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Summary

Ever since the difficult ratification of the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, the executive of the European Union (EU), i.e. the European Commission, has come to operate in a radically different political and public environment (Bickerton *et al.* 2015; Kassim *et al.* 2013; Wonka 2015, pp. 91-93). Before this time, Commission officials mainly prepared EU policy-making with political and economic elites out of the public's view. The Post-Maastricht era, however, has witnessed 'the politicization of the EU'. EU policy-making has now become more visible and widely contested amongst a growing number of actors, not least national publics (Franklin *et al.* 1994; Hooghe and Marks 2008; Kriesi *et al.* 2008). Dissatisfied with the EU's nascent authority and the citizens' lack of influence on the EU policy-making process, politicization challenges the nature of the EU polity itself and raises the question of its legitimacy (De Wilde 2011). Scepticism is often targeted at the 'undemocratic' Commission and its staff. Commission officials are portrayed as Europhiles who are concerned only with pushing European integration forward (Brack and Costa 2012, p. 101). Against this backdrop, this dissertation asks: 'What explains the institutional role conceptions and behaviour of Commission officials in the Post-Maastricht era?' To answer this question, this dissertation focuses on the extent to which Commission officials' institutional role conceptions and policy-making behaviour are affected by the politicization of the EU polity.

To unpack this question, **Chapter II** starts by mapping the institutional role conceptions of Commission officials, with the use of three waves of representative surveys conducted in the mid 1990s, 2002 and late 2008. The concept of 'institutional role conception', as applied in this dissertation, refers to how Commission officials conceive the role of their institution within EU decision-making. To assess variation in this particular type of attitude, I make use of a refined version of Liesbet Hooghe's (2012) typology of institutional role conceptions, which ranges from the 'supranationalist' view, that the Commission should be the government of the EU, to the 'state-centric' view, that the Commission should accommodate member states' interests. The Chapter shows that, while the supranationalists constitute the largest group in the Commission, they are far from hegemonic. In fact, the institutional role conceptions have become increasingly more diverse and nuanced over time.

The Chapter continues by testing the conventional approaches to explaining EU officials' attitudes: 1) European re-socialization (Egeberg 1999; Henökl 2014; Trondal 2007), which theorizes that the organizational objectives and the social environment of the Commission re-socializes its officials into having supranationalist attitudes; 2) national pre-socialization (Hooghe 2005, 2012; Kassim *et al.* 2013), which hypothesizes that Commission officials' attitudes are determined by their national experiences before they enter the Commission, and thus vary per nationality; and 3) strategic calculation (Franchino 2007; Pollack 2003), which supposes that

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Commission officials' attitudes are shaped by rational cost-benefit analyses, inducing them to favour more European integration and thus adopt supranationalist attitudes. I find that national pre-socialization provides the best explanation for understanding Commission officials' institutional role conceptions. These findings subsequently leave us with the following paradox: while Commission officials' institutional role conceptions have become more diverse and more nuanced, they are best explained by relatively static national background factors, such as the degree of federalism and population size of one's home country.

To transcend this paradox, I explore the influence of a dynamic national background variable: the politicization of the EU in the home countries of Commission officials. **Chapter III** develops propositions on how politicization may affect the institutional role conceptions of Commission officials by combining the literature on EU politicization (De Wilde 2011; Hooghe and Marks 2008; Rauh 2016; Statham and Trezn 2015; Zürn *et al.* 2012) with a norm-guided open system approach (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Meyer and Rowan 1977). From the latter, I take that organizations depend on their environment as it provides them with support and legitimacy (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Meyer and Rowan 1977). Organizations align their structures with widely recognized norms and values in their environment so as to maintain their legitimacy. From this perspective, politicization, which comes along with challenges to the legitimacy of the EU polity (De Wilde 2011; Statham and Trezn 2015), should make the Commission more open to its (Euro critical) environment.

I argue, however, that not only organizational structures respond to legitimacy challenges, but also the individuals who work *within* these organizations. For the Commission to perceive itself as legitimate, it is important for its officials to perceive the role of the Commission to be consistent with prominent norms and values in its environment. Politicization may therefore push Commission officials to reconsider their (predominantly supranationalist) institutional role conception. I evaluate these theoretical propositions in an exploratory case study of Dutch Commission officials ($n = 21$). The study tentatively confirms that, in varying degrees, politicization pushes Commission officials to moderate their (supranationalist) institutional role conceptions.

