**The Organizational Dimension of Differentiated Europeanization**

Continuity and change in an affiliated state administration

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*First draft, please do not quote*

*Paper prepared for the EUSA Fifteenth Biennial Conference, May 4-6, 2017, Miami Florida*

**Abstract**

This paper is premised on the assumption that organizational characteristics constitute a decisive factor in public governance. The assumption is illuminated by examining in what ways organizational factors affect how the European Union (EU) “hits” public governance inside government ministries. Acknowledging that most studies have focused on the effect of EU-level variables*,* this paper analyses how domestic-level variables affect ministry officials´ handling of EU-related work. In doing so, the paper contributes to a growing literature on differentiated European integration by presenting findings from a study on ministerial officials in an affiliated state - Norway. Benefiting from three large-N surveys (total N=5693), the paper examines continuity and change in how the EU ‘hits’ ministerial governance across two decades (1996-2016). The paper shows that even in formally non-member states ministerial officials have become tightly interwoven and affected by EU’s multi-level administrative system.

**Introduction**

Two decades of EU integration research have documented a densely interlocked European executive order (e.g. Bauer and Trondal 2015; Beyer 2017; Graziano and Vink 2007; Hanf and Soetendorp 1998; Hèretier et al. 2001; Knill 2001; Kassim et al. 2000; Laffan 2016; Olsen 2010; Trondal 2010). Processes of European integration and national adaptation have become two sides of the same coin and rendered the EU membership vs. non-membership dichotomy increasingly obsolete. States, institutions and decision-makers have become embedded in a differentiated institutional architecture. In effect, essential parameters of public governance - also inside formally non-member states of the EU - have become both tightly interconnected with EU institutions and governance processes, as well as profoundly transformed by this. Moreover, “Brexit” has reminded practitioners and observers that an EU characterized by differentiated forms of association is likely to remain a core feature of European integration in the years to come. This study contributes to this research with a comprehensive survey on how EU institutions and governance processes ‘hit’ public governance within the core-executive branch of a state closely affiliated to the EU - Norway. The paper shows that even in formally non-member states ministerial officials have become tightly interwoven and affected by EU’s multi-level administrative system over two decades (1996-2016).

Studies of multilevel administrative systems (MLA) show that the multilevel administrative system of the EU reorganizes and re-arrange power across levels of governance and territorial boundaries (Bauer and Trondal 2015). On the one hand, supranational institutions are the primary platform for European policies, and on the other hand, national institutions operate at the intersection between European and national concerns and agendas. Studies also suggest that the integrated European administrative system is conditioned by certain organizational traits, such as the emancipation of a strong European executive centre (the European Commission) and domestic fragmentation of state administrations (Egeberg 2012). Entangling administrative interdependencies and interaction has contributed to an understanding of how and under what conditions interests and agendas are forged and materialized at the European and at the national level. This has added new insights to the question of political control on national administrations and the inherent balance of power within state administrations.

Central to this paper are the enduring implications of organization on public governance processes. The paper analyses the filtering effect of organizational variables at the domestic level, more specifically, how organizational factors within central administrations bias how the EU is ‘received’ within nation states. The paper also contributes to research on differentiated integration by gauging how EU institutions affect public governance in an affiliated state (Norway) *over time*. Norway’s close ties to the EU imply constant supranational pressures on public governance inside the Norwegian central administration. Studies have found that although formal political representation and influence remain at a minimum given the context of Norway’s affiliated status to the EU, the nature of the multilevel administrative system does however significantly challenge conventional patterns of state-centric control also of the Norwegian central administration (e.g. Egeberg and Trondal 2015) and thus impels the question of the EU’s role in the national politico-administrative nexus. Considering Norway as a least-likely case of how the EU ‘hits’ domestic public governance, the paper offers novel and comprehensive data and robust probes on the EU-effect over time and also on how it is organizationally conditioned at domestic level. The data consists of questionnaire surveys among ministerial officials (N=5693) from all Norwegian ministries at three points in time (1996, 2006, 2016).

The ambitions of the study are threefold: Firstly, it seeks to outline an organizational explanation to account for how public governance is biased by domestic-level organizational factors in general and more specifically how ministerial officials´ handling of EU-related work is organizationally contingent. Secondly, it offers it offers a study amongst national civil servants in a formally non-member state. Finally, it aims at drawing some conclusions on the effects *over time*. It is assumed that if organizational structures remain relatively constant so would decision-making behaviour and processes. The paper is presented as follows: The next section outlines how an organizational perspective may account for variations in domestic adaption to the EU. This section offers the core idea of organizational theory and outlines seven propositions for study. The next section presents the data and methodology succeeded by a presentation and discussion of empirical findings. This latter section proceeds in two steps. The first step outlines the Norwegian ministerial apparatus and Norway’s form of affiliation with the EU. The second step presents and analyses how this associated status affects governance processes among ministerial officials. The paper concludes with key findings as well as suggestions for future research.

**Theoretical framework: Implications of organizational factors**

This section firstly outlines core assumptions of an organizational approach and secondly specifies propositions for study. The theoretical framework is grounded on the assumption that organizational characteristics may explain *how* the domestic level ‘adopts’ the EU (Egeberg et al. 2016). Public administration literature has, however, largely neglected how organization at one level of governance may *bias or* ‘lock in’ how public policy is produced at another level and/or *across* levels (Egeberg and Trondal 2015; Trondal and Bauer 2017). This suggests that in order to understand public governance, one must also understand how organizations at different levels fit together and how change in one institution is linked to change in others (Olsen 2009: 24). As regards time it may thus be inferred that variation in organizational variables over time may induce interrelated changes in how the EU affects governance process in national central administrations.

