THE IMPACT OF ENLARGEMENT ON THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S MANAGEMENT AND CULTURE

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1. Abstract

In 2004 and 2007, the European Union admitted 12 new member states, ten of which were Central and Eastern European countries. This was the largest enlargement in the history of the European Union, and it posed unique challenges for the European Commission, which follows a policy of representing all the citizens of Europe. In responding to this challenge, the Commission committed itself to bringing on board new staff equal to 20 percent of the size of the staff prior to enlargement. This paper, based on a recently released book, summarizes the process the EC followed and explores the impact, focusing particularly on two demographic/cultural issues: the shift in language use and the large number of women who joined the EC as a result of enlargement.

2. Background

This short paper is the final report to NISPAcee of a project that began in 2006. In fact, the first place I reported on the preliminary finding was the NISPAcee meeting of 2007.[2] And I have continued to share sections of what became a book at subsequent meetings. Now that the book has been released,[3] it gives me great pleasure to present the final conclusions of this research project.

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This paper discusses very briefly the findings on the process of selection and integration of new staff from the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries that joined the European Union in 2004 and 2007. It then examines the key question: What impact, if any, did the arrival of so many new staff have on the Commission itself?

3. Findings on the process of hiring and integrating new staff

3.1 How did the European Commission face the challenge of enlargement? What were the formal and informal processes used to hire, train, and socialize new staff, and how successful were they?

By almost any measure, the efforts of the European Commission to hire and integrate thousands of new staff as a result of the enlargement must be judged a success. This does not mean that there have been no challenges, but still overall the process ran quite smoothly.

The process is a complex one, with several steps:

1). The European Commission set targets by country.

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[2] "Enlarging Europe: Eastern Europeans in the European Commission," presented at the Annual Meeting of NISPAcee, Kiiv, Ukraine, May, 2007.

[3] *Management and Culture in an Enlarged European Commission: From Diversity to Unity?* Houndsmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

2) The normal process of recruitment is through a complex competitive process, known as the competition, or, in French, *le concours*, which is normally open to people from all member states. Only immediately following accession are the rules temporarily suspended, so that special competitions are run for citizens of specific new member states.

3) Those who pass the competition are placed on a reserve list, from which managers can select individuals to bring on boards.

The whole process for the recruitment and selection of new staff is thus complex and relatively slow. At the time of enlargement, it took 18 months or more before those who were successful were placed on reserve lists and were eligible for employment. Therefore, sizeable numbers of new officials did not begin arriving until 2006, two years after the first phase of enlargement, but still, the Commission has succeeded in meeting and even exceeding its recruitment goals for both the EU-10 and EU-2 countries, so from a formal perspective, the Commission has clearly succeeded in meeting its goals.

The impending enlargement was the spur for institutional changes to processes for recruitment and training new staff. First, after years of failed efforts, the EU institutions finally agreed to the creation of the European Personnel Selection Office, thus providing a unified approach to recruitment and selection and leading, over time, to reforms in the content and procedures for the competitions used to screen candidates for employment. Recognition of the need for formal steps to help so many new officials adapt to life within the Commission and other institutions led to development by EPSO of a standard newcomers' training course. Individual DGs also developed more formal training, as well as mentoring and coaching. And the Kinnock reforms' focus on improved management was reflected in more training for both new and existing managers and in provision of personal coaching, particularly for senior managers.

Informal socialization, which normally takes place at the unit level, also went well for most new staff, especially those at entry level. All but a handful report being welcomed and helped to learn the ropes both by their heads of unit and by their colleagues, although some report being initially overwhelmed by the volume of work and the level of responsibility placed upon them. The process of organizational entry was more challenging for those entering at management levels, but they, as well, mostly report having received support from colleagues and from their Director General as they worked to master the substantive areas for which they were responsible, to learn how to function effectively within the complex EU policy process, and to understand and adapt to the organizational culture of the Commission and of their DG.

