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INTRODUCTION: ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE, MANAGEMENT REFORM AND EU POLICY-MAKING

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ABSTRACT If it remains true that the Commission is an essential component within the process of EU policy-making, changes in the organizational basis of this key actor are likely to have broader implications. Adopting this vantage point the article discusses the potential for advancing our theoretical and empirical understanding of the EU policy process by analysing the recent administrative reforms in the European Commission. It is argued that studying internal reform is particularly important as it structures and conditions the capacities and subsequently the impact of the Commission as an actor in EU policy-making. Put simply, organizational changes do affect policy outputs. Hence, studying organizational change in the form of administrative modernization – be it as a dependent or independent variable – should become an important task also for students of EU policy-making.

KEY WORDS Administrative reform; European Commission; Kinnock reform; organizational change; throughput–output nexus.

1. INTRODUCTION

Many international and supranational public organizations have recently been busy modernizing their internal administration (Bauer and Knill 2007). Yet nowhere has management or administrative change received a similar degree of attention as in the case of the European Commission.[1] Although the perception prevails that the Commission has been losing out compared to the Council and European Parliament in terms of political clout in recent years, this avid interest, academic as well as public, in the Kinnock reform[2] suggests that the European Commission still remains 'at the heart of the Union' (Nugent 1997). It is thus only natural to take a closer look at the recent administrative reforms within the European Commission. If it remains true that the Commission is an essential part within the (admittedly complex) equation of European Union (EU) policy-making, changes in the organizational basis of this key actor are likely to have broader implications (Bauer 2006; Trondal 2007). Consequently, three crucial questions have to be asked about the recent administrative

reform of the European Commission: why was such a comprehensive reform possible, what are its specific implications for the Commission as an organization, and what is the likely impact of organizational change for the EU policy process? In short, studying the reform of the European Commission means putting the organizational base of EU policy-making centre stage (Egeberg 1999; Olsen 2006). In the following article I will attempt to develop the case for the importance of studying organizational change in order to enhance our understanding of the EU policy-making process. I therefore must address conceptual matters as well as the historical and theoretical context of *reforming the European Commission*.

2. THE 'LOW' POLITICS OF EU POLICY-MAKING

As regards the conceptualization of organizational change a narrow definition is adopted. To define an analytical starting point, the focus lies at the internal administrative or managerial basis of the Commission as an international public bureaucracy. This means that close attention will be paid to the internal rules and procedures as regards internal resource management, horizontal and vertical co-ordination, planning, monitoring, control as well as personnel related matters like recruitment, promotion, transparency, professional ethics, and so forth. In Brussels and Strasbourg these issues have come to figure under the label of 'governance in the European Commission'.[3] The working hypothesis is *that such formal and informal organization of administrative interactions and daily routines structure and condition the capacities and subsequently the impact of the Commission as an actor in EU policy-making*. Admittedly, this is a narrow definition. A broader view of 'organizational' in this context would perhaps also include issues such as alterations with respect to the Commission's official relationships with other institutions, substantial policy competences, number or formal powers of Commissioners or of the Commission President himself and the like (Spence 2000). However, for the purpose of the present research endeavour these kinds of changes are perceived more as *institutional* than *organizational*, since they refer to the specific web of inter-organizational relationships and they usually require comprehensive treaty revisions to be changed. To make the differentiation clearer, one may think of the classical distinction between 'high' and 'low' politics. Sticking to this metaphor used in the early days of theorizing about the process of European integration (Hoffmann 1966), *organizational change* in this volume can be subsumed into the category of 'low' politics and *institutional change* would fall into the category of 'high' politics of (inter-)organizational engineering. It is obvious that occasionally such institutional and organizational features relate to or may even condition each other – and where necessary also the institutional component has to be included in the organizational analyses (Peterson 2008). However, analysing the occurrence and the implications of the recent organizational changes

within the European Commission administration remains the principal objective of the subsequent investigations.

3. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

To understand the present state of internal management and to identify the challenges ahead, a glance at the history of administrative change in the European Commission – also as a topic of academic research – appears indispensable. While in the early 1990s one could still claim that there was a 'surprising dearth of academic and other study of the European Commission' (Edwards and Spence 1994: 1; Christiansen 1997), today the Commission is perhaps the most intensely researched international bureaucracy. There is no shortage of first-rate textbooks and hundreds of more specific monographs and journal articles (for overviews, see Cini 1996; Nugent 1997, 2001; Spence and Edwards 2006). But only recently and still very sparsely has more attention been paid to the internal organizational life of this crucial actor (Hooghe 2001; Bauer 2001; Trondal 2007; Suvarierol 2007). This new interest[4] in the European Commission as a public administration has been amplified by the shock waves produced by the resignation of the Santer Commission under allegations of fraud and internal mismanagement in 1999. The 'Santer crisis' and subsequent fears that an organizational image of an inefficient, inept and mismanaged bureaucracy may stick in the public perception, and further limit the Commission's political room for manoeuvre, paved the way for the Kinnock reform (Peterson 1999, 2004; Metcalfe 2000). It also boosted academic interest in the organizational foundations of the European Commission. The result is a growing number of works on what used to be despised as the nitty-gritty of supranational bureaucracy (cf. Kratochwil and Ruggie 1986; Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Benner *et al.* 2007). There is a broad consensus that Neil Kinnock's administrative reform was a product of the political attempt to quickly restore trust in and the credibility of the Commission. But from a comparative public administration perspective this is hardly astonishing. Administrative reform is rarely an objective in itself but usually a highly politicized exercise (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004; Peters 2001). Nevertheless, reform effects, positive or negative, apparent or real, have impacts, albeit rarely (only) those originally intended. Moreover, reform initiatives are windows of opportunity to instigate change of various quality – frequently with little connection to the intended improvements of the original ills. In the case of the Commission the major part of the Kinnock proposals was conceived and adopted between 2000 and 2004. This administrative reform is the topic of a number of insightful studies (Bearfield 2004; Coull and Lewis 2003; Kassim 2004a, 2004b; Levy 2004; Metcalfe 2000; Spence 2000; Spence and Stevens 2006; Stevens and Stevens 2006; Bauer 2001, 2002, 2008a, 2008b). While doubts have been raised as to whether the reform has been efficiently implemented and, even if so, whether it will boost organizational effectiveness or efficiency (Levy 2006; Ellinas and

Suleiman 2008; Bauer 2008a), it is fair to say that most observers see the reform as a kind of 'historic' achievement – if compared with the up-to- then unimpressive reform record of that institution (Kassim 2004a, 2004b, 2008; Spence and Stevens 2006; Stevens and Stevens 2006). After all, the Kinnock reform was the first comprehensive overhaul of the organizational basis of the European Commission in the 50-year history of this institution (Bauer 2007b). However, current analyses usually take little notice of the fact that there have also been a number of smaller initiatives for organizational change in the past – arguably with little visible impact. Table 1 lists these initiatives for organizational reform since 1958. There should be no misunderstanding. Many of them are on a minor scale, others are more fact-finding or screening exercises and those with broader implications – like the Spierenburg Report from 1979 – were not implemented. However, there is no denying that we lack information about these historical initiatives (failed or successful) and systematic accounts to analyse conditions and constellations favourable to or hampering managerial reforms in the Commission that would allow us to put recent changes into a broader perspective. The point is that so far we have not attempted to exploit the conceptional variance that these historical examples offer to sharpen and eventually answer our research questions. It is very likely that by studying organizational change in the Commission in a disciplined historical comparative fashion we would be able to learn a great deal about the conditions in which administrative reform initiatives at the supranational level emerge and when and how the implementation of organizational change in the supranational context may succeed or be doomed to fail.[5]

4. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Comparative historical analysis is one crucial dimension to put the study of administrative reforms within the European Commission into context. However, it is even more important to confine the appropriate heuristic tools and theoretical positions from which one starts conceptualizing and eventually interpreting observable organizational change. It should be recognized that studying public policy-making by putting the analysis of administrative reform centre stage makes sense if one accepts a plain epistemological position, namely that alterations of the organizational basis of a political actor impinge on this actor's capacities, and may subsequently affect directly or indirectly policy outputs to the production of which this actor contributes, and thus eventually also affect policy outcomes in general. As a consequence, studying administrative change is by no means a matter to be left exclusively to students of public administration alone but belongs to the core interests of political scientists or organizational sociologists who follow – however generally – a research agenda rooted in the new institutionalism (March and Olsen 1989; Koelble 1995).