An organizational approach posits that organizational factors create systematic bias in human behaviour and organizational patterns by directing attention locally and thus towards certain problems and solutions, i.e. make certain outcomes more likely than another (e.g. Gulick 1937). Organizational factors include structure, demography and locus (Egeberg 2012). This study focuses on the implications of organizational structure. There are two main reasons for choosing organizational *structure*:

* A profuse amount of empirical studies demonstrates the strong impact of organization structure on decision-making behaviour (e.g. Lægreid and Christensen 2006; Trondal 2006; Egeberg et al. 2016).
* Organization structure, compared to other factors that might intervene in the policy process, is likely to be more amendable to deliberate change and may thus be an important design instrument in the policy process (Egeberg et. al 2016).

An organization structure is a normative structure composed of rules and roles specifying who is expected to what, when, and how (Scott 1981). It suggests how roles, power and responsibilities are distributed, controlled and coordinated. It influences decision-making behaviour by providing individuals with ‘a systematic and predictable selection of problems, solutions and choice opportunities’ (March and Olsen 1976). Whilst formal structure does not necessarily predict nor determine actual decision-making behaviour, it does however make some choices become more *likely* than others (e.g. Egeberg and Trondal 2016). This entails that organizational factors do not impact *directly* on society; rather, they have an indirect effect by influencing the policy process. Bounded rationality (Simon 1958) is one of three key mechanisms that connect role expectations to actual behaviour; the organizational structure helps simply actors’ cognitive worlds by directing attention towards a selection of possible problems and solutions and ways to connect them. This concept holds that decision-makers operate under three inescapable limitations: (i) limited information in regards to possible solutions and alternatives, (ii) limited cognitive capacity to evaluate and process information, and (iii) limited time to make decision. Consequently, actors opt for a selection of satisfactory alternatives instead of an optimal one and often turn to their immediate surroundings and readily available data and knowledge to find suitable solutions. The second mechanism, the logic of appropriateness, views human action as driven by internalized perceptions of what is socially defined as appropriate (March and Olsen 1989). Lastly, actors may find that rule and role compliance is in accordance with their own self-interest. Organizations are seen as incentive systems that administer rewards and punishments (e.g. Ostrom and Ostrom 2015).

Though the majority of literature has emphasized how EU-level variables systematically affect national administrations, the line of reasoning outlined above also suggests that structural characteristics *within* central administrations bias how the EU ´hits´ domestic government institutions. This section focuses on the following three structural variables: horizontal specialization, vertical specialization and organizational affiliations.

*Horizontal specialization*

Horizontal specialization refers to how tasks are divided horizontally *within and between* organizations. In *Notes on the Theory of Organization* (1937)Luther Gulick contemplated four fundamental principles of horizontal specialization, namely specialization according to (i) territory, (ii) sector/purpose, (iii) function/process and (iv) clientele. Gulick also emphasized the dynamic relationship between specialization and coordination; areas that are encompassed by the same organizational unit are more likely to be coordinated than those belonging to different units. In the same vein, cleavages of conflict were assumed to reflect organizational specialization. For example, specialization according to purpose is likely to focus attention along sectoral lines of cooperation and conflict, as well as foster policy consistency within its respected field. We might thus expect that officials that are embedded in organizations that are primarily specialized by purpose would coordinate more strongly within their respective policy domains than across these domains. In the case of government ministries, it might thus be expected that officials in sector ministries report stronger intra-ministerial coordination than inter-ministerial coordination.

Though transnational cooperation on issue-specific tasks and practices has existed for decades, the EU executive centre has emerged as a more demanding player within regulatory networking over the past decades (e.g. Majone 1996; Dehousse 1997; Levi-Faur 2011; Egeberg and Trondal 2015; Joosen and Brandsma 2017). Essentially, the executive centre at EU-level (concentrated at the Commission and EU agencies (e.g. Bauer and Trondal 2015; Egeberg 2006)) – is largely specialized according to purpose (sector) and function (process), largely similarly to national administrations. This type of organizational compatibility is expected to facilitate sectoral allegiances and cooperation *across* levels of governance. Organizations that are specialized according to similar organizational principles may align more easily across levels of governance than those institutions that are organized according to different principles (e.g. Martens 2010: 13). Hence, the impact arising from organizational principles at one level of governance may be conditioned by the degree of organizational compatibility across levels (e.g. Cowles et. al 2001; Knill and Lehmkuhl 1999; March and Olsen 1995). ´The underlying assumption is that actors are more likely to integrate and play specific roles when these roles are “compatible with their social conceptions of themselves”, and that roles and modes of behaviour may be strengthened and mutually reinforced “as a result of having compatible institutional arrangements”´ (Martens 2010: 13).

Commission DGs and their system of expert committees are largely organized similarly (by purpose) as domestic sector ministries. By contrast domestic ministries of foreign affairs (MFA) are mainly specialized according to territory and thus organizationally compatible to the core structure of the Council of Ministers and the working groups. Following the abovementioned line of reasoning, this observation suggests that domestic sector ministries are likely to alliance and interact more with the Commission DGs than with the Council structure. Additionally, the continuous expansion of scope and content in the EEA agreement (from 1994 onwards) gives reasons to believe this pattern of interaction has, if anything, expanded in parallel.

Moreover, horizontal specialization of organization influences the task profile of organizations and their staff. We may predict that national civil servants that have a task profile that parallels that of Commission DGs are likely to be more affected and involved in EU-related work generally than national civil servants with an incompatible task profile. Noticing that the task profile of Commission DGs is largely regulatory, we may assume that national civil servants with a similar task profile are likely to be more strongly affected by EU institutions and processes than officials with tasks such as budgeting, administration, and the like. The following propositions may be derived:

*P1*: Ministry officials in sector ministries (as compared to officials from ministries of foreign affairs) are more likely to interact with the Commission than with other EU institutions.

*P2*: Ministry officials involved in regulatory tasks are more likely to have frequent interaction with the EU institutions than ministry officials with different task profiles.

