THE JUNCKER COMMISSION: A NEW MODEL OF PRESIDENTIALISM?

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> 'I am the first President of the Commission whose nomination and election is the direct result of the outcome of the European Parliament elections in May 2014. Having campaigned as a lead candidate, as *Spitzenkandidat*, in the run up to the elections, I had the opportunity to be a more political President' (Juncker, 2015a)

Drawing on original data collected as the Juncker administration approached the end of its term,[1] this paper examines the Juncker Commission, what he intended by the 'political Commission', and how the concept came to be operationalised in practice. Its aim is to compare the twelfth Commission President with his predecessors in terms of the power of the office and how relations with other figures within the core executive were configured. The paper argues that, although other Commissions may have been 'political' and indeed presidential, the Juncker Commission represents a distinctive model that is qualitatively different from earlier administrations. Although it continues a trend towards centralisation initiated by José Manuel Barroso, the Juncker Presidency differs importantly in structure and operation even to those of his immediate predecessor, arguably the Commission President to which he is closest.

Executive leadership of the Commission commands attention on account of the central position the institution occupies within the EU system. The Commission devises policy proposals, which it tries to steer through the EU's legislative process. It manages EU policies, administers EU spending programmes, and oversees the EU budget. It is the guardian of the treaties. It represents the EU and negotiates trade agreements on its behalf, and it enforces EU rules in a number of areas, including competition policy. It also acts an arbiter, determining whether national governments have complied with their undertakings and obligations. On account of its many responsibilities, how incumbents of the Commission Presidency approach the task of leading the Commission has been a long-standing concern of scholars of the EU. Since the European Communities' inception, the Commission President has been the most visible representative of the institutions, and the officeholder most closely identified with the European project.

Applying a core executive studies approach, the paper investigates how relations between key actors in the College and the administration have changed over time. It looks in particular at the latitude how different Commission Presidents have sought to mobilise the resources available to them both from the Treaty and other sources to organise their leadership of the Commission. As with prime ministers in a national setting, each Commission President attempts to a greater or lesser degree to recast key relationships between the office and other actors. As with PMs, the scope within which relations can be reconfigured is likely to vary over time.

[1] As part of 'The European Commission: Where now? Where next?', data was collected in 2018-19 from an online survey (n=6500), programme of interviews (n=208) and focus groups (5). The project team included: Hussein Kassim (PI), Sara Connolly (joint PI), Michael W. Bauer, Pierre Bocquillon, Renaud Dehousse, and Andrew Thompson; and RAs Vanessa Buth, Nick Wright, Kristina Ophey, Martin Weinrich, Louisa Bayerlein, and Thomas Warren. Existing studies mostly written in first couple of years of the Juncker Commission (Kassim 2016, Peterson 2017)

This paper has a narrower focus than treatments of the Commission Presidency in the existing literature. A number of earlier studies address the broader question of how the Commission President has performed as a leader of the EU, and attempt accordingly to evaluate or categorise particular individuals. Nor is it concerned with the policy accomplishments or achievements of Commission Presidents. Its interest lies in the relative position of the Commission President within the core executive, the drivers behind changes in the power of the office, and how the configuration of intra-executive relations has changed over time.

The discussion below is organised into three sections. The first offers a brief review of the literature on leadership of the Commission, and proposes a core executive approach. The second considers the distribution of resources within the Commission core executive in previous Commissions. It focuses in particular on the Commission Presidency, the powers available to particular incumbents, and how individual Presidents sought to mobilise those resources. The third section discusses what President Juncker intended by the 'political Commission', how his concept was operationalised in practice, and how it compares with earlier Commission Presidencies.

Approaching the European Commission Presidency

The Commission President has attracted considerable scholarly interest since the creation of the European Communities. In contrast to most international organizations, which were established to provide a permanent forum for cooperation and exchange between governments, membership of the European Union and its predecessor bodies entailed specific commitments on the part of its member states to enact common policies and to abide by common rules. EU member governments bound themselves to each other in a system of collective governance in which they share decisional power not only with each other, but with institutions that were designed to assist them in the pursuit of the goals that they had agreed.

Reflecting these very different ambitions, the European Commission was entrusted with a far broader mission and powers than its counterparts in most international organizations. Most were conceived as international secretariats and had limited powers. As a result of the Commission's centrality to the Communities, the Commission President quickly became 'fundamental to the operation of the Commission and to the coherence of the EU *per se*' (Spence 2006: 27), assuming a visibility and prominence unrivalled by any other EU officeholder. There was an obvious interest in how well the organisation would be able to manage these functions, and particularly in the capacities, aims and ambitions of the individual who headed it.

For these reasons, the existing literature has been preoccupied with the influence exerted by individual Commission Presidents on the EU as a system or their leadership of the EU overall. Attention has been directed at the capacity of Commission Presidents to set the EU's policy agenda, particularly with regard to 'heroic' policies. Most studies have been directed at individual Presidents. Unsurprisingly, Jacques Delors has attracted particular interest, where authors have sought to assess his contribution to the single internal market, and economic and monetary union (Grant 1994, Ross 1995, Endo 1999, Drake 2000). Scholars have also investigated the Hallstein Presidency and the role played by the first

Commission President in the institutionalisation of the Commission (Loth et al 1998, Seidel 2010). A more recent study considers the Jenkins Presidency (Ludlow 2016).

