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# Representative Bureaucracy and Seconded National Government Officials in the European Commission\*

Zuzana Murdoch<sup>a,b</sup>, Jarle Trondal<sup>b,c</sup> and Benny Geys<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Research Area ‘Organisation and Governance Studies’, University of Bremen, Germany.  
Email: zmurdoch@uni-bremen.de

<sup>b</sup> Department of Political Science and Management, University of Agder, Kristiansand, Norway.  
Email: zuzana.murdoch@uia.no

<sup>c</sup> ARENA Centre for European Studies, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway.  
Email: jarle.trondal@uia.no

<sup>d</sup> Department of Economics, Norwegian Business School (BI), Oslo, Norway.  
Email: Benny.Geys@bi.no

## Abstract

The bureaucratic arms of modern international organizations increasingly consist of staff with ambiguous organizational affiliations. This article analyses implications of this trend from the perspective of the Representative Bureaucracy – using seconded national experts (SNEs) in the European Commission (Commission) as the empirical laboratory. Using a variety of datasets, we unveil Commission SNEs’ profiles (to assess their passive representativeness) and link these profiles to their role perceptions (to evaluate their potential for active representation). This illustrates that Commission SNEs’ background characteristics do not match those of their constituent population (i.e. the EU27 population) – suggesting a lack of passive representativeness. However, we also find that their role perceptions are correlated with the policy preferences of their home country population: i.e., SNEs from countries favoring stronger national rather than European regulatory and policy-making powers are more likely to see themselves as a representative of their home country government. This suggests a *potential* for active representation in terms of SNEs’ home country’s policy preferences.

**Keywords:** Representation, Seconded national experts, European Commission, Bureaucracy.

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\* Corresponding author: Jarle Trondal, University of Agder, and ARENA Centre for European Studies, University of Oslo, Norway; e-mail: jarle.trondal@uia.no; Tel: +47 38141561. We are grateful to the editors, three anonymous referees and Morten Egeberg for excellent comments and suggestions, to CLENAD (especially its former president Matthew Snoding) and Nina Bonge (WZB Berlin) for invaluable assistance with the survey, and to FWO Vlaanderen (grant nr. G.0022.12 to Benny Geys) and the Norwegian Research Council (“EURODIV: Integration and division: Towards a segmented Europe?”) for financial assistance. The usual caveat applies.

## 1. Introduction

Two key questions have repeatedly occupied political science scholars: Who governs, and does it matter who governs? Similarly, public administration scholarship has long been occupied with equivalent questions concerning non-elected office holders. The evolving literature on regulatory governance, by contrast, has attached comparatively less attention to who regulates and how it matters (e.g. Levi-Faur 2011, 2012). With the increasing regulatory significance of international organizations (Biermann & Siebenhüner 2009; Costa & Jorgensen 2012) and the rising regulatory influence of international bureaucracies and transnational regulatory systems (Trondal *et al.* 2010; Abbott & Snidal 2013; Blauburger & Rittberger 2014), we arguably need to learn more about the representativeness of staff embedded in such international regulatory structures (Stevens 2009; Gravier 2008, 2013; Ban 2013; Halliday *et al.* 2013). Acknowledging that the main activity of the European Commission (Commission) is regulation, this study takes a novel step at addressing both questions among Commission office holders.<sup>1</sup>

Although such analysis would be of interest in its own right (Stevens 2009; Gravier 2008, 2013; Ban 2013), a key additional aim of this article lies in extending the literature on Representative Bureaucracy by offering the first large-N study of representativeness among *seconded national* bureaucratic staff in the Commission. Empirical studies on representative bureaucracy have thus far primarily addressed permanent office holders (e.g. Meier & Capers 2013; Kennedy 2014). Our focus on seconded staff is inspired by the increasing presence of staff with ambiguous organizational affiliations in bureaucratic and regulatory structures – recently referred to as a shift towards “contracted government” (Murdoch & Trondal 2013, p. 1). This, in our view, requires a re-assessment of the legitimacy and governance implications inherent in

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<sup>1</sup> Choosing the Commission as empirical laboratory offers an opportunity to embed our analysis within an existing body of knowledge on Commission bureaucrats (Egeberg 2012a; Hooghe 2005, 2012; Gravier 2008, 2013; Stevens 2009; Bauer 2012; Murdoch & Geys 2012; Ban 2013; Kassim *et al.* 2013). Moreover, and more practically, Commission staff data are more easily publicly accessible than those of other international organizations.

staff representativeness (Halliday *et al.* 2013; Meier & Capers 2013; Riccucci *et al.* 2014). On the one hand, the more flexible hiring procedures for seconding national staff into international organizations leave more room for manoeuvre in the hiring decision, which can affect the passive representativeness of the bureaucracy. On the other hand, seconded national government officials might feel less bound by the impartiality requirement implicit in (Weberian) bureaucratic decision-making than permanent office holders (Hammarsköld 1961; Cox 1969; Geuijen *et al.* 2008; Trondal *et al.* 2014), which may raise concerns about their chosen mode of governance and their active or substantive representativeness (more details below). The latter is particularly relevant for international organizations since “what is at stake here is the very concept of an impartial ICS [i.e. International Civil Service], serving the [international organization’s] member states in an independent way” (Mouritzen 1990, pp. 35-36; Weiss 1982; Ege & Bauer 2013). From this perspective, the contributions of this article are two-fold.

First, we assess the demographic profile of *seconded* government officials, such as to assess their passive representativeness. Our analysis concentrates on Seconded National Experts (SNEs) working in the Commission. These constitute approximately 10% of the Commission’s administrative staff with policy-making responsibilities, which makes them an important group within the workforce of the Commission. SNEs are particularly interesting from a theoretical perspective as they have an explicit policy-making role within the Commission. Such policy relevance is crucial where it concerns studies of Representative Bureaucracy (see also below). Moreover, SNEs are temporary staff members at the EU level, but at the same time they are permanent staff members of their national systems (where they remain formally employed and which continues to pay their salaries during secondment). This makes them of particular theoretical interest because they owe allegiance both to their home

and host organizations.<sup>2</sup> The cross-pressures that arise from such duality imply that socialization from long-term embedment within the organizational structures may be absent from – or more difficult to establish for – such individuals, which makes them important for studies of bureaucratic representation (for a similar argument regarding street-level bureaucrats, see Thompson 1976; Meier 1993). Indeed, one might expect them to serve their national masters (active representation) more than permanent Commission bureaucrats. As such, analysis of contracted staff’s potential for active representation (as inferred from their role perceptions) provides an important, novel way to assess the conditions under which they might suffer from a (lack of) autonomy or independence while working in IOs.<sup>3</sup>