*P3*: Coordination of EU-related work is relatively lower *between* than *within* ministries.

*Vertical specialization*

Vertical specialization denotes division of responsibility and labour *within and between* levels of authority. Recent decades have witnessed extensive reform efforts within both domestic and European administrative apparatus. The New Public Management (NPM) wave that swept across OECD states during the 1980s - and 90s made pleas for greater autonomy, fragmentation and proliferation of public administration. As a result, vertical specialization in the form of structural devolution became a major reform trend across Europe (in organizational terms: inter-organizational vertical specialization). This led to greater degrees of autonomy for agencies as well as the establishment of several new independent agencies at both the national and the European level (e.g. Lægreid et al. 2010; Bezes et al. 2013). A decisive feature in the organizational constellation of government agencies is the establishment at arm’s lengthfrom their parent ministries/DGs. This ensures that agencies are able to operate relatively insulted from political steering, thereby underpinning the importance of expertise and professional concerns. Yet, for national agencies this also makes them organizationally exposed to ‘capture’ from EU-level institutions and processes (Egeberg and Trondal 2015). Contrary to national agencies, ministries are organizationally more exposed to direct political guidance and control. Proximity to political leadership significantly reduces ambiguities stemming from interpretive leeway in task execution (Egeberg and Trondal 2009b) and organizationally ‘blocks’ them from ‘capture’ from EU-level institutions and processes.

Intra-organizational vertical specialization may be measured by official’s rank within their respective ministry. Various studies show that position matter, for example that top-ranked staff identify more broadly with organizations as whole than staff located at lower echelons. Additionally, these officials are exposed to a broader range of information than lower level staff and thus may be more attentive to a broader organizational ´perspective´ than lower ranked personnel. Higher ranked staff in both ministries and subordinated agencies is also shown to be more attentive to political signals than lower ranked personnel (e.g. Egeberg and Sætren 1999; Christensen and Lægreid 2009). It follows that government officials with lower ranks are more loosely coupled to the political leadership and have a local perspective on task execution compared to higher ranked staff. This has one important contiguous implication: a relative degree of insulation from political leadership makes lower-ranked officials more eligible receivers of impulses from EU-level institutions and processes. The following propositions may be derived:

*P4*: Ministerial officials at higher ranks are less likely to interact with EU institutions than ministerial officials at lower ranks.

*P5*: Lower ranked ministerial officials are less likely to be coordinated and mandated in their EU work than higher ranked ministerial officials.

*Organizational affiliation*

The final organizational factor considered is organizational affiliation. A ‘primary structure’ can be defined as the structure to which participants are expected to devote most of their loyalty, time and energy. A typical example would be a bureaucratic unit like a ministry. A ‘secondary structure’ can be defined as the structure to which participants are expected to be part-timers. It follows that secondary structures cannot be expected to shape actors’ decision behaviour to the same extent as primary structures do. Secondary structures include collegial bodies, committees and networks, and also EU-level institutions for national ministerial officials. The European multilevel administrative system is comprised of a set of inter-connected organizations at different levels of authority. Ministerial officials that operate within this frame will be exposed to several behavioural premises from their primary and secondary affiliations. Although it is assumed that decision-making behaviour is a result of both primary *and* secondary affiliations (Egeberg and Trondal 2015), a *logic of primacy* suggests that the primary affiliation is likely to affect behaviour more extensively than the secondary (March 1994). ‘The organizing principle of a political system is the allocation of scarce resources in the face of conflict of interest’ (March and Olsen 1984: 741). The following propositions may be derived:

*P6*: When taking part of both primary and secondary structures, ministerial officials are likely to consider signals from both structures, but most strongly from primary structures.

*P7*: When in conflict, ministerial officials are more likely to emphasise signals from their primary affiliation than from secondary affiliations.

**Table 1 Summary of propositions**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Horizontal specialization | *P1*: Ministry officials in sector ministries (as compared to officials from ministries of foreign affairs) are more likely to interact with the Commission than with other EU institutions. |
| *P2*: Ministry officials involved in regulatory tasks are more likely to have frequent interaction with the EU institutions than ministry officials with different task profiles. |
| *P3*: Coordination of EU-related work is relatively lower *between* than *within* ministries. |
| Vertical specialization | *P4*: Ministerial officials at higher ranks are less likely to interact with EU institutions than ministerial officials at lower ranks. |
| *P5*: Lower ranked ministerial officials are less likely to be coordinated and mandated in their EU work than higher ranked ministerial officials. |
| Organizational affiliation | *P6*: When taking part of both primary and secondary structures, ministerial officials are likely to consider signals from both structures, but most strongly from primary structures. |
| *P7*: When in conflict, ministerial officials are more likely to emphasise signals from their primary affiliation than from secondary affiliations. |

**Data and Methodology**

The analysis benefits from three large-N questionnaire surveys conducted at the ministry level in the Norwegian central administration in 1996, 2006 and 2016, respectively (N = 5693). The questionnaires address a variety of aspects relating to the role and function of civil servants, distribution of power, patterns of contact, coordination, identification, demographic backgrounds, etc. To allow for comparisons, the questionnaires have been kept nearly identical over time with just few necessary adjustments. The surveys include only ‘A-level’ officials with a minimum of one year of seniority. These surveys represent *the* ‘most thorough screening’ of the Norwegian central administration and among the most comprehensive surveys of national administrations in international comparison (Egeberg and Trondal 2009).

Some potential caveats have to be taken into account: firstly, studies that rely on respondents own behavioural perceptions do not observe directly the occurrence of such. Respondents may often exaggerate or downplay own role or the role of others. Yet, the use of three large-N surveys does, however, substantially increase the likelihood of robustness in the conclusions. Secondly, the use of cross-sectional data may be biased by inter-individual variability in perceptions or that it fails to take into account concurring factors that may influence outcome. Ideally, in order to draw robust conclusions on causal effects, research on developments over time should benefit from longitudinal panel data. Nonetheless, this does not mean that cross-sectional data cannot provide useful insights on continuity and change.