Moreover, if one recalls the system-theoretical origin of the sub-discipline policy analysis, the importance of a focus on organizational change becomes

Table 1 Initiatives for organizational change within the European Commission 1958 – 2001

Initiative	Structures	Process	Personnel	Finance	Ethics
1959 Preliminary Report on the organization and functioning of the European Commission	X	X	X		
1959 Report on the organization and functioning of the European Commission	X	X	X		
1961 Ortoli Report (Committee of Rationalization)	X	X	X		
1970 Report of the Round Table of Eight on the Personnel Problems and Organization	X	X	X	X	
1970 Framework Programme of the Round Table of Ten on Personnel Problems and Organization	X	X	X		
1972 A-U-R-A Report on the Internal Functioning of the Services	X	X			
1973 Personnel Politics: Propositions and Guidelines			X		
1973 Audland Report on Information, Documentation and Internal Co-ordination		X			
1973 Report of the Screening Group on Organizational Functioning			X		
1979 Spierenburg Report	X	X	X		
1980 Ortoli Report: Report on Implementation of Spierenburg Report		X	X		

(*Table continued*)

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Table 1 Continued

Initiative	Structures	Process	Personnel	Finance	Ethics
1986 Decision Commission on Modernization Politics		X	X		
1987 Programme for Creating Awareness of Management Questions – Seminars for Personnel		X			
1989 Set of Management Measures: Management, Mobilization and Information Programme		X	X		
1991 Guidelines and Programme on Personnel Training			X		
1995 Sound Efficient Management (SEM 2000)		X		X	
1997 Modernization of Administration and Personnel Policy (MAP)			X		
1997 Designing the Commission of Tomorrow (Decode)		X	X	X	
2001 Reforming the European Commission, White Paper	X	X	X	X	X

Source: Barbara Heisserer 2008.

even clearer. The heuristic credo of systems theory is summarized in Figure 1. Looking at this figure it is easy to see why it is crucial, from the point of view of a modified systems theory, to focus on the concrete organization of the 'throughputs' (Luhmann 1964; Easton 1965; Scharpf 1977).[6] This is so because inputs (political missions and public demands) pass specific throughputs (legal and personnel resources, reality of internal organization, i.e. constellations, processes, management, etc.) to form particular organizational outputs. In other words, the relationship between specific inputs and throughputs conditions particular outputs – with outputs being the organizational product aimed at generating a desired policy outcome in the real world. The exact relationship
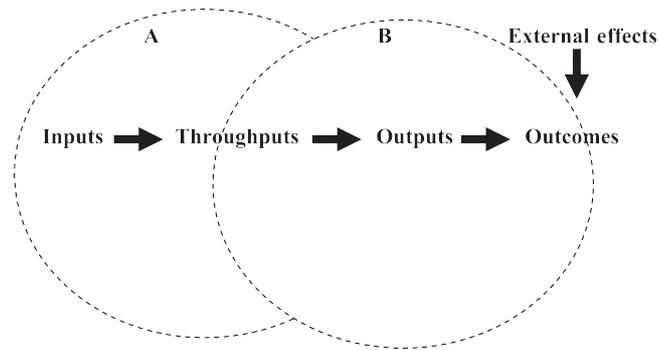
Figure 1 Two Perspectives on Organizational Change.

between specific outputs and the eventual outcomes is notoriously difficult to establish: first, because of long causal chains with each link constituting a challenge to causal analysis; and, second, owing to external effects which unavoidably and independently of the organizational outputs influence outcomes but remain difficult to anticipate, let alone control. As a pragmatic consequence, academic interest has privileged the study of inputs and outputs whereas to a lesser degree – or more precisely in a less systematic way – the triad of inputs, organizational throughputs and outputs has been the object of investigations.

Conceived in such a way, it becomes obvious why organizational change as an object of systematic study can basically assume two analytical purposes. Organizational change as the modification of throughputs can be studied as an *explanandum*. Then organizational change per se is the phenomenon of which we seek a better understanding, i.e. the dependent variable. Or, organizational change can be conceptualized as part of the explanation for a specific phenomenon on which we focus with our research question. In this case organizational change is of interest as much and insofar as it causes changes to policy outputs and outcomes. Conceived in this way organizational change is (at least part of) the *explanans* or the independent variable in a respective research design (Bauer 2007a).

So far, both of these research agendas shape the scientific production about the reform of the European Commission (Bauer 2008a). The first, more basic set of questions aims at explaining administrative reform as such (in Figure 1 indicated by ellipse A). The second, perhaps more complex and more ambitious set of questions asks what difference this particular administrative reform actually makes – in terms of policy output or even outcome (ellipse B). Since the second set of questions regularly builds upon the first, and as it seems reasonable to take the first step before the second, it is no surprise that up to now we know much more about the triggers, scope and quality of the recent organizational change within the Commission in the context of the Kinnock reforms than about the effects these reforms have on the Commission's capacity to deliver EU policy output or on policy outcome.