3.2 Sources of tension between CEE and West European Staff

Many of the people interviewed expressed very positive views toward the newcomers, especially those at entry level, who were seen as highly qualified and hard-working. Still, below the formal level (and in informal settings rather than formal interviews), one can hear comments that reveal more mixed or negative feelings about the new staff, some of it based on the mentality of the in-group versus the out-group, which has been explored in the social psychological literature. The question is whether the newcomers are really accepted as equals and respected as fully "European." Some older officials held negative stereotypes about the CEE staff, seeing them as coming from poorer countries and therefore as mainly motivated to join the EC by the generous pay and benefits. In fact, research on public-service motivation in the European Commission shows that CEE officials are very similar to those from EU-15 countries in their motivation, with both groups showing moderately high levels of public-service motivation (Ban and Vandenabeele, 2009). In a few cases, critics questioned the competence of people who had been socialized under Communism, but, given the long process of accession negotiations, the vast majority of those recruited entered the workforce after the transition from Communism.

Clearly the majority of entry-level staff (by far the largest group of new officials) were able to surmount any such negative attitudes quite quickly. The greater challenge was in attitudes toward new managers, some of whom did face hostile or at least skeptical reactions from those they were responsible for supervising.

In sum, the Commission put in place the formal structures needed to handle the demands created by such a large influx of newcomers, and the existing cultural value of cosmopolitanism meant that, with few exceptions, newcomers were welcomed.

3.3. Did the newcomers meet the performance standards needed for success within the Commission, and how well did they adapt to the culture of the Commission?
When we move from quantity to quality, assessing the qualifications and performance of the new staff (or of the old staff, for that matter) becomes more difficult. Through selection via rigorous screening, and through formal and informal socialization for the new entrants, the Commission has both chosen and shaped new entry level staff who "fit the mold" quite well, in the sense of their formal qualifications (appropriate education, work or study abroad, language skills) and in terms of their ability to work effectively in a high-pressure position in a multicultural environment and to adapt to the organizational culture. But can one assess the relative quality of the new staff, compared to those already in place?

Formal statistics are an unreliable basis for gauging the performance of new staff relative to those already at work in the Commission, since very few people are ever fired for poor performance and since the results of performance appraisals are not, in fact, accurate reflections of actual performance. I place greater confidence, therefore, in the assessments of those supervising the work of newly arriving staff, and most of them gave officials from the CEE countries high marks, stating that the newcomers were not that different from those entering from the "old" member states and were actually often better prepared and more motivated. As discussed above, there were a few comments reflecting the stereotype that the newcomers had come just for the high salaries, which is both unfair (in a few cases, especially among managers, newcomers actually took a pay cut to join the Commission) and ignores the fact that those entering from the EU-15 countries , as well, were often attracted at least in part by the salaries and benefits.

At the management level one can see a few cases of outright failure or of individuals who were a poor fit for their assignments. Concerns about the performance of new managers have, as one would expect, declined over time as people have, over several years, gained expertise and have demonstrated their ability to manage effectively within the Commission, but EU-15 managers do still have reservations about the abilities of some of their new colleagues and whether they are as effective as those who moved up from within.

4. Findings on the impact of enlargement

4.1 How did the new staff change the linguistic profile of the Commission?
When interviewed on the impact of enlargement, staff who had been in the Commission for some time most frequently reported that the most obvious effect of the enlargement was linguistic. The linguistic impact is paradoxical, in the sense that enlargement has simultaneously led to an increased number of official languages and a decrease in language diversity in everyday life in the Commission. As a result of the enlargement, the number of languages more than doubled, from 11 to 23. The inclusion of additional languages has complicated life within the Commission, requiring all documents to be translated into yet more languages and adding challenges for those meetings that require interpretation.

At the same time, within the Commission, it is widely recognized that the arrival of several thousand new staff has moved the Commission increasingly toward the use of English, rather than French, in everyday spoken and written communication. The French have fought a rear-guard action to preserve the use of French in the Commission, and there is certainly an expectation that newcomers should learn French at least at the level of passive knowledge, but fluency in French is certainly not a requirement for entry. Lower-level staff are under considerable pressure to learn French as quickly as possible, but it is impossible to force senior managers to do so, and, as an increasing number of Commissioners are not Francophone, documents are more frequently drafted in English.

