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Paper presented for the  
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**The deconsecrated administration:  
EU civil servants from mission to management**

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**Abstract:** This paper has several aims. On the theoretical aspect, it consists in reassessing two perspectives often neglected in the public administration literature by focusing, first, on “history-made body”, that’s to say reform effects on administrators as individuals and social body, and, second, on the symbolic dimension of reforms including, beyond discourse, the symbolic value of administrative and reform practices. Those related perspectives help to shed a new light upon the resistance/acceptance of administrative reforms, and moreover upon their effect on the administrative power. To illustrate it, the empirical part of the paper consists in studying the effect of the managerial reform within the EU Commission. It assumes that this reform is related to a crisis of reproduction due, among other factors, to an important symbolic matter, which consists in a deconsecration process of the Commission’s administrative body. In order to show it, the paper builds on revisiting the Weberian theory as well as a huge empirical material coming from several years of research. Beyond the EU Commission’s case, this paper aims to think about the more general deconsecration effect produced by managerialism in western bureaucracies.

**Points for practitioners:** This paper leads to a more reflexive approach on management and administrative reforms, an approach more sensitive to people making administration works rather than (too) many conceptual theories considering administration as a thing instead of a social body. In doing so, it reveals a hidden part of managerial effect, most of the time thought through the categories of cost, efficiency of procedures, etc: the social effect it produces in terms of power, re/devaluation of people concerned with. Practical dimensions of reforms, such as staff selection, core competences definition, training, assessment are consequently read with other glasses, which should lead to better understand why such tools fit or not with some type of organisations. Useful for European and international organisations considering their social histories and cultures, the findings are more over fruitful for western public services and administrations reforms.

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This contribution would like to reassess two theoretical points. The first one consists in discussing neo-institutionalism. In these theories, and particularly the historical one, historical determinations like the path dependency phenomena are always seen through history-made thing (legal rules, routines, procedures) but rarely through history-made body, that is to say history as embodied by individuals and groups. This focus, which most of the time occults administrators as a social body, is problematic in that the embodiment of a collective history is a strong variable for understanding how reforms are engaged, supported and perceived, and finally produces effects. The second theoretical point is related. It concerns something often neglected by scholars on public administration and administrative elites. That is simply the symbolic dimension of Power. This is a key point for politics and administration which both have, as we will see, quite sacred aspects and particularly when it comes to understand the European Commission and the European civil servants' legitimacy.

This perspective does not consist in moving "the middle constructivist historical institutionalism" supported by Pollitt and Bouckert (2004) into a more "strongly constructivist sociological institutionalism". It simply tries to find a more balanced model for understanding the Public administration reform including not only "the rhetoric and the language of reform" (ibid) as a relevant dimension among others, but also symbolic practices which seem to me at the heart of the administration's legitimacy. I claim that this perspective is relevant for at least three reasons. The first one is theoretical insofar as this perspective contributes to opening the scope of public administration studies' background notably in rediscovering a hidden part of the Weberian tradition on institutions. The second one is that these new glasses help to better analyse some deep transformations that occurred within the Western Public administration: particularly here the dedifferentiation's effects brought by the New Management as well as how the New Management has triggered a new wave of 'disenchantment' (in Weber terms) that breaks the legitimacy's bases of Administration and Public intervention. The third one is simply (but this is probably also the most important) that this perspective helps to better understand concrete cases of management effects and concrete administrative transformations by defining the tools of analysis to go beyond 'resistances against changes'.

The EU Commission and its last reform is one of these cases, which will be used in this paper as an empirical test for these broader theoretical aspects. The process of the EU commission's reform has already been treated by a mushrooming literature since the Kinnock reform and the publishing of the White paper on administrative reform in 2000. Many authors pointed out that this case was exemplary taking into account the EU Commission was previously very reluctant to management (Metcalf 2000), the large scale of the reform and the lack of inside resistances it raised (Stevens 2006, Kassim 2009). Concerning the effect of this reform, an important part of the surveys done by Bauer or Ellinas and Suleiman stressed the contrasted effect of the process on the staff. "Better manager but deprived entrepreneur" noticed Bauer, whereas Ellinas and Suleiman talked about the "castration" feeling shared by high EU civil servants (Bauer 2009, Ellinas Suleiman 2009).

Here, my assumption is that this process, including the general down climate or depressing atmosphere within the EU Commission for a few years up to this "castration",

is related to a crisis of reproduction, which affects the EU civil servants as a collective body of Europe servants. In this paper, I make the assumption that this crisis of reproduction is due, among other factors, to an important symbolic matter, which consists in a deconsecration process of the Commission's administrative body.

To show it, this paper will be structured in 5 parts. In the first one I will explain the theoretical framework claiming for opening the scope to the Weberian analysis of public administration. In the second one I pull the string of this model for understanding what is happening within the European Commission and how to grasp it through a multi-methodological approach. Follows two parts drawn from my empirical work. In the third one I demonstrate that the EU Civil servants used to be one of the last administrative bodies being similar to what Max Weber called a Stand, which contains a huge part of symbolic prestige and power. In the following one (that is the 4<sup>th</sup> in the paper), I show how this collective historical and sociological trajectory is highly jeopardized by the normalization process at stake with the administrative reform. Finally I show how this process matters within the EU Commission, that leading us to understand broader transformations within the western public administration.

### **I. Administrators, body and symbolic power (or when Weber met Durkheim).**

This first part aims at proposing a theoretical framework. Here I would like to point out that the focus operated by the different neo-institutionalisms on organisation, interest, or value tends to partly undermine what the institutions are and what differences they make. In the following theoretical framework, social representations and interest are made body (or embodied) by social agents and put in a sociological context defined not only by organisations, but by wider struggles between social and political groups for the design of the institutions and the qualities to make them work. These struggles contain an important part of symbolic aspects. Despite being occulted by the division of academic labour, this conception has deeper roots coming from the weberian sociology of institutions and its inheritors (up to Bourdieu's theory of State and field of Power). I assume that this perspective is relevant for understanding Public administration's transformations on a broader viewpoint, and even more to specify some deep particularities showed by the public administration of the EU institutions.