A newer wave of the literature takes a more comparative approach. Tömmell (2013), for example, analyses three Commission Presidents -- Jacques Delors, Jacques Santer and Romano Prodi – and assesses the extent to which they can be qualified as 'transactional' or 'transforming' leaders. Müller (2017) takes a different approach. Her investigation of the Hallstein, Delors and Barroso Presidencies is motivated by a concern with the ability of Commission Presidents to set the EU's policy agenda. Others have examined individual Commission Presidents over several decades (Kassim 2010, van der Harst and Voerman 2015).

Despite the diverse range of the existing scholarship and the many important insights it has delivered about the Commission President, relatively few scholars have focused specifically on the office, how it has evolved over time, or the forces that have driven its development. Yet arguably the Commission Presidency as a position of executive leadership within is an important subject of analysis in its own right, especially as it has evolved within the context of the College and the Commission more broadly. In particular, the extent to which treaty change, the institutional and political practice of the role, or the personal qualities of incumbents, have shaped the office or acted as drivers for its development remain largely unanswered.

This paper attempt to address these questions. It draws on the core executive approach that has been used in numerous domestic settings to examine how power is distributed among key actors and institutions (Dunleavy and Rhodes 1990).[2] Indeed, over the past two decades, the core executive framework has become the dominant approach for understanding presidential, prime ministerial and cabinet power (Elgie 2011, t'Hart 2013, Rhodes 2018). As well as its insistence on locating prime ministers and presidents within the political executive rather than focusing on the resources at their individual disposal, without making any prior assumption about the extent to which power is concentrated in the hands of an individual or shared,[3] the core executive approach highlights the importance of the relationship of key officeholders with the administrative or bureaucratic part of the executive (Goetz 2003). In other words, it extends beyond the cabinet the question of who holds power to include individual ministers, ministries and the civil service. A further defining characteristic of the core executive approach is its 'key intuition … that in contrast to the prime ministerial/cabinet government debate where power is assumed to be fixed, for Rhodes, power is "contingent and relational"' (Rhodes 2007: 1247).

The core executive approach has much to recommend itself for the study of the Commission. First, it separates questions relating to power and resources from issues of

[2] Existing approaches in the international relations literature are not suitable for this purpose. The tendency in this area of the discipline is to conflate leadership with the ability of the senior officeholder to demonstrate a capacity for independent action on the part of the international administration that he or she heads from the member states of the international organisation. See, e.g. Claude (1965), Cox and Jacobson (1973) and Reinalda and Veerbeek (2014).

[3] The approach emerged as the result of frustration with a long-standing debate about whether central government in the UK was prime ministerial or cabinet.

action and policy. Second, it avoids the difficulties associated with the use of 'leadership' as a core organising concept. Third, the assumption that the political and bureaucratic parts of the executive need to be considered together is especially apposite for an institution that is hybrid of the political and the administrative. In particular, it is an important corrective to studies that arrive at conclusions about the power of the Commission President, while focusing only on the political level – the College of Commissioners -- or on the administration – the services -- alone. Finally, it is neutral on issues of methodology.

Power within the executive: the European Commission pre-Juncker

The core executive approach highlights the distribution of resources among actors within the government and the bureaucracy. Applied to the Commission, this concerns the College of Commissioners and their cabinets as the political level of the organisation and the administrative services, headed by Directors General, which are the permanent bureaucracy.

Three types of resource, following Elgie (1995), can be usefully distinguished. *Political* resources include powers, formal and informal, that attach to the office and the personal legitimacy of the incumbent; *procedural* resources give influence over where, when, and how decisions are taken within a collective decision-making context; and *administrative*, resources relate to the size of the personal office, powers of appointment within the administration, and wider prerogatives concerning the administration as a whole. It is useful also to consider the origins of these resource. In the case of the Commission, the founding and amending treaties are an important source, but para-constitutional processes, conventions, external resources, and personal capital may also matter.

Three core executive models

Examination of the distribution of resources within the core executive prior to 2014 leads to two findings. The first is that political resources are the primary factor. The formal provisions of the Treaty have been the main determinant of how political resources are distributed within the core executive. However, how incumbents of the presidential office use the political resources at their disposal to shape procedural and administrative resources – what might be termed their institutional and political practice of the role Commission Presidents -- is also important. How Commission Presidents have used the political resources available to the office to inform their conception of the office and to distribute procedural and administrative resources is also important. The Rules of Procedure, supplemented by a text that sets out operating procedures or processes, that are adopted by the College on the proposal of the Commission President offer a useful reflection of the conception of the Commission President's role of his position relative to other members of the College in terms of agenda-setting and policy making (distribution of procedural resources), and of the relationship between the College and the services (administrative resources). These texts also serve as a marker of changing power relations.[4]

The second is that, after simplifying and abstracting, four models of leadership in the pre-Juncker era can be identified. The first is Commission President as primus inter pares in

[4] In the case of the Commission, President have used changes in the Rules of Procedure to record and operationalise powers gained by the office as a result of treaty change.

practice, though throughout the period in question Commission leadership remained collegial in name. Political resources are spread relatively evenly among the members of the College. The Commission President has the power of the chair, but all decisions are taken collectively. The second is personal presidential – essentially, the Delors Presidency – where the incumbent was able to exercise far-reaching authority due to a level of extra-institutional support that was exceptional.[5] The third is the post-Nice model. The first incumbent to take office following the entry into force of the Nice Treaty, José Manuel Barroso, exploited the new political resources to concentrate power in the presidential office. He thereby inaugurated an era of presidentialism.