Whereas the survey from 1996 was distributed to the respondents by postal mail, the 2006 and 2016 surveys were conducted as online surveys by the Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD). The overall response rate is solid and the total response rates have decreased only marginally during this 20 years’ period. The drop in response rates from 1996 to 2016 may only partly stem from a change of survey technology from postal survey to online survey. Perhaps the main explanation for decreasing response rates may be a general fatigue among respondents towards surveys more broadly.

**Table 2 Sample size and response rates in the ministry surveys, by year**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **1996** | **2006** | **2016** |
| **N** | 1497 | 1874 | 2322 |
| **Response rates** | 72% | 67% | 60% |

**Past and Present: The Norwegian central administration and 20 years of EU-affiliation**

This section is organized as follows: first, it briefly describes main characteristics of the Norwegian central administration. Secondly, it presents the main elements of the relationship between Norway and the EU. Finally, it presents and analyses key findings from the surveys.

The Norwegian central administration is organized into core-executive ministries and subordinated agencies. The system is characterized by a ministerial primacy where subordinated agencies are under political steering of the responsible minister and not primarily from the government collegium as a whole. The total number of employees within the central administration[[1]](#footnote-1) has increased from around 13000 in 1994 to 21000 in 2015 of which 4600 are employed in the ministries and the remaining 16400 are employed in subordinate agencies (DiFi 2015). Whilst Norwegian ministries are more like secretariats for the political leadership with to planning and coordinating functions (Christensen and Lægreid 2009), agencies are mainly responsible for advising ministries and being technical helpers, but are also essential ingredients in the political processes of preparing policies and implementing and administering policies.

Whilst the 1980s - and 90s embraced the New Public Management (NPM) doctrines which resulted in extensive decentralization of tasks to semi-detached agencies, the past decade has witnessed a shift towards ´joint-up government´/´whole-of-government´ doctrines (Christensen and Lægreid 2007). A core feature of the latter reform wave has been increased focus on political and administrative coordination to counterbalance fragmentation caused by NPM initiatives (Christensen and Lægreid 2007). This denotes ambitions for increased political control over the central administration in an attempt to, amongst others, achieve horizontal and vertical coordination of the core-executive apparatus. To a certain degree, such tendencies have arguably been mirrored in political initiatives in the field of EU policy and politics in the Norwegian central administration. For example, the establishment of a Norwegian minister of European Affairs in 2013 may be interpreted as a quest for increased political control and coordination of EU related work in the central administration (Trondal and Stie 2015). It is commonly assumed, both among civil servants and in much literature (e.g. Kassim et al. 2000; St. mld nr. 23 (2005-06)), that coherency and coordination within the central administration as a whole increases likelihood of successfully influencing policy outcomes at the EU level.

When the EEA agreement entered into force on January 1st 1994 it marked the beginning of a new area of political and economic cooperation between the EU and Norway. At the time, the EEA agreement was viewed by many as a *prelude* and an *interim-period* to full EU membership as the prospects of such were both open as well as vigorously pursued by the then-government. However, the following November when Norway rejected EU membership in a heated national referendum, the EEA agreement recurred as Norway´s foundation towards the EU and set the parameters for Norway as an ´active player´ on the EU stage in the years to come. Additionally, close historical and cultural ties as well as common interests on a host of policy areas led to subsequent cooperation and agreements in areas outside the framework of the EEA agreement (Meld.St 5 (2012-13)). At present there are approximately 70 agreements between the Norwegian government and the EU, with the EEA and Schengen being the most encompassing. The *dynamic* character of the EEA agreement requires Norway to continuously adjust to EU legislation. Yet, at the same time it politically blocks Norwegian governments from being represented in the Council (and most other EU institutions). Nonetheless, whereas Norway’s associated status does not grant Norway formal access to EU’s decision-making institutions, the EEA agreement does provide for *administrative* participation at various stages of EU´s legislative process. Norwegian ministries and agencies are represented in Commission expert committees and comitology committees, sit on most management boards of EU agencies, and are entitled to send national seconded experts to the Commission. It is thus largely Norwegian civil servants that are involved in EU-related work within the government apparatus and who remain largely responsible for handling everyday relationships with EU institutions - both in the up-stream processes (the agenda setting processes) and particularly in down-stream processes (the implementation and practising of EU law). Thus, whereas Norway is politically side-lined in EU decision-making processes, the Norwegian national central administration is granted access particularly towards EU´s bureaucratic apparatus (see below).

Like the Norwegian central administration, the Commission and EU agencies are organized according to the principles of purpose and function. From an organizational perspective, this has two substantial implications in fostering sectoral allegiances across levels of governance and secondly, underpinning tendencies of national inter-ministerial fragmentation. Moreover, as far as policy harmonization is concerned, the *form* of affiliation does in fact arguably warrant the EEA countries the same level of integration as full member states (Egeberg and Trondal 1999). One may even convincingly argue that because sectoral administrative EU integration in non-member states such as Norway is not subjected to political representation in the Council and thus subsequent inter-ministerial coordination, we may expect Norwegian sector ministries to be even more strongly ´hit´ by the Commission than member states (Trondal 2002). This assumption, however, lies beyond the scope of this paper.