Weber is a dominant reference for interpreting public Administration. Nevertheless, it seems that a large number of scholars read his conceptualisation of Public Administration with a special lens. The usual literature focuses on the ideal type of legal authority and more often on "the pure type of employment of a bureaucratic administrative staff". This reading is also dominant in European studies, where most of the authors wonder what kind of model of administration the European Commission belongs to, if not more directly if this is a weberian bureaucracy or not. These questions were probably raised by some apparent paradoxes created by the EU Commission, such as the fact that it is? an administration without States. These questions were also stimulated for emphasising the EC bureaucracy model as a cultural compromise or to put stress on its frozen border between Politics and administration. But this focus was also broadly produced by the 'state of the reading' of Weber in the 60s and its success in the academic field after the Parsons translation. As a matter of fact, if the Parsons translation made the "ideal type of bureaucracy" (and after him Merton with the "dysfunction of bureaucracy") very successful, the uses of this translation in the Public Administration academic field contributed to focus on 15 pages from *The theory of Social*

*and Economic Organisation*, overshadowing some tremendous other contributions coming from Max Weber. As have noticed several recent readers taking into account the whole weberian conception including his political writing as well as his sociology of religion, this focus neglected what seems to be another finding, based more on the social process leading to the bureaucratic order and its symbolic dimension.

First of all, in this refreshed reading, the description of a formal model, even ideal-typical, is less important than the social process embedded in the construction of bureaucracy. In plain language, this process consists in a differentiation process inside the ruling class between politicians and bureaucrats. As Weber showed, the bureaucratisation is not coming from a rationalisation process floating in the air, but this process is related to the increasing position of people coming from university, struggling for building secured positions secured by degrees, as Engels also showed for lawyers elsewhere. In other words, this bureaucratisation is the result of a competition between social groups whose effect consists in building a legitimacy<sup>1</sup> order. This tendency, observed Weber, is particularly heavy in Germany but also in other western countries including the US, as he showed in his political writing. Whatever it is, this is the engine of changes, whereas the bureaucratic ideal-type (which by the way is not for Weber the “best way” but a legitimacy order in process) is the result.

Weber is of course not alone to point out administrators as a social group. Unsurprisingly, the authors the most linked to him such as Karl Mannheim noticed the same dimension. What is the most important for them is not the formal modal of organisation, but instead to understand how this organisation (better: this order) is embodied by people and what differences it makes on their personality and *collective* behaviour. Consequently their interest focused on administrators as well as organisation. Karl Mannheim emphasised the fact that civil servants' careers often result from a call or a vocation? for public service very different from any other occupation. Entering the public service belongs to a life-plan (*Lebensplan*). Other consequence, this group becoming dominant (despite the fact that there are obviously strong social differences between High civil servants and people working in bureaus and street level bureaucrats), some authors emphasise that bureaucrats became a kind of new status-group or *Stand* already analysed by Weber. This dimension has also been raised, inspired by Mannheim, by American interactionist sociologists like Everett Hughes (1937).

This concept of *Stand* is interesting, and first of all because it enlightens why this part of Weber's work has been occulted in Public theoretical debates. This occultation seems to come from shortcuts as well as translation. As I previously suggested, the shortcuts are probably related to the fact that many readers were not interested in weberian chapters on traditional legitimacy or more broadly in his historical and sociological comparative views (despite the fact that this is obviously a key point for the greatness as Eisenstadt 1968 observed), considering this part as probably relevant in the past but not for understanding (or participating in) the period of *The Managerial Revolution*, according to the symptomatic title of James Burnham. Here again the division of academic labour matters. But there is also a problem of translation in English. As Parsons (Weber 1947) pointed out while defining the notion in a footnote in the traditional legitimacy chapter:

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<sup>1</sup>. Among these new readers, Jean Claude Passeron noticed an important shift in the fact that Parsons' translation uses legitimacy instead of legitimation, which was closer to the German Word.

“the term Stand with its derivatives is perhaps the most troublesome single term in Weber’s text. It refers to a social group the members of which occupy a relatively well-defined common status, particularly with reference to social stratification, though this reference is not always important. In addition to common status, there is a further criterion that the members of a Stand have a common lifestyle and usually more or less well-defined code of behaviour. There is no English term which even approaches adequacy in rendering this concept” (p. 348)”

Taking into account this problem, this is not a surprise if the authors referring to the concept of Stand wrote prior to this translation (such as Hughes and to some extent Merton), and regardless of it. To focus on the latter, Bourdieu emphasised that this concept as well as the social process it refers to matter. In its famous *Nobility of State*, he showed how dominant families use or invest the State for stabilising their positions, and how this process is also belonging, as showed a close historian (Charle 1997) studying the end of XIXth century in France and Europe, to the Republican Model. The latter has not totally subverted what was the ancient order and regime, but transformed it insofar as the dominant position needed to convert some resources into “meritocratic” guarantees such as degrees. In the case of France, this process puts the schools of States in the limelight, but it is coherent to think that in other countries the modernity (as Weber called it) gives similar effects like the Oxbridge model and the lawyers in Germany. Further considerations are made in Bourdieu’s seminal paper called “rethinking the state” as well as in “From the King’s House to the Reason of State: A Model of the Genesis of the Bureaucratic Field” edited by Wacquant (2004).

These findings have had a better reception in the sociology and history fields than in mainstream political science and public administration. Though they enable to make a more critical but also comprehensive reading of the administrative field as a human field, determined by social conflicts between different types of individuals and groups as well as organisations or rules, concerning – typically – the definition of what is good or not for the administration. As I will show later, this conception is very useful in the particular context of the EU considering that it relates to the differentiation of a transnational group of bureaucrats, which is for me the key point for understanding what is happening around the last reforms. It is also useful in order to understand its consequences on honours, consecration, as well as juridical and social status of officials.