Second, we link the demographic profile of seconded staff to their *role perceptions* (i.e. the extent to which they feel they act as a representative of their country’s government in their daily work). We focus on such role perceptions – rather than actual policy decisions or outcomes (see also Selden 1997; Sowa & Selden 2003; Bradbury & Kellough 2007) – because the discretionary power of bureaucrats is critical for their active representation of certain policy interests (Meier 1993; Sowa and Selden 2003). Final outputs, unlike personal decisions and individuals’ perceptions thereof, are often determined by numerous factors beyond bureaucratic

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<sup>2</sup> The Commission in 2008 formalized new rules on the secondment of national experts to the Commission (Commission Decision C(2008) 6866 of 12 November 2008). These maintain that SNEs are obliged to behave solely in the interests of the Commission, and cannot accept any instructions or duties from their home government. However, they do not have the authority to represent the Commission externally on their own, or to enter into any commitments on behalf of the Commission. Compatible with the wishes of Jean Monnet when staffing the High Authority in 1952, SNEs’ main role consists in providing the Commission with additional expertise, supplying learning across levels of government, securing the Commission a more flexible workforce hired through a fast-track recruitment system, and offering national governments with added experience.

<sup>3</sup> The recruitment of SNEs is not subject to similar organizational safeguards as permanent Commission officials (the same holds for other types of contracted staff in the Commission, though the hiring rules for SNEs and contracted staff in the Commission are evidently not equivalent). SNE vacancies are usually publicized by the Commission at the Permanent Representation of members-states, which subsequently contact the respective national administrations. The recruiting Commission unit subsequently receives applications of SNE candidates from the member states, makes a shortlist and selects a candidate following a round of interviews (Suvarierol & Van den Berg 2008, pp. 106-107). Yet, deviations from this ‘procedure’ appear quite common – e.g., with Member States taking the initiative and proposing seconded officials with particular knowledge (perceived to be) lacking in certain Commission units. To the best of our knowledge, no in-depth analysis exists of these various hiring ‘procedures’, nor their consequences. This remains an important avenue for further research.

control (such as, for instance, citizen coproduction of public goods and services; Whitaker 1980; De Witte & Geys 2011, 2013), which limits their relevance in measuring active representation (Bradbury & Kellough 2007). We thus study SNEs’ “potential for active representation (...) rather than seeking evidence of policy outcomes in line with the interests of specific groups” (Bradbury & Kellough 2007, p. 698).

The data – which derive from official documents detailing the staff composition of the Commission, and a unique survey among Commission SNEs (N≈400) – reveal two new findings: First, Commission SNEs are *not* representative of their constituent population (i.e. the EU27-population).<sup>4</sup> Although this may not be overly surprising in light of requirements that such officials have a certain level of education and expertise, the extent of this (un)representativeness varies substantially across policy areas within the Commission. Second, while the role perceptions of Commission SNEs do not consistently differ depending on their socio-demographic characteristics, they do reflect at least in part the policy preferences of their home country. That is, SNEs from countries favoring stronger national rather than European policy-making powers are significantly more likely to see themselves as a representative of their home country government. This suggests a *potential* for active representation in terms of SNEs’ home countries’ policy preferences, and may undermine their independence or autonomy from member state interests (we return to this below).

In the next section, we briefly review the existing Representative Bureaucracy literature, and highlight the extensions to this literature in our analysis. Then, in section 3, we use a variety of datasets to unveil Commission SNEs’ demographic and policy profiles (passive representation) and their role perceptions (active representation). Finally, section 4 concludes.

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<sup>4</sup> As our analysis relates to 2011, we employ information about the EU population without Croatia (i.e. EU27).

## 2. Theoretical backdrop

A key characteristic of ideal-type Weberian bureaucracies is that its bureaucrats follow “rules with regard to their office with dedication and integrity” and avoid “arbitrary action and action based on personal likes and dislikes” (Olsen 2006, p. 5; Weber 1978). As such, personal background characteristics and policy preferences are assumed to be irrelevant for explaining staff behaviour. Clearly, as also recognized by Weber himself, such an ideal can at best be approximated in reality. This realisation is central to the theory of Representative Bureaucracy, which assumes that “if bureaucracy is broadly representative of the public it serves, then it is more likely to make decisions that benefit the public” (Meier *et al.* 1999, p. 1026). Bureaucrats’ background characteristics are thereby thought to matter in two ways:

First, the legitimacy of government agencies depends on the extent to which their staff composition reflects salient demographic characteristics of their constituencies (Meier & Capers 2013; Riccucci *et al.* 2014). This reflects the normative viewpoint that “representation and staffing carries important implications for the delivery of public services [and] the sharing of power in society” (Schröter & von Maravić 2014, p. 6). In line with such view, a more representative bureaucracy has been linked to improved overall administrative performance (Kingsley 2003), increased worker loyalty and job satisfaction (Choi 2009) and higher legitimacy and accountability of the bureaucratic organization (Selden & Selden 2001). From a more political perspective, bureaucratic representation can also play a *symbolic* role by suggesting equality of opportunities and equity (Groeneveld & van de Walle 2010; Gravier 2013; Peters *et al.* 2013), and prove helpful during the implementation of controversial or unpopular (but necessary) policy programs (Pitts *et al.* 2010; Peters *et al.* 2013).