The relationship between the EU and non-member states such as Norway may be analysed by examining both the form and the *degree* of affiliation. Whereas the *form* of affiliation has remained stable and robust during the past 20 years, the *scope and content* of the affiliation have undergone significant developments both in response to policy progressions in the EU, in response to the dynamic character of the EEA agreement, and as a result of Norway signing ever-more sectoral agreements with the EU. Such an expansion increases the subsequent likelihood of pulling Norwegian government institutions and governance processes closer towards EU-level institutions and processes. The 2012 Official Norwegian evaluation of how the EU has affected Norway (NOU 2012:2: 38-39) listed five main changes that have occurred since the EEA agreement entered into force: (i) enlargement and the subsequent expansion of agreements, (ii) additional agreements and inclusion of other policy fields, (iii) expansion of scope and content of existing agreements, (iv) expansion and developments of existing agreements by common practice and interpretations, (v) asymmetrical adaption and emulation beyond formalized agreements. All of these changes have, directly or indirectly, affected the Norwegian central administration. The expansion in scope and content of the agreements implicate *increased* sectoral contact patterns between the national and the European level. The question remains, however, how this has affected actual decision-making behaviour among ministerial officials.

The final part of this section examines continuity and change in how the EU has ‘hit’ Norwegian ministries. First, officials were asked how, in general, affected they are by the EU/EEA/Schengen in their daily work. Table 3 displays an overall stability in this regard, yet with a small increase during the last decade.

**Table 3 Percentage of officials that are *affected* by the EU/EEA/Schengen, by year.**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **1996** | **2006** | **2016** |
| To a very large degree | 11 | 13 | 14 |
| To a fairly large degree | 12 | 12 | 12 |
| To some degree | 23 | 18 | 23 |
| To a fairly small degree | 27 | 21 | 31 |
| Not affected | 27 | 37 | 20 |
| N | 100  (1463) | 100  (1704) | 100  (1773) |

In the remaining of the analysis only those officials who report being affected (to a small degree or more) by the EU/EEA/Schengen are included. Officials were asked about their contacts and participation in EU-level institutions. Table 4 reveals two main findings: First, stability over time in both as regards degrees and patterns of multi-level participation. Whilst there was an increase in sector ministries’ contact towards the Commission as well as participation in expert - and comitology committees between 1996 and 2006, these patterns have remained stable during the last decade. Correspondingly, the gap between the sector ministries and the MFA had a notable increase between 1996 and 2006, and then remained stable from 2006 to 2016. One explanation for this may be increased institutionalization of common administrative capacities across levels of governance during the past decade. This arguably may lead to more stable patterns of interaction. Also worth noting is that whereas contact to the Commission has remained stable during the past decade, sector ministries’ contact to the EU agencies has decreased. This may also be a consequence of increased institutionalization of the MLA system in which national agencies have acquired a larger position as access-points for EU agencies (e.g. Egeberg and Trondal 2015). Secondly, the data shows that ministry affiliation matters (P1). Table 4 reveals a substantial difference between staff affiliated to sector ministries and staff affiliated to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). With the exception of the European Parliament (2016 data only), sector ministries are consistently more involved with EU-institutions, even the Council. Moreover, reflecting compatible principles of organization, officials from sector ministries tend to concentrate attention towards the Commission, EU agencies and Commission expert committees, whereas officials from the MFA concentrate more attention to the Council.

**Table 4 Percentage of officials that report *contact with\** and/or *participation* *in\*\** EU-level institutions, by year and ministerial affiliation (sector ministries (SM)/Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA))**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **1996** | | **2006** | | **2016** | |  |
|  | SM | MFA | SM | MFA | SM | MFA | Mean N |
| Contact with the Commission  Contact with the Council  Contact with the European Parliament  Contact with EU agencies  Participation in expert committee(s)  Participation in comitology committee(s)  Participation in the Council  Participation in committees, boards etc. in EU agencies | 68  -  -  82  86  -  - | 32  -  -  -  18  14  -  - | 83  -  -  90  95  100  -  - | 17  -  -  10  5  0  -  - | 83  57  22  76  89  100  60  94 | 17  43  78  24  11  0  40  6 | 100 (115)  100 (21)  100 (9)  100 (39)  100 (94)  100 (21)  100 (10)  100 (18) |

*\* The ´contact´ variables combine values 1 and 2 on the following four-point scale: (1) App. every week, (2) app. every month, (3) a few times, (4) never.*

*\*\* The ´participation’ variables apply value 1 on the following three-point scale: (1) several times, (2) once, (3) never.*

Next, Table 5 probes the effect of the task profile of staff (P2). Given the regulatory character of the EU system in general and the EEA agreement in particular, it is proposed that ministerial officials occupied with regulatory tasks interact more frequently with European executive institutions than officials with a different task profile. Nonetheless, the data suggests that officials occupied with *non*-regulatory tasks are more often in contact with – or participate at – the EU-level. This is also a consistent pattern over time. One possible explanation for the significant divergence between these two groups, however, may be related to the questionnaire design, which allowed respondents only one alternative to a set of various tasks-categories. It is likely that officials have multiple tasks and thus that the number occupied with regulatory tasks may in fact be much higher than what is reflected in the data. Another explanation may be related to a shift in the function of ministries during the past two decades towards more planning and coordinative functions and less emphasis on single cases (Christensen and Lægreid 2009: 955).