At this point in our discussion it is important to note the existence of a major research gap. The pertinent sub-disciplines – international relations, organizational sociology, comparative public administration – have failed so far to engage in studying internal changes of international public organizations. As a consequence, there have been virtually no attempts to systematically put such international organizational changes into analytical contexts in order to explain policy outputs. The emergence of the study of the organizational impact of international bureaucracies as an interest of empirical social science research is a very recent trend (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Liese and Weinlich 2006; Bauer and Knill 2007; Benner *et al.* 2007; Yi-Chong and Weller 2008; Geri 2001; Dijkzeul and Beigbeder 2003). It thus seems fair to emphasize that it is by no means clear whether these isolated scholarly endeavours will eventually add to the consolidation of a veritable research *agenda*, able to connect the pertinent questions from various approaches and to rally the various sub-disciplines behind a set of mature and salient research questions. In this respect, the recent work on organizational change within the European Commission seems much more advanced than that on any other international organization (Egeberg 1999, 2004; Trondal 2007; Suvarierol 2007; Bauer 2007b; Balint *et al.* 2008). Put bluntly, to better understand the case of reforming the European Commission little conceptual help can be expected from other research about international public organizations for the time being. At any rate, it is clear that the study of organizational change in the European Commission eventually needs to be put into context with this emerging and hopefully soon consolidating research agenda focusing on organizational issues of international and supranational bureaucracies.

Bearing this gap in mind, and agreeing that it is probably worthwhile to conceive the issue of reforming the European Commission as a case of management change in a public organization, the obvious thing to do is to turn to the comparative research on public sector reform. And indeed, here we find models that may help to depict the potential forces at work (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004: 25). Such models are strong in providing descriptive categories about origins, processes, scope and intensity of managerial change in public organizations. They implicitly contain a heuristic to identify crucial factors worth looking at in order to disentangle international organizational change as a dependent variable. Unfortunately, so far comparative public administration accounts are less advanced in providing analytical explanations for the change we observe, let alone for the effects in terms of policy output that these changes may cause (but see Barzelay 2001; Barzelay and Füchtner 2003).

Reviewing this literature, there seem to be two major descriptive categories of interest: process and substance. Substance means that one has to ask for the specific quality, magnitude or intensity of change of a managerial modernization.[7] The process category contains the preconditions and origins of management change, like specific triggers, and also the internal politics and external demands of how management change was put on the agenda, how specific

initiatives were designed, agreed upon and implemented. It is obvious that substance and process are descriptive categories. However, given the dearth of knowledge about managerial change in international bureaucracies in general and in the European Commission in particular, much might be gained if – by using such merely descriptive schemata – we were able to produce, better systematize and qualify empirical observations about organizational change in the international and supranational sphere.

When looking for explanations for management reforms in the European Commission, a priori, i.e. before settling the exact research question, there are no limits to subsume the ongoing modernization processes to particular and distinct research programmes in the broader social sciences. For example, the analysis of management reforms of international organizations fits well into the line of comparative public administration research attempting to understand the spread of new public management ideas (Osborne and Gaebler 1992; Peters and Savoie 1998; Wright 1997).

Administrative modernizations or reforms within international organizations can also be an issue for cultural theory (heterogeneous workforce, conflicting culturally loaded norms, styles and behaviour), discourse theory (role of media), organizational sociology (what leads staff to accept a reform?), management theory (how do organizations learn?), accountability theory (modernization as a means to legitimize organizational existence or expansion) and – most relevant for the research agenda pursued in this volume – policy analysis (how does reform affect policy output and outcome?; what is the role of policy networks, expert communities and the like?).

These approaches can be further distinguished as to whether their research programme focuses on external or internal factors. A first set of research programmes asks questions about how organizational procedures and styles become ever more homogeneous, how complex organizations learn from one another, how organizational solutions travel from one constituency to another, and what the factors facilitating the acceptance of 'alien' solutions 'at home' are (DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Dolowitz and Marsh 2000; Brooks 2005). Transfer, diffusion, lesson drawing, learning as well as bandwagoning and symbolic politics are the mechanisms which – although they cannot be discussed in detail here (see, however, Knill 2005) – appear to have great explanatory potential.