Second, background characteristics of officials become particularly important when ‘passive representation’ leads to ‘active representation’. Passive or descriptive representation thereby refers to shared characteristics along (usually socio-demographic) dimensions, whereas

active or substantive representation refers to decision-making processes in the interest, or on behalf, of the represented (Meier 1975, 1993; Riccucci & Saidel 1997; Kennedy 2014; Schröter & von Maravić 2014). It is thereby important to highlight that active representation does *not* necessarily imply the existence of *conscious* decisions or actions representing the interest of a particular group over another. Rather, it is about acting in a way that favours the interests of a given group, whether this is done consciously or not. Both forms of representation – i.e. passive and active – need not necessarily occur jointly or be causally connected. Indeed, as already articulated by Pitkin (1967) and Mosher (1968), it is not required that a bureaucracy is representative in a descriptive sense for it to take decisions that are representative in a substantive sense, or vice versa. Although recent work on Representative Bureaucracy has often uncovered a link between passive and active representation (Hindera 1993; Meier 1993; Keiser *et al.* 2002; Atkins & Wilkins 2013), such studies generally rely on aggregate- rather than individual-level data, “which limits the ability to draw inferences about the actions of individuals” (Riccucci *et al.* 2014, p. 13; see also Theobald & Haider-Markel 2008; Bradbury & Kellough 2011). Nevertheless, such studies have been able to uncover, and illustrate the relative importance of, the direct and indirect mechanisms linking passive and active representation (Lim 2006; Meier & Nicholson-Crotty 2006), and the role of threshold issues or ‘tipping points’ in such passive-active translation (Meier 1993; Keiser *et al.* 2002; Atkins & Wilkins 2013).<sup>5</sup>

Yet, recent reviews indicate that the Representative Bureaucracy literature has thus far been predominantly concerned with permanent full-time street- or executive-level bureaucrats in national governments (Meier & Capers 2013; Kennedy 2014). In our view, the increasing

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<sup>5</sup> Although it would be of significant theoretical interest to develop specific hypotheses about such ‘tipping points’ adapted to the multi-level, polycentric system of IO governance, we abstain from this here as our datasets do not allow testing such predictions empirically. That is, without direct insights into the role played by specific actors in particular decisions (about which we unfortunately lack data), we cannot assess how many officials from a given country with a given cultural identity and/or policy preference it would take to turn passive into active representation.



relevance of *seconded* national bureaucratic staff in international bureaucracies might well affect the overall representativeness of such bureaucracies. As indicated above, such influence can be expected in two dimensions. First, since the hiring procedures for seconded staff coming to the Commission are more flexible than those of permanent Commission staff, they might leave more room for manoeuvre in the hiring decision. This can make them an attractive instrument to bolster staff contingents that are under-represented in the permanent staff (e.g. women, minorities, disabled), and thereby improve passive or descriptive representation. However, the same flexibility can also be invoked to prioritize the filling of niche skill sets, which might carry unintentional or unrecognized adverse consequences for socio-demographic diversity. Hence, the overall effect on the passive representativeness of the bureaucracy is an important question that has not received empirical attention. Second, seconded government officials may raise concerns about how they actively represent the citizenry. For instance, national officials working in the Commission regularly invokes the fear that member-states strategically use such officials to their own advantage (Hammaršköld 1961; Cox 1969; Geuijen *et al.* 2008; Trondal *et al.* 2014). The underlying apprehension is that seconded national staff may feel less bound by the impartiality requirement implicit in (Weberian) bureaucratic decision-making, or feel less loyal towards the institution to which they are temporarily assigned. Hence, simply studying *who* works as seconded officials (i.e. passive representation) is insufficient when evaluating their overall representativeness (thus including active representation).

The latter argument's inclusion of civil servants' active representation immediately raises an additional question. Most existing work on bureaucratic representativeness concentrates on *socio-demographic* characteristics such as race or gender (Meier & Capers 2013; Kennedy 2014). Yet, even when single civil servants play some role of "passive representation", this does not inversely mean that a bureaucracy should ever be fully

representative in socio-demographic terms. Public officials are indeed required to have a certain level of education and expertise, and will thus be definition be unrepresentative in at least some respects. Moreover, it appears an ethical requirement for civil servants to serve the ‘common good’, which – in the absence of objective criteria to define the ‘common’ good – is generally viewed as being reflected in the preferences of the constituency’s majority. As such, representativeness in socio-demographic terms would have to be complemented (though *not* replaced) with representativeness in terms of the *policy opinions and preferences* of the population at large.

Individuals are indeed likely to retain opinions and viewpoints from previous organizational environments in which they were embedded, and thus might be ‘pre-socialized’ towards certain behavioural perceptions before entering a new organization (Pfeffer 1982; Selden 1997; Hooghe 2005; Beyers 2010). As re-socialization takes time, and arguably depends upon individuals’ perception of the continuity of their position (Egeberg 2004; Christensen & Læg Reid 2009), such influence of different organizational environments may be more important for seconded national staff. The result of such pre-socialization, however, might be that individuals’ policy preferences are *not* perfectly captured by their socio-demographic characteristics (Whistler & Ellickson 2010). This is not to deny the importance of demographics and other social factors. In effect, it implies that policy preferences are likely to be driven by both organizational socialization and demographics and other social factors.<sup>6</sup> This is implicitly acknowledged in Selden’s (1997, p. 133) conclusion that “scholars need to establish a relationship between demographic characteristics and work attitudes, and attitudes and administrative behaviours”. It is likewise reflected in recent findings by Bradbury & Kellough (2007, p. 712), who argue that “it is attitude congruence (...) rather than race, per se, or any

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<sup>6</sup> While credibly lying beyond the scope of this manuscript, our argument here entails that future work should engage in a clearer distinction between policy preferences that may exist due to organizational socialization, and those that derive from demographics and other social factors.

other demographic characteristic, which appears to be the most important direct influence on administrator adoption of a (...) representative role". As one might contend that a truly representative bureaucracy reflects *also* the policy preferences – not *just* the socio-demographic characteristics – of its constituency (Rosset 2013), this study goes beyond mere socio-demographics when evaluating staff representativeness.

### **3. Empirical analysis**

#### *3.1. Datasets*

The analysis rests on a number of data sources. First, we collected information about the characteristics of the European population, since this is the most relevant comparison group for European-level bureaucrats (Gravier 2004, 2013; Stevens 2008). Information about the socio-demographic characteristics (i.e. gender, age, educational background and nationality) of the population in the EU27 was obtained from Eurostat. To operationalize the European population's policy preferences, we rely on the Eurobarometer surveys (more details below).