Chapter IV goes on to further specify the influence of politicization on Commission officials' attitudes through a quantitative estimation of how Commission officials' institutional role conceptions are affected by the Euro scepticism in their home country. Here I draw on the theory of Representative Bureaucracy, a variant of the open system's theories. Representative Bureaucracy contends that a bureaucracy staffed by officials that are representative of the different societal groupings will be responsive to the wishes and demands its constituency (Meier 1993a; Saltzstein 1985; Selden 1997). Consistent with the national pre-socialization thesis, the

theory explains how personal attributes, such as class, gender, or ethnicity, lead to particular early socialization experiences that enable bureaucrats to identify with the interest of specific parts of the political community which they serve (Krislov 1974; Saltzstein 1979). When applying the theory of Representative Bureaucracy to the Commission, nationality is a particularly salient attribute. This leads me to assume that Commission officials respond to the (Euro sceptic) signals of their compatriots by adjusting their institutional role conceptions in a more state-centric direction. However, I add to the theory of Representative Bureaucracy that Euro scepticism only elicits attitudinal change amongst Commission officials when, at the same time, the EU is publically salient in their home countries. Salient issues are attention-grabbing and serve as a referent that Commission officials use to judge current or expected demands from the domestic political arena.

I assess this relationship with the use of three datasets. First, the 2008 wave of survey data which captures a wide range of attitudes amongst a sample of Commission officials (N = 1.649). Second, Euro scepticism is measured with the use of the 2008 wave of Eurobarometer data, whereas, third, EU salience is operationalized as salience of the EU amongst national political parties, which is derived from the 2006 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) (Hooghe *et al.* 2010). The analysis presents an unexpected finding: Commission officials from countries in which the EU is salient adopt a more supranationalist view on the Commission in response to Euro scepticism in their home country, while Commission officials from countries in which the EU is not salient adopt a more state-centric view in response to Euro scepticism at home. I explain this result with the work of Antonis Ellinas and Ezra Suleiman (2012). They find that when Commission officials are faced with an adverse environment, they tend to legitimate themselves 'from within' by denouncing the Euro scepticism and justifying their authority and existence themselves. Self-legitimation then reinforces supranationalism in the Commission.

In **Chapter V**, the focus shifts from Commission officials' institutional role conceptions to their policy-making behaviour. I assess how the politicization of external trade affects the positions that Commission officials adopt in the negotiations of international trade agreements. To investigate this, I compare the processes of two ongoing trade negotiations: the politicized Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and the publically overlooked negotiations of the EU-Japan free trade agreement. I formulate two mechanisms that can be expected to constrain Commission officials, in the sense that their default preferences for free trade are adjusted to accommodate public concerns. First, borrowing from Principal-Agent (PA) theory (Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991; Moe 1984; Pollack 1997), I hypothesize that when international trade agreements are politicized, negotiations are more tightly controlled by member states which, in turn, pushes Commission officials to be more responsive to the immediate public concerns as

articulated by the member states. Second, drawing on a norm-guided open system approach, I further hypothesize that politicized international trade negotiations are made more transparent in order to maintain their legitimacy. Transparency, in turn, increases Commission officials' exposure to widespread public interests. Still, as trade authority has been placed under the EU's exclusive competence, trade policy may be a hard target for politicization. The EU is argued to depoliticize policy-making because its non majoritarian institutions do not allow for organized public and political opposition (Mair 2007; Schimmelfennig 2014). The null hypothesis is therefore that Commission officials who are involved in the negotiations of international trade deals are *not* affected by politicization.

I explore all three hypotheses through interviews with 12 Commission officials who are involved in either one or both of the negotiations. To assess member states' oversight, I analyze the agenda items of the Trade Policy Committee (TPC). I find that the politicization of international trade negotiations pushes the European Commission to become more transparent about its mode of operation. I do not find tighter control of the member states on a politicized negotiation process. All in all, I detect little evidence that the Commission has had to adjust its initial positions substantially. Hence, even though politicization pushes the Commission to become more transparent, it does not affect the actual policy-making behaviour of Commission officials in the particular case of international trade negotiations.

Altogether, this dissertation shows that the Commission does not operate as an 'ivory tower' insulated from widespread public and political demands. I demonstrate that the Commission is responsive to its environment, and that Commission officials' attitudes are sensitive to politicization. However, the direction of the attitudinal effect is moderated by EU salience. When the EU is less salient, politicization appears to induce Commission officials to moderate their supranational institutional role conceptions. Concerns about legitimacy and subsidiarity nudge them towards a more pragmatic stance that seeks a middle ground between supranationalist and state-centric views. In times of salient EU debates however, Commission officials tend to disagree with public criticism and actually grow a thicker 'supranationalist' skin. To explain this, this dissertation argues that politicization heightens the tension between competing claims of legitimacy: a process-based legitimacy that stems from appropriate democratic input and procedures (Føllesdal and Hix 2006) and an output-based legitimacy that is rooted in technocratic expertise (Majone 2000; Moravcsik 2002). This puts Commission officials between a rock and hard place; should they follow the public's wishes, irrespective of the output, or should they focus on optimal output and hope the public falls in line? One thing is certain: politicization is not going to go away any time soon. Against this backdrop, Commission officials will have to keep 'reinventing' their institutional role conceptions as they struggle to align them with their need for legitimization.