A second way to unpack organizational change within the European Commission is to look at the internal side of the story. The concepts of veto players (who can obstruct reform or how does reform redistribute veto power?), incrementalism (bounded rational actors), garbage can (contingent decision-making processes), policy entrepreneur (reform advocates), office maximizing strategies (redistributive interests of top managers), principal-agent theory (reform pressure from constituencies – in particular those who finance the budget of the organization), decoupling (jumping rhetorically at the modernization trend without implementing meaningful reform) are all approaches that focus on internal driving factors and appear promising in the attempt to

disentangle the Commission's management reforms (Tsebelis and Kreppel 1998; Lindblom 1959; Kingdon 1995; Pollack 2003; Dunleavy 1992; Brunsson 1989).

Particularly important for the internal perspective is institutional context: decision-making rules, positional and policy-orientation power games and the like (North 1999). The institutional context in relation to (expected) power shifts between the affected administrative actors (as reform winners and losers) and reform advocates is crucial from that perspective. Moreover, looking at institutional relationships means focusing on the interrelatedness between internal and external factors.

In other words, organizational change in the European Commission is probably most fruitfully explored as a European public policy itself (Richardson 2006; Barzelay 2001). The particular importance of the study of organizational change derives from the fact that this kind of change not only affects the management of internal processes of the Commission, but may also influence virtually all policy output produced by this actor. Research questions within this context will probably remain as heterogeneous as the approaches, theories and mechanisms that shape the 'normal' analysis of EU policy-making. The challenge thus is to synthesize perspectives in order to arrive at more comprehensive and complete explanations of causes and effects of management reforms in the European Commission.

5. APPROACHES, POSITIONS AND FINDINGS

The articles assembled in this volume attempt to take on the challenge of starting to think systematically about organizational change within the Commission. In seven studies one can obviously not pursue all possible research programmes, (some of) which have been mentioned in the previous section. Mirroring the yet unconsolidated nature of the topic under scrutiny, the following articles take distinct perspectives, use various research strategies and methods, and attempt to solve diverse empirical puzzles related to the Kinnock reform of the European Commission. However, by exploring their various research interests they address the two basic sets of questions outlined above. First, why was such comprehensive reform possible and how was it implemented (Kassim 2008; Knill and Balint 2008; Schön-Quinlivan 2008), and, second, what are the implications of these reforms for the role of the Commission or Commission officials (Peterson 2008; Ellinas and Suleiman 2008; Bauer 2008a), and how do the Kinnock reforms condition the reform capacity of that organization in the post-reform phase (Cini 2008). In other words, the two core research programmes outlined above are well represented and the reform of the European Commission is thus studied as both a *dependent* as well as an *independent* variable.

Hussein Kassim starts by revisiting the historical account of the Kinnock reform. He shows what the reform initiatives were all about and how they were implemented in a surprisingly short space of time. Kassim goes on to

compare the particular path and the unforeseeable success (in terms of number of adopted reform measures) of the organizational change brought about under the leadership of Neil Kinnock with the standard approaches in comparative public administration used to explain management change. He shows that none of the pertinent theoretical traditions, be it approaches based on classical Weberian analysis, neo-institutionalism or principal-agent theory, can coherently and comprehensively account for the emergence of the Kinnock reform. By isolating three key 'puzzles', empirical characteristics of the Kinnock reform which contradict the classical explanations of public sector reform processes, Kassim points to highly important issues for further empirical research and theory development with respect to factors and conditions of organizational change in supranational and international organizations.

Christoph Knill and Tim Balint are also interested in the substance of reform and how to explain the organizational processes that led to administrative change. However, they focus on a particular part of the Commission reform endeavour (human resource management) and compare observable change in the European Commission with similar reform initiatives in the Secretariat of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). They take as a benchmark a systematically stylized version of new public management principles and root their theoretical expectations in organizational isomorphism. Knill and Balint find that while the Commission brought its management structures with regard to many dimensions under scrutiny closely in line with new public management, the OECD, by contrast, still relies on 'classical' Weberian bureaucracy procedures. Although it has the organizational mission to push for such kind of change in national administrations, Knill and Balint show how fruitful a structured comparison of international bureaucracies can be. They suggest that their results indicate that a more precise understanding of the scope conditions of the highly influential theory of isomorphism has to be developed. According to the isomorphistic expectations, the occurrence of change in line with new public management in the case of the OECD was over-determined. That this change did not materialize points to the fact 'that isomorphism theory needs to be complemented by arguments with regard to the conditions under which organizations adopt policy innovations which diffuse internationally' (Knill and Balint 2008: 687). More important than these remarkable results per se are two achievements: first, Knill and Balint overcome the 'sui generis' paradigm in the study of the Commission and show that one indeed can compare the Commission with other international organizations. The potential deriving from such a strategy for understanding the Commission better is self-evident. Second, they try to be systematic about comparing administrative reform by developing an interesting coding scheme for scoring administrative characteristics. We need more of such innovations if we are to theoretically and empirically advance our knowledge of organizational change in international constellations.