Strongly related to this weberian status considered as a status group, another important idea disappeared from the most part of the Public administration analysis. Focusing on the ideal type of legal authority, the majority of the authors introduce a radical gap between the legal authority and the charismatic authority. Here the academic division of labour produces devastating effects as if public administration scholars only read the legal type, political scientists the charismatic one, leaving to the historians the traditional one.

The point here is that this separation is not as strong as it seems. In his introduction of *On charisma and institution building*, Eisenstadt (Eisenstadt 1968, xxi) emphasises that the concept of charisma developed by Weber and its possible further extensions are of crucial importance to understand institution-building. The weberian concept of charisma is also crucial for understanding the particular status of concepts such as “charisma of office” (I probably prefer the expression ‘charisma of service’) developed by Weber, which is useful far beyond the church. Evoking the obliteration of the

dichotomy between the charismatic and the orderly regular routine of social organisation, N. Eisenstadt pursues that “as it is well known, these concepts, especially that of charisma of the office, have been used by Weber to denote the process through which the charismatic characteristics are transferred from the unique personality or the unstructured group to orderly institutional reality”.

As Parsons (Weber 1947) remarked in the same vein: “in the process of routinization the charismatic element does not necessarily disappear. It rather becomes dissociated from the person of the individual leader and embodied in an objective structure, so that the new holders of authority exercise it at a second remove as it were by virtue of an institutionally legitimized status of Office” (p. 67). Underlining some difficulties in the concept of charisma, Parsons adds: “He [Weber] treats [the charisma] not only as a quality (not necessarily only for persons), but as a non-empirical aspect of the situation of action of, in a special technical sense, a supernatural order, by recognition of which underlies the moral legitimacy of normative rules in general. The concept becomes exactly equivalent to Durkheim sacred. There are indications of this ambivalence in Weber’s treatment of the charismatic authority in that the routinization of charisma, the charisma of the original leader does not disappear, but becomes objectified as a quality of the order developing from a charismatic origin, as this “charisma of office” or of a “ruling rules”” (Weber 1947, p. 75-76).

This has two consequences. The first one concerns the general characterization of the administration, as well as its religious dimension. Pursuing on chasing theoretical occultation, I claim that this dimension was already emphasised by Merton (1957) in his seminal work... but unfortunately a few lines after the too successful chapter about “dysfunction of Bureaucracy”. Here is what he wrote: “In a stimulating paper, Hughes has applied the concepts of “secular” and “sacred” to various types of division of labour; “the sacredness” of caste and *Stände* prerogatives contrast sharply with the increasing secularism of occupational differentiation in our society (Hughes, 1932). However, as our discussion suggests, there may ensue, in particular vocations and types of organization, the *process of sanctification* (viewed as the counterpart of the process of secularization). This is to say that through sentiment-formation, emotional dependence upon bureaucratic symbols and status, and affective involvement in spheres of competence and authority, there develops prerogatives involving attitudes of moral legitimacy which are established as values in their own right, and are no longer viewed as merely technical means for expediting administration. One may note a tendency for certain bureaucratic norms, originally introduced for technical reasons, to become rigidified and sacred, although, as Durkheim would say, they are *laique en apparence*. (Hughes, 1937) Durkheim has touched on this general process in his description of the attitudes and values which persist in the organic solidarity of a highly differentiated society”. Here by the way, the insight coming from the American sociologists should meet historians of law such as Kantorowich (1956) who emphasised the Catholic origin of the State and its transfer to dogmatic thought.

Helped by his incomparable talent of taking the best from both Weber and Durkheim (as well as phenomenological philosophy and Levi-Strauss), Bourdieu flagged the second consequence in elaborating his concept of “Symbolic Capital” : “Generally speaking, the symbolic capital is any property (any form of capital whether physical, economic, cultural, or social) when perceived by social agents endowed with categories of perception which cause them to know it and to recognize it, to give it value” (1998. 47).



Owning this capital, which is concentrated by the State and transferred by consecration acts and rites of institution permitted by school and Concours, enables to produce magical and indeed Power effects. In the case of High Civil servants, this symbolic capital, pursues Bourdieu in another paper, is the ability (here again confirmed by passing through consecration process) to embody the general interest. That supposes a lot of skills, such as the capacity to speak in the name of the general interest, that is to say in conformity with the science of Law, but also taking distance with special interests, demining political incentives, etc. These skills are social skills, in the sense that they are both practical aptitude and authority to act, the latter being strongly linked to consecration process (Bourdieu 1994 a and b).

## **II. Methodological Consequences for analysing the EU administration**

This theoretical framework has conceptual and methodological implications for studying the EU administration and its reform. Here again Weber's problem was not to design an efficient model of bureaucracy, but to understand the social foundation of authority and legitimacy order. Whatever the bureaucratic ideal-type, he wanted to point out the disenchantment process at stake through rationalisation and bureaucratisation. Therefore, I assume that analysing this disenchantment is still a key issue for analysing administrative reforms. That is what leads me to questioning the deconsecration effect at stake within the European Commission.

Before presenting this hypothesis, it is important to notice that this re-reading of the Weberian teaching refines the "question of research" on the administrative reform. Indeed, the question moves from "to what model leads the reform" to "how the reform challenges powers". This is a key question to understand inputs, outputs and the black box of the reforms as well. How the reform challenges the balances between groups, how does it challenge the value of resources, skills or credential owned by individuals and groups? In the same vein it consists in studying the people involved in the process in first intention or, to say it differently, previously to any consideration about the model engaged. Here again, this focus is central. First because power is a matter of relationship between people, so that it should normally lead to study people instead of abstract variable. Second, because it sheds a new light on the cultural dimension of reforms. Most of the reform discourses claim for a change of mentality, a change of administrative culture, leading to a 'culture of service' for instance. The problem here again is that cultures do not float in the air, no more than identities as Weber recalled. Culture exists as embodied by individuals and group, in habits and moreover in embodied disposition to act, that is to say *habitus* as Weber said followed by Bourdieu. The question is therefore how does this reform (or some of its special measures) match (or not) the *habitus* of people involved.