Second, we collected information about the staff composition of the Commission. This is obtained from official publications of the Commission including, but not restricted to, the 2011 *European Commission Human Resource Report*, the *Draft General Budget 2012* and online publications documenting the *Distribution of Staff by Statutory Links and DGs*. (European Commission 2011a, 2011b, 2011c).<sup>7</sup> We supplement the limited official information available about SNEs via a unique web-based survey administered between January and April 2011 to all 1098 then active SNEs in the Commission. While 667 SNEs followed the link to the survey (representing a response rate of just over 60 percent) many did not complete all questions relevant to the present analysis. As the drop-out rate between the questions relevant to the present analysis differed significantly across SNEs, the final sample hovers around 400

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<sup>7</sup> The year of analysis – 2011 – is determined by the year in which our survey among the Commission's SNEs took place (see below).

respondents. It is important to note that the distribution of the SNEs across Directorate-Generals in this final sample compares to that observed for *all* Commission SNEs in 2011: for instance, we have more respondents from Directorate-Generals dealing with statistics, taxation and climate action (which tend to have more SNEs), compared to less respondents from Directorate-Generals dealing with human resources and language services (which tend to have fewer SNEs). This similarity suggests that non-response within the targeted population was independent of the Directorate-General in which SNEs work.

### *3.2. Passive representation*

Table 1 documents the passive or descriptive representativeness of Commission SNEs in terms of gender (percent female and male), education (share of tertiary graduates with a social science, law or other degree)<sup>8</sup>, age (share of population between 26 and 67 within four age bands) and geographic origin. Our analysis thereby documents population shares within each group (i.e. general EU27 population versus SNEs). These data could in principle be further aggregated using measures of variation or the Gini Index (which summarize a degree of inequality in one single number; for an overview of alternative measures, see Riccucci & Saidel 1997). Still, as our prime interest lies in the relative incidence and frequencies of both groups (i.e. their proportionality), translating their diversity in one number of bureaucratic representativeness obscures much of the information we are interested in. Note also that while the first three socio-demographic characteristics are commonly included in Representative Bureaucracy studies (Kennedy 2014), the last characteristic (i.e. geographic origin) arguably becomes more important in international bureaucracies (Gravier 2008, 2013). Table 1 documents geographic origin via countries in the original EU6 (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and

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<sup>8</sup> This operationalization of the education variable via individuals' field of study reflects the primary relevance of social science (particularly economics, political science and public administration) and law backgrounds in policy-making settings within the Commission. Its inclusion is relevant here since field of study choices have been associated with significant sorting in terms of personality characteristics (Humburg 2014), which in turn becomes reflected in decision-making and organizational cultures (Judge & Cable 1997; Krueger & Schkade 2008).

Luxembourg), the nine countries joining prior to 2004 (referred to as ‘EU9’: Austria, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and United Kingdom), and the twelve countries from the most recent enlargement rounds (referred to as ‘EU10+2’: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia).

Table 1: Representation by Gender, Education, Age and Geographic origin (%)

	Female	Male	Social Science	Law	Other	26-39 years	40-49 years	50-59 years	60-67 years	EU6	EU9	EU10+2
EU27	52	48	28	5	67	34	26	24	19	47	33	20
SNEs	40	60	37	16	47	41	30	18	11	30	33	37

*Note: For EU27, N=500700753 individuals (i.e. total EU27 population). For SNEs, N=1098 individuals.*

*Sources: Eurostat; European Commission (2011a, 2011b, 2011c); Authors’ survey among Commission SNEs.*

Table 1 indicates that the gender composition of Commission SNEs is significantly skewed towards men. This mirrors the fact that women are substantially under-represented also among the Commissions’ total administrative staff with policy-making responsibilities (40% female; not reported in table 1) – even though women are over-represented in assistant positions (65% female; not reported in table 1). This gender division is in line with recent observations on the Commission’s persistent ‘macho-culture’ (Ban 2013), but creates a significant potential for under-representation of female viewpoints in the Commission’s policy work. We return to this observation in section 3.3. With respect to educational background, we find that lawyers are significantly over-represented within the Commission’s SNEs (16%, versus 5% among tertiary graduates in the EU27 population), while there is a marginally smaller discrepancy between the share of tertiary graduates in the European population holding degrees in social sciences (i.e. economics and political science) and the share of SNEs with such degrees. Although legal expertise is obviously highly valued for drafting official documents and delimiting discussions within the boundaries of EU law, the Commission clearly experiences substantial under-representation of experts in other disciplines (e.g., hard sciences). The age distribution of the Commission’s SNEs suggests a slight over-representation of young working-

age individuals and a likewise slight under-representation in the 50-67 age range. Although this is likely to reflect the fact that younger people may be more interested in secondment to the Commission (e.g. for career reasons) and might be more able to engage in them (e.g. due to fewer family-related obligations), it creates at least some potential for an age-related bias in the Commission's policy work. Finally, compared to the share of the EU27-population living in EU6 (47%), EU9 (33%) and EU10+2 (20%) countries, new member states are heavily over-represented among Commission SNEs while the original six member states are under-represented.

All in all, the Commission's SNEs can barely be called descriptively representative of the EU27-population in terms of basic socio-demographic background characteristics. SNEs are more likely to be younger, male individuals from the 'new' member states with a degree in law or social sciences. Table 1, however, only looks at the Commission as a whole, and the results thus obtained obviously need not play out similarly across different sections of this large and diverse bureaucracy (Kennedy 2013, 2014; Meier & Capers 2013; Schröter & von Maravić 2014). Research in organization theory indeed indicates that decision-making logics, incentives and discretion may vary substantially across policy areas (Egeberg 2012b). For instance, it is easy to imagine that bureaucrats have less leeway for personal initiative in sensitive policy areas compared to less sensitive areas. Government units may also "foster different cultures of representation" (Kennedy 2013, p. 6), which can become reflected in the (interpretation of) staffing policies (Cayer & Sigelman 1980; Gravier 2013; Murdoch & Geys 2014). Hence, Table 2 reports the representativeness of SNEs across seven sets of Commission administrative

services (i.e. Directorate-Generals) covering distinct policy areas previously differentiated by Murdoch & Trondal (2013).<sup>9</sup>

Table 2 illustrates that the representation of various population groups differs dramatically across policy areas. This holds both in terms of educational background (i.e. over-representation of social scientists in Directorate-Generals occupied with External Relations and Research, while lawyers are over-represented in Central and Social Regulation Directorate-Generals), as well as age distribution (e.g. young SNEs are particularly over-represented in Market and Provision Directorate-Generals). Moreover, Table 2 illustrates that the under-representation of women is particularly strong in Market-, Supply-, and Research-related Directorate-Generals, but does not arise in Directorate-Generals linked to the Commission administration ('Central'). The latter is interesting as it obtains confirmation when looking at the representation of women in permanent administrative policy-making posts across policy areas (details upon request). This may reflect the fact that the Commission's credibility in requiring adherence to non-discriminatory gender hiring rules depends on the observance thereof in Central Directorate-Generals, which might play "the role of a kind of model employer" (Peters *et al.* 2013, p. 9). Even so, despite a steadily increasing representation of women in administrative policy-making posts (Ban 2013), this gendered variation reflects that the Commission, "more than a decade after the introduction of its [gender] mainstreaming mandate, has fallen well short of its goal" of gender equality (Hafner-Burton & Pollack 2009, p. 129).

