3
The Two Logics of Multilevel Administration in the EU

Edgar Grande and Martina McCowan

Politics and bureaucracy in the European administrative system

The recent ‘public administration turn’ (Trondal, 2007) in European Union (EU) studies has not only produced an overwhelming richness of empirical studies on individual organizations such as the European Commission, regulatory agencies, and various types of committees, more importantly it has created an inspiring perspective on the administrative system of the EU (see in particular Egeberg, 2006; Ellinas and Suleiman, 2008, 2012; Hofmann and Türk, 2006; Trondal, 2010). As a result of intensified integration, we are witnessing the emergence of a new form of compound ‘executive order’ in Europe, which integrates various types of supranational, national, and subnational organizations (Trondal, 2010). The new research perspective offers a comprehensive view of the EU’s administrative system and allows key questions in the field of public administration to be addressed in an innovative way. This pertains to the structuring of the ‘administrative space’ (Olsen, 2003) within the EU, its internal conflicts and dynamics, its external environment and demands, its effectiveness and efficiency, and its accountability and legitimacy.

However, if we examine existing studies on the current state of EU administration we find an irritating picture. The empirical literature is characterized by heterogeneous evidence, diverging trends, and multiple tensions. Evidence of the bureaucratization of the Commission (Egeberg, 2006) goes hand in hand with studies on the introduction of new managerial approaches (Bauer, 2007); and accounts on ‘bureaucratic center formation’ within the Commission (Trondal, 2012) are accompanied by evidence of fragmentation and decentralization by the establishment of new agencies and the delegation of administrative functions to national and subnational authorities (Busuioc et al., 2012; Støle, 2006). These are just some of the most striking examples.
How can we explain this puzzling state of affairs? Which factors contribute to these diverging trends? And what are the consequences for the future development of the European administrative system? The heterogeneous evidence provided by recent empirical studies may be partly due to the fact that the emergence of a new administrative order in Europe is still in flux. The expansion of the EU’s responsibilities and membership, the establishment of new agencies and committees, and the reform of administrative structures have produced substantial transformative pressure in the past 25 years and these developments are far from being completed. However, as we will argue in this chapter, recent empirical studies also reveal some conceptual shortcomings of research on EU administration. These difficulties result not least from problems of applying established concepts from national contexts to the EU. This not only holds true for the EU but is also the case for its multilayered administrative system. Most importantly, current research does not pay sufficient attention to the functional hybridity of the EU bureaucracy and its consequences.

In this chapter we analyze this problem in four steps. Firstly, we argue that the emerging European executive order is characterized by the tense coexistence of two logics of multilevel administration: a political one and an administrative one. Secondly, we show that these two logics are responsible for multiple strains within the Commission and in the European administrative system more generally. Thirdly, we describe several organizational strategies which have been developed at European level to cope with these strains. Finally, we discuss the consequences of these organizational strategies for the structuring of the European administrative system.

Functional hybridity as a characteristic of the European administrative system

It is a well-known fact that the EU, by integrating supranational and intergovernmental principles, is a unique political system, which is clearly distinct from both international organizations and (federal) states. Supranational institutions enjoy substantial autonomy from member states, and the functions and organizational design of some of them are also remarkably distinct. This applies in particular to the European Commission, which plays a ‘pivotal role’ (Trondal, 2010, 56) in the emerging European administrative system.

There is broad agreement in the scholarly literature that the Commission is a complex, hybrid, multifaceted, and multifunctional organization, which combines various organizational features, functions, and dynamics in a unique way (see Cini, 1996; Coombes, 1970; Nugent, 2001). Due to its exceptional legal status and its multiple functions, the Commission is clearly distinct not only from the secretariats of international organizations but also from national administrations. The Commission is certainly a bureaucracy, and it might have