It is highly unlikely that the Commission will abandon its language policy, as multilingualism is a core value with a clear relationship to multiculturalism and to the need to represent the diversity of Europe. But EC officials are often frank in discussing the costs of this policy, which slows down communication and which can lead to misunderstanding and confusion. Learning how to function in a multilingual environment and at the same time attempting to master the jargon specific to the EU and to grasp the informal norms of communication make the adaptation process for newcomers challenging indeed.

4.2 Demographic impact of enlargement
The new staff changed the demographic profile of the Commission in two ways: they tend to be younger than is typical for their peers at each grade level, and there is a much higher percentage of women among them. Given the

typical education and career patterns in the new member states and the lowering of the years of experience required for managers, it is not surprising that a significant number of those hired were younger, sometimes much younger, than their peers or, indeed, than the people they supervised.

The statistics on the number of women hired are quite striking. New staff members from all the CEE countries were more than 50 percent female, and those from three countries were more than 70 percent female. This can be attributed to two causes. First, the Commission, under pressure, especially from the Scandinavian member states, intensified its focus on diversity and used the enlargement to correct its gender imbalance. Second, as some of the women entering reported, one of the clearly positive legacies of Communism was that women had equal access to education, including in scientific and technical fields; women were expected to work and so services such as child care were often available; and there were role models of women in management positions.

So both changes can be traced in part to the culture of the countries of origin of the newcomers but also to conscious policy changes by the Commission, resulting in significant demographic changes (see Ban, 2010a).

It is important to note that this demographic shift has not yet been mirrored by a similar shift among those now being recruited from the EU-15 countries, and there is still considerable reluctance on the part of women from the "old" member states to take on the challenges of management.

5. Findings on the impact of CEE managers on the approach to management

5.1 Was the Commission open to change and to new approaches brought by managers entering from outside the organization? Is there evidence of direct or indirect organizational learning, as the new managers attempt to institute administrative changes or to introduce new approaches to management?

Here the challenge for an outside scholar becomes more difficult. It is easy to count heads to see how many people have entered and to hear from them about what the experience of joining the organization was like. It is more difficult to assess what impact the influx of newcomers had on the organization itself. We can, however, draw a few conclusions. First, because of the large number and diversity of new member states and the varied backgrounds of those entering, there was no main overriding "theme" or single effect identified by those who were working with or observing the new entrants. Rather, many perceived the newly arriving managers as bringing greater diversity in management approaches to the Commission. This reflected the fact that many of the managers had complex careers, including, in some cases, working in the private sector, including for international firms, or working in international organizations. The discontinuity that their countries experienced with the fall of Communism was, in many cases, reflected in non-straight-line career paths and shaped individuals who felt that what they brought to the Commission was a resilience and flexibility in adapting to new environments.

Second, the only group that was at a level to make conscious efforts to introduce new approaches to management or to push for change in administrative procedures were senior managers, at director or above, but their relatively small numbers and the fact that they were spread through the organization meant that there was probably not critical mass for any concerted change effort. Rather, individual managers working in specific parts of the Commission could, at least occasionally, be effective change agents, but only with the support of their superiors, especially the DGs.

Third, those who did attempt to introduce change often encountered resistance, which was not surprising since their model was often their previous place of employment, and such comparisons were seen as violating of an internal cultural norm. But resistance may also have stemmed from condescension based on their being outsiders, coming from CEE countries, or on their being double or triple outsiders, who were women, quite young, or both. It was certainly possible to work through the resistance (even for double or triple outsiders), but doing so required considerable persistence and political acumen.

5.2 Do CEE women manage differently?

There is considerable disagreement in the literature on women in management over whether women tend to use a different management style than men. Within the European Commission, most of the people interviewed for this study perceived a clear gender difference in management, with women less likely to rely on an aggressive and combative approach and more likely to use participative or democratic management approaches.