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<sup>9</sup> The seven policy areas are 'Market', which is comprised of Directorate-Generals COMP, ECFIN, ENTR and MARKT; 'External Relations' is Directorate-Generals ELARG, DEVCO, FPI, ECHO and TRADE; 'Social Regulation' is Directorate-Generals CLIMA, EAC, EMPL, ENV, SANCO, HOME and JUST; 'Supply' is Directorate-Generals ENER, CNECT, MOVE, RTD and TAXUD; 'Provision' is Directorate-Generals AGRI, MARE and REGIO; 'Research' is Directorate-Generals ESTAT and JRC; Central consists of BUDG, COMM, IAS, BEPA, SJ and OLAF (Directorate-General acronyms are explained in the appendix).

Table 2: Demographic representativeness of Commission SNEs by policy area (%)

	Female	Male	Social Science	Law	Other	26-39 years	40-49 years	50-59 years	60-67 years	EU6	EU9	EU10+2
<b>EU27</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>20</b>
Market	38	62	48	20	32	56	30	7	7	38	34	28
External Relations	46	54	51	11	38	35	32	22	11	28	43	29
Social Regulation	46	54	30	21	49	40	29	20	11	25	36	39
Supply	34	66	26	16	58	33	31	21	15	32	31	37
Provision	39	61	32	4	64	52	12	20	16	16	32	52
Research	31	69	50	0	50	35	33	20	11	33	20	46
Central	53	47	35	35	30	45	40	10	5	40	40	30
<b>Commission</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>37</b>

Note: For EU27, N=500700753 individuals (i.e. total EU27 population). For SNEs, the sample depends on the Directorate-General cluster: N=379 (Commission); N=61 (Market); N=59 (External Relations); N=94 (Social Regulation); N=72 (Supply); N=23 (Provision); N=46 (Research); N=20 (Central).

'Market' is Directorate-Generals COMP, ECFIN, ENTR and MARKT;

'External Relations' is Directorate-Generals ELARG, DEVCO, FPI, ECHO and TRADE;

'Social Regulation' is Directorate-Generals CLIMA, EAC, EMPL, ENV, SANCO, HOME and JUST;

'Supply' is Directorate-Generals ENER, CNECT, MOVE, RTD and TAXUD;

'Provision' is Directorate-Generals AGRI, MARE and REGIO;

'Research' is Directorate-Generals ESTAT and JRC;

'Central' consists of BUDG, COMM, IAS, BEPA, SJ and OLAF.

Translation and administrative services are excluded. (Directorate-General acronyms are explained in the appendix).

Sources: Eurostat; European Commission (2011a, 2011b, 2011c); Authors' survey among Commission SNEs.

Thus far, we have only looked at bureaucratic representation in socio-demographic terms – as in the existing literature. Turning now to representativeness *in terms of policy preferences*, we introduce a number of measures of citizens' opinion towards the EU polity and its activities. The first is a general measure of Euroscepticism (see column 1 in table 3). This reflects a general preference for less EU influence in public policy decisions, because it is likely to make citizens want to install accountability and control measures in order to avoid a 'run-away bureaucracy' in Brussels (Lubbers & Scheepers 2005; Serricchio *et al.* 2013). As such, it does *not* reflect preferences towards specific public policy programs, but *rather* indicates a preference concerning the level of decision-making (as an issue of sovereignty; i.e. the authority to adjust the content of a given policy). We measure Euroscepticism within the European population using the Eurobarometer question: "Generally speaking, do you think (your country's) membership is a good thing, a bad thing, neither good nor bad?". A country is defined



as Eurosceptic if more than 20% of the population answers that EU membership is a bad thing. To avoid this measurement from being influenced by the recent economic recession, we use information from the last Eurobarometer *before* the onset of the on-going financial crisis (Eurobarometer 67.2 from 2007). This defines Austria, Finland, France, Sweden and the United Kingdom as Eurosceptic (which jointly cover 30% of the EU27 population; see table 3).

Evidently, this only provides a very general measure of popular preferences towards European-level public policy-making. As individuals' stance towards the EU may vary across policy areas, we extend the analysis (in columns 2 to 7 in table 3) using the following Eurobarometer survey question: "For each of the following areas, do you think that decisions should be made by the national government, or made jointly within the European Union?". Support for the first half of the statement (and thus in favour of *national* policy-making) receives value 1, while support for the latter half of the statement (and thus in favour of *EU* policy-making) receives value 2. The question is repeated for 18 policy areas (including 'fighting crime', 'taxation', 'defence and foreign affairs', 'health and social welfare', 'agriculture and fishery', and 'transports'), which can be matched to the seven Directorate-General clusters differentiated in table 2. As such, we can calculate the share of a country's population that favours/opposes EU-level decision-making for each Directorate-General cluster (i.e. policy area). This allows us to define an indicator variable (i.e. *NO-EU*) equal to 1 if the share of a country's population opposing EU-level decision-making in a given policy area lies more than one standard deviation above the EU27 average in that policy area.<sup>10</sup> The results indicate Finland and the United Kingdom as opposing EU-level decision-making in all policy areas. To this 'core group', Sweden and Denmark are added for 'Market' Directorate-Generals (implying that, in total, *NO-EU*=1 for 19% of the EU27 population for this policy area),

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<sup>10</sup> We refrain from setting an absolute threshold here, as opposition to EU intervention is much higher in some policy areas (e.g. Social Regulation; over 65% of EU27 population) than others (e.g. External Relations; under 35% of EU27 population).