These different points of views lead to a central assumption concerning the public new management. First, they recall that NPM reforms lead to different models of administration, depending on their different acclimatisation (Eymeri 2010). As many showed (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004, Page & Wright 2006, Ongaro 2009, Eymeri 2010), the different social and political configurations of States lead to different paths of reform, including in some cases even more bureaucratisation. But the converging point is that, as it consists in a new rationalisation wave, it leads to a general process of disenchantment (or following Weber 1.0), which tends to devalue individuals and groups who built their social positions and trajectories in the public and State service.

Considering this theory, this new wave of disenchantment, as strong as the bureaucratisation process was – as he studied it at the beginning of the last century – has nothing to do with ideology. The strength of the wave of disenchantment is conversely related to the fact that it touches practices of individuals and groups. Impossible without this to understand the great interest of ‘pragmatism’ invoked by reformists. Moreover, and considering the whole model, these practices are not only administrative practices but legitimacy practices for administrators.

The EU Commission and its reform pull the string of this process and define therefore a good case study. Indeed, this case fits particularly well to the study of such a process, for at least three reasons. The first one is that the EU Civil service defines a group, which as we will see results from an interesting differentiation process as an elite group as well as a transnational one. Unsurprisingly, Bourdieu’s ‘Nobility of State’ model has already been used by some scholars such as C. Shore for instance, even though according to me it must be refined.

Second, there are a lot of evidence of the symbolic, and to some extent religious dimension within the EU Commission. Many historians demonstrated the role of prophecies and prophets within EU historiography and narratives. Distancing himself from that, Milward (2001) pointed out this “history of saints and prophets”. Many observed the role of the vocation within motivation, discourses on peaces and prosperity, people’s salvation, faith in the future, etc., as anthropologists and political sociologists did. As new historians observed, those values do not come from nowhere: Christian political groups and actors played an important role in the building of those institutions (Kayser 2008). In other words, the routinization of charisma and its transformation into a Charisma of office is an assumption strongly connected in this case. By the way, in addition to the literature which builds on the more or less French influence on the EU civil service model, it is worth noticing that the French technocracy is also the result of a prophecy as a French political sociologist showed (Gaïti 1998).

The third one is a paradoxical design of the reform, and especially the paradoxical attitudes at the forefront of the reform. On the one hand, the resistance against the reform were not so hard, as Kassim (2008) remarked in his paper whose symptomatic title was ‘mission accomplished’, which is true to some extent as we will see further. The polls made for DG admin (now Human Resources and Security) show that people are not always reluctant to better management. On the other hand, both papers from Bauer on Chiefs of Unit and from Ellinas and Suleiman (2008) on directors general stressed the down climate produced by the reform. The reform has indeed very contrasted effects, insofar as people feel paralysed, deprived, or even castrated as an interviewee said. Every researcher working on the recent period with regard to the EU institutions agree on the fact that a lot of officials seem to be disoriented.

Here my assumption is that the general down climate or depressed atmosphere within the EU Commission for a few years now (with some topics like the loss of meaning, the loss of Power, decline, the lack of leadership and project, the increase of control procedures, of audits, ethics being conceived as a way to fight fraud and being perceived as a lack of trust from the hierarchy in its staff, etc.), is related with a crisis of reproduction, which affects the EU civil servants as a collective body of servants of Europe. To put it simply, the EU Civil servants used to be one of the last administrative bodies being similar to what Max Weber called a Stand, and that contained a huge part of

symbolic prestige and power. But this collective sociological trajectory is highly jeopardized by the normalization process whose administrative reform is an example as well as a tool. The problem here is that the more and more diffused “within the house” management practices touch directly the ‘charisma of office’ that used to be dominant. The legitimation of position being now more related to the conformity with international standard of managerial ‘good practices’ than with their role as servant of Europe, the historical and sociological process embodied in EU high servants’ *habitus* is consequently totally wrong footed.

This assumption does not exclude other explanations. Here I focus on internal factors such as the effect of management. Obviously there are also external contextual dimensions such as the lack of political dimension of Europe, the enlargement, the changes of expectation and position from other elites towards the EU, broader institutional transformation etc.. This assumption does not exclude either that this process has a different effect considering the origin or the position of the agent in this field. Conversely that is at the heart of the assumption even if it will not be developed here (Georgakakis, 2010). But I claim that this disenchantment is the point that makes sense. That it gives the meaning of what is happening (in the Weberian tradition), and it gives sense to the other factors.

That being said, how to grasp this disenchantment process from a methodological point of view? The results I give further come from a broad historical and sociological survey whose aim is to give a general picture of the building of the EU civil service and the challenges it has to face nowadays. For doing so, I use materials such as archives, in-house documents (coming from trade unions as well as institutions), biographical analyses, interviews, accumulated through about 10 ten years of research, as well as existing studies reinterpreted by the new frame.

To be more precise, the results presented further come from the European services of archives in Firenze, Lausanne and Brussels. Here I analysed the debates on the staff regulation but also the recruitment done in the first circle of the European Steel and Coal Community’s High Authority to study the genesis of the *status* (staff regulation), as well as the Emile Noel’s archives’ to understand the further organisation of the Commission between 1957 and the 80s. The analysis of the collection of in-house journals such as *Le courier du personnel* or today’s *La Commission en direct* has also been useful. Biographical analyses have been done both through a database collecting all the Directors and deputy directors general (containing more than 200 biographies published in the Who’s Who) but also through qualitative interviews (15). Besides, interviews (10) have been collected such as direct observations, and trade unions’ paper analyses for analysing the mobilisation of EU-Civil servants which are precious moments to be analysed. The concours’ study leads to a statistical survey (500 questionnaires) as well as to interviews (50). The analysis of the inside literature (paper about reform or press announcement) etc, was useful for interpreting values and social images related to the definition of the EU Civil Service as well as the rhetoric of reform. Finally, this fieldwork is completed by direct and ethnographic observations conducted for 10 years from Strasbourg and more recently from Brussels including meetings organized by EU servants’ trade unions, successive offices of European civil servant selection, schools preparing to the Concours, and my 12 years experience as director of Master preparing to EU careers.