Model 1. Collegial in name; (barely) primus inter pares in practice

For much of the Commission's history, power within the organization was widely dispersed (see Coombes 1970; Cini 1996; Spierenburg 1979). The treaty did not differentiate the position of Commission President from other members of the College (Cini 2008). All Commissioners, including the President, were appointed by the common accord of member governments, who in practice also decided on the allocation of portfolios. Political resources were relatively evenly shared. The Commission President's mandate was no stronger than that of other Commissioners. Indeed, the Commission President was only member of the Commission whose re-appointment at mid-term was required under the treaty. Nor did the Commission President have patronage powers vis-à-vis other members of the Commission, or the authority to remove them from office.

The Commission's institutional myth was of a collegial body, reflecting its mission as supranational body that represented the general interest of the Union (Dimitrakopoulos 2010). However, within the College the President was *primus inter pares,* if by a small margin -- even if in practice, some Presidents were more *primus* within this margin than others. The *primus* derived from responsibilities, mainly functional, that arose from the Commission's day-to-day work, such as representing the body in inter-institutional relations, and gave the Commission President a slightly higher standing, but it did not issue in greater formal authority over decision making.

Although in practice, the first President of the Commission, Walter Hallstein, enjoyed considerable personal authority, he was firmly committed to the principle of collegiality, which he believed was to be inferred from the provisions of the treaty (Hallstein 1965). He held that decisions should be taken collectively by all members of the Commission at a weekly meeting convened expressly for that purpose. Although the Commission President chaired the meetings and prepared the agenda, other members of the Commission had the power to table items or to postpone discussion. Should the Commission take a vote, it would decide by a simple majority where, like other members of the College, the Commission President had one vote. Decisions concerning the organization of the services were no exception. They were taken by the College as a whole.

As Coombes (1970) emphasized in his classic study of the Commission, centrifugal pressures within the organization were strong, but countervailing centripetal forces were weak.

[5] For the sake of simplicity, we consider the entire Presidency as a single entity, recognising an incumbent may not be able to sustain a particular approach for the full term of office. See Ross and Jenson (2017) on late Delors.

Administrative services – the directorates-general -- enjoyed a high degree of autonomy, which they consolidated through clientele networks and used to pursue their own policy agendas. The Directors General at their heads were not only in full command of their 'fiefdoms' (Cini 1996; Smith 2004: 4; Stevens and Stevens 2001: 196–205), but benefitted from the classic knowledge and informational asymmetries that characterize relations between permanent officials and politicians, and that were even sharper in the complex world of EU policy making

The cabinet system, which had been introduced to support collegiality by enabling Commissioners to monitor and contribute to work conducted in portfolios other than their own, were a source of division rather than cohesion. They quickly became national enclaves, concerned to promote the interests of their Commissioner and his or her home state, rather than to support work outside the portfolio. Competitive with each other, they were also constantly at odds with the services (Coombes 1970; Spierenburg 1979; Ross 1995; Stevens and Stevens 2001; Spence with Edwards 2006).

Moreover, although it was the organization's central decision-making body, the College was often not equipped to offer leadership or direction. Its size was frequently cited as a problem (Coombes 1970, Spierenberg 1979), but members of the College were also appointed for different reasons, at different stages of their career, and came to Brussels with very different expectations. With no shared background, ideology, or common fate to bind together its members, Commissioners found it difficult to muster a 'unified political purpose by which administrative action can be oriented and guided' (Stevens and Stevens 2001: 224). Instead, Commissioners who wanted to make a mark pursued their own policy goals or, more typically, those championed by their departments. The Commission President, with no power over the College's agenda or authority to veto policy, reliant only on persuasion, and supported by a cabinet that was not significantly larger than other members of the cabinet, had very limited powers over the Commission's output. Responsibilities that are located at the centre of the organisation – human resources, budget, and communications – in most public administrations were departmental in the Commission. Large and unwieldy, the College was rarely up to the task of defining 'the mission of the institution [or creating] an organization … adequate to fulfil it' (1970: 247).

In short, power was widely dispersed within the College and among the services. At its centre, the Commission President was called upon to balance 'effective chairing of College, collegiate consensus, and leadership of policy orientation', but without 'managerial control' or the power to 'impose policy positions on his peers' (Spence 2006: 27–8). Unsurprisingly, it was described as 'an impossible job' by the biographer of one Commission President (Campbell 2014) and its extreme weakness underlined by former Presidents (Jenkins 1989, Delors 2004), members of the Commission (Tugendaht 1986) and scholars (Coombes 1970, Kassim 2012, van der Horst and Voerman 2015).

Model 2. An anomaly: personal presidential

The second model captures the period of the Delors Presidency, which represents an anomaly since it fell within the era described above. Jacques Delors held the office before it had been strengthened by treaty change, and confronted the formal, procedural and administrations limitations of the Presidency that defined it (Delors 2004). Yet Delors as

Commission President was clearly more than *primus inter pares* within the College and vis-à-vis the services at least during his first term of office and halfway into his second.