Sweden, Denmark and Austria for ‘External Relations’ (23% of the EU27 population), Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands for ‘Social Regulation’ (28% of the EU27 population), Austria for ‘Supply’ (18% of the EU27 population), Czech Republic, Austria and France for ‘Provision’ (31% of the EU27 population), and Denmark and Austria for ‘Research’ (20% of the EU27 population).<sup>11</sup>

To gain more insight into SNEs’ representativeness in terms of preferences for/against EU decision-making within the EU27 population, table 3 reports the results from a comparison on this share of the EU27 population (row 1) and the share of SNEs within a given Directorate-General cluster (row 2) that derive from countries that *do not* favour EU-level decision-making in that particular policy area (as defined above). In Column 1, we look at general feelings of Euroscepticism, while the remaining columns analyse preferences specific to six of the seven Directorate-General clusters separated above (no data are available for ‘Central’ Directorate-Generals as their activities cannot be linked unambiguously to particular public policy programs).

Table 3 illustrates that the share of the EU27 population living in countries defined by a Eurosceptic population (30%) is substantially higher than the share of all Commission SNEs who derive from Eurosceptic countries (17%). This under-representation is particularly obvious in Social Regulation (28% of EU27 population lives in countries most opposed to EU-level policy-making in this area, compared to 21% of SNEs deriving from such countries) and Provision Directorate-Generals (31% versus 16%), but appears completely absent in Market and External Relations Directorate-Generals. This pattern can have a number of possible interpretations, which, unfortunately, cannot be differentiated using our data. On the one hand, it might reflect that the Commission may avoid recruiting SNEs from countries opposed to EU-

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<sup>11</sup> Note that all percentages mentioned here include the population of Finland and the United Kingdom.

level policy-making in Directorate-Generals dealing with policies for which there is more opposition within the EU27 population (remember that opposition to EU intervention is much higher in Social Regulation than External Relations; see note 6). An alternative explanation could be that individuals deriving from countries with a more questioning position towards EU policy-making may be less interested in working for the Commission, or may face governments that are less willing to deprive themselves of skilled staff through the secondment system (especially where it concerns Directorate-Generals they consider as lacking legitimacy for these policy areas). Overall, however, the results in table 3 illustrate that the Commission might fall short of reflecting the policy preferences about (further) European integration within its constituency.

Table 3: Representation by preferences concerning the level of decision-making (%)

	Euroscepticism	Market	External Relations	Social Regulation	Supply	Provision	Research
<b>EU27</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>20</b>
SNEs	17	18	22	21	14	16	11

Note: For EU27, N=500700753 individuals (i.e. total EU27 population). For SNEs, the sample depends on the Directorate-General cluster: N=379 (General); N=61 (Market); N=59 (External Relations); N=94 (Social Regulation); N=72 (Supply); N=23 (Provision); N=46 (Research).

Source: Own calculations based on Eurobarometer surveys and authors’ survey among Commission SNEs.

### 3.3. Active representation?

Evidently, beyond the possibly symbolic role of representativeness (Groeneveld & van de Walle 2010; Gravier 2013; Peters *et al.* 2013), bureaucrats (i) with certain socio-demographic characteristics or (ii) arriving from countries with certain policy preferences may also actively represent their background. To assess this possibility, we analyze Commission SNEs’ *role perceptions*, measured by the extent to which SNEs’ feel they act as a *representative* of their country’s government in their daily work. The survey question employed is: “In your daily work, to what extent do you feel you act as a representative of your country’s government?”. Answers are coded using a six-point scale from ‘fully’ (coded as 0) to ‘not at all’ (coded as 5).

This question directly asks about role perceptions regarding the arguably most salient characteristic in our setting (i.e. nationality, or country of origin), and has therefore already attracted substantial attention in the literature studying socialization effects among *permanent* Commission staff (Hooghe 2005, 2012; Trondal *et al.* 2010) as well as those officials' belief structures (Kassim *et al.* 2013).<sup>12</sup> SNEs emphasizing national roles view European policy-making as an act of exchanging and balancing member-state interests. Adopting this role makes them more likely to defend national positions, and less likely to view Europe as an autonomous level of authority primarily designed to find policy solutions in the interests of a common European good. Exploring the extent to which Commission staff evokes 'European roles' thus also taps into the old neo-functionalist discussion on the conditions for loyalty transfer across government institutions (Haas 1958).

Our focus on role perceptions follows previous work by, among others, Selden (1997), Sowa & Selden (2003) and Bradbury & Kellough (2007), and implies that we study the *potential* for active representation rather than actual realization thereof in policy decisions (Bradbury & Kellough 2007). Although this diverges from the mainstream approach of measuring active representation through macro-level policy outputs or socio-economic outcomes, we believe that a focus on role perceptions is appropriate in our setting for two reasons. First, policy outcomes depend on numerous factors that lie beyond direct bureaucratic control (such as, for instance, citizen coproduction; Whitaker 1980; De Witte & Geys 2011, 2013), which obscures a clear assessment of the (theoretically crucial) discretionary power of bureaucrats over final outcomes (Meier 1993; Sowa & Selden 2003; Bradbury & Kellough

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<sup>12</sup> The phrasing of this question implies that we shift from comparing SNEs to the EU27 population (in section 3.2) to SNEs representing their government's policy preferences. Population and governments, however, are not necessarily the same thing, which raises the question how population preferences relate to those of their governments. Given that we are dealing solely with democratic countries, policy leaders are likely to be required to consider public preferences to maintain their legitimacy, or to appeal to a majority of voters at future elections. Hence, governments generally tend to reflect the majority opinion (though one can obviously imagine deviations from this in specific policy areas or circumstances).

2007). This difficulty does not arise for officials' role perceptions, over which they have full control. Furthermore, previous scholarship has illustrated that "administrators who perceive their role as that of an advocate or representative of minority interests, are more likely to make decisions that benefit the minority community" (Selden 1997, p. 140). Hence, role perceptions can be viewed as "a primary determinant of active representation" (Bradbury & Kellough 2007, p. 711; Selden *et al.* 1998). Second, as mentioned above, active representation is about acting in a way that favors the interests of a particular group, *whether this is done consciously or not*. Therefore role perceptions can be a factor easing the way into active representation of particular groups' interests. Interpreted in this way, analysis of seconded staff's potential for active representation (as inferred from their role perceptions) provides a novel way to assess the degree to which national officials might come to suffer from a lack of autonomy or independence from member state interests while working in IOs (Hammarösköld 1961; Cox 1969; Geuijen *et al.* 2008; Trondal *et al.* 2014).