I of course pay a special attention to the other surveys done by other scholars. This is the case of historians, despite the fact that the staff policy holds a minor part within EU historiography. The main part of the survey about the EU staff's attitudes or opinions are often taken into account, even if reinterpreted with the new lenses offered by this model and also ethnographic interviews that nuance some "situational effect" at play in answering a questionnaire. Surveys done about others groups involved in the EU field are also used in a comparative way or as a counter-model, notably regarding the collective survey we did at the Centre for European Political Sociology (Georgakakis, de Lassalle 2007, 2010).

This diversity of the methodological tools is the only condition to grasp the variety of viewpoints and the historical changes at stake. For understanding what is happening, whom for, in what condition, with what effect, it's important to analyse the process of the group in a broad way (for more details, Georgakakis 2008) as well as what is at stake with management. This shift to historical and social process analysis does not mean that there are no indicators, as a kind of literary narrative. Conversely, the Stand hypothesis calls for analysing the collective position of the civil servants through indicators of social position and the type of guarantee of such position. The symbolical aspects are also observed through indicators like narratives of the group, the building of collective images through portrait, ritual dimension of consecrations, etc. The study of reform and some practices it leads to are observed through similar indicators mixing methodology and social science's segments that fit with the new tendencies of interdisciplinarity in EU Studies. In order to show it, the two following parts will argue by picking up elements from this broader survey.

### **III. The EU civil servant as a Stand : a long-term historical and sociological process.**

First, to what extent can we consider the EU civil servants as members of a status-group? This assumption implies to emphasize their collective dimension. Most of scholars insist on divisions within the EU Civil servants: nationalities, cultural gap, sectoral or organisational differences and oppositions, ideological differences. These differences exist and it would be absurd to see the EU civil servants as a uniform army. But at the same time the EU civil servants do exist as a group, historically and socially, built as a "status group" (in the Weberian sense). Entering the institution is far from being neutral and has strong consequences both on the objective social position and the symbolic capital they own individually and collectively. Despite their internal differences, this is (or was) at the heart of their distinctiveness as regards to the other people involved in this field.

The building of this group results from a policy of *habitus*, that's to say a work on body and mind done by institutions. Historically the staff policy used to be weak (see also Stevens), but it did not really matter. As an official against the management reform was saying, "for a long time, there was no need to spend money in 'team building', there was already a team". My assumption is that this feeling has deep social conditions. As a matter of fact, entering and serving the EU institutions transforms the social position of the individual through different material dimensions. In his book, *the distinction*, Bourdieu differentiates three types of capital that make a social position. Whatever the EU civil servants social origin is, entering at the service of an institution has a real effect on the three of them. First, having a permanent position gives economic capital through high incomes but most of all it secures a high level of incomes which have patrimonial

effects. It also contributes to transforming cultural capital. If most of the officials already own high level degrees, much higher than legally required (considering for instance the high number of Ph.D. owners), the experience within the institution often adds a technical expertise, or at least what I would call a “multicultural interiorized capital”. Most of the EU servants are multilinguists, but their practical experience in working within a multicultural (a European) environment gives them a comparative advantage compared to other people involved in this field as well as diplomats. Social Capital, networks and relational power is the third capital accumulated through this position. By social capital, Bourdieu built a different notion than the one built by Coleman and Putnam: the volume of social relationship owned by social agents. Here again, entering the institutions changes this position compared to the others in entering the “community of elected people”. It also reverses the position as regards their former colleagues or even boss.

But there’s also a symbolic capital. This is important for a “Stand”, which is by definition related to honour. Here this symbolic capital is related to their capacity of embodying the European institutions and interest. This is a process that begins with schools, being completed and consecrated by the Concours. It follows through the different stages of their long-term career. That’s to say successive consecrations that give them this charisma of office, an institutional authority that offers the capacity to practice the service or the office, and being legitimated as an EU servant/officer. That is typically what Bourdieu and Wacquant (2004) call the “credential”, so to say the authority given by the belief about what means this position, both for those who occupy it and those who have relationships with it.

Beyond the legal aspect of the staff regulation that secures their permanent positions, this status (which results in the status group) results from wider social processes. Throughout their careers, the officials also go through a set of social filters which produce a rupture with respect to the other agents of the EU institutional field. Among these filters, the concours is the major prerequisite for producing and reproducing the group in these forms, and more particularly in a context where it is more difficult to control more conventional social institutions (family, school) which generally partakes of the formation of elites. The most prestigious concours, i.e. those opening the way to administrator careers (“public administration”, “law” or “economy”: selective examinations), which have been decisive and have shaped the life of the European institutions, are not necessarily the most numerous in view of the impressive development of *ad hoc* special expertise-oriented selective examinations (legal counsellors and linguists, IT engineers, researchers, public health specialists, etc. to name a few of the most recent ones). The formula of the selective examination has also changed in the course of time and, incidentally, the interpretation grids may vary according to the jury. But it remains that the European officials are thus the only ones to owe their position to a specific European selective examination or open competition, that’s to say the EU concours.

It also represents a “rite of institution” (Bourdieu, 1994a) which causes major effects on the definition of this group and of its members. Until now at least, it contributed first of all to select the members of the group from the angle of a set of academic as well as social skills mainly related to specifically European aspects. Although the European general knowledge part was suppressed during the 90s to the benefit of standardised verbal and numerical reasoning tests, MCQs and, for administrators, dissertations

focusing on European subjects in their majority (treaties, status, European policies and their instruments, etc.). The final oral part has been designed not only as a way of double-checking the previous parts of the exam, but especially to assess what the calls for candidacy describe as “the capacity to work in a multicultural environment”. Without never being explicitly so, an agent reproducing his national stereotype too blatantly stands poor chances of passing the oral test before a jury composed of officials of other nationalities. The oral test also enables to make sure that the future “elected” have a few cardinal dispositions (distance from national stereotypes, listening capacity, ability to verbalise knowledge when analysing problems, ability to work and more generally to live in a durable context of expatriation, etc.) which will enable them to evolve sustainably among the European institutions or to represent them in the outside world. Consequently, they have great chances of embodying the institution which they represent, at least until they reach the “glass ceiling”, i.e. the moment when their ascensions along their careers require political, in particular national, supports.