The rather exceptional status that Delors was able to enjoy derived less from the office than from his own personal authority, which was therefore non-reproducible (Grant 2004, Ross 1995, Ross and Jenson 2017). Delors had gained a strong reputation as a Finance Minister, as well as European credentials, for his advocacy and implementation of the *franc fort* policy. Crucially, as Commission President, he entered office and held if for several years with the strong and active support of both the French President, Francois Mitterrand, and the German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, at a time when the Franco-German relationship was especially close and when both leaders were focused on building Europe. Both championed the delivery of two ambitious policies, the single internal market and economic and monetary union, which Delors was charged with formulating and delivering.

Despite his success and stature, Delors was well aware of the limitations of the office. As well complaints about the Commission President's lack of say over the appointment of the College (Delors 2004), Delors found himself challenged by other colleagues, who sought to promote their own policy agendas – Brittan is perhaps the best example (Ross 1995). He was himself outvoted in the College. He also threatened to resign on multiple occasions in order to force through policy measures (Grant 1994).

Although Delors had greater political resources than all his predecessors, his Presidency was exceptional, improvised and personal. Largely uninterested in institutional politics, he did not reform the Commission or strengthen the formal machinery of the presidential office, even if the Treaty of European Union would begin a process of differentiating the appointment of Commission President by granting the European Parliament the right of approval over the member governments' nominee for Commission President (Westlake 1998) and the nominee for President a voice in the nomination of other members. For much of the period, he was able to overcome the limitations of the office by exercising power largely through informal networks that he developed throughout the organisation and that were run by his chef de cabinet, Pascal Lamy (Ross 1995, 2017).[6]

Model 3. Post-Nice presidentialism

The administrations of José Manuel Barroso marked a sharp departure from the traditional pattern of core executive relations in the European Commission. Having contended on entering office following the 2004 enlargement, against a background of rising Euroscepticism and needing to win the confidence of member governments, that a College of twenty-five Commissioners could only work effectively under strong presidential leadership (Kassim et al 2013), Barroso brought about a presidentialisation of the

[6] Murray (2004: 14) notes: 'The presidential cabinet of Jacques Delors maintained a vice-like grip on the rest of the Commission under the leadership of Pascal Lamy, who was then his chef de cabinet. Lamy built a small network of trusted senior officials to prepare key directives, excluding some of the directors-general. The Delors cabinet would also bully and cajole the cabinets of the other commissioners to ensure they carried out the president's bidding. One former cabinet member characterises the experience of officials in this system "as like working in a police state: efficient but miserable"'.

Commission.[7] Of course, he did not do single-handedly. Although there was a strong degree of political entreneurialism on his part, Barroso was the first beneficiary of a treaty change that strengthened the Commission Presidency very significantly vis-à-vis other members of the College and with respect to the Commission administration overall.

While the Amsterdam Treaty had recognised the Commission President's leading role in the College[8] and allowed him a role in selecting members of the Commission,[9] the Treaty of Nice, which came into effect in 2003, strongly differentiated the Presidency from other members of the College. As well as granting the Commission President the authority to define the Commission's main policy guidelines,[10] it gave the President the power to allocate and reallocate portfolio responsibilities among members of the Commission,[11] and, for the first time, personal authority over the Commission's internal organisation – an important, but overlooked executive resource.[12] In contrast to Prodi, who in the wake of the Amsterdam Treaty had proclaimed that he would become 'the prime minister of Europe', but then failed to make use of the new authority given to the office of presidency, Barroso took full advantage of Nice's recognition of the Commission President's leading role.[13] He announced his pre-eminence over other members of the College, rewrote the decision-making procedures of the Commission - he revised the Rules of Procedure and introduced a new operating procedures -- to enhance the President's control over the College agenda, and used the new powers of the office over the administration to strengthen the Presidency's administrative resources.

Barroso concentrated decision-making authority within the hands of the Commission President. He insisted that legislative proposals should have his personal approval and, unlike his predecessors, including Delors, was able to exercise considerable control over what proposals reached the College and which were adopted. In particular, he created an administrative machinery that monitored activities in the services, ensured compliance with the Commission President's agenda, and was able to intervene and bloc proposals on his behalf.[14]

Barroso took personal charge of key dossiers, including energy and the successor to the Draft Constitutional Treaty, and co-signed important policy initiatives, such as the services

[7] He explicitly rejected alternative models – for example, of clusters of Commissioners – that the Secretariat General proposed, and insisted that only strong presidentialism model would work (interviews).
[8] Art. 219 TEC: "The Commission shall work under the political guidance of its President."
[9] Commissioners were now appointed 'by common accord with the national governments'
[10] Article 217 (1): 'The Commission shall work under the political guidance of its President …'
[11] Vestiges of collegiality remained. The President's authority to appoint Vice Presidents and to require the resignation of a member of the Commission required the prior approval of the College
[12] Article 217 (1): ... [its President] 'shall decide on its internal organisation in order to ensure that it acts consistently, efficiently and on the basis of collegiality'.
[13] Murray (2004: 17) surmises one serving Commissioner as follows: '"The Commission president's problem is not so much a lack of power but of presence."' Interviews conducted in the Commission at the time with officials in the Secretariat General reflected concerns about the inability of the Prodi cabinet to take decisions.
[14] Three of the five the Commissioners interviewed as part of 'Facing the Future' had no hesitation in qualifying the Barroso Commission as presidential. One commented: 'We have clearly a presidential system now, and a very strong one' (interview 85). A second reflected that: 'I've been in the [name of a member state] government . . . [and I disagreed with the Prime Minister] but he allowed me to pursue my policy. With Barroso it's not the case . . .' (interview 115).