The empirical analysis relies on the following regression model (with subscript *i* referring to SNEs).

$$\text{ActRepr}_i = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Gender}_i + \beta_2 \text{Age}_i + \beta_3 \text{Education}_i + \beta_4 \text{EU6}_i + \beta_5 \text{EU9}_i + \beta_6 \text{Policy\_Pref}_i + \delta \text{Controls}_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

In equation (1), ActRepr is based on the question: "In your daily work, to what extent do you feel you act as a representative of your country's government?" (see above). Note that the nature of the dependent variable – i.e. a six-point scale from 'fully' (coded as 0) to 'not at all' (coded as 5) – requires estimation of an ordered logit model. We also cluster standard errors by Directorate-General to account for the fact that answers from SNEs within one Directorate-General may not be fully independent from one another.

The key socio-demographic explanatory variables are SNEs' gender (1 if male, 0 if female), age (in years), educational background (separate indicator variables for a degree in

social sciences or law; with other degrees as the reference group) and country of origin (separate indicator variables for EU6 and EU9; with EU10+2 countries as reference group). First, on gender, studies suggest that female permanent officials in the Commission are more supranationally oriented than their male colleagues (Kassim *et al.* 2013, p. 111), but it remains unclear whether this also holds for female temporary staff. Second, previous studies show no age effect with respect to permanent Commission officials' supranational orientation (Kassim *et al.* 2013). Thus, the age variable is applied in this study without any clear prediction. Next, it may be expected that different fields of study make SNEs more or less oriented towards European vs. national concerns, because different disciplines are characterised by varying degrees of paradigmatic status and international orientation (Becher 1989; Braxton & Hargens 1996; Smeby 2000; Raadschelders 2013; Vukasovic 2013). Fourth, country of origin measures SNEs' patterns of national pre-socialization. One might expect that SNEs originating from new and 'un-socialized' member states (i.e. EU10+2) give more priority to national concerns whereas SNEs from earlier accession countries have become more socialized into 'European concerns'. SNEs originating from old EU member states may thus be expected to have learned the 'supranational game' more than their junior fellows, whom are likely to be less pre-socialized into a European state of mind. Given the coding of the dependent variable, this implies that we expect positive coefficient estimates for the variables EU6 and EU9.

Finally, with respect to policy preferences, we introduce the share of the population in an SNE's home country answering that EU membership is a bad thing when analysing the complete sample of SNEs (column 1 in table 4). When looking at subsamples of SNEs within particular Directorate-General clusters (columns 2-7 in table 4), we instead rely on the share of a country's population that opposes EU-level decision-making in that policy area. Given the coding of the dependent variable, this implies we expect negative coefficient estimates for this variable. It should also be noted here that the data suggest a significant positive correlation

between SNEs' personal beliefs in the EU project (measured on a 5-point scale from 'advantageous' to 'disadvantageous') and the share of citizens in their countries of origin with positive attitudes towards the EU (Pearson correlation coefficient=0.107; p=0.0305). This is important since it implies that there is a positive relation between SNE's policy preferences and those in their home country – which is required for any form of active representation.

The results are provided in table 4, where the first column analyses the entire sample of SNEs, and later columns limit attention to SNEs within the Directorate-General clusters distinguished also in tables 2 and 3. Table 4 offers two main observations. The first is that demographic variables have fairly low explanatory power throughout the analysis, and generally fail to provide a significant effect in more than one of the estimations in table 4. The only exception is an SNE's country of origin: i.e. SNEs from EU6 countries (relative to those in EU9 and EU10+2 countries) are significantly *more* likely to profess national role perceptions when they are seconded to Market and External Relations Directorate-Generals, but not when seconded to the Research department. The former two findings are clearly opposed to our initial expectations. Still, this may reflect the content of the policy area of these particular Directorate-General clusters, since dossiers in Market and External Relations Directorate-Generals are generally more political than technical (Kassim *et al.* 2013).

Table 4: Estimation results

	<i>Full sample</i>	<i>Market</i>	<i>External Relations</i>	<i>Social Regulation</i>	<i>Supply</i>	<i>Provision</i>	<i>Research</i>
Male (dummy)	0.301 (1.37)	0.513 (0.59)	0.795 (1.07)	0.588 (1.40)	0.195 (0.39)	0.491 (0.73)	-0.516 ** (-1.98)
Age (years)	-0.016 (-1.48)	-0.001 (-0.02)	-0.025 (-1.13)	-0.030 (-1.26)	0.005 (0.14)	-0.012 (-0.19)	0.074 *** (2.75)
Social Science (dummy)	-0.100 (-0.38)	1.061 *** (4.12)	0.424 (0.95)	-0.030 (-0.09)	0.050 (0.08)	0.368 (0.32)	-1.669 (-2.81)
Lawyer (dummy)	-0.289 (-0.96)	0.508 (1.10)	0.996 (1.08)	0.288 (0.42)	-1.352 (-4.26)	0.042 (0.03)	-
EU6 (dummy)	0.146 (0.41)	-1.410 *** (-6.06)	-1.894 *** (-3.67)	-0.198 (-0.45)	0.391 (0.77)	-1.293 (-1.14)	2.068 ** (2.06)
EU9 (dummy)	0.489 (1.25)	0.441 (0.45)	0.235 (0.34)	-0.215 (-0.37)	0.581 (1.33)	-0.882 (-5.49)	1.739 ** (2.24)
Percent less EU	-0.043 *** (-2.82)	-0.114 (-1.45)	-0.059 ** (-2.55)	-0.038 ** (-2.09)	-0.072 ** (-2.12)	0.067 (0.94)	0.029 *** (4.31)

Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	1.36	8.68	9.50	3.10	7.93	5.32	9.46
N	379	61	59	94	72	23	46

Note: t statistics based on standard errors corrected for clustering at the country-level between brackets, \*\*\* significant at 1%, \*\* at 5% and \* at 10%. The dependent variable reflects SNEs' answer to: "In your daily work, to what extent do you feel you act as a representative of your country's government?" Answers are coded using a six-point scale from 'fully' (coded as 0) to 'not at all' (coded as 5).