Emmanuelle Schön-Quinlivan also follows a comparative design. She takes the analysis of organizational change to a 'meso' organizational level in order

to give a more fine-tuned account of the scope of change brought about by the Kinnock reform within the Commission. Rooting her analysis in the concept of 'translation' (Campbell 2004), Schön-Quinlivan analyses the application of the Kinnock reform processes in two functionally distinct Directorates-General (DGs) of the Commission. Doing this enables her to disentangle the constellations and conditions of the varying implementation processes within these DGs. She is able to pin down distinctive 'reform cultures' in the DGs under study and isolates supportive leadership of the individual Directors-General as the single most important variable to account for application differences in the organizational reform 'menu'. Her study is remarkable because she points to bureaucratic leadership as an important element for study – which is unjustifiably neglected in most of the current policy-analytical literature.

The study of Antonis Ellinas and Ezra Suleiman and that of Michael W. Bauer take the Kinnock reform conceptually as an independent factor. The studies – which were conceived and conducted strictly separately – are based on extensive and systematic interviewing of the objects of reform: top managers (Ellinas and Suleiman) and heads of unit (Bauer). Both studies are interested primarily in the effects of the reform on the Commission as an organization, and both studies are theoretically as well as methodologically disciplined and generate important new data. And their bottom line is strikingly similar, too: intentionally or unintentionally, the Kinnock reform has curtailed the capacity of the Commission to deliver policy drafts as a policy initiator and a political entrepreneur. Following the assessment of the likely effects of the Kinnock reforms, these studies nurture serious worries about the Commission's post-reform capacities to reach organizational efficiency and provide creative policy entrepreneurship as we know it, and as perceived to be an important driving force within the European integration process.

Michelle Cini addresses an extremely under-researched topic, as she focuses on the post-reform period in public organizations and asks whether the reform capacity of the European Commission improved or decreased in the aftermath of the Kinnock reform. This is indeed a very important issue as the problem of 'reform fatigue' after big organizational change initiatives have been adopted is one to which scholars have regularly failed to pay particular, let alone systematic, attention. Cini attempts to confront this gap by concentrating on the 'ethics chapter' of the Kinnock reform and how these issues have been tackled since 2004 – the year when the Commission reforms were said to be in operation. This case is well chosen, as the ethical part of the Kinnock reform was clearly aimed at cultural change in the Commission and was thus a long-term organizational challenge right from the beginning. Cini reveals that the postreform drive in the context of ethics and transparency has little to do with systematic organizational capacity-building or strategic decision-making but rather with incrementalism, coincidence, and thus a garbage-can style of policymaking. Her findings raise a number of questions about the possibilities of organizational learning in general, and about the missing post-reform management capacity within the European Commission in particular.

John Peterson, considering the combined impact of the two greatest organizational challenges confronting the European Commission recently, i.e. enlargement and Kinnock reform, asks the central question of how the Commission's role has changed since the Santer resignation in the context of such twofold organizational stress. The suspicion is that administrative reforms may have weakened the Commission's capacity for managing EU decision-making in the multi-level system. Concentrating on the relationship between the College of Commissioners and the administration of the Commission as well as on that between the Commission and the European Parliament and, first and foremost, the Council, Peterson finds little evidence for the thesis of such an endemic organizational decline. Rather, he sees the Commission undergoing a thorough transformation. The Commission appears set to become a more 'normal' organization in the sense that it adapts to the intergovernmental management and decision modes which have been reinforced by recent enlargements and more critical attitudes of the EU publics to an 'ever closer Union'. After all, the Commission is potentially in the best position – or perhaps even the only possible actor – to co-ordinate policy-making within the emerging structure of the 'EU27p' multi-level network governance. In this respect, the positive result from enlargements and internal reform is that the dynamic of events has led to a better fit of the Commission's capacities with the changing necessities. In short, it may be true that the Commission has lost policy-making autonomy but at the same time it appears now to be a more reliable organization to manage the new – presumably more intergovernmental – way of governing the EU. Thus implicitly John Peterson rightly warns us that our analytical benchmarks to assess the effects of organizational change in the case of the European Commission are inevitably rooted in particular concepts about the integration process and the ontological characteristics of the EU and its institutions.

