1995: 57, Suvarierol 2007: 137). It becomes such a taken-for-granted scene that nationality fades away as a relevant category: "In the Commission, you do not pay attention to where

people come from. You look at expertise and character. You take everyone as an individual.” (Official #12)

Whereas nationality is absent in the substance of work, it is at times present during interpersonal moments. Interestingly, at such moments the nation is presented in an idealized form (as in talking about national traditions) or stereotypical form (as in nationality jokes). The emphasis, however, is not on differences as creating a distance between individuals but rather on differences as the foundations of a shared identity. As such, everyday cosmopolitanism in the Commission manifests itself as “being at home with diversity” (Calhoun 2009: 210).

DISCUSSION

Primary socialization theories rest on the premise that the assumptions learned in one’s childhood and youth from their family and during their formative schooling years are so deep-seated that it is difficult, if not impossible, to unlearn them (Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman 1981: 200, Peters 1989: 39, Avruch 1998: 46, Hooghe 2005: 880). Furthermore, primary socialization is taken to be located at the national level, particularly in the elements of culture acquired through growing up in a particular country, which are common to the members of a nation (Hofstede 1991: 262, Sirmon and Lane 2004: 309). Following this *methodological nationalism*, the effects of nationality are theorized to remain almost unchanged, especially at the level of values.

Yet, methodological nationalism fails to account for the current state of global affairs: “As more processes show less regard for state boundaries – people shop internationally, work internationally, love internationally, marry internationally, research internationally, grow up and are educated internationally (that is, multi-lingually), live and think transnationally, that is, combine multiple loyalties and identities in their lives –

the paradigm of societies organized within the framework of the nation-state inevitably loses contact with reality" (Beck 2000: 80). *Methodological cosmopolitanism*, on the other hand, allows for both/and identities (Beck and Sznaider 2006: 14) which do not assume the predominance of the national, European, or the global, but looks instead to the contexts and the ways in which different identities are enacted. These both/and identity constellations are difficult to capture with quantitative equations which aim to break down reality to independent variables which are tested against each other. Qualitative methods are essential in unpacking processes through which actors internalize and synthesize national and cosmopolitan values that need not be conceptualized as incompatible but complementary or nested layers (See also the "marble cake model" of Risse 2004). The first sites to apply cosmopolitan logics to research are obviously international organizations, where hybridization, i.e. the combination and interaction of national and international identities (Johnston 2005: 1027), and everyday cosmopolitanism are out there to observe and to analyze.

Indeed, Commission officials seem to be the walking evidence of Urry's (2000) operationalization of cosmopolitanism with their cosmopolitan dispositions and cosmopolitan practices. Through their international experience prior to working at the Commission, Commission officials are already not typical representatives of their national cultures when they arrive at the Commission and they become less so by being exposed to colleagues of all nationalities on a daily basis. In this sense, one can argue that the predominance of national norms presupposes individuals who have been raised in a 'mono-national' environment. Individuals who have been exposed to other cultures through their families and/or education do not fit into the expectations of the primary national socialization scheme.

The previous empirical findings with regard to the effect of socialization in the Commission have been ambivalent. Specifically, whereas supranational socialization variables fail in quantitative analyzes explaining the policy preferences (Hooghe 1999, 2001, 2005) of Commission officials, qualitative research focusing on the identities of EU officials (Hermann et al. 2004) has concluded that officials internalize the values of EU institutions they work for, which is reflected in their daily behavior.

This article supports and extends the findings of previous qualitative research on socialization within EU institutions. The qualitative accounts and participant observation of the Commission officials point to a double effect of socialization, *both* before their time in the Commission in terms of self-selection and selection through international experience and *during* their time in the Commission in terms of organizational socialization through continuous daily exposure to the multinational environment of the Commission.

Given this cosmopolitan population, one might even argue that there is not much need for organizational socialization since these individuals are already pre-socialized. They already have the tools to deal with national differences. Still, the length of service in the Commission does make a difference in terms of increasing the amount of exposure to different cultures and cosmopolitan values on a daily basis. Length of service translates into learning to work with other cultures to the point that nationality becomes less relevant and national differences become a factor that binds Commission officials.