**Table 5 Percentage of officials that report *contact with\** and/or *participation in*\*\* EU-level institutions, by year and task (non-regulatory (NR)/regulatory (R)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **1996** | | **2006** | | **2016** | |  |
|  | NR | R | NR | R | NR | R | Mean N |
| Contact with the Commission  Contact with the Council  Contact with the European Parliament  Contact with EU agencies  Participation in expert committee(s)  Participation in comitology committee(s)  Participation in the Council  Participation in committees, boards etc. in EU agencies | 74  -  -  -  73  73  -  - | 26  -  -  -  27  27  -  - | 74  -  -  76  70  67  -  - | 26  -  -  24  30  33  -  - | 76  85  89  79  74  73  78  65 | 24  15  11  21  26  27  22  35 | 100 (110)  100 (20)  100 (9)  100 (38)  100 (91)  100 (20)  100 (9)  100 (17) |

*\* The ´contact´ variables combine values 1 and 2 on a the following four-point scale: (1) App. every week, (2) app. every month, (3) a few times, (4) never.*

*\*\* The ´participation’ variables apply value 1 on the following three-point scale: (1) several times, (2) once, (3) never.*

Respondents were then asked about their coordination behaviour in relation to their EU-work. Table 6 reveals firstly an overall low level of coordination of EU-related work across time. Secondly, in support of P3, coordination is slightly higher *within* ministries than *between* ministries at all three points in time. Moreover, the gap between participating in *intra-*ministerial and low-level *inter*-ministerial coordination committees appears to increase over time. Also worth noting is the general decrease in this type of coordination behaviour, particularly from 2006 to 2016.One important caveat should be noted though: Although coordination committees suggest that the primary objective of these meetings it to *coordinate,* studies (e.g. Trondal 2001) shows low level of substantial coordination in the inter-ministerial coordination committees. These committees are characterized by mutual inter-ministerial information sharing which is not necessarily related to coordination of tasks, policies or positions. Moreover, bearing in mind that EU-affectedness has remained stable (Table 3), one may contemplate the decrease in coordination behaviour could indicate that EU-related work has become more routinized and integrated and that this has diminished the need for formal dialogue.

**Table 6 Percentage of officials who have *met in ministerial coordination committees*, by year\***

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **1996** | **2006** | **2016** |
| Intra-ministerial coordination committee\*\* | 18 | 18 | 13 |
| Low-level inter-ministerial coordination committees\*\*\* | 17 | 15 | 9 |
| High-level inter-ministerial coordination committee\*\*\*\* | 5 | 7 | 5 |
| Mean N | 100  (1038) | 100  (1056) | 100  (1402) |

*\* This table applies value 1 on a three-point scale: (1) multiple times, (2) once, (3) never.*

*\*\* These committees are established to pursue intra-ministerial coordination of EU-related work.*

*\*\*\* These committees are headed by the responsible sector ministry to coordinate across affected sector ministries.*

*\*\*\*\* This committee is headed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to coordinate those dossiers that the low-level inter-ministerial coordination committees do not solve.*

It is proposed (P4) that officials’ rank is negatively associated with interaction with EU-level institutions. Table 7 strongly support this prediction. The finding is robust since this pattern in shown both as regards contacts with various EU-institutions and as regards participation in various EU committees – including those under EU agencies. Also, this pattern is consistent over time. Interestingly, Table 7 shows a 10 to 15 percent increase of interaction with EU-level institutions for low-level officials from 2006 to 2016 and a corresponding decrease in interaction for medium and high-level officials on all variables. This may arguably provide further support to the assumption that internal EU-handlings have become more routinized in consonance with tighter and more systematized administrative integration at the European level. It may also demonstrate the effect of the increase in scope of the agreements: more affected policy areas signify more affected officials.

**Table 7 Percentage of officials that report *contact with\** or *participation in\*\** the following EU-level institutions, by year and rank (lower level officials (L)\*\*\*/medium and higher level officials (MH)\*\*\***

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **1996** | | **2006** | | **2016** | |  |
|  | L | MH | L | MH | L | MH | Mean N |
| Contact with the Commission  Contact with the Council  Contact with the European Parliament  Contact with EU agencies  Participation in expert committee(s)  Participation in comitology committee(s)  Participation in the Council  Participation in committees, boards etc. in EU agencies | 74  -  -  -  78  71  -  - | 26  -  -  -  22  29  -  - | 63  -  -  73  70  70  -  - | 37  -  -  27  30  30  -  - | 76  90  100  83  85  86  80  72 | 24  10  0  17  15  13  20  28 | 100 (115)  100 (8)  100 (20)  100 (39)  100 (94)  100 (21)  100 (10)  100 (18) |

*\* The ´contact´ variables combine values 1 and 2 on the following four-point scale: (1) App. every week, (2) app. every month, (3) a few times, (4) never.*

*\*\* The ´participation’ variables apply value 1 on the following three-point scale: (1) several times, (2) once, (3) never.*

*\*\*\* Lower level officials include the following ranks: 1996: executive officer, higher executive officer, principal officer, assistant director. 2006: executive officer/adviser, principal officer/adviser, assistant director/adviser. 2016: adviser/senior adviser, specialist director/special adviser or equivalent.*

*\*\*\*\* Medium and higher level officials include the following ranks: 1996: director, director general, positions higher than director general. 2006: director/adviser, director general/adviser, positions higher than director general. 2016: director or equivalent, director general or equivalent*

A similar analysis (Table 8) on the effect of rank on officials’ coordination behaviour reveals a similar pattern: a negative relationship between staffs’ rank and their participation in coordination committees as well as the degree to which their ministry’s work has been subject to coordination from the Prime Minister’s Office, the MFA, other ministries, the parliament and/or interest groups. Officials at low ranks score consistently higher on these variables than does officials at medium and high ranks. The finding is also consistent over time. Most notable is the increase in participation in high-level coordination committees from around 55 percent in 1996/2006 to almost 70 percent in 2016. Moreover, from 2006 to 2016 the data show an average of 11 percent increase in participation of lower level officials in the three coordination committees. A similar pattern can be found when examining the degrees of modification/change due to coordination with other actors: from 2006 to 2016 there was an average 16 percent increase in lower level officials that stated that their ministry’s work had been modified or changed due to the actors listed above. P5 proposed that lower level officials score lower on coordination than higher level officials. The proposition is based on the assumption that lower level officials would enjoy greater rooms of leeway in their work. The inverse findings may, however, derive from insufficient measurement validity of coordination. Participation in coordination committees and modification/changes related to coordination with other actors may simply measure degrees of involvement in EU-work, not merely the coordination thereof. Thus, Table 8 suggests that lower level officials generally are tasked with EU-related work to a greater extent than medium and higher level officials. Provided the latter, the data may arguably imply, however, both a general increase in EU-related work likely due to increase in the scope of agreement, and also that such tasks may more extensively fall to lower level officials. It follows that the lower level officials in general also have a more comprehensive view of their ministry’s EU-related work compared to higher level officials.