directive and the REACH directive. He exercised tight control of College meetings, deciding what matters would be discussed, and preventing the tabling of dossiers where agreement had not been reached. He limited the issues discussed in the College and used orientation debates outside the normal College meetings to decide on matters of fundamental principle. He had a strong preference for not calling on the College to vote. [15] Though he kept an open door himself to hear Commissioners, Barroso's cabinet and the Secretary General intervened to challenge policy proposals that the President did not like. The conversion of the Secretariat General,[16] with its oversight role, planning responsibilities, and coordinating machinery, from a guardian of collegiality into a personal office that acted on his behalf to monitor policy activity across the organisation, was fundamental to the new style presidentialism.[17] Not only was the Secretariat General able to monitor the policy initiatives that the services were preparing, but the close association with the Presidency gave the Secretariat General the authority to intervene in the President's name to ensure that policies were that were not aligned with the President's preferences or that did not meet appropriate quality control standards did not reach the College table.[18]

Explaining presidentialisation

Whereas Hallstein and Delors relied on personal standing and authority, and in the case of the latter a powerful cabinet and personal networks throughout the Commission, Barroso's power has been rooted in the constitutional strengthening of the office, the appeal to centralized authority in an expanded College, and in the transformation of the Secretary General the annexation of a key organizational resource. How did the new model presidency arise? The political science literature suggests several ways in which a political office in general or the executive more specifically can be redefined. The first is as the intended result of deliberate 'constitutional engineering' (Sartori 1994) by the framers of the constitution. A second is presidentialization, where it is contended that changes in political campaigning and an increased focus on individuals has led to the personalization of power across liberal democracies (see for example Poguntke and Webb 2005). A third is as the result of a process of institutionalization (Ragsdale and Theis 1997; Lewis 2002; McGuire

[15] According to one Commissioner: [i]n this Commission, we normally do not have controversial points, or contentions . . . The President simply doesn't want that. Yeah? And he doesn't put it on the agenda, as long as there are still different views. (interview 85). He continued: In this [Barroso] Commission there was never a vote . . . Well, normally, a vote is not needed . . . [T]he consensus in this Commission is achieved before the college meets. Before. The Prodi Commission, that was still normal, but at least two or three agenda points—yeah?—were on the agenda, where consensus was achieved during the meeting, and not before . . . [The matter] is solved at the level of cabinet members of the President, officials in the Sec-Gen, and your cabinet members. I think that is the normal way—it is normally the exception if a Commissioner is involved . . . ' (interview 85).

[16] The Secretariat General provides procedural expertise and has been the Commission's institutional memory (Kassim 2004, 2006). It is the only body to know what is going on in every Commission service and at level of the organization. It also monitors the progress of legislation through the Council and the European Parliament, and manages the Commission's interactions with other EU institutions and outside actors. The Secretary General chairs key meetings, including the weekly meeting of the *chefs de cabinets* that acts as a clearing-house prior to the meeting of the College.

[17] In the words of one interviewee, the Secretariat-General 'used to be a coordinating body focusing pretty largely on procedures. It is beginning to become more a prime minister's office, a large prime minister's office, trying to focus on policy' (interview 144).

[18] As Danuta Hübner, Commissioner for Regional Policy between 2005 and 2010, observed: 'The presidential system doesn't mean the president is making all the decisions; it means that there is a strong role of the Commission Secretariat'.

2004). The fourth is through entrepreneurship, whereby an incumbent is able to redefine and expand a political office by mobilizing new and existing resources.

The last best explains the strengthening of the Commission Presidency under Barroso. With respect to the 'constitutional engineering' hypothesis, by differentiating the Commission President from other members of the College, member governments did not aim necessarily to create a Presidency that would dominate the Commission. The successive reforms that they introduced after Maastricht were intended as a response to calls to remedy the 'democratic deficit', which they sought to do by linking the European elections to the selection of the Commission President (Majone 2002; Rittberger 2005). They were also intended to avoid a repeat of the resignation of the Santer Commission, where the inability of the Commission President to remove a Commissioner had forced the collective resignation of the entire Commission. In short, the formal powers granted to the office were motivated by pragmatic conditions and incremental. They were not informed by a desire to engineer a radical reconfiguration of power.

Was the strengthening of the Commission Presidency under Barroso an instance of a more general process of presidentialization evident across liberal democracies since the late twentieth century? In the case of the European Commission, the factors identified by Poguntke and Webb (2005) do not apply. The presidentialization of the Commission in 2004 to 2010 was not the result of the concentration of leadership resources and autonomy within political parties or the rise of leadership-centred electoral processes, since the Commission President was not a party leader, nor was the Commission an elected body. Moreover, the EU is only partly a parliamentary system (Majone 2005; Hix 2005). To paraphrase Neustadt (1991: 29) in regard to the latter, parties in the Union have not combined what the treaties have kept separate—or at least they have not done so yet.