6. OUTLOOK FOR EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Taken together, the findings leave no doubt that recent initiatives for administrative modernization have transformed the European Commission. The reality of working in the Commission has altered and the organizational environment has also simultaneously changed. This is particularly evident in the relationship between the Commission and the other main actors at the supranational level (Peterson 2008). In addition, the organizational roles of the Commission (further) diversified. Thus it becomes increasingly difficult for analysts to refer to 'the' Commission; rather, one has to differentiate more precisely than in the past between the various organizational roles of the Commission, such as co-policy-making, supervising the national implementation of European policies, adjudicating national policies in line with European law, and managing its own organizational functioning efficiently and effectively (Hooghe 2001; Cram 1994). Against the background of the conceptual considerations and empirical findings in this volume, some of the most promising areas for

further research in the context of organizational change and managerial reform within the European Commission appear to be as follows.

The first topic involves comparing the Kinnock reform and the initiatives for administrative change succeeding it with past modernization initiatives. We know of a number of small and medium-size administrative reform attempts in the history of the European Commission (see Table 1). But we have not yet attempted to study these cases systematically, let alone identify conditions and constellations that may comprise comparative lessons to shed light on the current reform outcomes. Not to try to bring the historical dimension to current analyses would be worse than short-sighted; it would be to act negligently and to forgo the potential to advance theory-building with respect to the topic of reforming the European Commission.

Another set of questions to ask (simple to state but inherently intricate and challenging to settle) is which of the Kinnock reform innovations are working now and which are not, and whether it makes sense to take 'the' Kinnock reform as a coherent and clearly distinguishable set of initiatives.[8] Implementing the Kinnock reform involved tremendous internal turmoil and it is far from clear how the organization as a whole is coping with it. Moreover, even after formally 'completing' the reform as a conceptual undertaking in 2004, many unfinished items have been left on the agenda (Levy 2006). It appears appropriate in this context to recall an iron law of the study of public policy, namely that the adoption of a public policy is by no means a guarantee of subsequent implementation. Many seem to think that the Kinnock reform is indeed 'past' and that the challenge is now to study the various processes of institutional innovation and power redistribution that this reform has initiated – for good or bad. To decide whether to take the Kinnock reform as a conceptual yardstick or not is no trivial matter, since much depends upon it for individual research endeavours. In simple terms, taken as a pure yardstick for the analysis of organizational change, one would have to focus the analysis on the degree of its 'appropriate' implementation. Conceptualizing organizational change 'exclusively' against the background of Kinnock's reform programme thus means risking missing or misjudging the broader transformational potential that emerged within the context of a – from many perspectives – perhaps failed original reform. Moreover, somewhere alongside tackling the history and the yardstick question researchers have to find the means of reasonably clear measurement – that can be operationalized across individual cases – in order to determine in comparative terms the intensity of the observable organizational change.

A further challenge is to bring the European Commission and the study about organizational change within it out of its *sui-generis corner*. The Commission certainly has unique features that distinguish it from other international organizations. However, there seem to be more similarities than differences and certainly enough features to conduct meaningful comparisons between the Commission and its organizational peers (Knill and Balint 2008; Balint *et al.* 2008). Much could thus be gained if organizational change within the

Commission were put into the context of the emerging research agenda on international bureaucracies (Bauer and Knill 2007; Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Benner *et al.* 2007; Geri 2001; Liese and Weinlich 2006; Yi-Chong
and Weller 2008).

Finally, there is an emerging consensus that the Kinnock reform has changed the internal politics within the European Commission. But how exactly, and with what effect, is still an unanswered question. The most interesting mechanism in this context is that the reform has apparently had a differential impact on the various organizational roles of the Commission (Schön-Quinlivan 2008). The challenge is thus to come to grips with this differential impact and to tell which particular effects are to be expected under which conditions and in which constellations. Empirical evidence to settle such questions is sparse and, at best, mixed. For example, there appear to be forces within the Commission who disliked Kinnock's auto-reform exercise and the administrative changes it brought about. However, once they have learned to cope with the inflicted organizational transformation, and once they have become confident in mastering the politics of this new administrative reality, they want to refocus what they see as their 'real' mission. Hence, they want to keep to the new status quo (which they now know) rather than engage in further organizational engineering (to ends they ignore). We can thus safely assume that the original Kinnock reform, and those managerial elements which have been conceived since 2004, are now taken into consideration by the internal actors when pursuing their individual objectives. Following this line of argument, the reform has certainly produced winners and losers. A new internal dynamic appears to be the result, favouring change of one sort over change of another. Seen from this perspective a 'final assessment' of 'the' Kinnock reform appears difficult, if not pointless. The ongoing and lasting significance of the Kinnock reform for students of the EU in general and from an EU public policy-making perspective in particular rather stems from the new internal politics it produces (cf. Hartlapp 2007). To uncover these patterns and to identify the differential impact the reform generates is perhaps the single most important challenge for empirical research.