Within this group of women, is there also a difference between CEE women and others? The evidence here is limited, because a relatively small subset of interviewees directly addressed these questions, but there are two separate issues of relevance here. As we have seen, women from the CEE countries were socialized into an environment with different gender policies and values than those in Western European countries. Does this matter? And does the combination of gender and nationality affect how some of those entering, especially at more senior levels, were received by their peers?

First, it is clear that women coming from the new member states were influenced by the gender policies and norms of their countries. Of course, women exhibit a range of management styles, and women (and especially CEE women) are insistent that they be seen and judged as individuals rather than as tokens, just as those entering from the new member states do not wish to be seen or treated as a class but rather as good officials and managers. But, as seen above, they were the only people interviewed who reported that the experience of Communism had affected their careers in positive ways.

Second, some women perceived that they had to prove themselves, even more than men, in order to be accepted, because they were, as I term it, "doubly different." The literature on assimilation of newcomers reports that the perceived degree of "differentness" affected that process. Clearly, the fundamental challenge of diversity, including gender diversity, is how to integrate people who are seen as different. The question, then, is not only the extent to which those coming from the new member states were seen as somehow different but whether women from those countries were in some way doubly different.

There are, in fact, close parallels between the experiences of women and of people coming from the new member states into the European Commission, even apart from the obvious overlap between the two groups. Both are the focus of formal programs to improve their representation, with targets for recruitment and formal efforts of socialization or encouragement, but in both cases, this is a decidedly mixed blessing, since the need to fill a quota has occasionally led to the cynical behavior of throwing someone into a position for which he or she is not fully qualified simply in order to check off the box and move on. Not only does that set some individuals up for failure or at least ensure that they have very stressful entry, it also reinforces the logic of tokenism: the assumption that others, even those with excellent credentials, are just there because of nationality or gender. This accentuates the perception that they are outsiders, and it intensifies the need for them to prove themselves to be accepted as fully equal and not just as someone brought in to fill a quota.

5.3 Is there an interaction effect between the Kinnock Reforms and enlargement, and what has been the overall effect of both on management of the Commission?

At exactly the same time as the European Commission was responding to enlargement, it was putting into place a far-reaching administrative reform, triggered by the need to respond to a major scandal that caused the resignation *en masse* of the full College of Commissioners. In this brief paper, we cannot review the full range of the reforms, but the timing of two major changes makes it challenging to assess the results of each separately. This research did indeed find an interaction effect between administrative reform and the arrival of a cohort of new officials and managers, in spite of the fact that the two processes were technically separate. While enlargement was not the primary impetus for reforms, the Commission, like other European institutions, did recognize the need for changes to adapt the institutional structure to the needs of a much larger organization and to the challenges of integrating thousands of newcomers. Many of the reforms had an important positive effect on this process, with an integrated approach to recruitment and selection of new staff and improved training and mentoring programs. Even the most contested part of the reform, the increased emphasis on formal management, had indirect positive effects in that newcomers were less likely than past new entrants simply to be dropped into the job without adequate support and even without a clear job description.

There was, however, one aspect of reform that was perceived negatively both by newcomers and by their more senior peers: the decision to lower the starting grade and salary of newly hired officials. This was, of course, a political decision in response to pressure from member states, but there was widespread dissatisfaction (among new and more senior officials) with the lack of equity that resulted and a fear that, in the future, this policy would limit the EC's ability to attract the strongest candidates.

This research also supports several conclusions about the dual impact of the two reforms. It is clear, both from my interviews and from other research, that the reforms imposed a broadened management role for managers and that,

although this change was initially contested, most have come to accept the change, however grudgingly. At the same time, the Commission has pulled back from at least some of the more burdensome and less effective parts of the reform, especially the system for appraisal and promotion. Many of the managers from CEE countries were strongly supportive of the goals of the reform, especially as they took rather for granted, given their prior work experiences, that formal planning and management systems were normal, but they were, if possible, even more strongly frustrated than their colleagues by the excess rigidity and bureaucratic "heaviness" of these systems as they were designed by the Commission.