The institutionalization of the executive is a third hypothesis (Ragsdale and Theis 1997; Lewis 2002; McGuire 2004), where following a long-process of steadily accumulating resources the office gains the capacity to exercise institutional autonomy. It is debatable, however, whether the concept is appropriate for understanding the development of the Commission Presidency. The office is far smaller than the heads of government in national systems. It is not at all comparable to the US Presidency. It is not at clear that an office such as the Commission Presidency can achieve the same degree of institutionalization or stability as an executive position at national level.

The most convincing explanation for the rise of the new model presidency lies in Barroso's exploitation of the new authority granted to the Commission Presidency under the Nice Treaty combined with his rhetoric about the need for strong presidential leadership in the post-enlargement environment. To avoid what he termed the 'fragmentation' or 'Balkanisation' of the College in the wake of 2004 and with the prospect of further enlargement in the future, Barroso argued for 'a President that is seen by members of the Commission as a last resort and authority'. Moreover, in a climate wary of further integration, Barroso took the view that without centralised control over the volume and quality of Commission initiatives, it would be easy for the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union to ignore the Commission. Importantly, both arguments

were accepted within the Commission.[19]

Table 1: Vice Presidents and their project teams in the Juncker Commission

The Juncker Presidency and the 'political Commission'

The distribution of resources within the Commission core executive underwent further substantial change with the Juncker Presidency. The Commission President's preeminent status vis-à-vis members of the College and the administration were both strongly enhanced. The origins of the transformation lie with the Spitzenkandidaten process, a para-constitutional process, according to which the European People's Party (EPP) and a number of other European political groups, backed by the European Parliament, insisted that the provision of the Lisbon Treaty which required the European Council to make their selection of the Commission President 'in the light of the results of the European elections' should be interpreted to mean that the selected candidate of the party that wins the elections would be appointed to the position.[20]

Discussion of the process and its consequences for inter-institutional relations can be found elsewhere, but the result was that following his selection as the EPP's candidate and the EPP's victory in the May 2014 European elections, Jean-Claude Juncker was able to claim both a personal mandate and a mandate for the implementation of the policy platform on which he had campaigned. Addressing the European Parliament in July 2014 as candidate for Commission President, Juncker underlined the novelty of his appointment and its significance:

> 'This Parliament, which has just started its term in office, is different from its predecessors. You are the first Parliament to truly elect, in all senses of the word, the President of the Commission. You will elect him in a new spirit. In the aftermath of the elections, you insisted that the results, produced by universal suffrage, had to be taken into account. By so doing, you gave Article 17(7) of the Lisbon Treaty its true democratic and political meaning' (2014: 15).

He continued, observing that: 'The Commission is political. And I want it to be more political. Indeed, it will be highly political' (2014a: 16. This was a message that he continued to re-affirm in the presentation of his political guidelines to the European Parliament in October 2014 (2014) and in his first State of the Union speech (Juncker 2015).

Juncker's Commission was not of the first Commission to be political – the Commission President indicated as much and noted that the Treaty required the Commission to be political – but his conceptualisation was significant as it derived from the novel circumstances of his selection. Juncker viewed the election as giving him a democratic mandate as Commission President to implement his programme of policies – the 'five

[19] Several interviewees speculated that the President's concern to maintain a tight grip over policy derived from concerns about what was necessary to make a 27-member College workable. One manager, commented for example: 'There's been a heavy centralization of what we do, but I think to myself that that's inevitable, given the size of the College' (interview 134).

[20] Although in his second term Barroso was the first Commission President to be appointed after the Lisbon Treaty came into effect, Jean-Claude Juncker was the first the Spitzenkandidaten process.

priorities'[21] -- for which he had argued during the campaign and which had fleshed out into 10 priorities in time to be presented to the European Parliament in July 2014. The 'political Commission' would deliver these priorities, which were intended to draw a line under austerity, as well as to prepare the European Union for the challenges of the future (see Kassim, Laffan and Bocquillon 2019), and it would defend the European Union and the European Commission.

In practice, the 'political Commission' took a particular form. First, the Commission President appointed senior politicians to the College, underlining that the Commission would have a political dimension it did not have before' and signalling the intent that the Commission would be political rather than technocratic.[22] The 'political heavy-weights' in the College include: 'nine former Prime Ministers or Deputy Prime Ministers, 19 former Ministers, seven returning Commissioners and eight former [MEPs], all with solid economic and finance background, and for some of them with extensive foreign relations experience' (European Commission 2014a). They are 'politicians who have a past and a future… (Juncker 2015b).

Second, and most visibly, the Commission President introduced a change to the structure of the College through the creation of seven Vice Presidents.[23] In previous Commissions the role had been largely ceremonial, but in the Juncker Commission all had coordinating roles albeit of varying scope (table 1). While five were responsible for coordinating policy teams in particular areas, Vice President Georgieva oversaw budget and human resources, while the duties of First Vice President, Frans Timmermans, included overseeing better regulation in the Commission (which would be considered strengthened in 2015), responsibility for sustainable development, inter-institutional relations and promoting a new partnership with national parliaments, and coordinating work on transparency. In practice, Timmermans would, according to the President, be Juncker's 'right-hand man'. He would check whether policy initiatives form the services complied with the Commission President's ten policy priorities, and his approval was necessary before policy items could be placed on the College agenda. The responsibilities of the Vice Presidents and Commissioners were outlined in the mission letters sent out by Commission President-elect.[24] Balance between party-tickets within each policy team was an important consideration.