The divergence in conclusions might partly stem from generational difference. Whereas Hooghe's research (1999, 2001, 2005) only focuses on the senior officials of the Commission, this research included Commission officials of all ranks in the range of AD-level officials. Nowadays, not only is the Commission predominantly populated by officials who have mostly grown up in an increasingly globalized world, but relatively

few officials have had an opportunity to acquire much experience at their national administration (Egeberg 2002: 17) which according to Hooghe (1999, 2001, 2005) is an important factor that makes an official sensitive to national interests.

Alternatively, the discrepancy may lie in the different understandings and interpretations of supranationalism. In Hooghe's interpretation, the length of service works rather contrary to the supranational norms of the Commission Hooghe (1999) seems to equate 'being responsive to nationality' as adhering to the norm of intergovernmentalism. However, taking all national positions into account and finding the least common denominator across Europe is one of the core tasks of the Commission, as the independent supranational EU institution that defends the overarching European interests. In this respect, supranationalism does not exclude keeping an eye on national specificities in order to find the best approach and to arrive at an acceptable solution for all parties involved.

Previously, all references made by respondents in open interview items to nationality have often been taken as proof of the pervasiveness of national identities. As this article has shown, nationality can take different and multiple meanings in a particular organizational setting that are difficult to capture only through interviews. Though it is a time-consuming research method, participant observation has a lot to contribute to socialization research that aims at observing change processes. The essential challenge for socialization research lies in developing better indicators and research designs to capture the effects of different types of socialization. There is also a need for more longitudinal studies to measure the change in values and perceptions as a result of learning. Repeating this study on other EU institutions or international organizations such as the UN or WTO (World Trade Organization) would also contribute to finding out

how socialization mechanisms function and how cosmopolitanism is enacted in comparable organizations.

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NOTES

¹ In human resource management, this process is described by the *Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) Theory* (Schneider 1987). The ASA theory argues that organizations are occupied by people who are similar to each other. The homogeneity results from the three phases of the ASA cycle: “organizations *attract* people to them who share their values. Organizations *select* those people who share their values. And finally, there is *attrition* from those people who find they do not share the organization’s values (i.e. they chose to leave)” (Billsberry 2004: 1).

² Quoted from http://europa.eu/epso/discover/looking_for/index_en.htm, consulted on 1 December 2009.

³ European Communities, 2005, *Serving the People of Europe: What the European Union Does for You*, p.8.

⁴ By contrast, the Council and its related structures are organized primarily according to a territorial logic (and secondarily sectoral logic) whereby it is legitimate to defend national interests. Yet socialization research on the Council is equally ambiguous. Whereas quantitative research has concluded that national socialization shapes the behavior of officials in working groups (Beyers 2005), qualitative research on COREPER participants (Lewis 2005) has provided evidence for supranational socialization working hand in hand with national role conceptions.

⁵ European Communities, 2004, *Staff Regulations of Officials of the European Communities and Conditions of Employment of Other Servants of the European Communities*, Article 45/2.

⁶ I would like to thank all the Commission officials I interviewed for providing me information on these personal details.

⁷ As Cris Shore also notes, “‘cosmopolitan’ in the context of the Commission means ‘multinational’ rather than multiracial.... Most officials are white, Caucasian and middle-class and the representation of ethnic minorities within the EU civil service is not an issue given any weight” (Shore 2000: 192). Amongst my respondents, there was only one official had a minority background.

⁸ I have not openly asked officials their reasons for joining the Commission. Still, even though the respondents referred to the cosmopolitan backgrounds of officials, they did not refer to the ‘European ideal’ or to being pro-European integration.

⁹ Presumably, this is a factor that plays a relatively larger role for officials from Eastern Europe, since a comparative civil service career at the home country is financially less rewarding.

¹⁰ Seconded national experts who only work temporarily for the Commission also change (Official #22). The research of Trondal, Van den Berg and Suvarierol (2008) comparing the loyalties of former and current SNEs has shown that their allegiance to the Commission is temporary whereas the allegiance to the EU tends to be long-lasting. The attitudinal change happens thus at a more generic level.

¹¹ Even though Commission officials enjoy the unique multicultural context they find themselves in (Official #10), having coffee, lunch or an after-work drink with a compatriot is also a welcome break – a break from the constant shift between languages and from having to explain national idiosyncrasies. As such, sharing the same nationality is a way of avoiding nationality small talk.

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