7. THE NEXUS BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE AND POLICY OUTPUT

There are complaints from inside the Commission that the reform intensified instead of solved the 'silo problem', in particular by pushing for decentralization of operational tasks and in the context of the implementation of activity-based management procedures. The 'silo problem' characterizes a situation in which individual DGs are run as political and organizational 'fiefdoms', and it hence remains more difficult than ever to integrate this multi-organization into a coherent line of policy-making. Moreover, the last progress report about the implementation of the administrative reform from 2005 (!) states that the Commission intends to further 'consolidate, streamline and simplify internal procedures and working methods in the interest of effectiveness and efficiency' (Commission

2005: 19). In the same vein, the Commission leadership since 2004 has shown little or no interest in the administrative reform agenda inherited from its predecessors. At least, it is not easy to tell what exactly have been the measures adopted in order 'to strike a better balance between the level of risk and cost of control' that was promised in the last official document about the Kinnock reform (Commission 2005: 19). This can, and perhaps must, be read as evidence that the Kinnock reform remains unfinished. It is fitting that those who currently work on management issues within the Commission seem to see their ongoing mission precisely in further consolidating, streamlining, simplifying and obviously also somewhat safeguarding what has been achieved so far.[9]

As regards understanding management reform – and even more so from the perspective of theory-building about organizational change – the task is perhaps less to pin down what the Kinnock reform has formally and informally changed within the Commission. The challenge rather lies in unpacking the nexus between organizational changes in the Commission and deriving consequences for EU policy output as such. This volume goes some way in this direction. It develops a number of analytical instruments and theoretical perspectives to better understand this relationship between alterations of organizational throughputs and their direct, as well as indirect, consequences for policy output. However, far from being able to settle this discussion, it calls upon students of EU politics, comparative bureaucracy and organizational sociology to pay more attention to what can be called the throughput–output nexus[10] in EU policy-making.

NOTES

1 See Kassim (2004a, 2004b); Levy (2004, 2006); Stevens and Stevens (2006); Spence and Stevens (2006); Balint *et al.* (2008); Bauer (2008a, 2008b) and Bearfield (2004).
2 The reform is commonly named after Neil Kinnock, the vice-president in charge of implementing the administrative modernization. Furthermore, one can argue, if administrative change stretches over various areas as is usual, if it is appropriate to talk about *the Kinnock reform* or *reforms*. For simplicity, I will refer to the administrative reform packages initiated between 2000 und 2004 in the singular form as the 'Kinnock reform'.
3 Cf. the public hearing 'governance in the European Commission', 3 and 4 October 2007 in the European Parliament, Brussels. (http://www.europarl.europa.eu/comparl/cont/site/auditions/governance_en.htm).

4 One can argue if it is indeed a new or just a renewed interest, cf. Coombes (1970) or Metcalfe (1992).

5 For an attempt focusing on actors' constellation over time, see Bauer (2007b).

6 'Throughputs' are in this context perhaps best understood as a label for the internal organizational reality and a specific way to process particular tasks with the organizational resources at hand.

7 It is common in the fields of comparative public policy and public administration to distinguish between three to four levels of intensity of such organizational change (Hall 1993; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993; Knill 2001; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004). One may thus differentiate loosely between 'no change', 'optimization', 'reform' and 'transformation'. How to establish the intensity of an administrative reform is analytically as difficult as it is important if one wants to engage in cross-case comparisons.

8 It is remarkable and astonishing that, after five years of operation, the Commission itself has provided so little hard information about the effects of reform and how it works in practice. The European Parliament appears particularly disappointed about this continuing silence despite various formal demands for clarification of the picture. Recently, the Parliament complained that the Commission had 'archived' the official homepage about the reform. Moreover, some Members of the European Parliament from the Budgetary Control Committee have initiated several external research studies (about activity-based management and the effects of organizational decentralization) – apparently in response to the restricted information policy of the Commission with respect to the effects of organizational reform.

9 That was the message conveyed by high officials in interviews between 18 and 20 December 2007.

10 For a more extensive discussion of the throughput–output nexus in the context of administrative reform and its potential for policy-making on the empirical example of the recent management changes in the European Commission, see Bauer (2008b).

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