The tier of Vice Presidents would act on behalf of the Commission President and therefore share the leadership role, but also protect him. Vice Presidents were responsible for upstream coordination, ensuring that policy initiatives complied with the President's policy priorities and were agreed at political level between the Commissioners prior to the

[21] 'Available at http://juncker.epp.eu/my-priorities

[22] The claim that the Commission President's choice was restricted by the nominations that member governments were prepared to make is true to a point. The incoming President used his personal capital, derived from 18 years as Prime Minister of Luxembourg (1995-2013), 20 as Finance Minister (1989-2009), and 9 as chairman of the Eurogroup (2004-13) to make direct contact with his favoured candidates and, in his communications with heads of government, cited his mandate as *Spitzenkandidaten* as basis of his authority to propose candidates (interview).

[23] Available at http://ec.europa.eu/archives/juncker-commission/docs/structure_en.pdf

[24] Available at http://ec.europa.eu/archives/juncker-commission/mission/index_en.htm

involvement of the services. The aim was four-fold: to ensure delivery of the Commission President's ten policy priorities; to assure that political differences were settled at the beginning rather than at the end of the decision-making process; to strengthen the political leadership of the College vis-à-vis the administrative services; and to overcome fragmentation between Commission departments.

Third, although the 2010 Rules of Procedure remained in place, the Commission introduced 'new ways of working' that were set out in a document discussed by the College at a seminar in November 2014. The 'new ways of working' emphasized the centrality of the College, the role of the Vice Presidents, and the role of the Commission President's cabinet and Secretariat General in helping to 'ensure that Vice-Presidents always act with the support and in line with the mandate given to them by the President' (Commission 2014b: 6). An important innovation, underlining that the Juncker Commission should take political responsibility was that delegated acts would be considered and decided by the College rather than by administrative services.

Fourth, the administrative resources supporting the Commission President were strongly enhanced. While the President's cabinet remained the same size (12 AD grade staff and up to two experts of grade AD 13 – Commission 2014b) as under Barroso II (Commission 2015), it pro-actively engaged with other cabinets, including those of the Vice Presidents, in ensuring that the President's policy agenda was enforced. The important role played by Martin Selmayr, as the Commission President's chef de cabinet, and later as Secretary General, was widely commented upon.

The Juncker Commission made DG Communications a presidential service, and restructured the Spokesperson Service. It replaced the Bureau of European Policy Advisers (BEPA) with the European Political Strategy Centre, which would play an important role in the Juncker Presidency. The Secretariat General was strengthened and its responsibilities extended. It gained an extra 80 staff, when personnel resources were aligned with the Commission President's policy priorities, due mainly to its new function of providing support for the Vice Presidents and as an intermediary between Vice Presidents and Commissioners, and between Vice Presidents and Commission services (Commission 2014: 6).

Under the Juncker Commission, relations within the core executive were reconfigured once again. In contrast to Barroso, the basis for the change came not from treaty reform, but a new interpretation of the Lisbon Treaty on which the European Parliament insisted. Acting with the authority and legitimacy that derived from the *Spitzenkanditaten* process, President Juncker restructured the College, reorganised the services, and redefined the relationship between the College and the administration, in order to deliver his policy priorities. Interviews conducted as part of 'The European Commission: Where now? Where next?', including especially with members of cabinet and Directors General, suggest that the changes enacted under the Juncker Commission have affected the operation of all structures at all levels. As well as the tier of Vice Presidents, which have introduced a new dynamic into the organisation, the 'new ways of working' have altered relationships between Commissioners, between the College and services, between cabinets, between cabinets and the services, and between the services. Even if opinion is sometimes divided on the merits of the changes, their consequences have been far-reaching.

Table 2 here. Four models of resource distribution within the European core executive

Conclusion

Approaching leadership in the Commission from a core executive perspective highlights variation in the distribution of resources among political actors and between political actors and the administration. Three models prior to the Junker Presidency can be identified, although the second, which applies to the Delors era, is anomalous. The authority exercised by the President can be explained by the exceptional level of external support – from Bonn and Lisbon – but, importantly, even the most celebrated President in the Commission's history ran up against the limited powers associated with the office.

The analysis highlights the Barroso Commission as the period when the Commission becomes genuinely presidential. Although treaty reform was the main driver, since under the Nice Treaty, the Commission President gained new authority, the way in which Barroso mobilised the new resources as a result of a rhetorical appeal to the difficulties of managing the post-enlargement College and channelled them towards the creation of a stronger central administration, mark a new era of presidentialism in the Commission.

The model practised by the Juncker Commission, following its entry into office in 2014, further strengthened the Presidency. The *Spitzenkandidaten* process produced a personal mandate that gave the incoming President a stronger negotiating position in selecting the Commissioners that he wanted and enabled him to operationalise the 'political Commission' through a series of structural and procedural reforms that were designed to deliver the presidential programme. Policy prioritisation, the firm control of the President over the policy agenda supported by the Vice Presidents and the Secretariat General, and the high barriers that deterred Commissioners from submitting proposals that did not fall within the ten priorities were features that distinguished the Juncker Commission sharply from even its immediate predecessor, with which it shared the greatest similarities.