This process differentiates the European officials both from their national counterparts (by celebrating the European adventure, the multicultural and multilinguistic wealth, and more prosaically the capacity of treating important cases very quickly and with high autonomy) and the other expatriates, to whom they are socially akin, but against whom they confirm their commitment to public service and common interest against particular interests, connected to the interests of the Member States or of the economic sector, mainly. This process being reproduced by other means of consecration throughout the career, it has an effect on the type of careers they follow. The case of directors general (Georgakakis, de Lassalle, 2010) i.e. the position situated at the apex of the hierarchy is from this point of view enlightening. As we showed with the studies of 200 trajectories of Directors general, the part of in-house profile, having held positions in Commissioners’ cabinet instead of ministers’ private offices, having been members of a foreign commissioner’s Cabinet, holding international degrees, or being recognized for their European dimension, is more and more important. In other words, this has an effect far beyond discourses or beyond the idea of Europe, it has an effect on the mental map the EU officials have of their careers, trajectories and body.

#### **IV. Management importation and deconsecration effect: from mission to management.**

How does the eruption of management change this long-term process? Before giving some elements, it is worth raising some usual objections. First, it is clear that even if the effect of management on the Commission is proportionate to the delay after which it came into force, the management does not mechanically change the rules. Effects are obviously diverse. Here we only isolate one type of them — desacralization —, and by the way without any normative implicit about it. Moreover, as many have observed, the Kinnock Reform was far from being built in one go, up to the point that it is more accurate to speak about Kinnock reforms. Nevertheless, various elements coming from these reforms converged in changing the forms and ritual of consecration as well as the legitimacy practices into a disenchanting way. In parallel, with Bauer’s (2008) and Ellinas and Suleiman’ (2008) observations, it is important to notice here that this disenchantment is not only a matter of discourse ex-post the reform. This disenchantment — which is the ideal-type we isolated — is included within the new practices promoted by the new rationalisation. This can be illustrated by several

practical chapters of the administrative reforms. Running out of time, I will only discuss two of them.

The first one is ... the last one in the reform's chronology, but to some extent the first one considering the future of the administrative career: the concours, that is to say in English, the open competition for entering the European Institutions as an official. One of the aims of the Kinnock's White Paper was to create a new organisation of the selection of the staff. This aim was motivated by several elements, including some related to the very recent history of the sector. Indeed, the previous Liikanen reform and the end of the mandate of Santer's College were perturbed by several huge problems and even scandals related to the organisation of the 1998 staff selection open competition. Anyway, with the creation of EPSO, the concours has been reformed in several steps (Ban 2009). Despite the fact that the last reform is too recent for being studied as regards its results in terms of body recruited, the goals and measures are emblematic of the changing consecration process. The title given by one of the rare studies on this reform — "moving the sacred cow out the road" as Carolyn Ban chose for her studies — is really significant. For me, the strength of this title is not only to underline that the concours was deeply embedded in the culture of this organisation; it is also to show that the reform moved the sacred dimension of the concours out of the field.

The rhetoric of this reform is interesting in the first place: it indeed illustrates the practices founding the legitimacy of the selection. The general culture, knowledge and typically here the European culture, used to be important elements, making the laureates proud of their success in a distinctive way<sup>2</sup>. In many interviews I conducted, people used to talk about their oral as a debate on European integration or policies, describing how they anxiously but intellectually disputed with members of jury. This was typical from the elite's legitimacy by culture, putting consistency at the top of the hierarchy of symbolic values. Here the concours' reform introduces a radical gap. In a message addressed by EPSO for promoting a conference on the EU competition in London in March 2010, EpsO wrote: « *We will also provide information about our new selection procedures for graduate entrants. From 2010 these are changing and move away from the traditional EU-knowledge testing towards a competency-based model which we feel is needed to find candidates with the ability and potential that we want to help develop modern Europe* » (UACES email list, mars 2010). These official goals were implemented in very concrete measures. Now, two stages constitute the new selection procedure for administrators. The first one consists in a computer-based testing, that includes three tests: verbal and numerical reasoning (close to the Gmat test), abstract reasoning (something close to IQ test), and situational test. The second stage consists in an "assessment stage" in Brussels (taking place in an assessment centre), multiplying the stages: case studies in the field, group exercise, oral presentation, structured interviews, etc. The members of jury are also more controlled, not by any authority, but by the procedure itself that breaks what was naturalised in the oral examination, and its social reproduction bases.

Whatever the intentions are — a big part probably is an attempt to solve practical problems such as the number of candidates and "recours" (remedies) before the court,

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<sup>2</sup>. Here I do not ignore that people could insist on this scholar dimension considering they are interviewed by ... a scholar. Nevertheless, interviews done in the private sector by the same scholar give different results.

whereas another one is probably more ideological as Ban showed in 2009 — these new forms break with the sacred order in several respects. First, let us have a look at the place of the competition (and of course its symbolic significance). Here, the first stage is an individual test, carried out in a cabin alone facing a computer, within an assessment centre where people are mixed with other people with no relationship to the community of European servants (private sector recruitment, national bureaucrats, etc.). This is a radical break with the previous situation: a big hall (like the Heysel stadium in Belgium) with a “cathedral atmosphere” (as an interviewee said), with thousands of people, all here for the same reason, sharing the same fear (most of them talk about the impressive background of the previous first stage). The exercise was moreover very ritualised: finding one’s seat, remaining silent, waiting for everybody, waiting for the subject to be distributed, remaining silent once again, looking at the organisers opening the envelope, distributing it to thousand of tables and people, waiting again, being allowed to take one’s pencil, doing the exercise in silence, on paper, looking at some abandoning their position, staying concentrated, signing at the end, meeting other candidates and sometimes friends during the break, and doing the same in the afternoon for the dissertation. Of course, not everybody followed this ritual, but it is included in the institutional memory and at least partly reproduced in other procedures. The concours also used to be organised along a symbolic path, starting in a collective area (as we just saw) pursuing to being invited to an individual meeting with (and *de facto* within) the institution. For some people, it was the first meeting within the institution. Now no meeting with or within: the selection takes place again in an assessment centre. The candidates are directly competing against each other, no longer against or face to face with the jury.