**Table 8 Percentage of officials that report the following *coordination behaviour*\*, by year and rank (lower level officials (L)\*\*/medium and higher level officials (MH)\*\*\***

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **1996** | | **2006** | | **2016** | |  |
|  | L | MH | L | MH | L | MH | Mean N |
| Participation in intra-ministerial coordination committee  Participation low-level inter-ministerial coordination committee  Participation in high-level inter-ministerial coordination committee  Modified/changed own ministry´s position in EU related work due to coordination with the Prime Ministers’ Office  Modified/changed own ministry´s position in EU related work due to coordination with the  MFA  Modified/changed own ministry´s position in EU related work due to coordination with  other ministries  Modified/changed own ministry´s position in EU related work due to coordination with the National Parliament  Modified/changed own ministry´s position in EU related work due to coordination with the  Interest groups | 71  83  56  63  63  65  83  76 | 29  17  44  38  37  35  17  24 | 62  75  55  48  54  64  60  58 | 38  25  45  52  46  37  40  42 | 73  84  69  70  73  69  77  77 | 27  16  31  30  27  31  23  23 | 100 (181)  100 (116)  100 (61)  100 (35)  100 (60)  100 (82)  100 (20)  100 (27) |

*\*This table applies value 1 on the following three-point scale: (1) multiple times, (2) once, (3) never.*

*\*\* Lower level officials include the following ranks: 1996: executive officer, higher executive officer, principal officer, assistant director. 2006: executive officer/adviser, principal officer/adviser, assistant director/adviser. 2016: adviser/senior adviser, specialist director/special adviser or equivalent.*

*\*\*\* Medium and higher level officials include the following ranks: 1996: director, director general, positions higher than director general. 2006: director/adviser, director general/adviser, positions higher than director general. 2016: director or equivalent, director general or equivalent*

In order to be able to ascertain the extent to which coordination behaviour is mutually supplementary or contradictory, we have to investigate whether various types of coordination behaviour are deemed important *by the same persons* within their particular issue area. This is done in the correlation matrices presented in Table 9. In order to merely probe patterns, Table 9 applies data from the 2016 survey.

*(….to be conducted…)*

**Table 9 Inter-correlation matrix on *coordination behaviour (Pearson’s r, 2016 data)***

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1) | 2) | 3) | 4) | 5) | 6) | 7) | 8) |
| 1. Participation in intra-ministerial coordination committee 2. Participation low-level inter-ministerial coordination committee 3. Participation in high-level inter-ministerial coordination committee 4. Modified/changed own ministry´s position in EU related work due to coordination with the Prime Ministers’ Office 5. Modified/changed own ministry´s position in EU related work due to coordination with the MFA 6. Modified/changed own ministry´s position in EU related work due to coordination with   other ministries   1. Modified/changed own ministry´s position in EU related work due to coordination with the National Parliament 2. Modified/changed own ministry´s position in EU related work due to coordination with interestgroups |  | ... | ....  .... | ...  .....  .... | ....  .... | ....  .... | ....  .... |  |

Examining power within and between institutions through questionnaire studies implies asking respondents about what institutions that are deemed important when decisions are made. Table 10 illustrates the perceived importance of both primary and secondary structures (P6). Two main findings are displayed: First, primary structures are, as proposed, significantly more important than secondary structures. Secondly, this pattern is robust over time. The most noteworthy change is the increased importance ascribed to national agencies from 1996 to 2016. This finding most likely reflect the ‘agencification’ wave in Norway, as in most OECD countries, during the same time period (e.g. Verhoest et al. 2011). Whilst Table 4 revealed a decrease in sector ministries’ contact to EU agencies, Table 10 shows a corresponding decrease in perceived importance of such. This may also have been caused by the increased importance of national agencies as access-points to EU-agencies. Studies have demonstrated increased tendencies of EU agencies to bypass the ministerial level and cooperate directly with the national agencies (e.g. Egeberg and Trondal 2009a). This may have taken some EU-workload off the ministerial level.

**Table 10 Percentage of officials that report that the following institutions are *important*\*when making decisions on their own policy area, by year.**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **1996** | **2006** | **2016** |
| *Primary structures* | Own ministry  Subordinated agencies  Other ministries  National Parliament  National government | 95  53  64  78  86 | 96  65  64  77  90 | 98  69  72  80  91 |
| *Secondary structures* | Commission  Council  European Parliament  EU agencies | 23  -  -  - | 29  -  -  11 | 22  14  12  9 |
| Mean N |  | 100  (1043) | 100  (1007) | 100  (1340) |

*\*This table combines values 1 and 2 on a five-point scale: (1) very important, (2) fairly important, (3) somewhat, (4) fairly unimportant, (5) very unimportant (6) Do not know/not relevant*

Finally, to probe P7, respondents were asked how they prioritize if conflicts appear in their work. Table 11 shows that, when in conflict, a vast majority of ministerial officials seek to compromise between the wishes of their political leadership and the requirements of EU law. This suggests that ministry officials, not only agency officials as studied by Egeberg and Trondal (2009b), are ‘double hatted’ in their EU-related work. Table 11 illuminates the intrusiveness of the ‘double-hatted’ national central administrations where even ministry officials serve ‘two masters’. This observation is an even stronger test of the ‘double hatted’ assumption, since ministry officials are less likely to ‘go Brussels’ than agency officials simply because these officials are more strongly bound by national political steering (Egeberg and Trondal 2009a). Among the few that report being ‘single hatted’, their primary structures (the wishes of own political leadership) is deemed slightly more important than secondary structures (the requirement of EU law).