It is, however, difficult to determine with certainty the extent to which introduction of formal systems has led to a change in deeper administrative culture. Indeed, the reforms actually sent mixed messages, with rhetoric promising more flexibility and decentralization but actual policies that had the opposite effect. The Commission took steps to encourage a more professional approach to management by introducing an assessment centre and more stringent evaluation of management experience into the process of selecting new managers and also by providing more management training and coaching.

In fact, policy changes to create a family-friendly environment within the Commission and thus to encourage recruitment and promotion of women may over time be contributing to a change in deeper culture. It is here where one sees a strong interaction effect between reform and enlargement, since, as discussed above, the Commission consciously used the planned recruitment of new officials to improve its gender balance. This effort can be seen as based on simple equity for women, but it may have more profound effects on organizational culture, if, as many in the Commission believe, women tend to embrace a more participative or democratic management style.

Further, some of the men entering as a result of enlargement also favored a more participative management style, an approach that may reflect their previous work experience as well as the culture of the CEE countries. While one might have expected those who were "formed" under Communism to be more comfortable with formal and hierarchical management styles, in fact, the new managers often worked abroad and some were shaped by their opposition to Communism, so very few people saw them as reflecting that traditional culture. Further, the CEE countries rank much higher on support for gender equality than most western European countries and just below the Scandinavian countries on this value.

Both reform and recruitment of women (and of some CEE men), then, do appear to have an effect on management culture, but in ways that are gradual and uneven across the organization. It will take several more years to see to what extent those values spread throughout the Commission and whether "old-style" management – aggressive, dictatorial, and, in the extreme, bullying – will be tolerated in the future.

6. Directions for future research

This research provides an unusually detailed view of life inside a complex international organization as it is adapting to two major changes. As such, it is an example of organizational anthropology, applying the methods of in-depth qualitative research to gain a deep understanding of how an organization works by observing and conducting interviews in the organization over a period of six years. While such research is labor-intensive, and thus difficult to replicate, the findings raise a number of possibilities for future research. First, it would be very useful to conduct similar studies in other international organizations to see how they cope with the challenges of diversity, including such issues as gender, cultural, and linguistic diversity. Much of the early research on international organizations (IOs) was conducted by political scientists, who focused primarily on the role of IOs in global governance, not only their internal politics or processes, and it is only recently that there has been greater focus on IOs from a management perspective (Trondal 2007).

Second, it will be important to continue to track changes within the European Commission itself. The changes in the grade structure of the Commission will make advancement into management positions a slower process, and there are concerns about the willingness of newly hired staff (from all of the EU member states) to wait patiently. Higher turnover will have obvious costs for the organization. There is also concern about the road to the very top. In recruiting new managers, the EC leaders decided that it would be best not to recruit directly into positions as Director General (DG). This was a response to a high failure rate of new DGs after the 1995 enlargement. So senior managers were hired as Directors or Deputy Directors General, with the assumption that they would move up after they gained experience. But it took many years before the first DG from a CEE country was appointed, and the number is still at only two, so there is considerable impatience, both among those who had hoped to move up and

among those in national governments who are keeping a close eye on whether their countries are getting what they see as a fair share of senior appointments. Given the politics of very top appointments, there is a strong tendency for the larger member states to dominate the leadership of the most powerful Directorates General, with considerable horse-trading and lobbying when appointments are made, so it may be even longer before we see a DG from a CEE country in, for example, DG Competition or DG Internal Market and Services.

Third, this research sheds light on the possible challenges posed by further enlargement. Given that Croatia is quite small, there is little concern about the EC's ability to recruit and integrate new staff from the next country to join, but the research raises some important questions about how the Commission and other European institutions would cope with the enormous challenge that would be posed by Turkey, were it to succeed in joining the EU.

Finally, my own research priority is to begin to examine the impact of austerity on the Commission itself, both the management strategies used to cope with declining resources, demands for reduction in staff size, salary freezes, and other stressors caused by the fiscal crisis that still dominates Europe and the EU as a whole. Among the issues this situation raises, which have a direct relationship to the research reported here, will be the impact on both recruitment and retention of staff if work in the European institutions, and especially the EC, is seen as less desirable.

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