The second, and arguably more interesting, observation is that the policy preferences of SNEs' home country population with respect to European decision-making powers in a given policy area *do* play a significant role in most estimations. Given the coding schedule of the dependent variables, we find that SNEs from countries favoring stronger national rather than European policy-making powers are significantly *more* likely to see themselves as a representative of their home country government. This observation holds when analyzing the full sample of SNEs (column 1), as well as the subsamples related to the four largest Directorate-General clusters (Columns 2 to 5) (note, however, that column 7 provides an opposing finding). The main tenor of the results in table 4 thus suggests that there is some evidence of a significant *potential for* active representation in terms of policy preferences.

This result initially appears at odds with recent work suggesting that SNEs in the Commission are "in practice likely to be relatively independent from member-state influence" (Trondal *et al.* 2014: abstract). However, it should be remembered that we are investigating the *potential* for active representation, not its *actual* realization. From this perspective, it is interesting to observe that Trondal *et al.* (2014) highlight a number of *conditions* under which the independence of national civil servants in international bureaucracies might become compromised (such as the 'revolving door' hiring practices characterizing secondments). Based on our analysis, deriving from an EU-sceptic country can be seen as one further relevant condition. That is, table 4 indicates that the autonomy of SNEs is more likely to be endangered for SNEs coming from EU-sceptic countries. Still, the passive under-representation of SNEs from such countries (observed in table 3) implies that this condition applies to only a relatively



small share of SNEs. Consequently, most actual SNEs are *de facto* likely to remain independent of member state interests.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study provides two main contributions. First, we extend the literature on Representative Bureaucracy by being the first to analyse bureaucratic representation among *seconded* bureaucratic staff in international organizations. Such officials are making up a gradually increasing share of public policy-makers in international public organisations due to financial constraints. As this is likely to substantially affect the governance structure of such institutions, and will affect both passive *and* active representation among the overall body of public-sector officials, this evolution requires more attention in future RB research. Second, we introduce the importance of examining representativeness in terms of the *constituent population's policy preferences* in order to accurately assess the representativeness of a given bureaucracy. Both innovations taken together furthermore allow a novel way to assess the independence or autonomy of national officials working in IOs. The latter can be viewed as our main contribution to scholarship studying the increasing regulatory significance of international bureaucracies (Trondal *et al.* 2010; Abbott & Snidal 2013; Blauberger & Rittberger 2014).

Our central findings indicate Commission SNEs' background characteristics do not match those of their constituent population (i.e. the EU27 population) – suggesting a lack of passive representativeness. However, they do appear more likely to take up national role perceptions when the policy preferences in their home country population are more opposed to EU-level decision-making. The latter result indicates that there exists at least a *potential* for active representation in terms of policy preferences – something we, in line with Gravier (2013), failed to establish with respect to SNEs' socio-demographic characteristics. Based on our data, it is impossible to establish to what extent this potential is realized in practice, but its mere

existence raises the question: What does this imply for the crisis-driven development towards administrative cut-backs and ‘contracted government’?

The Commission has in recent years repeatedly signalled its intention to hire more SNEs – rather than permanent staff – because they are a cheaper means to finance its steadily increasing number of tasks (remember that SNEs’ home organization continues to pay their salaries during secondment; see above). For instance, the former Commissioner for Inter-institutional Relations and Administration proposed in 2011 that the Commission should *i*) implement a five percent reduction of staff in all categories in all institutions at the 2012 levels (by exploiting normal turnover rates); *ii*) fulfil secretarial and clerical tasks by contractual staff rather than officials with lifetime appointments; and *iii*) raise the maximum duration of contracts of other contract agents in the institutions from three years to five years (Šefčovič 2011, pp. 1-3). EU member states, however, likewise face financial constraints and may thus have an increased incentive to mainly send SNEs to Directorate-Generals of ‘use’ to them (or SNEs with a stronger national orientation). The UK Foreign Office (2012, p. 9), for instance, recently stated that the seconding of UK diplomats to the EEAS is an “investment worthwhile in terms of (...) [its] policy interest in the EEAS being better able to deliver on UK security and prosperity”. Our results suggest – at least at the time of the survey in 2011 – that any such ‘self-selection’ may bear seeds of problematic representation and governance effects from the Commission’s perspective.

Finally, it is important to reiterate that ‘perfect’ passive representation seems untenable in light of requirements that public officials have a certain degree of education, and so on. Moreover, as mentioned in the theoretical section, the passive representativeness of SNEs cannot be seen as independent of the (un)representativeness of the overall Commission staff. That is, seconded positions may be used to bolster staff contingents that are under-represented in the permanent staff or may replicate existing Commission staff patterns (and thus increase

its overall unrepresentativeness). As such, public officials are always likely to be unrepresentative at least to some extent. A more intuitively appealing benchmark may, therefore, arise through the comparison of the passive representative patterns of national and international bureaucracies. To the extent that we would observe major differences in the socio-demographic and policy representativeness of (inter)national bureaucratic staff, this would raise important questions regarding the nature and meaning of their *relative* representativeness. To the best of our knowledge, no such comparative studies exist in the RB literature to date.<sup>13</sup>

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## **Appendix: Acronyms of Commission Directorates-General and Services**

### Departments (Directorate-Generals)

Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI)  
Budget (BUDG)  
Climate Action (CLIMA)  
Communication (COMM)  
Communications Networks, Content and Technology (CNECT)  
Competition (COMP)  
Economic and Financial Affairs (ECFIN)  
Education and Culture (EAC)  
Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (EMPL)  
Energy (ENER)  
Enlargement (ELARG)  
Enterprise and Industry (ENTR)  
Environment (ENV)  
EuropeAid Development & Cooperation (DEVCO)  
Eurostat (ESTAT)  
Health and Consumers (SANCO)  
Home Affairs (HOME)  
Humanitarian Aid (ECHO)  
Internal Market and Services (MARKT)  
Joint Research Centre (JRC)  
Justice (JUST)  
Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (MARE)  
Mobility and Transport (MOVE)  
Regional Policy (REGIO)  
Research and Innovation (RTD)  
Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI)  
Taxation and Customs Union (TAXUD)  
Trade (TRADE)

### Services

Bureau of European Policy Advisers (BEPA)  
European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF)  
Internal Audit Service (IAS)  
Legal Service (SJ)