Time is another important component. As Epso underlined it: [the new procedure consists in] “much quicker competitions with fewer steps in the procedure and annual cycle of competitions for the most common job profiles ». This new style inspired by the British « fast Stream » is apparently more comfortable for candidates, and at the same time interesting insofar as it breaks the magical — and indeed very irregular — timing for the selection of administrators into a more routinised annual procedure. Moreover, the duration of the competition used to be a long process (up to two years), so long that an interviewed official said it was like “priesthood”. It would be too long to quote the interviews where former candidates talked about how they prepared and what volume of time they spent on it, alone as well as in group, and (potentially) supported by national programmes or school “prepas” (training) or not. Most of them also sat the competition several times, which was also important in socialisation terms. Here again, the “fast stream” method is breaking this dimension that was also a period of time devoted to interiorizing the European values (contained for instance in the European public policies and the staff regulation which were central) and confirming their vocation (or their call).

What is important in this anti-elitist process is not really the result. In devaluating knowledge and most of all consecration by knowledge, the recruitment does probably not become more democratic, it is simply changing the type of elite: to use a formula, computer-based testing exercises such as Gmat and IQ are the “daily jogging” of the business school students mainly. (Here new studies will be helpful in several years). But it devalues through practices, namely the practices of legitimacy which were typical for the public service and all what was specifically European. Symptomatic is also the process of ordination that closes the process of recruitment. This is not a consequence of



the reform, but a trend converging and leading the whole to make sense. Less than ten years ago the entry within the Commission led to a session at the college of Europe in Bruges for a few weeks. Beyond the fact that the new official followed courses in academic disciplines (such as European Law, economy and political science) something very important at a symbolical level was the consecration by the oldest and the most important European schools. Now the process is segmented between courses offered by the institutions on what happens in Brussels (e.g. how to find a doctor and being paid) with some self-integration and management advices.

Tu dis que tu as parler de deux “chapters” de la réforme (p.13 de ton article), mais tu développes les concours sur plusieurs pages, puis tu mentionnes “other practices” alors qu’il me semble que tu te mets à parler ici du 2ème “chapter” (transparency and accountability). J’ai l’impression qu’il faudrait que tu sois plus explicite pour dire que c’est le 2ème aspect des réformes que tu veux présenter, meme si tu le présentes moins longuement.

This deconsecration process is followed by a number of other practices, which were at the heart of (accessing) the nobility of the European Civil servants. The first practice concerns transparency and accountability. Whatever the more or less good effect they produce, these practices introduce a substantial rupture with what Ernst Kantorowich (1956) called the ‘mystery of state’, or what the middle age scholastics and dogmatics called the ‘mysterium of ministerium’, which is something like the enigma of office structuring the making of the State and its high civil service (Bourdieu/Wacquant). Here again, the charisma of service owned by some EU civil servants and especially Directors General, considered as a legend by people within the European Commission, was a practical thing, done without reflexivity, often unspoken but also done personally in an impersonal context (which is important for understanding the charismatic dimension). The double change introduced by personal responsibility and accountability through the practice of the annual report supposes an objective procedure and an annual and bureaucratic public account for directors general, instead of a magical effect obtained by the accomplishment of little miracles (like achieving a hard negotiation, having resisted to member states’ pressures, ending a long-term battle, managing to maintain his/her position confronted with the EP or the Council, etc). Embodying the general interest (as a magical operation) was not passing through objectivation.

In the same vein, the official’s credential was linked to the belief that the service was well accomplished, belief shared by both the officials and the people in relation with them. For many reasons, contextual as well as political, (Cini 2007, Georgakakis 2004), the promotion of a new « culture of service » incarnated by codes of conduct edited since 2000, policies of morality, etc. have been built in response to corruption. The legal basis has always been a kind of obsession for policy makers. For all administrators, the legacy of practice became more important. In other words, suspicion replaced belief and European enchantment.

### **How deconsecration matters?**

These processes, both the historical and sociological construction of this group as a Stand, and the deconsecration process included in management-inspired practices, matter in several respects. Understanding this process sheds a new light on the process of the reform. This is the case to several extents of who leads it and why, who resists to it and how, to what kind of improbable effect (or supposed to be so) does it lead to.

First of all, this deconsecration enables to understand some inputs of the reform and who it mobilizes. As we can guess, this historical construction process as an elite group let some actors by the roadside. By accessing a relative autonomy, that is also power-led by the group, its members win respect... and challengers. From this point of view, other elites in charge of Europe outside the institutions, such as national civil servants, do not consider the social position achieved by the EU Staff as legitimate in itself. The bad opinion of “Eurocrats”, their “Ivory cage” and all that is not only a topic flagged by the British Popular Press. This opinion is shared by member States representatives insofar as they are practically confronted with Eurocrats’ Power. In their competition for defining the European general interest, they have no interest in maintaining and consecrating the Euro civil servant’s dominant position in this field. There would be no impact if this was only a matter of opinions and discourses. The fact is that the Council of minister’s agenda is a central place for the EU staff policy as shown by the history of strikes within the EU institutions. The history of some major strikes done by EU civil servants showed that there is a clear division between the EU civil service, most of the time allied with the political staff of the Commission, and the Council. During the Kinnock reform, a unionist reported that a member State representative to the Council in charge of the Staff reform policy told him: “There will be blood”. The definition of the situation is different with MEP in charge of the reform, considering that positions are more nationally and politically cleaved.