The changes in the distribution of resources alter power relations within the Commission and have a very significant impact on how the organisation operates. The consequences are felt internally by staff, they affect the Commissions inter-institutional interactions, and are experienced more broadly by actors and institutions. The above analysis shows that how the Commission is led and how it functions internally cannot be treated as a constant. It follows that research programmes need to take account of changing core executive relations within the Commission as a key variable in the functioning and operation not only of the Commission, but of the EU more generally.

References (to follow)

Table 1: Vice Presidents and their project teams in the Juncker Commission

Project team	Better regulation, interinstitutional relations, the rule of law, the Charter of Fundamental Rights and sustainable development	Budget and human resources	A stronger global actor	A new boost for jobs, growth and investment	A deeper and fairer Economic and Monetary Union	A resilient energy union with a forward looking climate change policy	A digital single market
Commission Vice President	Frans Timmermans	Kristalina Georgieva	Federica Mogherini (High Representative of the EU for foreign Affairs and Security Policy)	Jyrki Katainen (Vice-president for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness)	Valdis Dombrovskis (The Euro and Social Dialogue)	Maroš Šefčovič (Energy Union)	Andrus Ansip (Digital Single Market)
Commissioners involved	All Commissioners	All Commissioners	Johannes Hahn (European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations) Cecilia Malmström (Trade) Neven Mimica (International Co-operation and Development) Christos Stylianides (Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management)	Günther Oettinger (Digital Economy and Society) Pierre Moscovici (Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs) Jonathan Hill (Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union) Elżbieta Bieńkowska (Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and Smes) Marianne Thyssen (Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility) Corina Crețu (Regional Policy) Miguel Arias Cañete (Climate Action and Energy) Violeta Bulc (Transport)	Pierre Moscovici (Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs) Marianne Thyssen (Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility) Jonathan Hill (Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union) Elżbieta Bieńkowska (Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and Smes) Tibor Navracsics (Education, Culture, Youth and Sport) Corina Creţu (Regional Policy) Věra Jourová (Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality)	Miguel Arias Cañete (Climate Action and Energy) Violeta Bulc (Transport) Elżbieta Bieńkowska (Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and Smes) Karmenu Vella (Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries) Corina Creţu (Regional Policy) Phil Hogan (Agriculture and Rural Development) Carlos Moedas (Research, Science and Innovation)	Günther Oettinger (Digital Economy and Society) Elżbieta Bieńkowska (Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and Smes) Marianne Thyssen (Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility) Věra Jourová (Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality) Pierre Moscovici (Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs) Corina Creţu (Regional Policy) Phil Hogan (Agriculture and Rural Development)

Table 2 here. Four models of resource distribution within the European Commission core executive

	Collegial/Primus inter pares (the 'impossible job')	**Improvised Presidential** (e.g. Jacques Delors)	**Post-Nice Presidential** (José Manuel Barroso)	**'The political Commission'**
Political resources	• Treaty does not differentiate role of President from other members of the College • Resources evenly distributed within College • Commissioners selected and appointed to portfolios by common accord of governments	• = Treaty does not differentiate role of President from other members of the College (from 1993: nominee Commission President must be approved by European Parliament) • = Resources evenly distributed within College • = Commissioners selected and appointed to portfolios by common accord of governments (from 1993 Maastricht: the Commission President isconsulted on appointments) • President has strong support of Paris and Bonn	• Candidate for Commission President is selected prior to College • Candidate Commission President participates in selection of other Commissioners (Amsterdam) • Commission works under President the 'political guidance' of its President (Amsterdam/Rules of Procedure 1999) • Commission President appoints members of the College and allocates portfolios (Nice/Lisbon) • President can request resignation of a member of the Commission, subject to approval of College (Nice) • President can request resignation of member of the Commission (Lisbon)	• Selected candidate of party who wins European elections is nominated Commission President by European Council • = Candidate Commission President participates in selection of other Commissioners (Amsterdam) • = Commission President provides 'political guidance' (Amsterdam) • = Commission President appoints members of the College and allocates portfolios (Nice)
Procedural resources	• Policies and decisions are made collectively by the College (Rules of Procedure, 1963)	• (Maastricht from 1993): the Commission shall adopt an annual programme	• President decides multiannual programme as basis for annual work programme and draft budget (Rules of Procedure 2005)	• The 'new ways of working' affirm the President's centrality, define the roles of the Vice Presidents, and describe College-service interaction
Administrative resources	• Decisions on internal organisation of the Commission made by the College (Rules of Procedure, 1963)	• President creates powerful cabinet • Centralised press office	• Commission President can create groups of Commissioners (Nice/Lisbon) • Decisions on internal organisation made by Commission President (Amsterdam/ Rules of Procedure 1999/Nice/Lisbon) • President converts Secretariat General into presidential service • President strengthens Better Regulation	• = Commission President can create groups of Commissioners (Nice/Lisbon) • Decisions on internal organisation made by Commission President (Nice/Lisbon) • President restructures College, creating seven Vice Presidents with responsibilities to coordinate work of members of the Commission • President strengthens the Secretariat General, makes DG COMM a presidential service, and reforms the Spokeperson Service • President further strengthens Better Regulation machinery