**Table 11 Percentage of officials\* who report the following *priorities if conflicts appear* between the wishes of their national political leadership and the requirements of EU law**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Primarily follow the wishes of own political leadership | 5 |
| Try to combine the wishes of own political leadership and the requirements of EU law | 38 |
| Primarily follow the requirement of EU law | 2 |
| Not relevant/Not occupied with such tasks | 55 |
| **N** | **100**  **(1350)** |

*\*This includes those officials that incorporates and/or practices EU legislation within their own policy field.*

Finally, Table 12 shows a regression analysis that includes a selection of the substantially most important dependent variables is included. A separate regression analysis will be conducted on official’s prioritization in cases of conflict (Table 13).

(*both to be conducted…)*

**Table 12 Summary of factors *affecting ministerial officials´ EU-related work* (Standardized Beta Coefficients. Linear Regressions, 2016 data)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Contact with the European Commission | Participation in low-level inter-ministerial coordination committees | Importance of own ministry | Importance of the European Commission |
| * Ministry affiliation (SM/MFA) * Rank (L/MH) * Task profile (NR/R) |  |  |  |  |
| R2  Adjusted R2  *F* statistic  Significance *F* |  |  |  |  |

*\*) p ≤ 0.05 \*\*) p ≤ 0.01*

*Variable coding:*

**Table 12 Summary of factors *affecting ministerial officials´ priorities if conflicts appear* between the wishes of their national political leadership and the requirements of EU law (Standardized Beta Coefficients. Linear Regressions, 2016 data)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Try to combine the wishes of own political leadership and the requirements of EU law |
| * Ministry affiliation (SM/MFA) * Rank (L/MH) * Task profile (NR/R) |  |
| R2  Adjusted R2  *F* statistic  Significance *F* |  |

*\*) p ≤ 0.05 \*\*) p ≤ 0.01*

*Variable coding:*

**Conclusion**

This paper intended to examine the effect of organization on public governance. The underlying assumption was that organizational variables at the national level would ‘bias’ the impact of the EU on national administrations, in this case: Norwegian national ministries. Data derives from three large-N studies conducted at three points in time. Firstly, the data consistently displays a relatively high degree of interaction between sector ministries and EU-level executive institutions (P1). It also affirms a higher level of coordination *within* than *between* ministries (P3). However, contrary to the initial proposition (P2) the data does not establish a positive relationship between regulatory task-profiles and interaction towards the EU-level. Arguably, this may have been caused by unfavourable survey design. Secondly, as regards to vertical specialization, the data clearly shows that officials of lower ranks are more extensively involved at the EU-level than officials of higher ranks (P4). The data does not confirm the assumption that lower level officials would report lesser degree of coordination and modification/changes due to coordination (P6). This may be linked to insufficient measurement validity. Thirdly, the importance of primary structures is affirmed (P6) and the data also demonstrates a strong tendency of ‘double-hattedness’ amongst ministerial officials (P7). In sum, five out of seven propositions were confirmed. Yet, even though the data could not validate P2 and P5, it does overall clearly confirm the explanatory value of organizational factors in the governance process.

Taken as a whole, the data displays stable patterns of affectedness over the past two decades. In regards to time, there are four main observations that can be drawn from the data: firstly, ministerial affiliation as an explanatory factor for interaction (organizational compatible structures) significantly increased its importance between 1996 and 2006. From 2006 to 2016 these patterns remained stable. Secondly, the data suggests a general decrease in participation in coordination committees, and that the gap between intra-ministerial coordination and inter-ministerial coordination has increased over time. Thirdly, between 2006 and 2016 there has been a significant increase in lower lever officials’ interaction with the EU. There has also been a considerable increase in lower level officials’ participation in ministerial coordination committees, as well as an increase in the percentage in lower level officials that report having changed or modified their ministry’s positions based on coordination with other actors. Finally, a noticeable observation is the extent to which ministerial officials appear to be ‘double-hatted’.

How can these developments over time be accounted for? Two interrelated circumstances need to be considered: one is the increase in scope of the agreements between Norway and the EU, and the second is institutionalization of the European administrative system. The continuous expansion of the agreements, especially the EEA, has made the EU relevant on an ever-increasing number of policy fields. This may have led to a more extensive involvement of lower level officials. Simultaneously, to accommodate advances in policy developments, the multi-levelled administrative system in Europe has become increasingly institutionalized and integrated, especially during the past decade. It could be contended that this to some extent is reflected in, for example, the increase in patterns of interaction between lower level officials and the EU and also in the decrease in ministerial coordination. It is likely that an institutionalized European administrative system fosters a higher degree of routinization and predictability amongst officials and thus, the need for both hierarchical control and involvement decreases. Another observation that may also indicate a more integrated multileveled system, is the noteworthy decrease in importance ascribed – and interaction with –EU agencies during the past decade. This decrease coincides with a strengthened role of national agencies as access-points for EU agencies.

A mounting literature has documented an emergent interlocked European executive order. This study suggests how this process also manifests itself beyond the formal members of the Union and in effect render the EU membership vs. non-membership dichotomy increasingly obsolete. Essential parameters of public governance - also inside formally non-member states of the EU - are becoming both tightly interconnected with EU institutions and governance processes, as well as profoundly transformed by this. Moreover, this study suggests how the EU hits the policy-making processes over time and how it is received differently inside the government of the state contingent on its organizational architecture.

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1. Includes all employees in ministries and subordinate units. For full list, see <https://www.difi.no/rapporter-og-statistikk/nokkeltall-og-statistikk/ansatte-i-staten#4817> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)