There is also an effect on who pulls the reform inside the house. Here again, this making of a group process includes that there are battles for power within the group, especially between segment or fraction owning different types of resources and legitimacies. Clearly the policy makers’ task has for a long time been considered as the most legitimate one comparing to the management one within the Commission. Unsurprisingly the people in charge of the administration (selection, training, etc.) or ‘new’ administrative and management tasks support the process or were mobilised by it. To sum up, the question of their type of capital was as important as for instance the country of origins or the type of degree (economists vs. lawyers) (Georgakakis, de Lassalle 2010) as well as their linguistics skills (by the way variable according their DG). The anti-elite discourses coming from some reformists are consequently understandable and a perfectly adapted rhetoric tool in this context of balance of power. This explains largely why management, and particularly “new” public management – that is actually an old tool considering it has been implemented for twenty years by some countries – could have been perceived and politically presented as a modern one. This representation as a “new tool” was actually wrong but socially founded considering it helped changing the table of values and legitimacies.

This desacration process also sheds some new light on the ambivalent attitude demonstrated by officials about the reform. There is indeed an apparent paradox, considering they accepted the reform but are still reluctant about management. Some authors observed that the Kinnock reform as well as the Concours reform didn’t lead to strong conflicts with the staff (Kassim 2008, Ban 2009). Here I stress that they accepted it because the reform doesn’t really touch deeply upon the material foundations as a status group (status, incomes, etc). Here they probably forgot (or pretended to) the consequences for the newcomers. Whatever: saving the status as well as the wages (that is to say also the social prestige attached to it) was the motto of the majority of the trade unions negotiating the Kinnock Reform. To some extent, the question of the new staff policy including management was not considered as central comparing to the risk of

touching the status in a deep way. The symbolic aspects were also at the heart of the process. Indeed, the political context of the post Santer resignation explains that for many the reform was an opportunity to bring collective salvation. Here management considered by many as a modern tool was not only the cost to pay to restore the dignity of the group, at that time deeply jeopardized by the comments on the Santer resignation, but also a deeper strategy to reproduce its dominant position through its conversion into a dominant and internationally accepted model. This agenda deeply divided the trade unions in two camps. In line with its more institutional and traditionally dominant position (and probably also social basis of administrators), the *Union Syndicale* went for the compromise with the Kinnock team, whereas a part of the other official trade unions quitted the ongoing negotiations. Symptomatically, the less traditional unions, sociologically based on a lower level staff paying more attention to career and concrete effect introduced by the new HR strategy ranked first at the elections that came after the reform.

The same social process explains conversely their reluctance to management. Officials could indeed theoretically agree with the idea of a better management, but in practice, they feel embarrassed. As I showed earlier, the pragmatism of management destroyed their legitimacy practices consisting in building their position as a distinguished group of Europe high servants. Agreed upon theoretically, they physically disagreed on the new practices introduced by management considering that they touch (and that is indeed the right term) on what they are and how they have been built. No surprise, if within the theoretical situation of answering (such as surveys by questionnaire, for instance), a part of the group agree, but is embarrassed in practice. The series of words which constitute the qualitative data of Bauer (2008) and Ellinas and Suleiman (2008) are very illustrative of this phenomenon — “paralysed”, “castration”, etc.

These processes finally explain the administrative and political effect of the reform. First of all, it helps to better understand the curious mix defined by New Public Management-inspired measures and a culture previously based on Law, or rather an ongoing European Public Law. Authors often observe the central part played by the Law-based culture within the Commission (Stevens 2001). Considering that this culture was not floating in the air (as Weber liked saying) but was deeply rooted in the building of the group as a Stand, embodied by High civil servants, among whom the part of Lawyer was important for a while (Georgakakis, de Lassalle, 2010). That probably explains why this mix of Law based culture and management led to a more bureaucratic structure as both external (Levy) and insiders observers observed, once again shown by qualitative data from Bauer (2008) and Ellinas & Suleiman (2008).

More deeply, that leads to understanding the socio-morphological changes into the EU Commission's values for a few years. People that are embodying a new profile, more economist- than lawyer-centred, belonging to transversal services (like SG) more than to technical-labelled DG, younger than older, English speaking (which is, from this point of view, not a question of nationality but of conformity to the management style, language and process), less technocratic than bureaucratic (by function, habits or skills), became more important in the structure of the Commission. This is a big issue considering the new demographical challenge that the Commission is facing. In this sense, the question of the new recruitment reform, as well as the one of old officials who quit after their term (instead of trying to stay, as it used to be the case) should lead to more quantitative data.

This process explains the so-called turn from « administration de mission » into « administration de gestion »<sup>3</sup>. Everybody knows that the Commission is not a real “administration de mission” taking into account its size and its broader set up. But it was thought and perceived by its members as such. The fact is that the word « mission » used to make sense as regards the collective belief in the European civil service and also as regards the religious or even “transcendental” dimension of the building of Europe. The turn into an “administration de gestion” is from this point of view significant of this rationalization/disenchantment process.

Finally a set of questions is raised concerning the political effects of this administrative turn. Is the Commission still the engine of Europe or is it in decline (Dimitrakopoulos 2004, Kassim, Menon 2010)? What is the link with the new “agencification”<sup>4</sup>? These questions obviously lead to challenging the EU Model, as a state-strategy building, which doesn’t really seem on the movement. Conversely, it broadly challenges the model of western bureaucracy. State or services providers? No doubt that the model proposed in this paper does not answer. But at least it made us think in broader terms about the evolution of the EU institutions, looking at the social foundations of these issues.

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<sup>3</sup> « Mission administration » into « Management administration ».

<sup>4</sup> Tendency of the European Commission to delegate the execution of some of its competences to agencies.

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